

Fear of stigma stops people from seeking problem gambling help

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Photo by Jeff Kubina via Flickr.

While gambling is an accepted past-time in our community, having a problem with your gambling is not. There is also significant public stigma connected to seeking help for gambling problems – so much so, that it may stop people from seeking the help they need.

Research released today from the ANU Centre for Gambling Research

indicates that problem [gambling](#) is not well understood by the community in the way that alcohol and drug addictions are understood, and that this contributes to stigma associated with having a gambling problem.

"Our research found that people with gambling problems feel ashamed and feel stupid, and that other people perceive them as being stupid, selfish people who hurt their families," says Dr Annie Carroll from the ANU Centre for Gambling Research.

"Under these circumstances, people experiencing problems with their gambling don't want to seek help because they don't want to be labeled a problem gambler."

"While people with alcohol and other drug problems who seek treatment elicit some public sympathy because they are understood to have an addiction, people with gambling problems tend to be blamed for their lack of control and are more likely to be viewed as being desperate if they seek help."

The research also found that the promotion of the 'Gamble Responsibly' message can be counterproductive when viewed by some people experiencing gambling harms which can lead to feelings of shame.

"The slogan promotes the notion that responsible gambling is within individual control while ignoring the fact that there are innate risks in gambling products," says Dr Carroll.

The report concludes that people experiencing gambling problems should be encouraged to view seeking help as a wise and mature action, as they would view seeking advice or help for any other health problem.

"The general public should be encouraged to view seeking help for

gambling problems as being a sensible action, rather than as a sign of weakness or desperation," says Dr Carroll.

Greg Jones, Chief Executive Officer of the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission, welcomed the research and indicated that it would be useful in guiding the Commission to refine and further develop its harm minimisation strategies.

"The Commission's aim is to encourage early intervention with gambling problems and this important research project will assist in achieving this goal."

The Stigma and Help-seeking for Gambling Problems Report was based on over 100 in-depth interviews with professionals from health and welfare services in the ACT, people who played electronic gaming machines at least once per week, people who self-identified as having a gambling problem and [problem gambling](#) counsellors and financial counsellors from around Australia.

Provided by Australian National University

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