

New ways to target gambling harm identified

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New insights into gambling addiction from those experiencing its harmful effects will help inform more effective treatment and interventions.

Researchers at the Centre for Gambling Research (CGR), based at The

Australian National University (ANU), interviewed more than 50 people in the ACT about their experiences of [gambling](#)-related harm and the public health approaches to tackling the problem.

The research found many gamblers don't want to receive help from formal services, are resistant when it's offered and don't consider the amount of time they spend gambling as an indicator of gambling harm.

Dr Marisa Fogarty, Director of the CGR said attitudes such as "gambling is not a problem if you can afford the losses" were common and terms such as "gamble responsibly" were considered counter-productive.

"What we found has given us significant insight into facilitating peoples' ability to identify gambling harm and to develop strategies and identify appropriate resources to address gambling harm."

The report, "Informing Targeted Interventions for people Experiencing Gambling Harms in the ACT," recommends a holistic [intervention](#) approach.

Dr Fogarty said to date [public health interventions](#) into gambling harm have been "ad hoc."

"Any public health approach that does not target all areas of the community is likely to have limited impact," she said.

"We need to better target the general population, as well as the at-risk groups in society and people already experiencing gambling harm in a co-ordinated fashion to have any real impact in preventing and helping people experiencing gambling harm."

The report found partners, family and friends were overwhelmingly the most preferred option for talking to people about their gambling.

"With this information, we can support close family and friends in making an approach which is more likely to be heeded, whereas we found an approach from gambling venue staff for example, elicited strong emotions such as 'horrified,' 'embarrassed' and 'ashamed' from people we interviewed," said Dr Fogarty.

Key findings of Informing Targeted Interventions for People Experiencing Gambling Harms in the ACT:

- Messages like: 'Gamble responsibly' and 'problem gambling' are considered stigmatising and counter-productive.
- People experiencing gambling harms also tend to experience poor health, mental health, alcohol and other drug issues.
- People experiencing gambling harm do not tend to seek help unless their problems become extreme, impact others and have a severe financial impact.
- An underlying belief that people should deal with gambling problems themselves.
- Despite not seeking help from formal services, people employed a range of strategies to stop or control gambling, like creating barriers to accessing cash, setting expenditure limits and relinquishing control of their money to a family member or friend.

Barriers to self-identification were:

- Variations in gambling behaviour over time.
- Focusing on wins and not losses, behaviours and impacts.
- Internal dialogues such as justifying losses as affordable.

Some recommendations for interventions include:

- Interventions designed to support and inform partners and close

- family about gambling harm
- Interventions supporting the use and success of self-regulation strategies for at-risk groups
 - Interventions targeting "spending more than you can afford" have limited potential.
 - Participants were generally positive about GPs (69%) and counsellors (57%) enquiring about their gambling.
 - For those already experiencing gambling harm, initiatives that portray positive outcomes from gambling interventions may assist in changing attitudes.

Provided by Australian National University

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