

High price of pokies

Barry Kennedy

Punters pump millions into 230 machines across five venues

THE amount of money poured into pokie machines in Sunbury in the past financial year could have paid for the soon-to-be-built global learning centre.

Punters plunged \$18,582,731 – or \$50,911 a day on average – into Sunbury pokies in the 2016-17 financial year, according to new Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation statistics. Sunbury has 230 electronic

gaming machines at five venues, with the two operations not attached to clubs taking almost a third of the expenditure.

Thirty-one machines at the Royal Hotel yielded \$5,667,863, while the Olive Tree Hotel, where there are 43 pokies, collected \$5,372,084.

The other venues' figures were the Sunbury Bowling Club, \$3,898,810; Sunbury Football Social

Club, \$1,884,696; and the Sunbury United Sporting Club, \$1,759,276.

Sunbury Community Health's building healthier communities manager Bernadette Hetherington said the figures were alarming.

"As an organisation, we are formulating a response which will focus on community awareness," she said.

"We need people to be aware of

the size of the losses, what opportunities from an economic or social point of view we might be missing and trying to advocate for more equity in ensuring venues invest meaningfully in their communities."

Ms Hetherington said it was difficult as a community health provider to actively respond to the gambling addiction.

"It's a hidden shame – people are just not going to come forward and tell you straight out how much they have lost," she said.

Sunbury councillor Jack Medcraft said Sunbury had enough pokies.

"They do provide a social outlet for people, but they are also taking pensions in some instances," he said.

Across Hume, punters spent \$105.7 million on the machines during the past financial year.