

Gambling in Alberta Policy Background Paper

Prepared for the AADAC Commission Board

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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Definitions	2
Availability	3
Revenue/Expenditures	4
Prevalence of Gambling in Alberta	5
Adults (18+)	5
Youth	6
Seniors	7
Cultural Sub-Populations	7
AADAC Clients	8
Consequences	9
Health	9
Crime	9
Workplace.....	10
Addiction Services.....	10
Key Considerations	11
Policy/Legislation	11
Government and Industry Strategies – Harm Reduction	12
Prevention	14
Treatment	14
Research	15
Public Opinion	15
Conclusions.....	16
APPENDIX A.....	18
References.....	22

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Introduction

In 1994 the *Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act* was amended and AADAC's mandate expanded to include the delivery of programs for problem gambling.¹ At that time, the AADAC Commission Board adopted a Policy on Gambling that broadly guides the provision of services and research within AADAC, and supports collaboration in developing community-based initiatives that are intended to minimize the harmful consequences of gambling.

The purpose of this paper is to provide the Commission Board with background information for their review of AADAC's Policy on Gambling.² It is not meant to be a comprehensive review of the research literature, and many of the issues presented could be covered in greater depth. The paper consists of four main sections. First, the expansion of legalized gambling and the number of gaming venues in Alberta are considered. Second, the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling in Alberta is presented. Third, the consequences of problem gambling are examined in relation to health, crime and the workplace. Finally the policy considerations arising from this information are discussed.

Definitions

Gambling is defined as any activity involving an element of chance where a person places a bet or wager. It can include purchasing a lottery ticket, making speculative investments on the stock market, guessing the outcome of a sporting event, playing a casino game or betting on a horse race.³

Problem gambling is a recognized psychiatric disorder characterised by (1) continuous or periodic loss of control over gambling behaviour, (2) a preoccupation with gambling and with obtaining money to gamble, (3) irrational thinking, and (4) continuation of gambling behaviour despite negative consequences.⁴

Many researchers consider the term gaming a euphemism that is used by governments and the gambling industry to soften public perceptions. Widespread use of this term reinforces the legality and socially acceptable status of gambling.⁵

Availability

Gambling in Alberta is governed by federal and provincial legislation: the *Criminal Code* (Canada) and the *Gaming and Liquor Act* (Alberta). The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC) was established under the *Gaming and Liquor Act*, and is responsible for the administration and regulation of all gambling activities in Alberta.⁶ There are three general types of gambling activities in Alberta: (1) charitable gaming which includes bingo, casinos, raffles and pull tickets, (2) provincial lotteries which include Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs), slot machines (also called Casino Gaming Terminals) and ticket lotteries, and (3) horse racing.

Due to changes in government policy in Alberta, an increasing variety of gambling activities have become legally available over the past five to ten years. In particular, electronic gaming (e.g., VLTs, slot machines) has proliferated, satellite bingo and sports betting were introduced, most existing casinos have been renovated and expanded, and casinos now have permission to offer craps games and to operate 24-hour poker rooms.⁵ Table 1 shows the number and type of licensed gambling activities currently available in the province.⁷

Table 1: Licensed Gambling in Alberta

Bingo	56 halls
Casinos	16 facilities (with slots)
Horse Racing	5 tracks
Lotteries	2,111 ticket centres
Racing Entertainment Centres	2 (with slots)
Slot Machines	6,347 (in casinos and racing entertainment centres)
Video Lottery Terminals	6,000 in 1,179 locations

Further expansion of gambling in Alberta can be expected, and two planned initiatives are noteworthy.

- In 2001 the Alberta Government introduced the First Nations Gaming Policy, which will allow the development of casinos on-reserve. Under this policy, the government will continue to regulate and control gaming, and the charitable gaming model will be maintained. However, 40% of the revenue generated will be directed to a First Nations Development Fund.⁸ To date, seven First Nations have applied and proposals are at various stages of the approval process. Applications have been received from the Enoch Cree (Edmonton), Alexis First Nation (Alexis), Samson Cree (Hobemma), Louis Bull and Montana First Nation (Hobemma), Cold Lake First Nation (Cold Lake), Tsuu T'ina (Calgary) and Stoney Nakoda (Kananaskis).⁹

- In August 2003 the government announced that it will be testing the popularity of penny slot machines. Penny slots have been available for some time in B.C. and Saskatchewan casinos, as well as in the United States.¹⁰

One of the fastest growing forms of gambling, and one that is unregulated in Alberta, is Internet gambling. Observers expect that increasing use of the Internet combined with the introduction of on-line gambling will have a profound effect on the prevalence of problem gambling; especially among youth that are comfortable and familiar with on-line technology. Many gambling activities are easily adapted to the Internet, including casino games, sports booking and on-line bingo.³ According to law enforcement sources, there are more than 1,400 on-line gambling sites operating in 54 jurisdictions (compared with 15 identified in 1997) and there are approximately four million on-line gamblers using these sites.¹¹

Revenue/Expenditures

The financial impact of gambling in Alberta, and especially the increase in electronic gaming, has been considerable. Government revenues from lotteries, VLTs and casinos increased from \$225 million in 1992 to more than \$1 billion in 2002/03.^{7 12} Government revenue is expected to continue to rise, albeit at a slower pace, as new facilities and electronic games are established.¹³

Currently there are approximately 9,000 groups licensed to conduct charity gaming events in Alberta. In 2002/2003, the returns on charitable gaming were \$206 million. Similar to licensed gambling formats, returns to charities are expected to increase in coming years with the introduction of electronic bingo and keno and the opening of new casinos. Other than licensing fees, the government receives no revenue from the charitable gaming it regulates.⁷

Per capita, adult Albertans (18 and older) lead the nation in spending on gambling. In 2001, Albertans spent \$604 per person compared to \$105 spent by adults in the Territories (Yukon, Northwest and Nunavut combined), and a national average of \$447. Since 1992, per capita expenditures on gambling among adult Albertans have increased 400%.¹²

AADAC services for problem gambling are funded through the Alberta Lottery Fund. In 2003/2004, AADAC's budget for problem gambling programs and initiatives was \$4.3 million, which represents 0.36% of Government gaming revenue.⁷ Funding to AADAC for problem gambling services has increased yearly since 1994, and has almost doubled since 1997/1998 (\$2.3 million).¹⁴ A recent cross-Canada comparison of funding for problem gambling programs ranked Alberta sixth among provinces for per capita spending (\$1.34).¹³

The government also provides \$1.5 million in funding per year to subsidize the Alberta Gaming Research Institute (AGRI)—a consortium of Alberta's three universities—whose mandate is to produce peer-reviewed research on a variety of gambling-related topics.⁵

Prevalence of Gambling in Alberta

Adults (18+):

Three population surveys have been conducted to assess the gambling patterns and behaviours of adult Albertans (18 and older). In 1994, Alberta Lotteries and Gaming commissioned a study to establish a baseline for the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling in the province.¹⁵ In 1998, AADAC contracted a study to replicate this research and to assess changes in gambling participation and problem rates.¹⁶ Both surveys used the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) to determine the extent of gambling problems in the population.¹⁷

More recently, the Alberta Gaming Research Institute funded a third study that measured gambling participation and validated a new measure of problem gambling—the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI). This instrument is considered better able to discriminate between problem gambler types and is more theory based than the SOGS.⁵ In addition, the CPGI was designed specifically for Canadian communities and has also been used in New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia.¹⁸

As shown in Table 2, the prevalence of gambling in Alberta has declined since 1994. One possible explanation for this may be that Alberta is nearing the saturation point relative to gambling participation. As Smith and Wynne suggest, “Alberta has had more legal gambling formats and had them longer than most other provinces, [so] perhaps the novelty is wearing off...”⁵

Results from the Smith and Wynne study show that Albertans living in the northern part of the province are more likely to gamble than residents in Edmonton, Calgary or southern Alberta. Findings also indicate that the higher the household income, the more likely respondents were to have gambled in the previous year. Most commonly, adult Albertans reported buying lottery (61.8%), raffle (49.5%) or instant win tickets (29.2%) with fewer playing slot machines (15.9%) and VLTs (13.4%). Despite media interest and concern, less than 5% of Albertans reported Internet gambling.⁵

**Table 2: Gambling and Problem Gambling in Alberta
Alberta Adults (18+)**

Year	Prevalence (% Gambling Past Year)	Problem Gambling*
1994	90.3%	5.4%
1998	87.4%	4.8%
2002	82.0%	5.2%

*Represents adult respondents who scored as either problem or pathological gamblers on the SOGS (1994, 1998), or adult respondents classified as moderate risk or problem gamblers using the CPGI (2002).

Although the three prevalence surveys conducted in Alberta made use of two different instruments to assess problem gambling, results are loosely comparable. As shown in Table 2, the prevalence of problem gambling has been relatively stable since 1994. About 5% or 111,000 adult Albertans experience moderate to severe problems as a result of their gambling. That is, they may be heavily involved in gambling and may have lost control of their behaviour; spending greater amounts of time and money than intended, borrowing or committing illegal acts to continue gambling or pay debts, experiencing stress anxiety and guilt as a result of their gambling behaviour, and having personal or employment problems due to their gambling.⁵

Overall, problem gamblers are more likely to participate in almost all types of gambling, and they spend more per month on gambling than those adults classified as non-problem gamblers. The most prominent risk characteristics for problem gambling identified by Smith and Wynne include living in northern Alberta, being young (19-24 years), single, unemployed, having a high-school education or less, and being of Aboriginal ancestry.⁵

When the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling in Alberta is compared to that reported in other provinces, Alberta has a higher proportion of moderate risk and problem gamblers than all other jurisdictions with the exception of Saskatchewan (Table 3).¹⁸

**Table 3: Gambling and Problem Gambling
Provincial Comparison for Adults (18 and older)**

	Year	Prevalence (% Gambling Past Year)	Problem Gambling*
British Columbia	2002	85.0%	4.6%
Alberta	2002	82.0%	5.2%
Saskatchewan	2002	86.6%	5.9%
Manitoba	2001	85.0%	3.4%
Ontario	2001	83.2%	3.8%
New Brunswick	2001	80.2%	3.2%
Canada	1999	---	3.3%
*Represents adult respondents classified as moderate risk or problem gamblers using the CPGI.			

Youth:

According to results from the *Alberta Youth Experience Survey*, 41.2% of students (11-19 years) are current gamblers. The most frequent youth gambling activities are scratch tabs (30.8%), playing cards for money (23.0%) and betting on sports events (21.1%). Survey results suggest that Alberta students perceive gambling as socially acceptable.¹⁹

Among Alberta students surveyed in 2002, 9.5% were classified as either hazardous or problem gamblers (according to the South Oaks Gambling Screen Revised for Adolescents, SOGS-RA). Findings indicated that problem gamblers were more likely to be male, older (i.e., in high school as opposed to junior high), self-identified as Aboriginal, and from mid to larger cities in the province. The primary risk factors identified for youth gambling in Alberta include age (i.e., as youth get older they are more likely to gamble), peer behaviour, family history of substance use or gambling, little connection to school and signs of drop out.¹⁹

Canadian research suggests that teens and young adults are two to four times more likely than adults to experience gambling problems. For example, a Nova Scotia study reported that 11.7% of students had gambling problems compared with 4.8% of adults in the province.^{4 20 21} The situation in Alberta appears to be quite comparable.

Seniors:

Like alcohol and other drug use, studies generally show that gambling participation declines with age, particularly beyond age 65.⁵ There is ongoing speculation, however, that with the aging of the Baby Boom generation, this pattern of behaviour will change significantly. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of seniors who gamble is higher than current prevalence estimates.²²

Research conducted in Alberta confirms that the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling is lower among seniors than in the general adult population. Findings from an AADAC study conducted in 2000 showed that 67.8% of Alberta seniors (65 and older) were current gamblers. The majority of seniors reported buying lottery (77.1%) or raffle tickets (56.5%), whereas fewer seniors reported that they played slot machines (20.7%), bingo (17.9%) or VLTs (12.4%). Interestingly, many seniors commented that they did not consider buying lottery or raffle tickets a form of gambling.²²

In general, men were more likely than women to participate in all types of gambling, with the exception of bingo, and seniors with higher incomes (>\$20,000) were more apt to gamble than those with lower incomes.²² In terms of gambling problems, a minority of Alberta seniors were identified as problem (1.4%) or pathological gamblers (0.4%).

The prevalence and patterns of gambling and problem gambling among Alberta seniors are quite similar to study results reported in Manitoba. Overall, it appears that seniors are less likely than younger adults to experience gambling problems. They also participate in fewer types of gambling activities, gamble less frequently and spend less money on gaming activities.²³

Cultural Sub-Populations:

A recent review of the research literature suggests that among Aboriginal populations, rates of problem gambling (for both adolescents and adults) are two to 15 times higher than in non-Aboriginal populations.²⁴ This review included information on some of the studies conducted in Alberta. However, prevalence and problem gambling estimates among Aboriginal populations have been questioned due to the methods and

instruments used, which are not considered culturally relevant. Therefore, the figures presented below should be interpreted with caution.

- A 1995 study reported that 89% of Aboriginal students were current gamblers and 28% were identified as problem gamblers.²⁵
- In 2000, a study of Aboriginal adults reported that 88% of respondents were current gamblers and 25% had moderate to severe gambling problems.²⁶

Another cultural group that appears to have a high prevalence of gambling is the Asian population. Little research has been conducted to determine whether or not this perception is accurate. One U.S. study reported serious gambling problems among members of the Southeast Asian community, particularly refugees.²⁷ Local information about this issue will be available following the completion of two studies currently funded by the Alberta Gaming Research Institute (AGRI). Researchers from both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta are conducting studies to determine the prevalence of gambling and the effect of culture in the Chinese community.²⁸

AADAC Clients:

In 2002/2003, 4% of AADAC treatment clients (adults and youth) were admitted for gambling problems only, and an additional 2% were admitted for alcohol/other drug and gambling problems. The gambling activities most commonly reported by clients were buying lottery (28%) or instant-win (25%) tickets, and playing VLTs (23%). Fewer clients reported playing slot machines (14%), betting in the casinos (11%) or playing bingo (11%).²⁹

In 1997, AADAC conducted a clinical study with clients seeking treatment for problems related to VLT gambling. While results cannot be generalized to gamblers outside of the AADAC treatment population, they were informative for AADAC in developing and improving treatment programming. The study showed that the majority of VLT clients gambled to win money (91%) or to distract themselves from problems (70%). Clients stated that they preferred VLTs to other forms of gambling because of the excitement and speed of play, and because it was convenient and easy access VLTs. Most clients said they financed their gambling through household accounts, credit cards or by borrowing from friends, and 65% said they spent more than \$500 per month playing VLTs.

A large majority of clients (71%) said they had not experienced gambling problems prior to playing VLTs. Using the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) for assessment, virtually all of the clients in the study (97%) were considered probable pathological gamblers. Many of the clients participating in this study reported at least one attempt to seek help or quit gambling prior to coming to AADAC, and although unsuccessful, previous treatment experience was seen as helpful.³⁰

Consequences

Problem gambling can lead to a number of well-documented and serious consequences. These include mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, substance abuse, loss of financial stability, interpersonal problems and criminal involvement. Problem gambling can also have consequences for the gambler's family, friends and employer.^{31 32}

Health

One of the most severe health consequences from gambling is suicide. Currently there are no reliable national statistics on gambling-related suicide, but efforts are being made to standardize the collection of coroner and medical examiner data.³³ Information from provincial coroner and medical examiner files shows an increase in gambling-related suicide in recent years. In Quebec for example, 27 gambling-related suicides were recorded from 1994-1999 compared to 126 recorded since that time. Nova Scotia reported that 6.3% of all suicides were linked to gambling over an 18-month time period in 2001/2002. In Alberta, 10% of suicides in 2001 were gambling-related.³⁴ The Medical Examiner in Alberta only records information about gambling if a relative or friend mentions it, or if there is other evidence of gambling at the scene of the death.

Reporting by the coroner or medical examiner on gambling-related death is relatively new, but the link between problem gambling and suicide is not. A number of published articles and case studies have identified an association between problem gambling and suicide ideation. One study, completed with a random sample of Edmontonians, showed that in the general population 4% reported a suicide attempt, but among problem gamblers, 14% had attempted suicide. Many investigators note that the observed relationship between problem gambling and suicide can largely be accounted for by mental health problems like depression.³¹

Some researchers suggest that a growing number of seniors are adversely affected by someone else's gambling. For example, a study from Manitoba reported that elder abuse, in relation to problem gambling, is not uncommon. That is, family members with gambling problems may be inclined to pressure, manipulate or steal money from parents or older relatives, or use threats and violence to obtain gambling funds.³⁵ Among Alberta seniors surveyed in 2000, a small proportion reported that they were worried or experiencing stress as a result of someone else's gambling, and/or that they had been asked for money to support someone else's gambling activities.²²

Crime

The impact of gambling on criminal activity and crime rates in Canada has not been examined in any depth. Law enforcement sources, the media, and public perceptions support the view that gambling expansion leads to an increase in crime. Specifically, crimes that are directly related to gambling such as loan sharking, extortion, fraud, embezzlement, bookmaking, theft (by patrons and employees) and money laundering,

and to a lesser extent, crimes that are indirectly related like family violence and child neglect.³⁶

A recent study using Edmonton police records confirmed that gambling and crime are connected in at least two ways. First, gamblers will commit crimes such as theft or fraud to fund their gambling activities. Second, larger gambling venues like casinos tend to attract opportunistic criminals who launder money or pass counterfeit bills. Study findings showed that in 2001, 2.7% of Edmonton Police Service files were gambling-related. However, the authors noted that there are limits to how much police data can reveal about the link between crime and gambling because, (1) official police incident reports seldom specify gambling, (2) many crimes are not reported to police and instead are handled by industry security, and (3) monitoring illegal gambling is a low priority for municipal police forces.³⁶

On-line gambling is of concern to law enforcement agencies and is considered the fastest growing illegal business on the Internet. At present there is no legislation in Canada that expressly criminalizes on-line gambling, but provisions in the *Criminal Code* are broad enough to cover this activity. The issue is that investigating and monitoring on-line gambling requires considerable police resources.¹¹

Workplace³⁷

The impacts of gambling in the workplace include, but are not limited to, problems with employee attendance, lost productivity and theft.

AADAC recently released the report, *Substance Use and Gambling in the Alberta Workplace*, which is a replication of research completed in 1992. Results showed that 66% of Alberta workers are current gamblers and 3% can be classified as moderate risk or problem gamblers (using a modified version of the CPGI).

Approximately 30% of employees reported gambling while at work. In general, both employees (23%) and employers (35%) agreed that gambling was a socially accepted activity within their workplace. Less than 1% of Alberta employees reported that they had experienced any work-related problems as a result of their gambling and few employers (14%) were concerned about the negative impacts of employee gambling.

Addiction Services

AADAC services for problem gambling include print and other information resources for clients, parents, teachers/students and allied professionals, public awareness campaigns, operation of a toll-free help-line (1-8666-33AADAC), problem gambling intervention training for VLT operators and casino staff, outpatient counselling for adults and youth, and a crisis stabilization program.

AADAC also provides funding for community prevention and education initiatives (e.g., Problem Gambling Resource Network of Alberta) as well as funding to a number of agencies that offer problem gambling treatment programs. Community agencies with residential gambling programs include Aventa in Calgary, Slim Thorpe Recovery Centre in Lloydminster, South Country in Lethbridge, and Poundmaker's Lodge in Edmonton.¹⁴

Key Considerations

In recent years, public concern about the growth in gambling opportunities and the adequacy of services for problem gamblers, have been apparent. In general, there is evidence to suggest that when new forms of gambling are introduced—especially new electronic games—problem gambling prevalence will increase.^{4 32} For example, the addition of penny slots, while a cheaper option, could keep people in the casino longer and induce them to spend more than intended.¹⁰

Policy/Legislation

Given that gambling is a regulated activity, there is a clear responsibility for the Alberta Government to adopt policies aimed at ensuring the integrity and viability of the gaming industry, and aimed at reducing the potential harms from gambling.⁴ To this end, the Ministry of Gaming and the AGLC have engaged in a number of stakeholder consultations and conducted various reviews of gaming policy in Alberta (see Appendix A).³⁸ This is a positive step in the policy development process and one that can increase awareness of both the benefits and costs of gambling.³⁹

At the same time, increased revenues from gambling in Alberta have not been matched by increased government investment in reducing the harmful consequences of gambling.¹³ In fact, it has been argued that public health implications and social impacts have been largely absent from the economic decisions surrounding the expansion of legalized gambling in Canada. As such, the true costs and benefits of gambling have not been accounted for.⁵ Ontario (2%) and Nova Scotia (1% from VLTs) are currently the only provinces that dedicate a fixed percentage of gambling revenues for education, prevention, treatment and research. In contrast, Australia has established a Ministerial Council on Gambling, and virtually all of the Australian states set aside a fixed percentage of gambling revenue for these activities.^{32 45}

In Alberta, as is the case in many other North American jurisdictions, gambling has been presented as a means to financial autonomy for Aboriginal populations. Generally, there are two positions taken with respect to the establishment of on-reserve casinos: (1) Advocates suggest casinos are a way to reduce economic dependence, create employment and empower Aboriginal communities. (2) Opponents believe that problem gambling will increase among Aboriginal groups—a population already contending with problems related to alcohol and other drug use.^{24 40 41}

Comparative studies indicate that not all Aboriginal gambling operations are viable. As noted in a report by the Canada West Foundation, "First Nations gambling should not be seen as an economic panacea..."⁴² The benefits depend largely on geography (i.e., proximity of the reserve to major population centres) as well as the market for gambling, or the ability to draw gamblers to the reserve. Without question, on-reserve casinos will impact the community, and local resources may be absent or insufficient to deal with an increase in gambling, or an increase in the negative consequences of gambling among reserve residents. Given the potential for harm, both the government and the Aboriginal community need to look closely at the experiences of reserves in other jurisdictions, and proceed with caution when implementing the First Nations Gaming Policy in Alberta.

Access to Internet gambling is a serious concern given that virtually all barriers to play are removed. Games can be easily accessed from home, 24 hours per day, and play can go uninterrupted provided the gambler has adequate credit (i.e., most transactions are performed using a credit card, bank card or 'smart' card which has a specified cash limit). Moreover, opportunities for intervening are minimal given the isolated nature of this activity. An additional concern is the increased opportunity for adolescent gambling since there are few checks and balances to prevent underage betting.^{3 43}

The principle regulatory options for Internet gambling are prohibition and licensing. To date, Alberta has not developed a formal strategy to respond to on-line gambling. In some U.S. states, laws have been passed that prohibit on-line gambling. However, debate continues at the national level on how to define what forms of Internet gaming are illegal and how to enforce any bans.⁴⁴ There are also many countries that license Internet gambling sites, and Australia has a national regulatory policy that includes on-line gambling. In addition, the industry has taken some steps to self-regulate Internet gambling. For example, some operators use screening mechanisms or disincentives such as a high minimum wager to reduce the likelihood that minors will place bets. Credit card companies are also introducing restrictions or in some cases prohibiting credit card transactions at gambling sites.³

Government and Industry Strategies – Harm Reduction

Since the 1990s, governments and the gaming industry have introduced various harm reduction and responsible gambling initiatives, including modifications to the player environment. Strategies include (but are not limited to) player warnings of the hazards of excessive gambling, staff intervention training, self exclusion programs, changes to machine design, restricted access to cash (e.g., prohibiting Automated Teller Machines in the casino), limits to the size, location and operating hours of gaming facilities, or providing on-site counselling and referral services. While many of these strategies are seen as practical, an Australian review states there is no empirical evidence available to support their effectiveness.^{45 46}

Research has demonstrated a link between continuous play games (e.g., VLTs, slot machines, bingo) and problem gambling. These games feature a short time span between placing a bet and learning the outcome, and both problem and non-problem gamblers admit periodic losses of control when playing electronic games.^{5 47 48} The

addition of Responsible Gaming Features (RGFs) is meant to reduce the negative impacts of electronic games by reducing the time and money spent by individual players. These features consist of prominent displays of gambling help-line numbers, clocks that show the time of day and duration of play as well as the dollar amounts wagered by the player, and they force a 'time out' that requires the player to cash out before resuming play.⁴⁵

RGFs have been implemented on VLTs in both Nova Scotia and Alberta. A study is underway in Alberta to evaluate the effectiveness of RGFs, but this research will not be completed until 2006. Results from the Nova Scotia evaluation are available, and findings were mixed. RGFs reduced the amount of time gamblers spent playing VLTs, and players reported being better able to track the amount of money they were spending. However, overall spending actually increased, and the new terminals were more likely to attract players with some risk for gambling problems. The investigators suggested that there are opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of the RGFs by looking further at machine characteristics (e.g., switching from a credit to a cash-based betting system) and other behaviours that might mediate their effectiveness. Findings from the NS evaluation also indicate that while the harm reduction goal behind modifications may be laudable, doing so can lead to some unforeseen outcomes (i.e., players were spending the same amount of money but in less time).⁴⁹

In 2000, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission introduced a self-exclusion policy whereby citizens who have difficulty controlling their gambling can have themselves banned from Alberta casinos (over 300 Albertans are currently enrolled in this program).⁵ Casino self-exclusion programs have been adopted in most Canadian jurisdictions even though it is not known whether these programs are useful in helping individuals control their gambling behaviour. Most self-exclusion programs are voluntary, and at best, difficult to enforce. Self-exclusion programs are reliant on monitoring systems that detect infringements, co-ordination between casino operators, and the extent to which other gambling options are readily available and acceptable to gamblers as a substitute.⁴⁵ Recently, a number of lawsuits seeking monetary compensation have been launched against provincial governments and lottery corporations by individuals claiming they were not refused access to casinos despite signing self-exclusion orders.³⁴

Worldwide, many gaming venues have implemented voluntary or mandatory training programs for employees. These programs provide information about problem gambling and help employees develop skills to intervene. There is no expectation that staff will counsel gamblers but rather that they will be able to promote responsible gambling practices and provide accurate information to patrons.⁴⁵ In 1999, the gaming industry in Alberta implemented mandatory intervention training for VLT retailers and staff in dedicated gaming venues such as casinos.⁵⁰ A similar training program for charitable groups in Alberta (GAIN) will be offered beginning in November 2003. This program will help clarify policies and procedures for volunteers involved in bingo, casino, raffle and pull ticket events.⁵¹ To date, evaluation of employee intervention training in Alberta has not been completed.

When considering government and industry interventions, it seems likely that a combination of strategies would be most effective in reducing gambling-related harms. However, rapid implementation of these strategies without any systematic effort to gauge success has made it increasingly difficult to isolate the benefits of any one strategy, or to determine their combined effect.

Prevention

As a growth industry, ever-increasing numbers of individuals are exposed to gambling in Alberta. In particular, children and adolescents live in a time where the number of legal gambling opportunities is greater than in any previous era. Studies show that youth are especially vulnerable to developing gambling problems and an increased emphasis on prevention is warranted.

While existing research on gambling has proven helpful in developing treatment programs and information-based strategies, many would argue that knowledge about problem gambling is still very much incomplete. Some have compared it to the state of the alcohol and drug field 25 years ago.⁵ In particular, evidence is still lacking about the effectiveness of public education and awareness campaigns, which, although widely used, may not produce results for some time. As well, research concerning the risk and protective factors for problem gambling, especially among youth and in sub-population cultural groups is just beginning to emerge; it is this type of information that is needed to better inform practices in prevention and harm reduction.¹⁹

Treatment

Clinical practice for the treatment of problem gambling is still evolving. As identified by Smith and Wynne (2002), the correlates of problem gambling among Alberta adults are a family history of gambling or substance abuse problems, experiencing an early big win or loss, and faulty cognition. That is, problem gamblers are more likely to come from a dysfunctional family environment where other members had or have a gambling or alcohol/drug problem; their first gambling experience was notable because it involved a considerable win or loss of money; they have irrational positive thoughts about the probability of winning and/or their ability to affect a win—regardless of the chance nature of all gambling activities.

There are many similarities between clients seeking treatment for substance abuse or problem gambling. Like alcohol/other drug use, problem gambling is often a means to cope or escape from painful life events. Research shows that problem gamblers frequently have co-morbid substance use and psychiatric disorders, so that aside from services that directly address gambling behaviours, many require addiction and mental health counselling.⁴ Generally speaking, problem gamblers recognize that their behaviour is unhealthy, and many admit they have tried unsuccessfully to quit or currently want to stop gambling.⁵ As with other addictions, people with gambling problems continue to experience stigmatization due to the belief that they are morally inferior or simply unwilling to control their behaviour. This can present a significant barrier to effective treatment and can hamper a response when relapse occurs.⁵²

Seniors often have greater difficulty accessing services for their own or someone else's gambling problems. Because of their relative social isolation, problems can go unnoticed or untreated.²³ Results from the *Seniors and Gambling* study conducted by AADAC (2000) indicate that few seniors knew where to go for information about gambling, or where to access help, and many were unsure of where to turn for support if they or someone close to them had a gambling problem.²²

For Aboriginal populations living on-reserve, jurisdictional issues could impede access to gambling prevention programs and treatment services. The federal government, through the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIB) is responsible for the delivery of health and social services on-reserve. FNIB manages the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP), but NNADAP does not provide problem gambling services. While programs operated by AADAC are available to all Albertans, access by First Nations may be limited because (1) many First Nations' communities are remote. Lack of proximity to a major population centre can influence access to AADAC information, prevention and outpatient counselling services. (2) FNIB must give approval for clients to attend AADAC residential treatment programs (vs. a NNADAP facility). Current co-operative arrangements are such that not all AADAC fees for room and board are covered, and First Nations clients are expected to pay the difference.

Research

The Alberta Gaming Research Institute is sponsoring a number of important research projects that will contribute to our understanding of gambling and gambling problems. However, studies evaluating the effectiveness of current problem gambling policies, and research examining the effectiveness of information and prevention methodologies do not necessarily dominate the AGRI research agenda.²⁸

The public health perspective on gambling has merit in that it offers a broad viewpoint that does not focus exclusively on the individual problem gambler and takes into consideration the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged people. A public health strategy for gambling would emphasize prevention and treatment and would include a research agenda that systematically examines existing gambling policies and their impacts.³⁹ Alberta's participation in the development and testing of the CPGI is one example of how research can be used to move the focus from the individual gambler to one that looks at gambling and problem gambling in the context of population health.⁵ Results from the CPGI validation studies showing the types of games preferred and the prevalence of problem gambling have prompted provincial governments to intervene by improving services for problem gamblers and by considering or implementing regulatory or industry intervention strategies. However, sustainable funding for research to monitor problem gambling and to evaluate existing strategies remains critical.

Public Opinion

In 2003, 53% of adult Albertans reported gambling problems had increased in their community over the past year, and 29% indicated gambling was a serious community issue.⁵³

The Addiction Roundtables hosted by AADAC in May 2002 identified a number of community concerns related to gambling. In particular, participants noted a decrease in funding for problem gambling services, greater involvement in gambling activities by at-risk populations including youth and Aboriginals, and increased responsibility given to individuals, families and communities to deal with gambling-related problems. Roundtable participants also expressed concern about increasing government reliance on gambling revenues and the apparent conflict of interest this creates.⁵⁴

According to surveys conducted by the Canada West Foundation, public attitudes toward on-reserve casinos are mixed. In 1999, 52% of Canadians agreed that government should license gambling on First Nations reserves. In 2001, a similar survey of western Canadians reported that the majority of respondents (58%) did not feel on-reserve casinos would benefit Aboriginal communities.⁴²

Conclusions

Like alcohol, gambling is a unique product. It is legal for adults, widely marketed and highly regulated. Laws are used to prohibit underage gambling and illegal gaming activities, while problem gambling prevention messages focus primarily on personal responsibility. The prevailing public attitude appears to be that because governments and the gaming industry promote and benefit from gambling, they have an obligation to take steps to mitigate any negative impacts.

The proportion of adult Albertans who currently experience moderate or severe gambling problems may appear small, yet it is widely recognized that the individual consequences resulting from problem gambling can be considerable. Personal debt, marital conflict and breakdown, child neglect, employee absenteeism, and suicide are often cited as individual harms.

Despite a slight decrease in the overall prevalence of gambling in Alberta since 1998, revenues continue to rise. This suggests fewer players are spending more money on gambling activities. Furthermore, researchers expect that continued expansion of electronic gaming will lead to an increase in spending and an increase in problem gambling rates—with teens, young adults and Aboriginal Albertans most at risk.⁵

There are both critics and supporters of the direction taken by the Alberta Government, and their efforts to create public policy that balances gambling revenue with safeguards to prevent gambling problems. What appears to be missing from the current policy debate is a clear accounting of the costs and benefits of gambling in Alberta, and a more rigorous approach to evaluating the effectiveness of gambling intervention strategies. In particular, the social costs of gambling are not yet well understood or easily articulated.³⁹ Lessons can be learned from state governments in Australia who are at the forefront in conducting sound research to inform policy and program practices, within government and the gaming industry.³²

AADAC is not a regulatory agency or an advocacy group. The Commission's mandate is clear with regard to the delivery of services for problem gambling. AADAC provides information about the harms associated with gambling, delivers prevention services that assist individuals, families and communities in making healthy choices, and offers effective and compassionate care to those persons experiencing gambling problems as well as those affected by someone else's gambling behaviour. Funding for AADAC problem gambling services has increased, but has not been matched to the rise in gambling revenues. Therefore, the predominant challenge for the Commission is to work within the existing legislative framework, and within existing resources, to address the often complex needs of clients, and the concerns of the community.

APPENDIX A

Table 4: History of Gaming in Alberta³⁸

1892	The <i>Criminal Code of Canada</i> is amended to allow gambling under certain conditions.
1910	An amendment to the <i>Criminal Code of Canada</i> allows pari-mutuel betting and participation in games of chance where profits are used for charitable or religious purposes. Some gaming is allowed at agricultural fairs and exhibitions.
1920s	Bingo is played in community halls and church basements. The popularity of horse racing grows.
1950s	Illegal sale of Lucky 7 jar tickets (pull tickets) occurs until the 1970s, when the sale of pull tickets is legalized.
1967	Alberta's first charitable casino opens at Edmonton's annual fair.
1969	Amendments to the <i>Criminal Code of Canada</i> authorize lotteries and sweepstakes. Provinces have the authority to licence and operate lotteries and casinos.
1970s	Edmonton's Northlands Park and the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede start holding sweepstakes.
1975	An Edmonton Kinsmen Club establishes Alberta's first not-for-profit casino. The first-ever lottery ticket, "The Western", is sold.
1979	Lotteries are now exclusively under provincial authority.
1980	Alberta's first permanent, privately operated charitable casino opens in Calgary.
1981	Alberta's second permanent, privately operated charitable casino opens in Edmonton.
1982	Lotto 6/49 is launched.
1985	A government lottery review gathers Albertans' views on the disbursement of unused lottery revenue. An amendment to the <i>Criminal Code of Canada</i> allows provinces to operate mechanical gaming devices.
1987	Revenue pooling is an option for casinos and bingo associations.
1989	Bill 10 establishes the Alberta Lottery Fund .
1990	The first horseracing simulcast is run at Calgary's Trout Springs. Teletheatre betting is introduced.
1991	Video lottery terminals (VLTs) are tested at summer fairs in Edmonton and Calgary.
1992	The VLT program is officially introduced.
1994	Alberta Lotteries and Gaming releases a commissioned report on gaming behaviour and problem gambling in Alberta. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) receives funding for problem gambling treatment, research and education.

- 1995** The Lotteries Review Committee releases "New Directions for Lotteries and Gaming: Report and Recommendations of the Lotteries Review Committee" following public consultations.
- Government establishes new policies for gaming in Alberta after adopting several recommendations from the report.
- 1996** The MLA Committee on Native Gaming releases its report and recommendations on native gaming in Alberta.
- Slot machines are introduced into Alberta's charitable casinos.
- Satellite bingo is introduced.
- The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC) is created by combining the responsibilities and operations of the Alberta Liquor Control Board, Alberta Lotteries, the Alberta Gaming Commission, Alberta Lotteries and Gaming and the Gaming Control Branch.
- The Alberta Racing Corporation is formed to help revitalize the horse racing industry in Alberta.
- 1997** VLTs are removed from Rocky Mountain House and Sylvan Lake following local plebiscites.
- Plebiscites are also held in Barrhead, Wood Buffalo (including Fort McMurray) and Lacombe.
- Barrhead votes to keep VLTs.
 - Wood Buffalo votes to remove VLTs, but retailers take legal action.
 - The courts declare Lacombe's vote invalid.
- 1998** Community Lottery Boards are established by the Alberta government to oversee the distribution of an additional \$50 million in lottery funds.
- The Alberta Lotteries and Gaming Summit '98 is held in Medicine Hat in April. Government accepts or accepts in principle all eight summit recommendation.
- During the October 19 civic elections, VLT plebiscites are held in 36 Alberta municipalities. Six municipalities vote to have their VLTs removed. VLT retailers take legal action.
- Courts rule the Alberta government cannot direct the AGLC to remove VLTs from municipalities unless there is specified legislation in place.
- Government passes legislation to remove VLTs from Wood Buffalo and the six communities that voted against VLT.

1999

Bill 36, the *Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act*, is passed on May 19, giving the Minister authority to give policy direction to the AGLC and to terminate VLT retailer agreements in municipalities that voted in favour of VLT removal.

The Alberta Court of Queen's Bench granted on interim injunction on May 20, prohibiting the AGLC from disabling or removing VLTs pending the constitutional challenge of Bill 36.

AGLC launches a Bingo Industry Review to examine the bingo industry and charities that take part in bingo activities.

The Ministry of Gaming is created, which is the Department of Gaming, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, the Community Lottery Program Secretariat, the Alberta Gaming Research Council and the Horse Racing Alberta Act.

An agreement between the Government of Alberta and the province's three major universities results in a leading-edge research institute to study gaming issues in Alberta. The [Alberta Gaming Research Institute](#), a consortium of the Universities of Alberta, Calgary and Lethbridge, will sponsor research into the social and economic aspects of gaming, aboriginal gaming issues, gaming trends and other related gaming topics.

2002

Alberta Gaming initiates a review of gaming licensing policies and processes. While the review is underway, consideration of requests to licence or approve new casinos, casino expansions and relocations, new games and gaming environments are suspended.

Government announces the implementation of the majority of recommendations from the [Bingo Review Committee](#).

The AGLC teamed up with the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission ([AADAC](#)) and the gaming industry to develop new programs to assist problem gamblers, including "Casino Voluntary Self-Exclusion Program" and "Deal Us In."

2001

The governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba signed a new agreement with the Western Canada Lottery Corporation ([WCLC](#)) resulting in cost savings to the AGLC of approximately \$2.2 million per year.

The Alberta government introduces a new [First Nations Gaming Policy](#), based on Alberta's unique charitable gaming model. First Nation casinos will be located on reserve land, will be regulated by the AGLC and operate under the same terms and conditions as off-reserve casinos.

The government released the [Gaming Licensing Policy Review](#) (GLPR), which included 61 recommendations that were developed during a comprehensive, 20-month review of gaming policies.

2002

The moratorium respecting new casino facilities was removed on March 1st, after the AGLC developed specific casino terms and conditions to manage and control gaming expansion in the province, consistent with the policy direction provided by government as a result of the Gaming Licensing Policy Review.

The AGLC reviewed the Gaming and Liquor Act and Gaming and Liquor Regulation in order to ensure gaming and liquor activities are conducted with integrity. This review resulted in Bill 14, the [Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act](#), which was debated and passed in the spring legislature session, and came into effect in May.

Bill 16, the [Racing Corporation Amendment Act](#), was debated and passed in the spring legislature, and came into effect in May. This Bill is a major step in revitalizing the province's horse racing industry.

The Community Lottery Board program was discontinued.

The [Community Initiatives Program](#) was introduced on June 24, and commits \$30 million per year for the next three years.

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