

**Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal  
of New South Wales**

**Review of Gambling Harm Minimisation Measures**

**Submission by McKesson Asia-Pacific  
Provider of the G-line (NSW) 24 hour counselling service**

**November 2003**

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## **Purpose**

This document is prepared by McKesson Asia-Pacific in response to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of New South Wales (IPART) request for submissions to assist in their review of Gambling Harm Minimisation Measures on behalf of the Minister for Gaming and Racing, the Hon. Grant McBride MP.

## **Background**

McKesson Asia-Pacific has a proven track record in the planning, implementation and delivery of innovative, cost-effective technology solutions for a wide range of organisations including government departments, health insurers, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies and worker's compensation and disability insurers.

McKesson currently provides a wide range of innovative telephone based services to our clients these include G-line(NSW) and gambling helplines for two other state governments as well as several telephone based mental health triage services. Further information on McKesson can be obtained on request.

McKesson has been the provider for G-line (NSW) since July 1999. During this time the utilisation of the service has increased. Most recently this has been as a result of an advertising campaign that commenced in November 2002. This campaign used a range of media including print, radio and television, in mainstream and ethnic publications. The impact of this campaign on utilisation of the G-line(NSW) service was significant with an increase in call volume in November 2002. There was a further increase in calls in February 2003 when the second phase of the campaign commenced.

## **McKesson approach to delivering G-Line (NSW)**

McKesson is a specialist health call centre provider, in this unique environment we have over the years established "best-practice" procedures for the delivery of telephonic assessment of problem gamblers using an approach based on Prochaska motivational interviewing techniques <sup>1</sup>.

McKesson employs a multi-disciplinary team to answer G-line(NSW) calls. These professional staff have a range of qualifications such as psychology, social work and registered mental health nurses. McKesson believe that is important that calls to the service are handled by health professionals with specific training in the needs of gamblers and their family and friends. It is vital that a thorough assessment of caller needs is made and appropriate follow-up and referrals are planned for.

The Productivity Commission identified that an average problem gambler has a financial or emotional impact on five other people<sup>2</sup>. Similarly gamblers are likely to have other social and psychosocial needs such as alcohol and drug abuse and relationship difficulties. For this reason assessment by skilled health professional specifically trained in gambling problems is vital to ensure the safety of all callers whether they are gamblers or their families and friends.

McKesson's performance in delivering services to the contract with the Department of Gaming and Racing has been independently audited twice during the term of the contract. These audits have resulted in positive feedback about the service provided by McKesson to callers to the G-line (NSW) service.

## **G-line (NSW)**

The objectives of the G-Line (NSW) service are to:

1. Provide a high quality gambling telephone counselling service to all people of NSW, including those from a non-English speaking background, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders and those who are hearing impaired.
2. Provide immediate crisis counselling to callers in distress
3. Actively assist problem gamblers and other targeted clients with advice and services that address the gambling problem, including telephone and telephone typewriter (TTY) counselling, referral to appropriate counselling services, and usage of interpreter assisted counselling and bilingual counsellors and printed information
4. Operate on a 24 hour basis serving NSW through a "toll-free" number (1800 633 635) or any designated telephone number as determined by the delegate.
5. Be staffed by appropriately qualified and/or trained counsellors at levels that are sufficient to meet demand
6. Ensure confidentiality and allow anonymity for callers
7. Cooperate with other agencies addressing gambling-induced needs of the target group
8. Store and access data through an appropriate computer database to enable effective monitoring of usage of the service
9. Report regularly to the Delegate (Dept of Gaming and Racing)<sup>3</sup>

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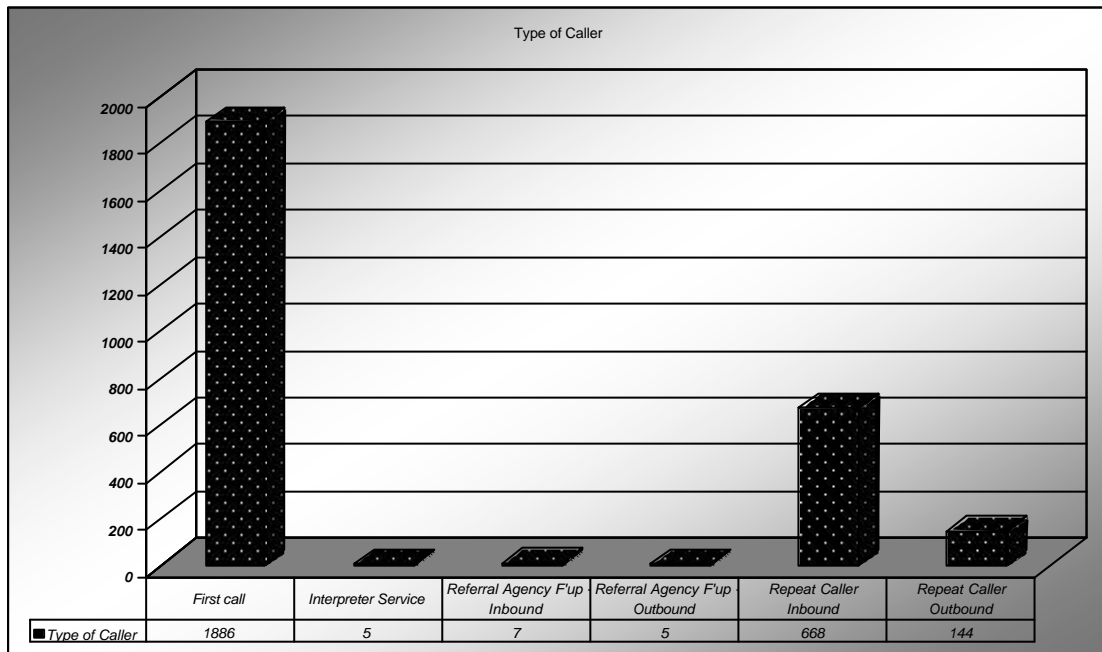
<sup>1</sup> Miller & Rollnick (1991) "Motivational Interview Techniques"

<sup>2</sup> Productivity Commission, *Australia's Gambling Industries*, Report No 10, Volume 1, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Contract 13AK specifications between McKesson Asia-Pacific and Dept of Gaming and Racing

G-line (NSW) is an integral part of the strategy for providing gamblers and their families with immediate response to their concerns 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. G-Line provides the frontline support for people affected by gambling in the state. Data collected over the period since 1999 has indicated that the majority (69%) of calls to the service are from people seeking help for the first time. The remainder of calls are from repeat callers (30%) and a small proportion of calls to the interpreter service or from other counselling services.

**Type of Caller**  
**Data from Quarter 3 - 2003**

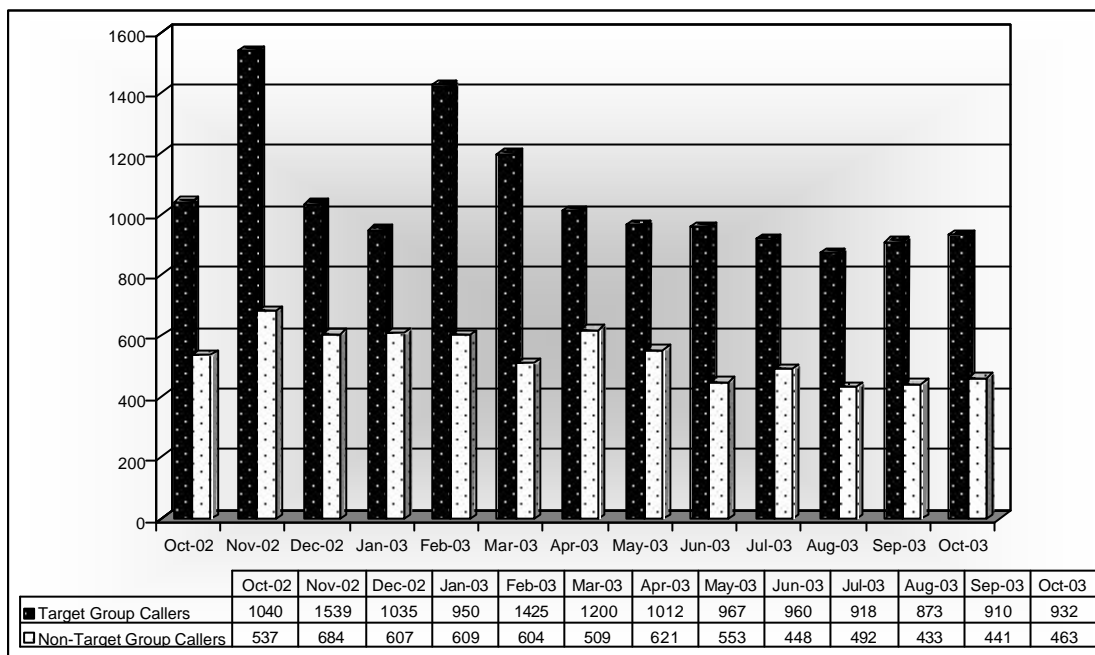


The specification identifies that the service will answer calls from the target group. The definition of the target group is “those persons who are intended users of the services, being people in NSW who have or believe they have a gambling problem, or their families, carers, friends, colleagues and professional counsellors”.

Callers who ring the G-line(NSW) 1800 number who do not fall within the definition of target group callers are categorised as non-target group callers. Examples of these calls are prank calls, wrong numbers, hang ups, people calling about gaming rules

The following chart identifies the number of callers that fall into the target group and non-target by month for the last 12 months. The peak of calls in November 2002 and February 2003 correspond with the advertising campaign conducted by the Department of Gaming and Racing. It is clear from this data that the impact of this strategy in creating awareness of the G-line(NSW) service was significant. This strategy falls under the “Information for Gamblers” harm minimisation measure category. It is clear from this data that there is a need in the community for information about services available to gamblers and their families and friends. A further increase in calls was noted when the mandatory placing of the messages about harm from gambling that include the G-line (NSW) number were placed on all poker machines in 2000. McKesson believes that it is important that continued information about the support services available to gamblers and their families is vital to ensure that people seek help.

## Target and Non target calls by month October 2002 – October 2003



Further information on the types of target and non-target group callers is available in Annexure A to this report.

McKesson also support the harm minimisation measure to restrict promotion of gambling. Gambler callers to the service who are seeking to modify their behaviour and limit their gambling or stop gambling altogether report to the counsellors that the amount of promotion about gaming venues in clubs and hotels is problematic to them as it is a constant reminder and lure for them to continue their gambling habit.

The most recent data collected by G-line(NSW) indicates that 71% of target group callers are from gamblers themselves. The counsellors assess these callers and record them as "problem gamblers" if they meet a set of criteria modified from the DSM IV criteria<sup>4</sup>. These criteria are listed below:

1. Has repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop gambling
2. Gambles as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving dysphoric mood (e.g. feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression)
3. After losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even (chasing one's losses)
4. Has jeopardised or lost a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of gambling.

<sup>4</sup> "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)", Fourth Edition. Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Association, 1994.

This definition was signed off at the commencement of McKesson's contract with the Department. It does however highlight a concern about the consistency of definitions around all data collection fields and specifically in this instance in relation to the categorisation of gamblers as problem gamblers. The Department's Policy framework is introducing a standard data collection template for use by all services. Until this happens it is very difficult to get an accurate reflection across all services of information about the gambling population of NSW that are using services. In the case of defining gamblers as "problem gamblers" there are different definitions used by different services. It is important that a uniform definition is adopted.

Self exclusion is a strategy used by counselling services to encourage gambler callers to exclude themselves from gaming venues. In our opinion the self-exclusion schemes in operation are difficult for the venues to enforce. The strategy is used and in some instances has proven successful. However, if a gambler really wants to return to the venue then at a busy time they are very likely to be able to do so. A review of this strategy and ways of improving enforcement of it may assist in the success of self-exclusion for problem gamblers.

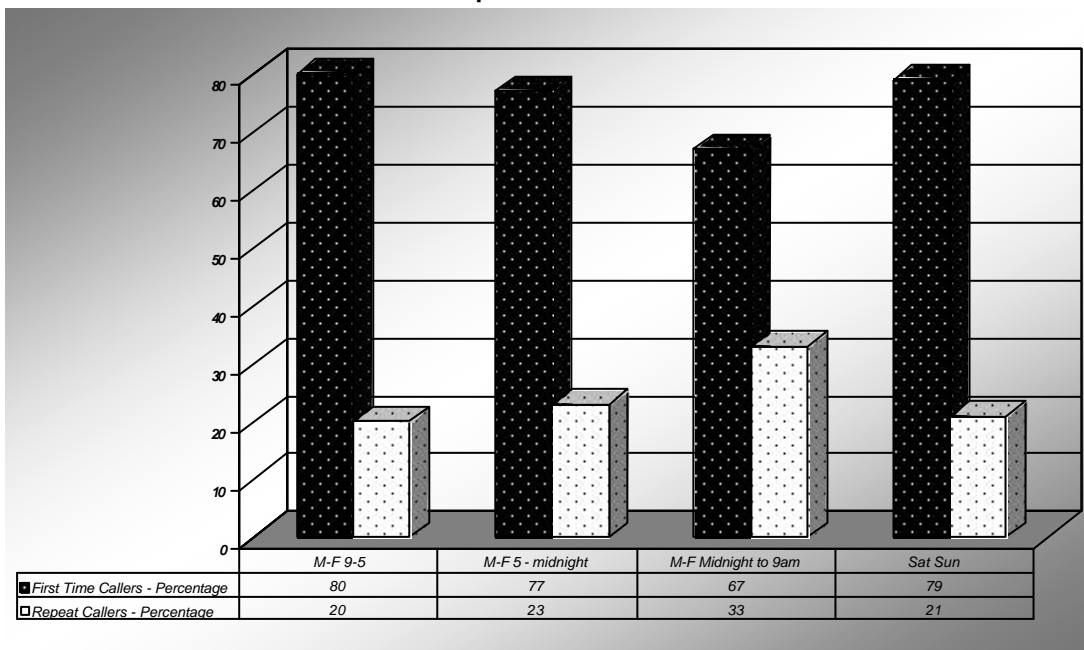
### Calls to the service by time of day

G-line(NSW) is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week, 375 days a year. 80% of calls to the service are out of the usual business hours of Monday – Friday 9am -5pm. 21% of calls are taken at weekends and a further 33% overnight from midnight – 9am.

The graph below indicates the times of day that calls are received to the service by first time callers and repeat callers to the service.

This data supports the importance of the strategy to continue with a 24 hour telephone counselling service to allow access to skilled counsellors for all NSW consumers. Access to help is important and again information about the help available in venues will assist to improve awareness of this important strategy.

**Calls by time of day for First time and repeat callers**  
3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2003 data



## **Access for callers from Non-English Speaking backgrounds**

G-line (NSW) is available to callers from all cultural backgrounds. McKesson use the Telephone interpreter service to assist callers for whom English is not their first language. Information in printed form is available in 8 different languages and is able to be mailed to the caller directly.

There is also access to a Telephone Typewriter service for the hearing impaired to access G-line(NSW). This service has had limited uptake.

## **Referrals to other service providers (community counselling services)**

It is an integral part of the G-line(NSW) service to provide referrals to callers to local face-face counselling services. An online directory of these services is available to all counsellors taking calls for G-line(NSW). This is updated regularly and feedback is provided to referral agencies on the directory of the number of referrals that have been made to each agency on a quarterly basis. Despite regular requests from G-line(NSW) there has been limited feedback from referral agencies about the number of people that actually present for an appointment. Privacy legislation limits the efficacy of some of this data matching. In addition the fact that callers are able to maintain their anonymity and that this feature of the service is important to encourage callers to seek help, present problems in following up with referral agencies that callers referred by G-line actually attend.

The requirement for venues to develop a relationship with counselling services has contributed to some duplication of services with other gambling helplines being promoted in venues along side or in place of the G-line(NSW) promotional material.

In summary the harm minimisation measures outlined in Table one of the IPART Issues Paper are important from our perspective particularly in relation to the relevant and accessible information for gamblers and also on restricting the promotion of gambling. Some of the strategies listed are outside of the scope of our expertise to be able to comment upon e.g. Liquidity controls, technical measures and in part “circuit breakers”.

With G-line(NSW) being the option which many gamblers choose as their first “cry for help” we support the introduction of standards to the industry, including a minimum data set, clarity on definitions for problem gamblers and the ability to develop meaningful outcome data to allow true analysis of the effectiveness of the current strategies employed to assist gamblers. This has only been accomplished with small numbers of participants to date.

Clarity is also required within the industry with respect to the advertising of “alternate” helplines to G-line (NSW). This duplication of service delivery offering has caused confusion in the community and for other service providers.



## How Does G-line (NSW) Addresses Harm Minimisation Objectives

G-line (NSW) addresses the harm minimisation objectives as follows:

### 1. Early Intervention

G-line (NSW) due to well promoted number encourages individuals to anonymously seek help when they perceive that they have a problem. As it is a free call service and has the capacity to maintain anonymity, this reduces significantly the barrier for contact.

### 2. Responsiveness

G-line (NSW) has an operational target of providing service with 70% of its calls answered in 30 seconds. This rapid response time minimises the likelihood of callers "hanging up" who may well require immediate assessment.

### 3. Availability 24 hours, 7 days a week

The call arrival pattern for G-line (NSW) is predominantly outside of normal business hours. People typically seek help around the time of their gambling, particularly when they may have suffered losses. The availability of immediate assessment and counselling provided by G-line (NSW) ensures that individuals who require help in the "heat of the moment" do actually receive that initial assessment.

### 4. Linkage to Face to Face Counselling

G-line (NSW) is a conduit and entry point into face-to-face counselling services. Once the mental health professional in G-line has made an assessment they provide a range of service which are outlined in Annexure A. In particular, G-line (NSW) has in its database or resources, accredited services in NSW to provide face-to-face counselling. It is able to then link and refer individuals to these services, acting as in effect the gateway into problem gambling services.

### 5. Data Collection

G-line (NSW) captures a wide range of data on its callers. This data can be analysed to allow better service planning for problem gamblers.

### 6. Crisis Assessment

A small but not insignificant percentage of callers are in crisis with acute suicidal ideation associated with financial issues and co morbidity (eg alcohol abuse and depression). These individuals present an acute risk and in these instances G-line (NSW) provides not only assessment but crisis management and referral to acute psychiatric services. It is likely that a responsible percentage of these individuals would attempt suicide were G-line (NSW) not able to respond in this manner.

## The Potential Expanded Role of G-line (NSW) to Address Harm Minimisation

### 1. Proactive Service Providing Case Management

At present, G-line (NSW) is largely a reactive service, that is, individuals call a 1800 number at which point a rigorous assessment occurs and they are either given information, telephone numbers or other such resources to support them in seeking help for themselves. As a general rule there is no proactive follow-up by G-line (NSW) as this has not been contractually mandated between McKesson and the Department of Gaming and Racing. Nonetheless, based on other telephonic mental health service, it is clear that G-line (NSW) could be significantly more effective in terms of harm minimisation were its role to move from

a purely reactive service into a proactive service. This proactivity would involve G-line (NSW) counsellors not only receiving calls but actively following up selective individuals who suffer from problem gambling to encourage and facilitate them entering into treatment for their problem gambling. This approach is far more likely (based on concepts of motivational interviewing and the cycle of behaviour change by Prochaska) to bring about behaviour change in problem gamblers via the efforts of the counsellor gradually recognise the need to enter into management of their gambling. This has been successfully used with a number of other conditions such as smoking, obesity, in which there are "impulse control issues".

In addition, case management in can be provided by G-line (NSW) counsellors to support individuals who are attempting to address their problem gambling. This would enable those individuals who are presently receiving help from face-to-face problem gambling services, or indeed those who are considering seeking help to be encouraged to call G-line should they feel that they are deteriorating or at risk of gambling again in the hope of preventing recurrence of their problem gambling. This may be particularly relevant at certain times of day in the context of alcohol usage or where they are going to be exposed to gaming machines or venues.

## **2. Back-up Advice to Other Practitioners**

G-line (NSW) could also, in the future, provide advice to practitioners such as general practitioners in rural areas who may not have access to problem gambling services but would like advice on the appropriate management of problem gamblers. In addition, GPs and other community health services could be encouraged to refer individuals to G-line who could undertake telephonic counselling on an ongoing basis in rural areas.

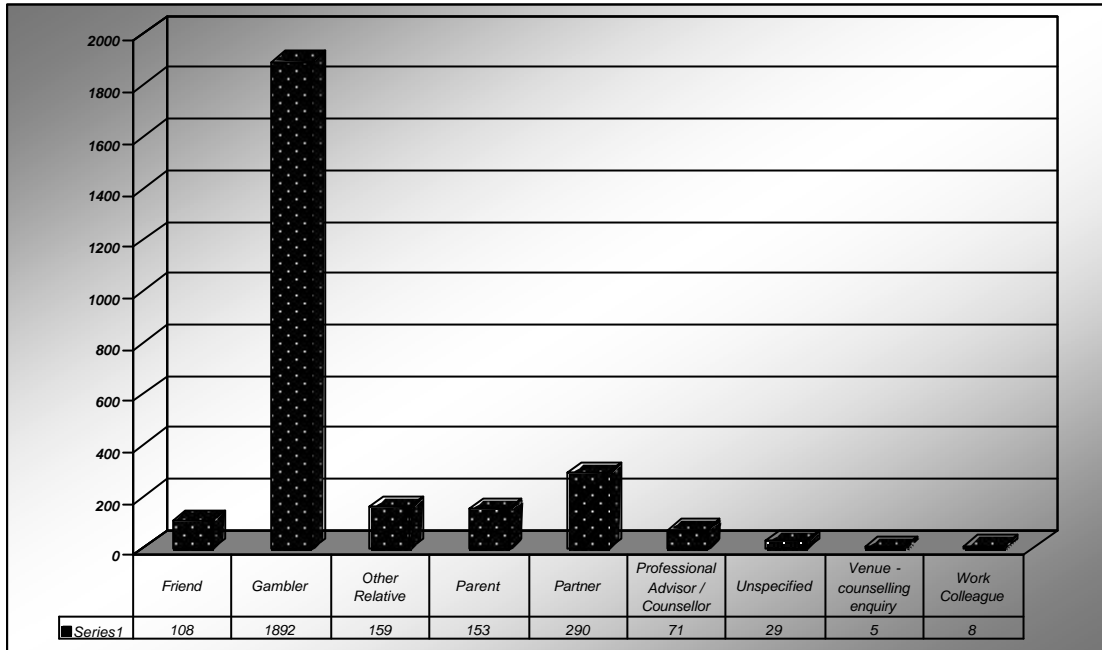
## **3. Broader Use of Technology**

The use of technology such as SMS messaging to individuals who were being case managed or encouraged to consider behaviour change could be made sending positive, supportive comments that build to the goal of encouraging reduction in gambling.

## Annexure A

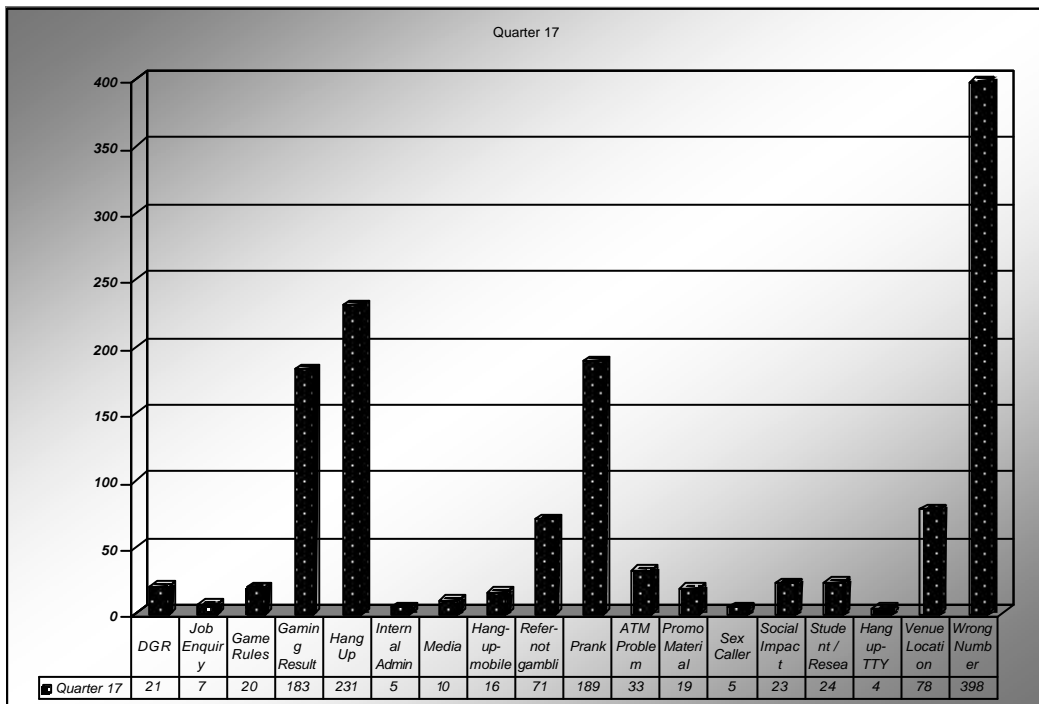
### Target group callers

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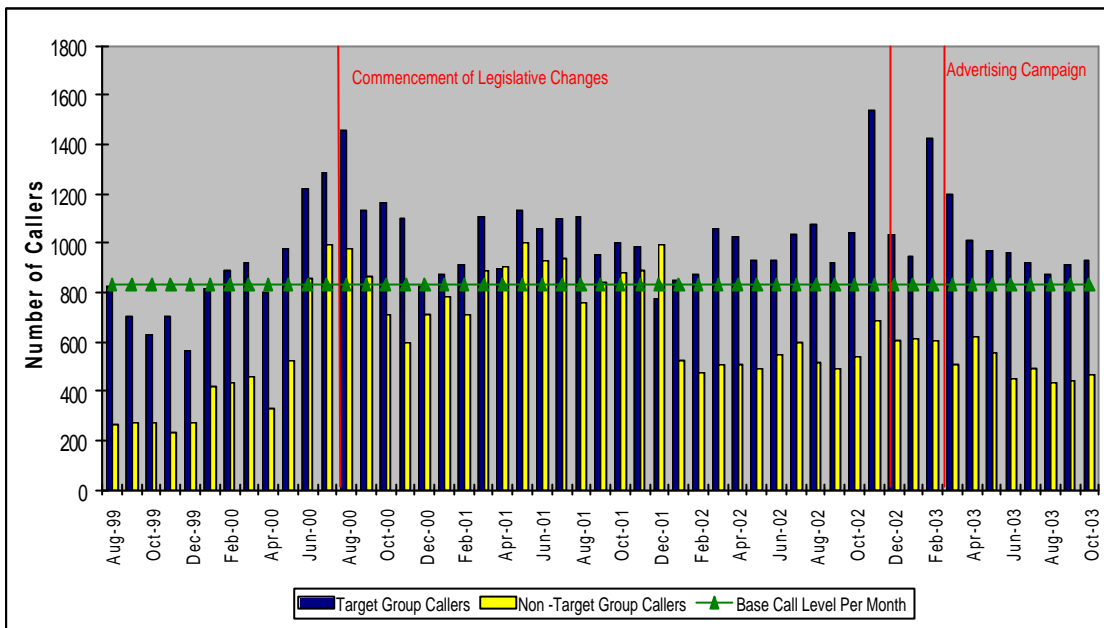


### Non – target group callers

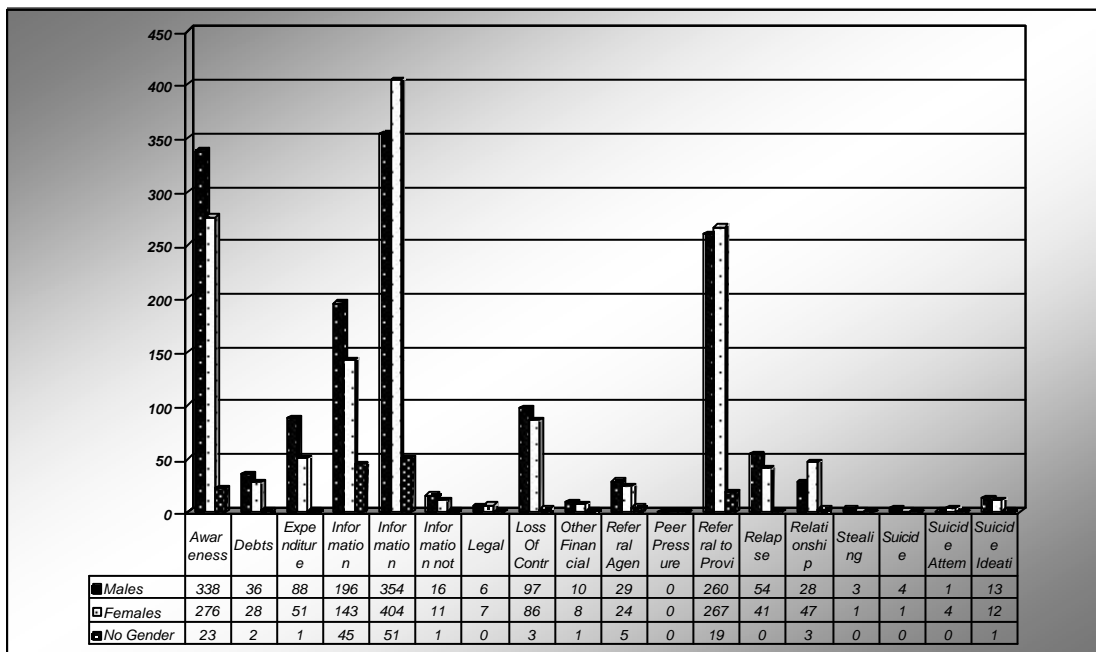
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### Target and non target group calls since August 1999



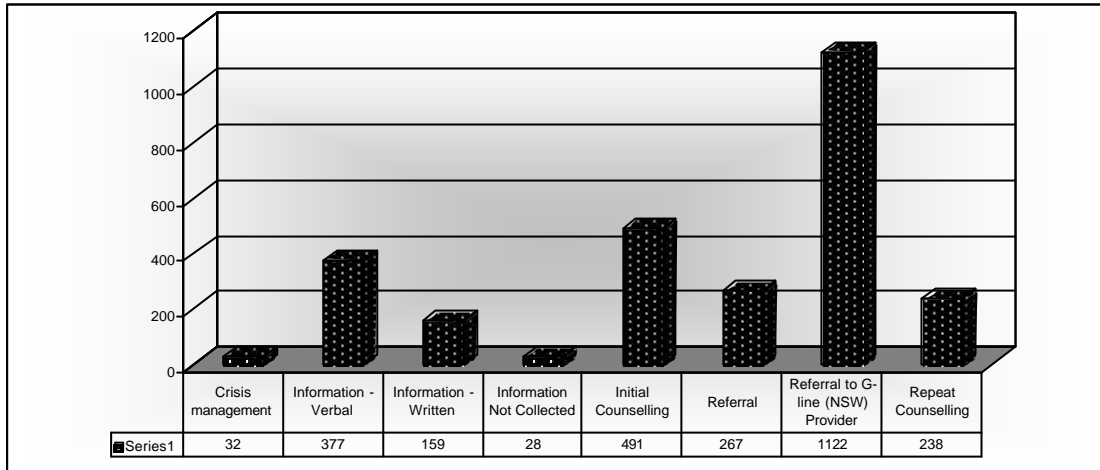
### Reason for calls 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2003



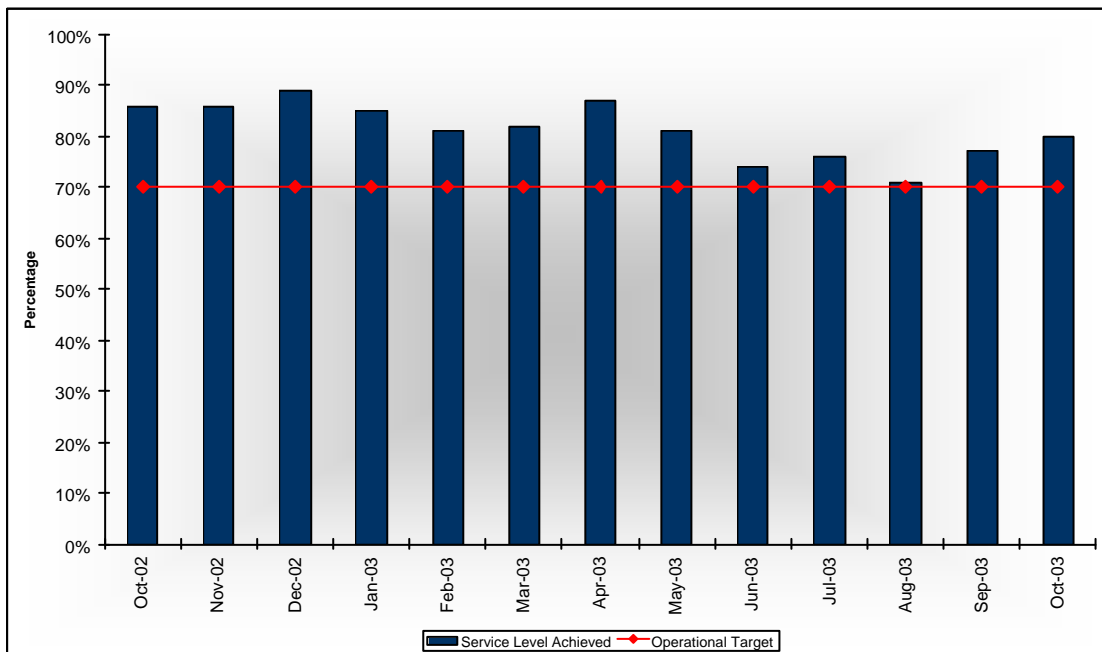
## Primary Assistance Given

3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2003

Most callers are provided with a referral to a Department of Gaming and Racing funded provider. Other interventions include crisis management, written information and repeat telephone counselling.



## Service Levels by month October 2002 – October 2003



The previous graph indicates that more than 70% of calls to the G-line (NSW) service are answered by a counsellor within 30 seconds. This indicates that the service is responsive and ensures callers are answered promptly.