

Push for sin levy to fund Legal Aid

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GAMBLING and alcohol companies should pay a levy to help fund legal services, according to a peak lawyers' group.

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.

Legal Aid, Community Legal Centres and the courts have been overwhelmed by cases in which drinking, illicit drug abuse and gambling are at the centre.

A high-income corporation levy and a speeding-fine levy are two more options the ABA wants to investigate to put money back into legal services, as well as more efficient justice options, such as arbitration.

The ABA's Access to Justice Committee chairwoman, Jaco-

ba Brasch, QC, said governments should not be "let off the hook", with new revenue-raising ideas 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.

"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 ideas came out of a meeting of bar associations from around the country and other key players, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service and community legal centres.

"We know legal assistance services are at crisis, and this levy proposal in no way is to let governments off the hook,"

Ms Brasch said. "Indeed, if we were able to identify pots of money from a levy, it would have to come with a commitment from government that it wouldn't decrease funding.

"So we are certainly still calling for more funding from governments, but we are also keen to start a conversation about alternatives, and we keep coming back to the correlation between alcohol, gambling and drugs."

The levy and other ideas will form part of a discussion paper the ABA is finalising to present to the Federal Government, attorneys-general and chief justices this year.

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**IT'S REALLY ABOUT
A CORPORATE
CONSCIENCE**

Jacoba Brasch, QC