

Alcohol, gambling giants in firing line

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BIG gambling and alcohol companies should pay a levy to help fund legal services.

The Australian Bar Association will lobby State and Federal governments to use a "special industry levy" as an alternative source of income to combat a growing funding crisis in Legal Aid and other legal

services due to the link between gambling, illicit drugs, alcohol and court workloads.

It comes as key services such as Legal Aid and Community Legal Centres, as well as courts, are overwhelmed with cases where drinking, drug abuse and gambling are at the centre of offending and litigation.

A high-income corporation levy and speeding fine levy are two more alternatives the ABA wants to investigate as a way to put money back into legal services.

The ABA's Access to Justice Committee chairwoman Jacoba Brasch, QC, said governments should not be "let off the hook" but the reality was new revenue-raising ideas were needed.

"We know there is a huge correlation between alcohol, drugs and gambling across whole areas of law," she said.

"It's not just the person being drunk at midnight who punches someone else who ends up in the criminal system; we see it in domestic violence

courts, family law and right down to personal injuries cases. And the fact is that some

of the companies involved in terms of gambling and alcohol make huge amounts of money, so it's really about a corporate conscience."

The alternative ideas came from a meeting of Bar Associations from around the country and other key players like the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service and Community Legal Centres.