

Problem Gambling: Associations with mental health

In recent decades, the gambling industry has seen rapid expansion across the globe, with estimates that the total amount of money lost by consumers to the gambling industry will reach US \$700 billion by 2028.¹ This global expansion is linked with the increase of problematic gambling behaviours, and a recognition of gambling as a public health issue.² Additionally, new forms of gambling have emerged to make it more accessible, such as an increase in online gambling in Canada.²

Problem gambling, marked by a disruption to daily life, is associated with several negative outcomes, such as increases in risks for anxiety and suicidal ideation.² Additionally, gambling and the consumption of alcohol frequently occur together, which can lead to increases in distress, gambling severity, and disordered drinking.³ Despite this, there are steps that can be taken at the population, and individual levels to help minimize the harms of problem gambling. At the population level, educational awareness programs and the use of early gambling screening tools by prevention programs can help detect problem gambling.³ At the individual level, accessing financial assistance programs, as well as involving friends and family in your recovery are crucial to long-term positive outcomes.⁴ In Alberta, community and family resources are available on the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis website that also provide educational content, crisis support and self-help tools for anyone to access.

Gambling disorder is a behavioural addiction.⁴

Online gambling is an emerging public health issue.²

Online gambling is particularly prominent amongst youth.²

Social determinants of health such as poverty are common causes of problem gambling.⁴

Gambling disorder shares many similarities with substance use disorders, such as withdrawal.⁴

For support, you can call 211 or the Virtual Rapid Access Addiction Medicine line: 1-844-383-7688

Facts

- Individuals are less likely to view gambling as problematic, compared to substance use and other behavioural problems.⁴
- It is common for individuals to consume alcohol while gambling, increasing the risks for negative outcomes.³
- Youth and adolescents are particularly susceptible to the negative effects of gambling such as anxiety and depression.²
- Accessing financial assistance and involving friends and family are important in the recovery process.⁴

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2. Pabayo R, Patel P, Patte KA, Leatherdale ST. Income inequality and the odds of online gambling among a large sample of adolescents in Canada. *Journal of gambling studies*. 2024 Mar;40(1):289-305.
3. Sinclair ES, Punia K, Tabri N, Balodis IM, Kim HS. Who Engages in Simultaneous Gambling and Alcohol Use, and Why? A Mixed-Method Study. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. 2025 Feb 18:1-20.
4. Coelho SG, Tabri N, Kerman N, Lefebvre T, Longpre S, Williams RJ, Kim HS. The perceived causes of problems with substance use, gambling, and other behavioural addictions from the perspective of people with lived experience: A mixed-methods investigation. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*. 2024 Feb;22(1):722-45.

^aAddiction helpline at Alberta Health Services [1-866-332-2322](tel:1-866-332-2322) provides support, information and referrals to Albertans experiencing addiction concerns, including problem gambling.

^bAlberta gaming, liquor and cannabis provides a range of resources that can be helpful: <https://gamesenseab.ca/>

N165, 6815 8th Street NE
Calgary, AB T2E 7H7
recoveryexcellence.org