

New Measures to Curb Gambling

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SINGAPORE — Working with employers of foreign workers to encourage them to apply for self-exclusion orders even before they enter Singapore and monitoring casino advertisements to ensure they do not glamorise gambling.

These were some of the new measures that the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) had adopted to curb problem gambling and deter would-be gamblers, Major-General (NS) Chan Chun Sing said yesterday.

The Acting Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports also told Parliament that more individuals and families were coming forward to seek help for gambling-related problems.

The Tanjong Pagar Family Service Centre and the National Addictions Management Service, which provide counselling and treatment services for such problems, have seen 568 cases between January and August. The figure was higher than the 304 cases seen in 2008, said MG (NS) Chan in response to questions by Member of Parliament Christopher de Souza (Holland-Bukit Timah GRC) on casino gambling addiction and casino-related gambling debts.

MG (NS) Chan noted that even before the local casinos opened, demand for casino gambling existed — a 2008 gambling participation survey conducted by the ministry had shown that one in 10 respondents reported participating in casino gambling overseas.

That survey, along with an earlier one in 2005, had also indicated that both probable pathological and problem gambling rates among Singapore residents were between 1 and 2 per cent.

As of last month, there were 750 family-exclusion orders, 28,600 third-party exclusions and 29,000 self-exclusions in force.

MG (NS) Chan added that the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) had also engaged other legal operators — such as those running jackpot rooms and the Telebet accounts of Singapore Pools and Singapore Turf Club — to implement exclusions.

MG (NS) Chan said his ministry was expanding on efforts to get those at risk to apply for self-exclusion. This includes working with employers to apply for self-exclusion before they enter Singapore — when they apply for work permits. As of Sept 30, there were 22,700 self-exclusions by foreigners.

An NCPG spokesperson told Today: “The National Council on Problem Gambling has been working with the Ministry of Manpower since November last year to extend employer facilitated self-exclusion to foreign workers. This facilitation is open to all employers.”

MG (NS) Chan also noted that all advertisements linked to gambling were now under the ministry’s purview, thus allowing the MCYS to have a more direct influence on them. In a separate reply to a question about the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC), MG (NS) Chan said that more centres would be opened. Existing centres will be

expanded and staff numbers will be increased. The ministry is also looking into working with private service providers.

These measures will add 700 places to the EIPIC by April and shorten the waiting list for these schools from six months to three.

The number of pre-school children diagnosed with disabilities and developmental delays almost doubled in the past five years — from 1,300 in 2005 to 2,500 last year.