

Poker machines in areas of Australia with high Indigenous populations

An analysis of concentration by LGA

Poker machines are more likely to be located in areas of Australia in which at least 10% of the population is Indigenous. The exception to this national pattern is Western Australia, where poker machines are confined to one casino. As losses from pokies disproportionately affect Indigenous Australians, stronger poker machine regulation would significantly benefit Indigenous Australians.

Discussion paper

Morgan Harrington

Skye Predavec

Matt Grudnoff

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PO Box 3839

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Summary

Nationwide, 3.8% of Australians are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This paper shows that Local Government Areas with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander population of at least 10% - which is more than twice the national average – tend to have significantly more poker machines than areas where the Indigenous population is less than 10%. While the high concentration of poker machines in these areas does not *only* affect the proportion of the population that is Indigenous, it means that stronger poker machine regulation would significantly benefit Indigenous Australians. Specifically, this paper shows that:

- Across all the local government areas we examined, almost \$13 billion is lost to poker machines every year – this disproportionately affects areas with higher indigenous populations.
- LGAs with Indigenous populations of 10% or more have one poker machine for every 99 people, whereas LGAs with an Indigenous population of less than 10% have one poker machine for every 148 people. This means that there are 50% more poker machines in LGAs with high Indigenous populations.
- In areas with relatively few poker machines (less than 100 per 10,000 people), an average of 3% of people are Indigenous. In contrast, in areas with more than 100 poker machines per 10,000, the Indigenous population is 7% – more than double.
- People in areas with an Indigenous population of 10% or more lose almost \$700 per person to poker machines every year, compared to “just” \$581 in those where less than 10% are Indigenous. This means that LGAs with high Indigenous populations lose over \$100 more per person. This figure includes everyone in each LGA, including those who do not use poker machines, meaning that the actual losses for those who do gamble would likely be much higher.
- While an overall total of 16% of Australians live in LGAs with more than one poker machine for every 100 people, the figure is 32% for Indigenous Australians. These highly saturated LGAs account for over a quarter of all money lost to poker machines, amounting to almost \$1,000 per person each year.
- LGAs with high indigenous populations are nearly three times as likely to have more than 100 machines per 10,000 people.

This paper also provides an analysis of the concentration of poker machines in areas with higher Indigenous populations by state. However, not all corners of the continent are equally affected by pokies. Western Australia could not be included in this analysis because it restricts poker machines to a single casino in Perth. This means that per-person gambling losses in the state are far lower than the rest of Australia. This restriction means it is far more difficult for poker machine operators to exploit communities across suburban, regional and remote areas.

Introduction

Indigenous Australians disproportionately live in regional communities in which good quality essential services like health and education are scarce.¹ According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, improving access to these critical services is fundamental to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. One thing these communities do not lack, however, is Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs, more commonly known as poker machines or pokies).

While the high concentration of poker machines in these areas does not *only* affect the proportion of the population that is Indigenous, it means that stronger poker machine regulation would significantly benefit Indigenous Australians.

For this paper, the authors analysed data on poker machines from each state and territory, comparing it to ABS data on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in each area. This allowed us to show a clear picture of where – and who – is targeted by the poker machine industry.

Nationwide, 3.8% of Australians are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.² This means that areas in which more than 10% of the population self-identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander have an Indigenous population more than twice the national average. This paper shows that areas of Australia with high Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander populations – of 10% or more – tend to have significantly more poker machines than areas where the Indigenous population is less than 10%.

Across Australia, Local Government Areas (LGAs) with high Indigenous populations tend to have significantly more poker machines (aka pokies) – and gambling losses per capita – than areas with Indigenous populations of less than 10%. Although this analysis does not tell us *why* more pokies are in these areas, it shows that a higher-than-average percentage of Indigenous people are exposed to poker machines. As a consequence, losses from pokies are larger in these areas. This also means that stronger poker machine regulation would significantly benefit Indigenous Australians.

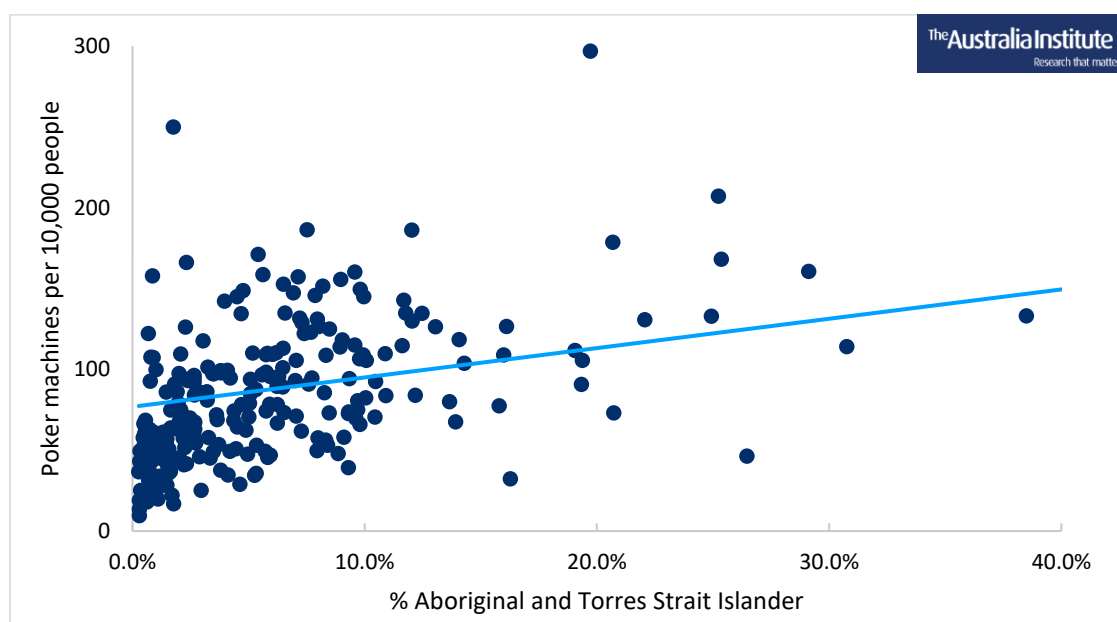
¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) *First Nations people and the health system*
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/Indigenous-australians-use-of-health-services>; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) *Education of First Nations People*
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/Indigenous-education-and-skills>

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023) *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release>

Pokies in areas with large Indigenous populations

Figure 1 shows that areas of Australia with Indigenous populations of 10% or more tend to have significantly more poker machines, and higher losses from gambling.

Figure 1: Pokies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population by LGA



Source: Population data: ABS (2023) *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 30 June 2021*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release#data-downloads>; Poker machine data: Australia Institute analysis of data on poker machines from each state and territory; See section “Individual Jurisdictions” for state and territory sources.³

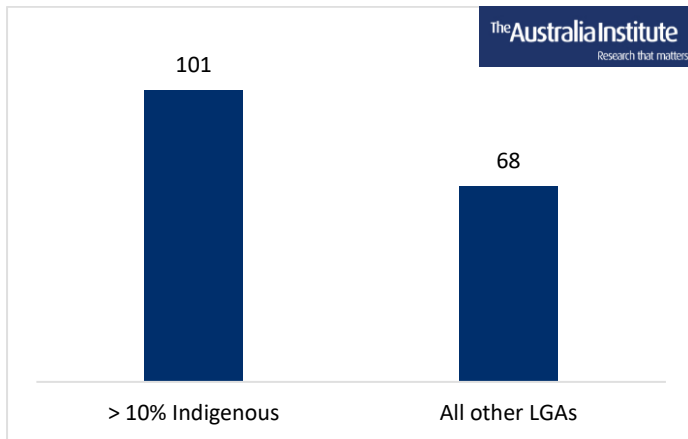
Figure 2 shows that LGAs with Indigenous populations of 10% or more have one poker machine for every 99 people, whereas other LGAs have one machine for every 148 people. In fact, many LGAs with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of less than 10% have as few as one poker machine for every 500 people. The higher concentration of poker

³ Note: So that Figure 1 is readable, this scale cuts off areas in which Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people make up more than 40% of the population (one LGA in SA, and one in the NT) and those with more than 300 machines per 10,000 people (three LGAs in NSW). Figure 1 includes LGAs in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and South Australia; the ACT is included as a single point of data. LGAs with low populations have been combined for NSW, Queensland and South Australia, and excluded for Tasmania. The Northern Territory does not release poker machine data by LGA, so is included by region (such as Darwin, Katherine). Western Australia is not included because they do not allow poker machines in pubs or clubs.

machines in areas with a high Indigenous population means that losses from gambling are also higher. Collectively, there are enough machines in LGAs with high Indigenous population for everyone living there, including children, to play for 15 minutes a day every day.

At a national level, LGAs with an Indigenous population of 10% or more have a much higher number of poker machines per capita than other LGAs.

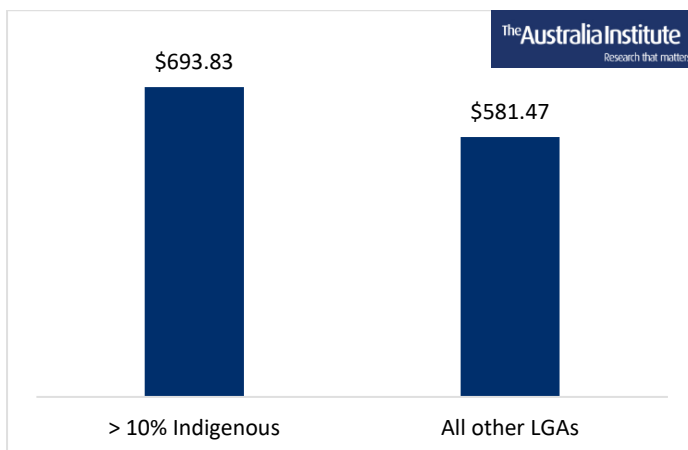
Figure 2: Poker machines per 10,000 people in areas with higher Indigenous populations



Source: See Figure 4

People in areas with an Indigenous population of 10% or more lose almost \$700 per person to poker machines every year, compared to “just” \$581 in those where less than 10% are Indigenous.

Figure 3: Yearly per capita losses in areas with higher Indigenous populations



Source: See Figure 4

Figure 3 shows that LGAs with high Indigenous populations lose over \$100 more per person than other LGAs. This figure includes those who do not use poker machines, meaning that the actual losses for those who do gamble would likely be much higher.

As Table 1 shows, poker machines tend to be concentrated in areas of Australia where the Indigenous population is higher. In areas with relatively few poker machines (less than 100 per 10,000 people), an average of 3% of people are Indigenous. In contrast, in areas with more than 100 poker machines per 10,000, the Indigenous population is 7% – more than double.

Table 1: LGAs with more than 100 poker machines per 10k people

Machines per 10k	Indigenous population	Total population	% Indig.	Loss per person	% of pop	% of Indig. pop	% of machines	% of losses
> 100	247,403	3,541,792	7.0%	\$ 970.96	16%	32%	30%	27%
< 100	525,107	18,341,618	2.9%	\$ 512.93	84%	68%	70%	73%
<i>All LGAs</i>	<i>772,510</i>	<i>21,883,410</i>	<i>3.5%</i>	<i>\$ 587.06</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>

Source: Australia Institute analysis of AEC & poker machine loss data

Note: “All LGAs” only includes those with poker machine loss data, not all of Australia.

While an overall total of 16% of Australians live in LGAs with more than one poker machine for every 100 people, the figure is 32% for Indigenous Australians. These highly saturated LGAs account for over a quarter of all money lost to poker machines, amounting to almost \$1,000 per person each year.

Out of the 40 LGAs with high Indigenous populations, 26 – or 65% – have more than 100 machines per 10,000 people. In comparison, of the 213 other LGAs we examined, just 50 – or 23% – have more than 100 machines per 10,000 people. This means that LGAs with high indigenous populations are nearly three times as likely to be pokies hotspots.

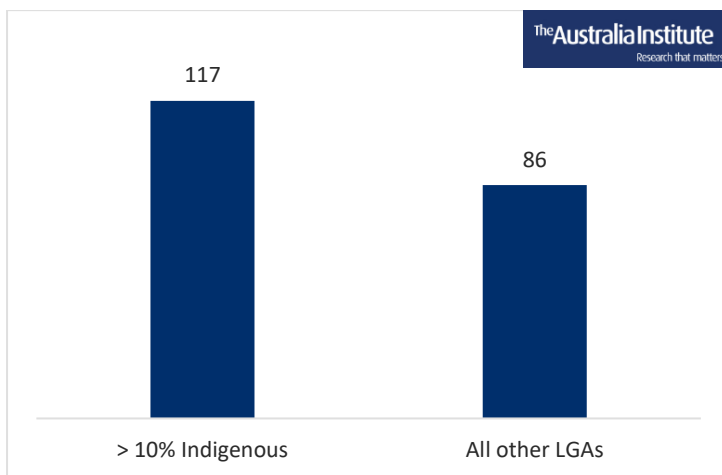
The rest of this paper analyses the concentration of poker machines in areas with high Indigenous populations at the state level.

Concentration of pokies by state

QUEENSLAND

The concentration of poker machines in areas with Indigenous populations of 10% or more is even more pronounced in Queensland than it is nationally.

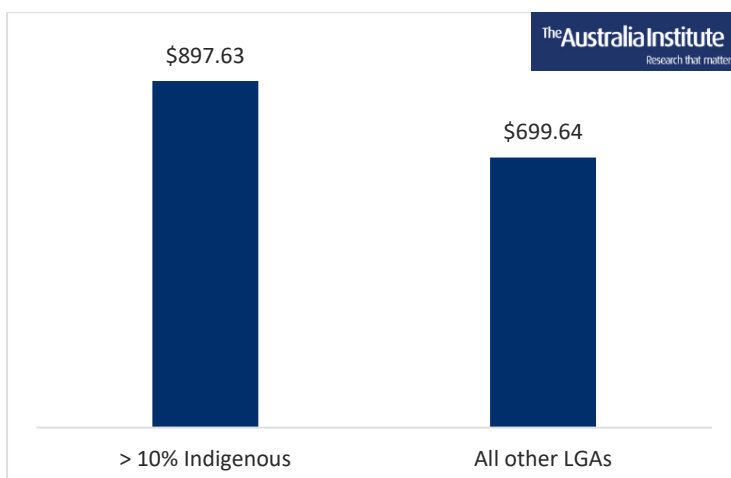
Figure 7: Poker machines per 10k people in areas with high Indigenous populations – QLD



Population data: ABS (2023) *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 30 June 2021*, Poker machine data provided by Queensland Liquor and Gaming for the May 2024-April 2025 period.

Collectively, areas of Queensland with high Indigenous populations have a poker machine for every 85 people — in some areas it is closer to one for every 50 people.

Figure 8: Poker machine losses per capita in areas with high Indigenous populations - QLD

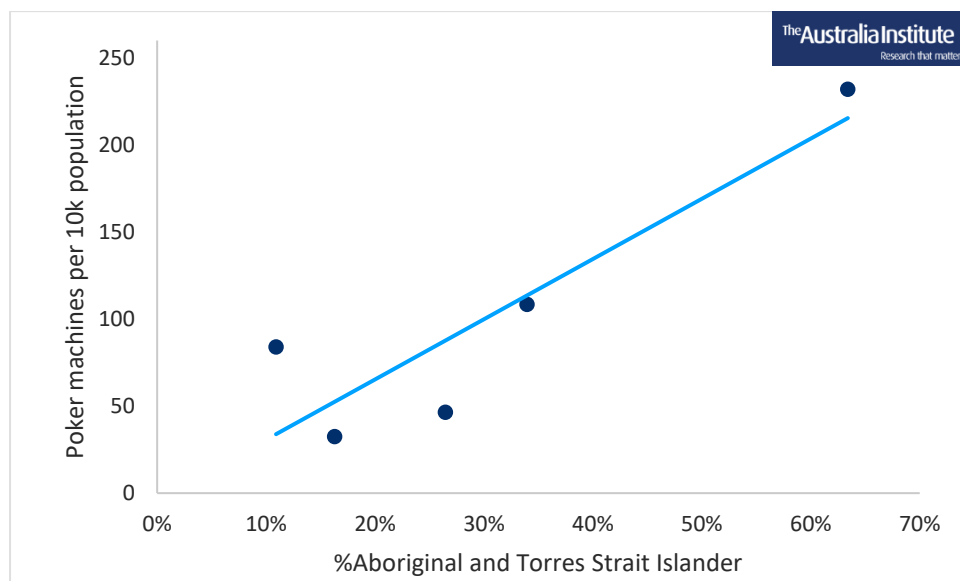


Source: See Figure 7

NORTHERN TERRITORY

We could not find the data needed to make comparisons between the Northern Territory and the rest of Australia in any NT government publications. If this data was readily accessible on the Territory’s open data portal, or any other source, it would give the public a clearer understanding of gambling-related issues. However, we were able to analyse data from secondary news reporting on the release of 2022-23 data from the NT Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade.⁴ This data is by *region* — areas clustered around the Territory’s population centres — which do not map directly onto LGAs, so the areas they correspond to have been approximated using other ABS data. The results of our analysis are in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Poker machines and Indigenous population by region - NT



Population data: ABS (2023) *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 30 June 2021*; Poker machine data: Dick (2023) *Gamblers lost nearly \$150 million on NT poker machines during the last financial year, data shows* <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-12-19/gamblers-lost-150-million-to-nt-poker-machines-before-christmas/103181330>

Of the five regions for which data is available, Tennant Creek has the highest population of Indigenous people. It also has the most poker machines per capita *and* the highest per capita losses to poker machines, at \$1,370.

Although data limitations mean the population of the region “Remote NT” cannot be estimated (which means it is not shown in Figure 7), it is notable that the region’s poker machines are the most profitable in the Territory. For every poker machine in Remote NT, \$166,425 is lost — this is over \$60k more than in any other region in the Territory.

⁴ Poker machine data: Dick (2023) *Gamblers lost nearly \$150 million on NT poker machines during the last financial year, data shows* <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-12-19/gamblers-lost-150-million-to-nt-poker-machines-before-christmas/103181330>

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

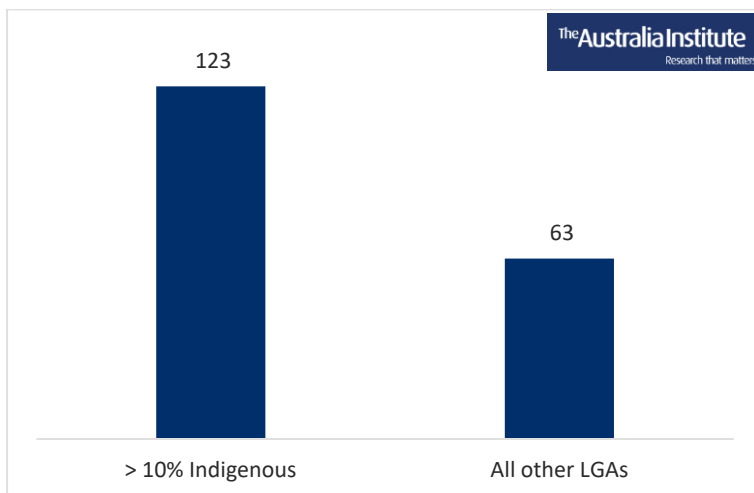
While LGAs with higher Indigenous populations make up just 2.3% of South Australia’s population, they have three times as many venues with poker machines as other areas.⁵ These LGAs have an average Indigenous population of 22%. This is almost 10 times higher than the state’s other LGAs, which have an average Indigenous population of 2.4%.

Table 2: Pokies in LGAs with large Indigenous populations – SA

	% of population	% of venues	Average % Indigenous
High Indigenous pop.	2.3%	6.8%	22.2%
Other LGAs	97.7%	93.2%	2.4%

The concentration of poker machines is about twice as high in LGAs with high Indigenous populations than other LGAs.

Figure 11: Poker machines per 10,000 people - SA



Population data: ABS (2023) *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 30 June 2021*;

All data poker machines in SA comes from Government of South Australia (n.d.) *Gaming statistics: Gaming machine revenue by ABS LGA, 2023-24*

This means that LGAs with larger Indigenous population have a much higher concentration of poker machines in a much higher concentration of venues.

⁵ All data poker machines in SA comes from Government of South Australia (n.d.) *Gaming statistics: Gaming machine revenue by ABS LGA, 2023-24*, <https://www.cbs.sa.gov.au/sections/LGL/gaming-statistics>

NEW SOUTH WALES

The NSW data for poker machines is split into those that are in clubs, and those that are in hotels (aka pubs). In their publication of this data, the NSW Government combines LGAs in different ways for clubs and hotels. This means that it is not possible to combine the data for clubs and hotels. The majority of poker machines (74%) are in clubs, and the remaining 24% are in hotels, so our analysis focuses on clubs.⁶

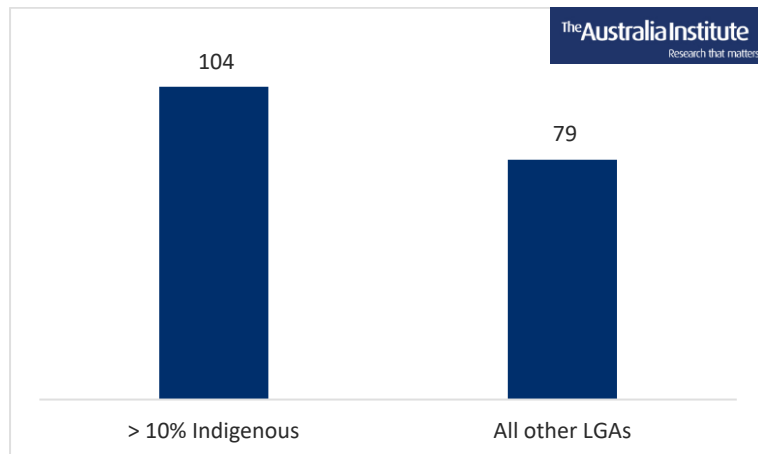
In NSW, LGAs with an Indigenous population of more than 10% make up just 6.2% of the state’s population. But these areas have almost three times the rate of poker machines as areas with an Indigenous population of less than 10%.

Table 3: Clubs by LGA and Indigenous population - NSW

	% of population	% of venues	Average % Indigenous
High Indigenous pop.	6.2%	16.7%	15%
Other LGAs	93.8%	83.3%	3.4%

In LGAs with high Indigenous populations, the concentration of poker machines in clubs is about 30% higher.

Figure 12: Poker machines in clubs, per 10,000 people - NSW



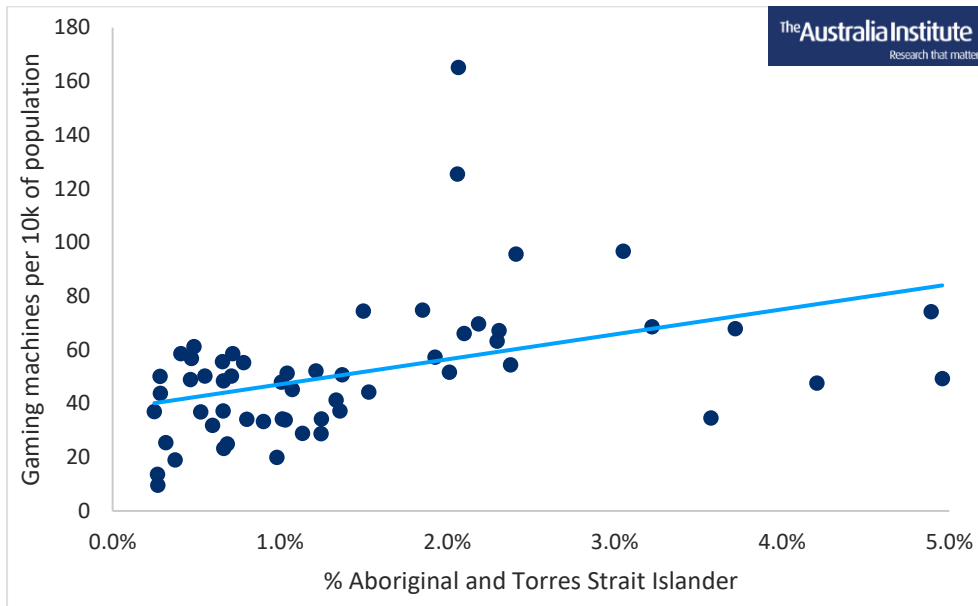
Population data: ABS (2023) *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 30 June 2021;
 NSW Government (2025) *Quarterly gaming reports*, February 2025,

⁶ NSW Government (2025) *Quarterly gaming reports*, February 2025,
<https://www.liquorandgaming.nsw.gov.au/resources/quarterly-gaming-reports>

VICTORIA

Victoria has the smallest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of any state and territory (1.2%). This means that, for the purposes of this analysis, no LGA met the 10% threshold necessary to be classified as an area with a high Indigenous population.⁷ Nevertheless, like other states and territories, it appears that Victorian LGAs with higher proportions of Indigenous people also have a larger concentration of pokies.⁸

Figure 13: Poker machines and Indigenous population by LGA - Vic



Population data: ABS (2023) *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 30 June 2021*;

Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (2025) *Gambling data*

<https://www.vgccc.vic.gov.au/for-community/gambling-victoria/gambling-data>

⁷ ABS (2023) *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 30 June 2021*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release#data-downloads>

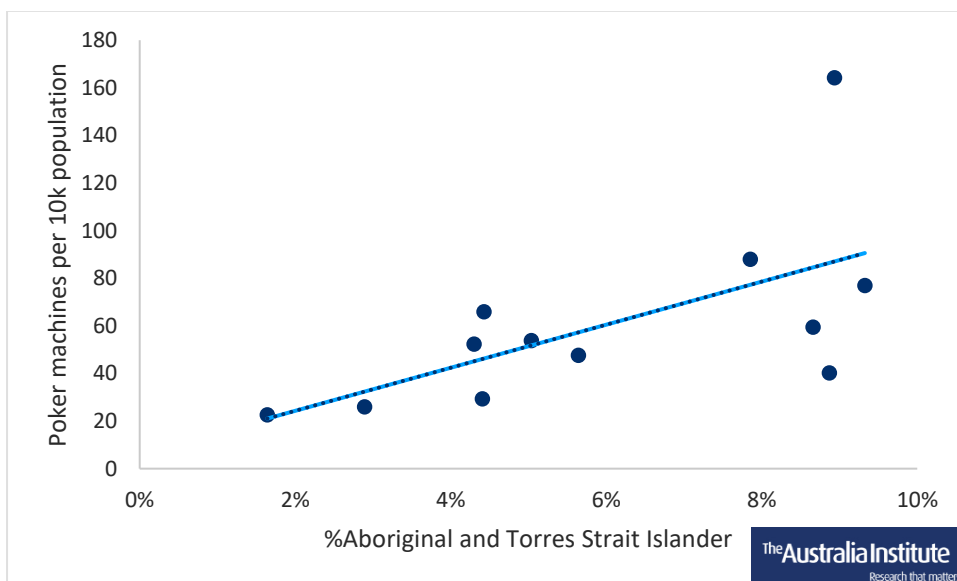
⁸ Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (2025) *Gambling data*

TASMANIA

Compared to other parts of Australia, the Indigenous population of Tasmania is relatively low. No LGA with reported data on poker machines met the 10% threshold necessary to be classified, for the purposes of this analysis, as an area with a high Indigenous population.⁹

While data on poker machines is only available for the 12 largest of Tasmania’s 29 LGAs, a correlation between Indigenous population and concentration of poker machines can still be identified.¹⁰ While populations may be lower than 10% of the total, LGAs with more Indigenous people tends to have more poker machines.

Figure 4: Poker machines and Indigenous population by LGA (Tasmania)



Population data: ABS (2023) *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 30 June 2021;

Burgess (2022) *Data reveals Tasmania’s pokies hot spots and where the most money is lost*

⁹ ABS (2023) *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 30 June 2021, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release#data-downloads>

¹⁰ Burgess (2022) *Data reveals Tasmania’s pokies hot spots and where the most money is lost* <https://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/data-reveals-tasmanias-pokies-hot-spots-and-where-the-most-money-is-lost/news-story/96a6cd0fbee427dc1448e3dc59eda326>

Conclusion

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities often do not have access to the high-quality health and education services that other Australians enjoy. It has been 17 years since the “Closing the Gap” strategy was launched, but only four of its 19 targets are on track.¹¹ The challenges in bringing critical infrastructure and services to these communities, however, do not appear to affect the proliferation of the gaming industry into areas with higher-than-average Indigenous populations.

As our analysis has shown, areas of Australia with an Indigenous population of 10% or more have one poker machine for every 99 people. In contrast, other areas of Australia have one poker machine for every 148 people. This means that there are 50% more poker machines in LGAs with high Indigenous populations.

Across all the local government areas we examined, almost \$13 billion is lost to poker machines every year – this disproportionately affects areas with higher indigenous populations. But not all corners of the continent are affected equally. Western Australia could not be included in this analysis because it restricts Electronic Gaming Machines to a single casino in Perth.¹² This means that per-person gambling losses in the state are far lower than the rest of Australia.¹³ This restriction means it is far more difficult for poker machine operators to exploit communities across suburban, regional and remote areas.

In discussions about gambling in Australia, individual people are often blamed for choosing to gamble. This kind of victim blaming is exacerbated when combined with racist tropes about Indigenous people. Our analysis, however, shows that areas of Australia with higher Indigenous populations have more poker machines, which make a profit off some of Australia’s more vulnerable people.

¹¹ Guivarra (2025) “Amongst national failures on Closing the Gap, local programs are seeing success”, <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/closing-the-gap-local-strengths-rising-above-national-failures/wqupo1omo>

¹² Turner & Martin (2021) “Crown Perth casino royal commission raises questions about how pokie-free WA is”, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-03/crown-perth-royal-commission-pokie-machines-questions/100429214>

¹³ Queensland Treasury (2023) *Australian Gambling Statistics, 39th edition, 1997–98 to 2022–23 Summary tables 2022-23*, Table A, <https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/statistics/theme/society/gambling/australian-gambling-statistics>