

ACT Gambling Prevalence Study – November 2010 - Summary of Findings -

The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission contracted The Australian National University's Centre for Gambling Research to undertake a comprehensive study of gambling and problem gambling in the ACT. *The Nature and Extent of Gambling and Problem Gambling in the Australian Capital Territory* study surveyed 5,500 ACT residents in late 2009 and reports in detail on the prevalence of gambling in the Territory. The only previous prevalence study on gambling in the ACT was undertaken in 2001.

At a glance

The major findings of the latest study are:

- around 70% of adults gambled at least once in the last 12 months;
- 30% of adults played gaming machines at least once in the last year with 3% playing at least once a week;
- participation in gambling activities has fallen slightly in the last decade; -
- overall, gamblers spent 21% less in real terms than in 2000-01; -
- the level of problem gambling in the ACT, as measured by the widely used Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI), is 0.5% which compares to 0.4% in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia and 0.7% in Victoria;
- 7.9% of gamblers had at least one symptom of problem gambling, with 2.9% being classified as moderate risk or problem gamblers;
- of those that were identified as moderate risk or problem gamblers, 90% reported playing gaming machines (but not necessarily exclusively);
- problem gamblers tend to bet on a range of products – the average being four - different products; -
- the typical problem gambler is male, young and less well educated – education level has the strongest association with gambling measures;
- smoking and harmful levels of alcohol consumption were strongly associated with higher frequency gambling; and
- problem gamblers and those at risk typically do not seek intervention (ie counselling support) until they are at risk of, or are contemplating, suicide.

The study's findings will inform future initiatives aiming to reduce the harm caused by problem gambling. It also provides a sound basis from which future research can be conducted. The next phase of the Commission's research program will examine the key findings of the prevalence study in more detail, including the barriers to problem gamblers seeking help.

Major Findings -

Findings applied to the estimated June 2009 adult population (274,054) -

Category	Proportion based on survey	Equivalent number of adults
problem gamblers	0.5%	1,370
moderate risk problem gamblers	1.5%	4,111
low risk problem gamblers	3.4%	9,318
Total reporting symptoms of problem gambling	5.3%	14,525

high frequency gamblers	17.6%	48,234
medium frequency gamblers	17.1%	46,863
low frequency gamblers	35.2%	96,467
non-gamblers	30.2%	82,764

expenditure of less than \$103 in the last year	66.9%	183,342
expenditure between \$103 and \$999 in the last year	22.8%	62,484
expenditure between \$1,000 and \$9,999 in the last year	9.0%	24,665
expenditure over \$10,000 in the last year	1.4%	3,837

High frequency gambling: 48+ times in the past year, or 4+ times per month. Medium frequency gambling: 12 to 47 times in the last year. Low frequency gambling: fewer than 12 times in the last year. Percentages have been rounded to nearest 0.1%. Numbers are estimates of the number of adults in the ACT population for each category.

Gambling prevalence, frequency and expenditure

Although the report found a 3% decrease since 2001 in people who reported gambling at least once in the last 12 months, gambling remains a common activity both in the ACT and nationally. Almost 70% of people reported gambling at least once in the last 12 months. On average 35.2% gambled less than once per month while 17.1% gambled more than monthly and a further 17.6% gambled at least weekly.

Most gamblers reported gambling on more than one activity with some activities rarely reported in isolation; just 13.1% of gaming machine players reported gambling on gaming machines alone. Comparisons with other findings include:

- compared to 2001, 3% fewer people reported gambling in the last 12 months;
- 17.3% of the adult population reported losses of \$520 or more in the last year;
- per capita expenditure on gambling in the ACT in 2007-2008 was \$918, which is \$194 less than the national average of \$1,112; and
- between 2000-01 and 2007-08, per capita gambling expenditure in the ACT fell by 4% in dollar terms and 21% in real terms.

The report revealed a strong interrelation between frequency of gambling, number of gambling activities reported, amount of money lost and duration of gambling session. The report also examined the socioeconomic and demographic factors associated with high frequency gambling. Compared to the rest of the population, high frequency gamblers (who are not necessarily problem gamblers) are more likely to be male, in an older age group, less educated, with income derived from pensions, benefits, or superannuation, or in full time employment.

Problem gambling

0.5% of the population were identified as problem gamblers using the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI). However, care must be exercised when assessments of risk or harm use the population as a base, as this includes infrequent and non-gamblers. As the Productivity Commission's report on gambling notes, assessments should focus on the specific products most related to harm and the people who regularly use them.

In the ACT, 44.5% of people gambling weekly or more on activities other than scratch tickets or lotteries were experiencing some symptoms of problem gambling and 5.6% were identified as problem gamblers. For those who played gaming machines weekly or more, 55% were experiencing some symptoms of problem gambling and 8.9%, or one in eleven, were problem gamblers.

Compared to the rest of the population, problem gamblers are more likely to be male, young, Australian born, less-well educated, never married, and either unemployed or employed full time.

While the problem gambling figure of 0.5% may appear to indicate a decline of 1.41% since the previous survey results published in 2001, it should be noted that the 2001 prevalence study was conducted using the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) and these two measures are not directly comparable. The CPGI is the current and accepted measure of problem gambling and has eclipsed the SOGS since the last prevalence study in 2001. As noted in the report, research since 2001 has argued that the previous SOGS measure tends to overestimate problem gambling frequency.

Where the measurement components of each assessment method are comparable, there is an indication of a slight decline in gambling problems among regular gamblers.

Gaming machines

Gaming machines were second only to lotteries in both popularity and frequency with 30.2% of the population playing machines in the past year and 10% of gaming machine users playing weekly or more.

- 5% of gaming machine players reported losses of \$5,000 or more in the last year.
- 7% were identified as moderate risk or problem gamblers and 11.9% typically spent more than 2 hours on gaming machines when at a venue.
- 92.2% of people identified as moderate risk/problem gamblers played gaming machines and this was the most common activity reported by this group.
- Nationally, around 30% of regular (weekly or more) gaming machine players are problem gamblers or at moderate risk while in the ACT this figure is just under 27%.

Internet gambling

The report revealed that using the internet to gamble has become more popular but remains an uncommon activity in the ACT with just 5.2% of people reporting that they used the internet to gamble. However, this internet gambling was associated with high expenditure, moderate risk/problem gambling and for those playing casino type games for money (1% of the population) long session times.

- 35.4% of people who reported playing casino type games on the internet were identified as showing some symptoms of problem gambling.
- About 20% of all internet gamblers reported losing \$2,000 or more in the last 12 months.

Help seeking and service use

As with other Australian jurisdictions, the report found that receiving help for gambling problems is not only a rare event in the general population (0.7% have ever received help) but is also uncommon amongst people with gambling problems, with only about one in five ever getting help. It appears that even when people recognise they have a problem with their gambling, a large proportion do nothing about it. The report found that feeling suicidal was the most common factor associated with help-seeking for problem gamblers. This gives the impression that seeking help is a last resort.

Despite these findings, there was also little indication that people had tried to get help but could not access services, or that they wanted help in some way but did not know how to go about finding it. When asked directly why they had not looked for help, most people said that they felt they could beat their problem on their own or that they did not need help.

The Commission will use the report's results to inform future policy development and to appropriately target awareness or information campaigns.

Community attitudes

The survey also asked a number of questions relating to participant's attitudes towards gaming activity. A large proportion of the ACT population thought that the number of gaming machines should be decreased (57.8%) and 70.3% did not think ATMs should be available in gaming machine venues.

Support is available

Anyone experiencing problems with their gambling is urged to seek assistance. The Commission's problem gambling website provides information on responsible gambling, self help materials and links to help services: www.problemgambling.act.gov.au

Immediate assistance is available anytime by phoning Lifeline Canberra on 6247 0655, the national helpline on 1800 858 858 or through the national online help service at: www.gamblinghelponline.org.au