

Gambling and alcohol lobby plough \$2.165 million into political parties, up 40% from previous year

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Alcohol and gambling companies and their lobby groups donated \$2.165 million to Australia's major political parties in 2021-22 representing a 40 per cent increase on the previous year, an analysis of disclosure returns published today by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) shows.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) CEO Caterina Giorgi and Alliance for Gambling Reform (AGR) CEO Carol Bennett jointly called for political donations by alcohol and gambling companies to be banned to ensure that community views are prioritised in policy discussions about proposed reforms that would affect them.

Alcohol and gambling companies and their lobby groups collectively made \$2.165 million worth of donations to the Labor, Liberal and National parties and their associated entities in the last financial year, up from \$1.535 million the previous year.

These donations were split almost equally between Labor and the Coalition with Labor receiving \$1.12 million and the Liberal and National parties receiving \$1.05 million.

"When alcohol and gambling companies are allowed to donate large amounts to political parties, it creates a power imbalance, giving these companies greater access to politicians than the members of the community that they are elected to represent," Ms Giorgi said.

Companies and lobby groups with interests in both alcohol and gambling disclosed \$905,000 worth of donations in 2021-22, while entities that profit from gambling but not alcohol and their lobby groups disclosed \$678,000. Entities that profit from selling alcoholic products but not from gambling, and their lobby groups, disclosed \$583,000.

"The huge increase in the number and value of donations from alcohol and gambling companies and their lobby groups to the major political parties is concerning. The community expects politicians to make decisions that are in the public interest and not influenced by donations made by these companies," Ms Bennett said.

"The Labor and Liberal parties exclude tobacco donations. They could extend this to alcohol and gambling companies tomorrow if they wanted to. Like tobacco, alcohol and gambling cause significant health and social harms to Australians," Ms Bennett said.

FARE CEO Caterina Giorgi said it was concerning that alcohol and gambling companies were still allowed to make political donations in Australia, calling for donations from alcohol companies to be banned.

"Political donations from alcohol and gambling companies need to be banned if policies are to be prioritised that put the health, safety and wellbeing of the community ahead of the interests of these companies and their lobby groups," Ms Giorgi said.

FARE and AGR analysed the annual returns of alcohol and gambling companies lodged with the AEC under mandatory disclosure laws with data released on February 1, tallying donations to the three major parties and their associated entities in 2021-22.

This analysis examined the Detailed Receipts data from the AEC and is likely to underrepresent the total donations made from these industries.

Previous research has also shown that there is a considerable amount of “dark donations” made to parties that are not required to be disclosed because they are below the threshold, which was \$14,500 in 2021-22 and is \$15,200 for the current financial year.

Caterina Giorgi, CEO Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education and Carol Bennett, CEO Alliance for Gambling Reform are available for interview.

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