**[More than 500 new poker machines installed in NSW despite Chris Minns promising to slash numbers](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/nov/05/more-than-500-new-poker-machines-installed-in-nsw-despite-chris-minns-promising-to-slash-numbers)**

Total number of machines in state increased from 87,094 in March last year to **87,644** in October 2024

*The Guardian -* [**Henry Belot**](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/henry-belot) *-* Tue 5 Nov 2024

More than 500 new poker machines have been installed since Labor won office in [New South Wales](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/new-south-wales) last year, despite a campaign pledge to cut their numbers in pubs and clubs.

In January 2023, two months before the state election, the now premier, Chris Minns, declared a Labor government would [“**reduce the number of poker machines**”](https://x.com/ChrisMinnsMP/status/1615164754472861696?lang=en) in NSW.

But the government’s latest figures show an additional 550 poker machines have been registered since March 2023, when the state election was held.

The total number of machines operating has increased from 87,094 in March last year to 87,644 in October, according to an analysis by Wesley Mission.

“It is embarrassing that the number of gaming machines has gone up,” said Stu Cameron, the charity’s chief executive. “The government had a very public commitment to see them reduced.”

While the state government reduced the cap on gambling machine entitlements by 3,000 in June last year, the number of pokies was able to increase as some clubs had not exhausted their existing allocation.

When clubs amalgamate, entitlements from smaller clubs can be transferred to other venues. New owners may be more willing to increase the number of machines.

Some of the poker machines that have come online since March 2023 had previously been in storage at venues.

According to Wesley Mission, many of these new machines were installed in Sydney’s western suburbs, which are [**responsible for two-thirds of the city’s gambling losses**](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/feb/12/silent-epidemic-almost-two-thirds-of-sydneys-gambling-losses-occur-in-citys-west). Another 97 were registered in Parramatta, 93 in Canterbury Bankstown and 22 in Fairfield. Another 135 were registered in Canada Bay.

The increase in pokies has also led to a spike in gambling losses.

More than $2bn was lost to poker machines during the second quarter of this year, according to the analysis, which equates to roughly $22m a day. This was a $142m increase on the amount lost in the first quarter of 2023, before the state election.

The increase is despite several state government initiatives designed to reduce losses, including a $500 cash limit, a cashless gaming trial and a ban on advertising outside venues. The government has also flagged a buyback scheme aimed at removing 2,000 machines over five years.

A spokesperson for the NSW gaming minister, David Harris, said the government was “strongly committed to reducing gambling harm and preventing money laundering and criminal activity”.

The spokesperson said the the cap on machines would be “continually lowered on a regular basis”.

The government has also sought to reduce the number of pokies by changing the forfeiture scheme. For every two gambling entitlements traded between venues, one will be forfeited.

Cameron said he believed the NSW government was genuine in its commitment to reduce gambling harm but warned the forfeiture scheme was “broken” and “not having an impact”.

Charles Livingstone, an expert in gambling at Monash University, said the data showed the harms caused by gambling in NSW were getting worse.

“The data give the lie to any claim that electronic gaming machine numbers in NSW are declining,” Livingstone said.

“As clubs and pubs give up pokies or amalgamate with other operators, the number of venues is declining, as the number of electronic gaming machines increases.”