



# LUCK OF THE DRAW?

## INSIDE WESTERN SYDNEY'S GAMBLING HARM EPIDEMIC



CENTRE FOR  
WESTERN SYDNEY





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that its campuses occupy their traditional lands, Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal (also referred to as Tharawal) and Wiradjuri peoples and thanks them for their support of its work in their lands (Western Sydney and beyond).

**LUCK OF THE DRAW?: INSIDE WESTERN SYDNEY'S  
GAMBLING HARM EPIDEMIC**  
A CENTRE FOR WESTERN SYDNEY  
ISSUES PAPER



**CENTRE FOR  
WESTERN SYDNEY**

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Authored by Tom Nance  
Images by Sally Tsoutas

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# ISSUES PAPER

# LUCK OF THE DRAW?

## KEY POINTS

1

Despite only containing 54% of Sydney's population, Western Sydney endures 63% of electronic gaming machine losses.

2

The impact is significantly higher in Western Sydney's inner ring, where Fairfield, Canterbury-Bankstown and Cumberland account for a third of Sydney's losses.

3

An additional 169 electronic gaming machines were introduced in Western Sydney over the past 12-month reporting period, compounding the already high levels of electronic gaming machine saturation in the region.

4

Analysis shows that the disproportionate number of "mega clubs" in Western Sydney significantly contributes to this saturation.

5

The frontlines of the gambling-related harm epidemic are concentrated within locations with high levels of socio-economic disadvantage.





# ISSUES PAPER

# LUCK OF THE DRAW?

## KEY POINTS

- 6** The analysis within this paper provides a more granular view of the issue, identifying locations where the concentration of pokies and disadvantage contributes to a higher risk of gambling-related harm.
- 7** All 13 locations of significant concern for gambling-related harm are in Western Sydney. Over three-quarters of these house at least one premises in Sydney's top decile for electronic gaming machine losses.
- 8** Spatial concentrations of gambling-related harm in Western Sydney establish an evidence-based rationale for targeted interventions, which is critical to addressing the impacts these communities face.
- 9** Given the significant proportion of locations of concern in Western Sydney, insights from those on the ground, generated by meaningful consultation with communities and practitioners, will be critical in addressing this epidemic.





## LUCK OF THE DRAW?

# ELECTRONIC GAMING'S GROUND ZERO

Western Sydney remains the epicentre of electronic gaming in the state, with gambling-related harm disproportionately impacting the region's individuals, families and communities. Publicly available data from Liquor and Gaming NSW lays bare the extent of this epidemic, which compounds poor socio-economic outcomes in already disadvantaged suburbs.<sup>1</sup>

**“Despite a small decrease from the last reporting period, nearly \$9 million was lost daily in pubs and clubs in the West.”**

The region accumulates losses disproportionately: Western Sydney incurs 62% of Greater Sydney's electronic gaming machine losses despite housing just 54% of its population. Of particular concern are the persistent losses accrued in the Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland and Fairfield local government areas, which account for a third of Sydney's losses despite only making up 16.5% of its population.

Cost-of-living pressures and the subsequent decrease in discretionary spending likely played a part in the modest decrease in losses, with both Western Sydney and the rest of Sydney recording a drop of 8.0% and 6.2%, respectively. Whether this downward trend will continue or is an outlier in the context of the significant losses that people in VIP Rooms across the Western Sydney region incur remains to be seen.

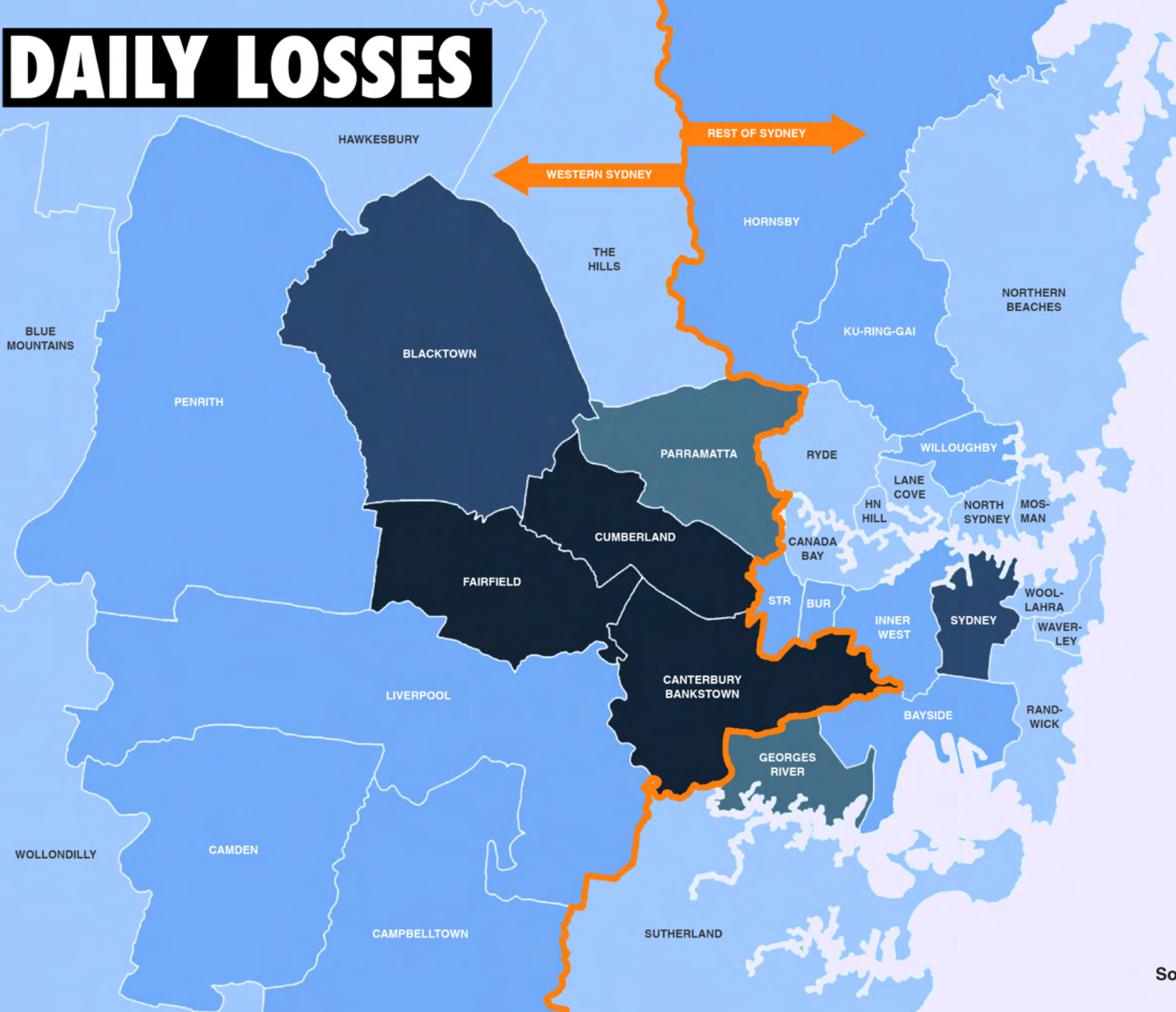


# DAILY LOSSES

Mapping and analysis by the Centre for Western Sydney  
[www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws)

## Figure 1: Daily Losses

Daily electronic gaming machine losses, 1H 2023



<b>\$1.8M</b>	Canterbury-Bankstown	<b>\$400K</b>	Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai & Willoughby
<b>\$1.7M</b>	Fairfield	<b>\$390K</b>	Northern Beaches
<b>\$1.3M</b>	Cumberland	<b>\$360K</b>	Randwick, Woollahra
<b>\$960K</b>	Sydney	<b>\$360K</b>	Sutherland
<b>\$940K</b>	Blacktown	<b>\$350K</b>	Ryde
<b>\$660K</b>	Georges River	<b>\$310K</b>	The Hills
<b>\$640K</b>	Parramatta	<b>\$250K</b>	Camden
<b>\$590K</b>	Penrith	<b>\$200K</b>	Canada Bay, Hunters Hill & Lane Cove
<b>\$540K</b>	Liverpool	<b>\$170K</b>	Mosman & North Sydney
<b>\$530K</b>	Campbelltown	<b>\$160K</b>	Hawkesbury
<b>\$520K</b>	Burwood & Strathfield	<b>\$130K</b>	Waverley
<b>\$460K</b>	Bayside	<b>\$60K</b>	Blue Mountains
<b>\$410K</b>	Inner West	<b>\$60K</b>	Wollondilly

> \$1M	\$800K – \$1M	\$600K – \$800K	\$400K – \$600K	< \$400K
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Source: Liquor and Gaming NSW, 2023

# LOSSES OVER TIME

Figure 2: Total electronic gaming machine losses per reporting period, 2017–2023







## LUCK OF THE DRAW?

# A REGION OF MEGA CLUBS AND SUBURBAN PUBS

An additional 169 electronic gaming machines were introduced overall in Western Sydney over the past 12-month reporting period, compounding the already high levels of electronic gaming machine saturation in the region.

**“Despite significantly high gaming losses in the Canterbury-Bankstown and Cumberland local government areas, an additional 177 machines came online during this period.”**

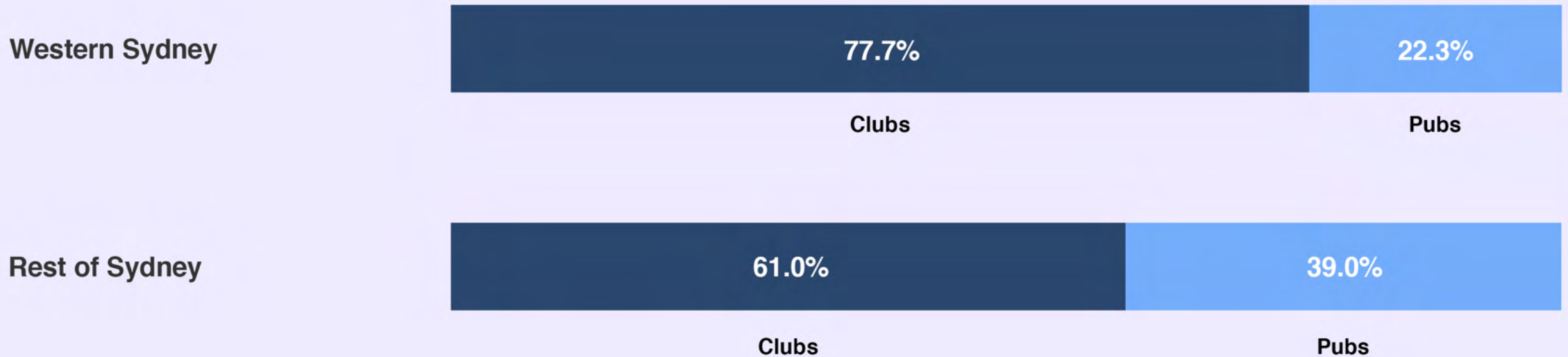
Fairfield continues to have the lowest resident ratio per electronic gaming machine at 55 people. During the previous reporting period, Canterbury-Bankstown, Hawkesbury, Cumberland and Penrith maintained concerningly high electronic gaming machine concentration levels.

Analysis of Liquor and Gaming NSW data shows that the disproportionate number of mega clubs in Western Sydney significantly contributes to saturation, with 27 clubs in the region housing over 250 electronic gaming machines.<sup>2</sup> This is reflected in the relatively high proportion of electronic gaming machines in Western Sydney clubs, at 77.7%, compared to 61.0% in the rest of Sydney.



# WHERE ARE THE POKIES?

Figure 3: Location of gaming machines by venue type



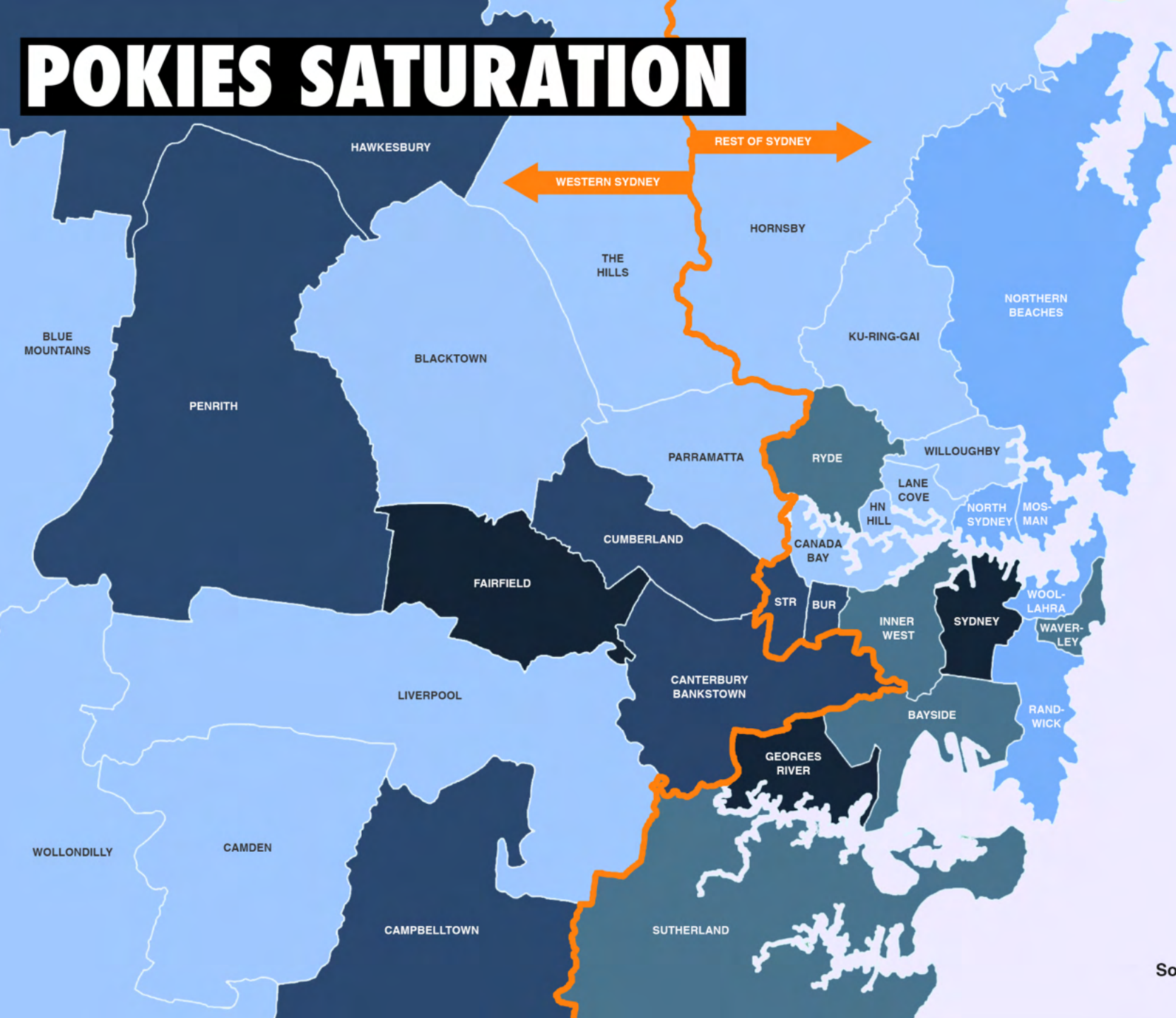
# POKIES SATURATION

Mapping and analysis by the Centre for Western Sydney  
[www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws)

## Figure 4: Concentration of EGMs

Number of people per electronic gaming machine (EGM) by local government area, 1H 2023

55	Fairfield	120	Sutherland
63	Sydney	125	Northern Beaches
74	Georges River	125	Randwick & Woollahra
77	Canterbury-Bankstown	131	Mosman & North Sydney
81	Hawkesbury	142	Blacktown
87	Cumberland	145	Blue Mountains
89	Penrith	151	Parramatta
95	Campbelltown	168	Canada Bay, Hunters Hill & Lane Cove
100	Burwood & Strathfield	172	Wollondilly
101	Inner West	172	Liverpool
108	Ryde	194	Camden
114	Waverley	208	Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai & Willoughby
117	Bayside	224	The Hills



Source: Liquor and Gaming NSW, 2023





## LUCK OF THE DRAW?

# SOCIAL COMPLEXITIES AND ECONOMIC REALITIES

Previous research has shown that high levels of socio-economic disadvantage are a significant risk factor for gambling-related harm.<sup>3</sup>

**“This continues to play out in real time in Western Sydney, where the frontlines of the gambling-related harm epidemic mirror its most disadvantaged local government areas.”**

While the region has pockets of advantage and disadvantage, the latest data paints a grim picture.<sup>4</sup> Alarmingly, 97.3% of Sydney’s suburbs in the highest decile for disadvantage are located in Western Sydney. Most of those are in Blacktown, Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland and Fairfield.

A range of intersectional factors contribute to the entrenched socio-economic disadvantage within the region. Western Sydney’s comparatively lower educational attainment, household income and workforce participation rates, discussed in the Centre’s recently released Bridging the Divide paper, must be addressed to improve outcomes for residents, including a decrease in susceptibility to gambling-related harm.<sup>5</sup>

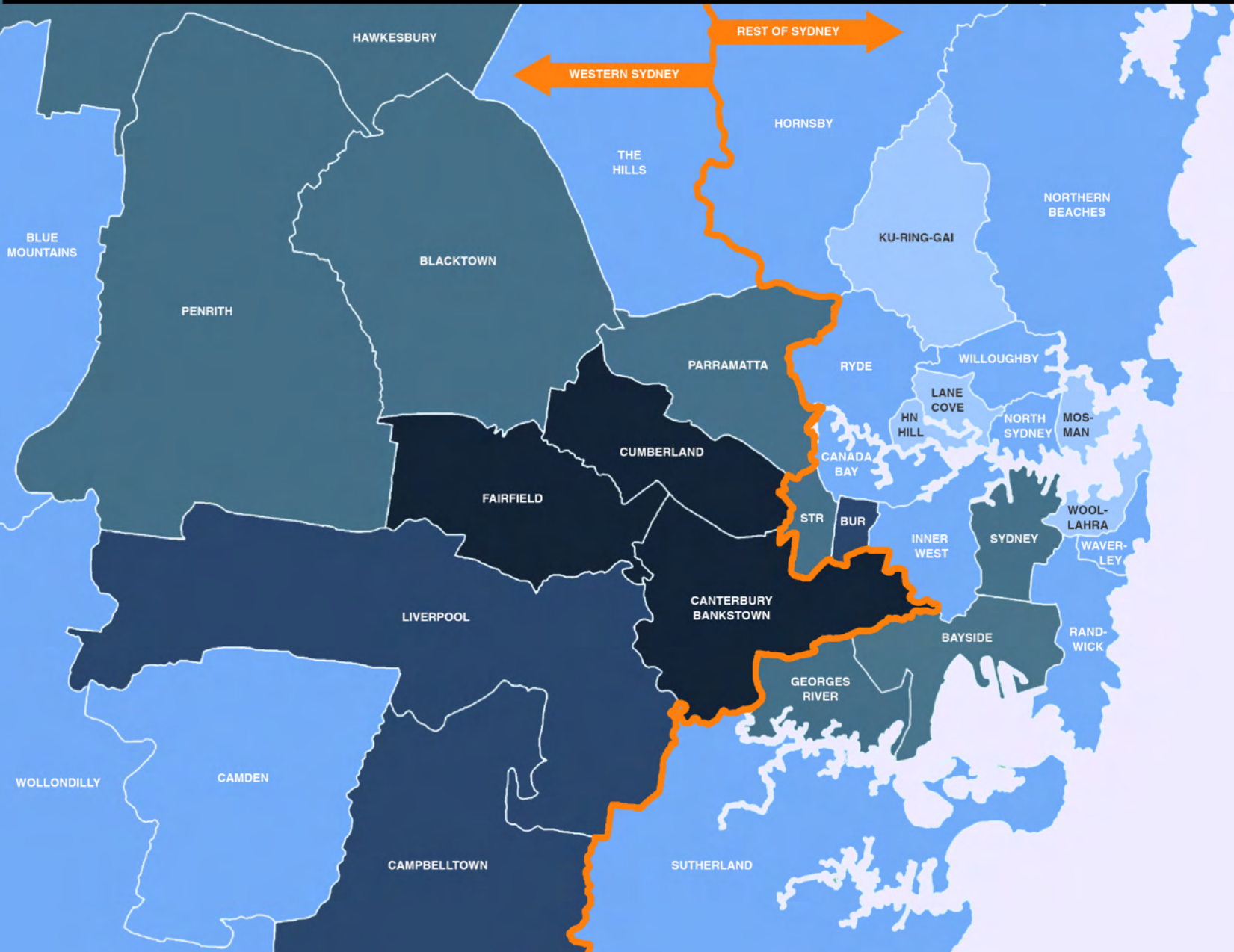


# SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

Mapping and analysis by the Centre for Western Sydney  
[www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws)

## Figure 5: Disadvantage

Local Government Area Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage, 2021



814	Fairfield	1055	Ryde
904	Cumberland	1057	Inner West
917	Canterbury-Bankstown	1059	Randwick
931	Liverpool	1067	Canada Bay
947	Campbelltown	1075	Willoughby
977	Burwood	1079	Sutherland
987	Blacktown	1082	Hornsby
991	Penrith	1089	Northern Beaches
1004	Bayside	1092	Waverley
1011	Strathfield	1096	North Sydney
1011	Georges River	1098	The Hills
1026	Hawkesbury	1101	Hunters Hill
1029	Parramatta	1105	Lane Cove
1031	Sydney	1108	Ku-ring-gai
1041	Wollondilly	1110	Mosman
1045	Camden	1110	Woollahra
1048	Blue Mountains		



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023





## LUCK OF THE DRAW?

# A PERFECT STORM IN THE WEST

New analysis provides a more granular view of the issue, identifying locations where the concentration of pokies and disadvantage contributes to a higher risk of gambling-related harm.

**“All 13 locations of significant concern for gambling-related harm, identified through the Centre for Western Sydney’s analysis, are situated in Western Sydney.”**

These locations of concern are defined as being in the top decile in Sydney for both disadvantage and electronic gaming machine saturation. Over three-quarters of these locations house at least one premises in Sydney’s top decile for electronic gaming machine losses.

Further, 83.8% of additional locations of concern are in Western Sydney. These sites are classified as being in the top decile in Sydney for disadvantage and the top quintile for electronic gaming machine saturation, or vice versa. A clear correlation exists between these locations and pubs and clubs that attract significant profits through electronic gaming.

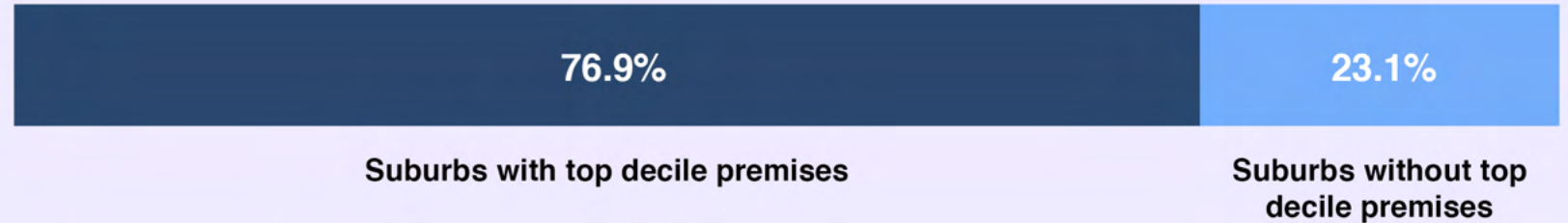
Identifying these locations for the first time provides an evidence-based rationale for targeted interventions, which are critical to addressing the impacts communities face due to gambling-related harm.

# A CLEAR RELATIONSHIP

Figure 6: Proportion of suburbs with at least one premise in top decile for losses

## Locations of significant concern

Top decile in Sydney for both disadvantage and electronic gaming machine saturation.

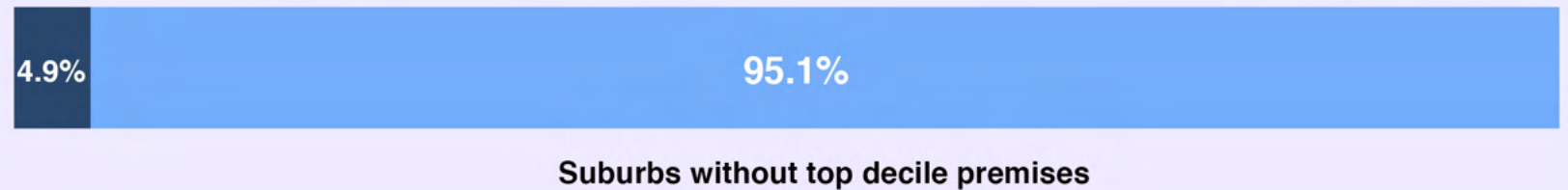


## Locations of concern

Top decile in Sydney for disadvantage and top quintile for electronic gaming machine saturation, or vice versa.



## Remaining locations





# LOCATIONS OF CONCERN

Mapping and analysis by the Centre for Western Sydney  
[www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws)

## Locations of significant concern

Top decile in Sydney for both disadvantage and electronic gaming machine saturation.

Bankstown

Dharruk

Riverwood

Birrong

Fairfield

Smithfield

Bossley Park

Mount Pritchard

St Johns Park

Cabramatta

North St Marys

Wakeley

Canley Vale

## Locations of concern

Top decile in Sydney for disadvantage and top quintile for electronic gaming machine saturation, or vice versa.

Belmore

Leumeah

Richmond

Burwood

Lidcombe

Rooty Hill

Campbelltown

Liverpool

South Windsor

Campsie

Merrylands

St Marys

Emerton

Narellan

Sydney

Granville

Penrith

Windsor

Guildford

Regents Park

Yennora

Haymarket

Revesby

Source: Liquor and Gaming NSW, 2023,  
and Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023



## LUCK OF THE DRAW?

# NEW GOVERNMENT, NEW APPROACH?

A skirmish regarding gambling in pubs and clubs emerged as a subplot of the March NSW State election, with both parties taking significantly different positions on key reform elements.

**“Ultimately, in the context of soaring costs of living and commitments regarding public service wages and privatisation, gambling reform wasn’t a high priority for voters.”**

After winning the election, the Minns Government announced a trial of cashless gaming technology across 500 machines.<sup>6</sup> An expert panel has been appointed to oversee this trial and advise whether cashless gambling should be widely adopted.

Given the significant proportion of locations of concern in Western Sydney, insights from those on the ground, generated by meaningful consultation with those working on the frontlines in Western Sydney and those with lived experience, are critical. These insights and the cooperation of the region’s pubs and clubs are essential in ensuring that any policy reform enacted meaningfully addresses gambling-related harm.





## PAYING THE PRICE

# REFERENCES

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Rintoul, A., Livingstone, C. H., Andrew, M. P., & Jolley, D. J. (2013). Modelling vulnerability to gambling related harm: How disadvantage predicts gambling losses. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 21(4), 329 - 338.

<sup>4</sup> Socio-Economic Indexes for Australia (SEIFA), 2021 (2023). Australian Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/socio-economic-indexes-areas-seifa-australia/latest-release>

<sup>5</sup> Itaoui, R., Balogh, S. & Gerace, G. (2023). Bridging the divide: Exploring the intersections of education, income and identity in Western Sydney. Centre for Western Sydney.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet (2023) NSW Government announces independent panel to oversee gaming reform roadmap. Retrieved from <https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/gaming-reform-roadmap>



**CENTRE FOR  
WESTERN SYDNEY**

## **About the Centre for Western Sydney**

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**WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY is the only university in NSW with a legislated commitment to conduct research that meets the needs of Western Sydney communities. Fulfilling this unique mandate for research, the University established the Centre for Western Sydney in 2014.**

Combining world-class research expertise with frank and fearless advocacy on issues of importance to Western Sydney, the work of the Centre for Western Sydney is guided by its ambition for a thriving Western Sydney that is understood and respected for its strengths and contributions regionally, nationally, and internationally. Delivered through a strong politics of listening, the Centre aims to drive informed dialogue and action in the region.



@westsydu\_cfws

cws@westernsydney.edu.au

[www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws)