

2019 ACT Gambling Survey: Summary of findings

The survey at a glance

In 2019 the Australian National University conducted a telephone survey of 10,000 ACT adult residents, covering gambling experiences, impacts and attitudes in the last 12 months.

Amongst the ACT adult population:

- 60.1 percent reported having gambled, the most common activity was purchasing lottery tickets (43.8 percent);
- 19.7 percent reported they had played electronic gaming machines (EGMs);
- 20.9 percent had gambled online;
- 9.7 percent gambled exclusively online;
- 13.6 percent – around 44,000 people – reported having experienced harm from their own or someone else’s gambling;
- 5.3 percent reported that another person’s gambling had personally affected them, equivalent to 17,000 adults; and
- 0.8 percent - or 3,000 people - met the diagnostic criteria for problem gambling
- Identifying as having had a gambling problem in their lifetime, 23.6 percent reported seeking help for their gambling.
- People most often nominated that they would seek help or information for gambling issues via the internet (49.7 percent), a gambling helpline (15.1 percent), other family or friends (11.6 percent) and Gamblers Anonymous (9.3 percent).
- About half (49.4 percent) thought the current \$10 maximum bet per spin limit on EGMs should be changed. On average the people who wanted change, wanted a reduction, reflecting a 30.8 percent reduction in the maximum bet limit.
- Men who were aged under 45 and had not completed a university qualification were most likely to report at least some problem gambling behaviours and symptoms, with 21.1 percent scoring 1 or more on the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI).

Drawing definitive conclusions about change over time was problematic because the 2019 survey recruited people using mobile phones for the first time. However, there was no evidence of change in participation, problems or harms between 2014 and 2019. The one exception was a marked increase in online gambling which increased from 8.4 percent to 20.9 percent over surveys.

Background

In 2019 the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission (the Commission) funded the Australian National University’s Centre for Gambling Research to undertake a comprehensive study of

gambling in the ACT. The resulting *2019 ACT Gambling Survey* report was based on interviews with 10,000 ACT residents about their gambling related activity, impacts they reported experiencing from their own or another persons' gambling, information and help seeking, as well as their attitudes towards specific gambling activities and policies.

The Commission funds gambling surveys every five years with previous surveys having been conducted in 2001, 2009 and 2014. The surveys provide an invaluable and detailed picture of gambling in our community over time.

In 2019, the Commission also released its five-year *Strategy for Gambling Harm Prevention in the ACT (the Strategy)*, outlining core objectives and principles guiding the adoption of a public health approach.

This summary prioritises the survey findings that best address and inform the objectives and principles of the Strategy.

The survey was limited to ACT residents aged 18 or older and so all findings relate to the adult population.

Gambling participation and financial losses by type of activity

One of the Commission's core functions is to monitor and research the social effects of gambling and gambling harm in the ACT. In order to achieve this function it is essential to keep track of how many people are gambling in the ACT, how often they are gambling and how much money they are losing through gambling. Understanding the different types of gambling activity is a core principle guiding the Strategy.

Gambling participation

Within the ACT adult population:

- 60.1 percent – or 192,000 people – reported having participated in at least one form of gambling in the last 12 months.
- 32.5 percent reported gambling less than 12 times in the last 12 months, 14.6 percent gambled 12-51 times, with 12.5 percent gambling more often.
- The most common form of gambling was purchasing lottery tickets – 43.8 percent of adults reported having done so.
- 19.7 percent had played EGMs in the last 12 months. A smaller proportion of the population reported betting on horse¹ or greyhound races (14.3 percent), followed by sports betting (9.7 percent).

Financial losses from gambling

On average, people who gambled on casino table games reported losing more money (\$897) than people gambling on any other activity. Average losses for people gambling on EGMs (\$656), horse and greyhound races (\$609), and sports and special events (\$576) were also particularly high.

¹ Sweeps were not included in horse and greyhound race data

However, data provided by industry about gambling revenue in the ACT illustrates that the total amount of money lost on EGMs in the ACT in 2016/17 (\$169m) was by far greater than that lost on any other gambling activity, accounting for two thirds of all gambling expenditure. This is primarily because more people play EGMs than participate in these other activities.

Negative impacts from gambling

An underlying principle of the Strategy is the importance of recognising that harms can be diverse and can be experienced by people who gamble, people around them and at the community level.

- The 2019 survey found that 13.6 percent of ACT adults - around 44,000 people - experienced harm from their own or someone else's gambling over the past 12 months.

For people who gamble

The survey assessed both gambling harm and problem gambling in the ACT.

Gambling harm is 'Any negative consequence caused or made worse by gambling. It can harm health, wellbeing, work, study, relationships and finances.' Gambling harm was assessed using the Short Gambling Harm Screen. The survey found that:

- 9.6 percent of ACT adults- around 31,000 people - experienced harm from their own gambling.

The prevalence of problem gambling was assessed using the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). The term 'Problem Gambling' is the label given to the highest risk category of the PGSI. This category identifies people most likely to meet diagnostic criteria for pathological or disordered gambling. Moderate and low-risk categories refer to people experiencing some behavioural signs and symptoms of problem gambling but to a lesser degree than the problem gambling group.

Amongst ACT adults:

- 0.8 percent - or 3,000 people - met the PGSI criteria for problem gambling;
- 2.5 percent - or 8,000 people - met the PGSI criteria for moderate risk gambling;
- 7.0 percent - or 23,000 people - met the PGSI criteria for low-risk gambling; and
- 46.9 percent - or 131,000 people - met the PGSI criteria for non-problem gambling.

The majority – 82 percent – of gambling harm in the ACT was accounted for by people who did not meet the PGSI criteria for 'problem gambling'.

For family and friends

In the ACT survey, 5.3 percent of adults reported that another person's gambling had personally affected them, equivalent to approximately 17,000 people.

People who said they had been affected by another person's gambling most often described emotional and relationship impacts. More than half of these individuals reported:

- an inability to trust (61.8 percent),

- stress or anxiety (59.1 percent),
- less quality time (58.8 percent),
- feelings of anger (58.3 percent),
- needing to keep a close eye on the person (58.1 percent),
- breakdown in communication (53.2 percent), and
- arguments (51.7 percent).

In contrast, financial hardship (23.9 percent) and legal difficulties (5.5 percent) were less common than emotional and relationship impacts.

More than half the people who were impacted by another's gambling were women (57.5 percent) and the relationship most often involved a friend (24.8 percent) or a spouse (18.8 percent).

Seeking information and support

The third objective of the Strategy is to provide a wide range of accessible, responsible and effective services and initiatives that prevent and reduce harm. As in other Australian jurisdictions, the report found that receiving professional help for gambling problems is uncommon.

- The proportion of people seeking help for gambling issues remained low, with only 1.5 percent of current gamblers having ever sought help.
- Of the people who identified that they had ever experienced a problem with their gambling, 23.6 percent reported having sought help for their gambling.

The survey therefore asked where people were likely to look for information or support as a means of increasing the likelihood that initiatives designed to provide information and support might be accessed.

- When asked where they would seek help or information for gambling issues, ACT adults most commonly nominated the internet (49.7 percent), a gambling helpline (15.1 percent), other family or friends (11.6 percent) and Gamblers Anonymous (9.3 percent).
- Approximately 1 in 10 gamblers experiencing harm did not know where to look for gambling help.

Community attitudes towards gambling

The second objective of the Strategy is to increase understanding about gambling harm amongst government, gambling industry, communities, families and individuals. A key component of the Strategy is also to engage with a broad range of people, including the ACT community, about gambling harm and initiatives designed to prevent and reduce harm.

The survey asked a number of questions relating to participants' attitudes towards gambling activities and harm prevention policy initiatives currently in place.

- Overall the survey found the ACT adult population holds a predominantly negative attitude towards gambling. ACT residents were most negative about online gambling and EGMs, with most ACT residents agreeing that they did more harm than good for the community (Online gambling 69.8 percent; EGMs 64.3 percent).
- About a third of adults (33.9 percent) had heard of the ACT's self-exclusion program and awareness was higher amongst gamblers (39.6 percent) and EGM players (47.9 percent).
- The survey found strong community support for a pre-commitment scheme (70.6 percent).
- Just under half the ACT adult population supported changing the current \$200 ATM withdrawal limit (46.1 percent) and \$250 EFTPOS limit (48.6 percent) in clubs.
- On average people who supported change suggested a \$136 limit (a 32.5 percent reduction) in ATM withdrawals and a \$147 limit (a 41.2 percent reduction) in EFTPOS withdrawals.
- About half (49.4 percent) thought the current \$10 maximum bet per spin limit on EGMs should be changed. On average the people who supported change suggested a \$6.92 (a 30.8 percent reduction) in the maximum bet limit.
- 80 percent of ACT adults had been to an ACT club with gambling facilities in the previous 12 months: 45.7 percent attended less than once per month, 23.2 percent attended 1–3 times per month, 9.8 percent attended weekly, and 1 percent attended daily.
- 58.4 percent of adults agreed that clubs make an overall positive social contribution to the community, with 18.1 percent stated that the overall social contribution of clubs was negative.

Change over time

Changes in the survey methodology from 2014 to 2019 presented limitations in the ability to draw definitive conclusions about change over time in gambling activity, problems, harms or service use. For instance, this was the first survey to contact people via mobile phones as well as landlines, and 70 percent of people were reached on their mobile. The potential impact of this specific shift in methods is best illustrated by the finding that mobile respondents were almost twice as likely as landline respondents to meet the criteria for problem gambling. The survey report further demonstrates that the prevalence rate would have been lowered by 50 percent if mobile phones had not been used in the 2019 survey.

Overall, the introduction of mobile phone interviewing in 2019 was necessary in terms of most comprehensively reaching the Canberra population, but it restricts the ability to make comparisons to the findings of previous surveys.

The survey report nonetheless makes a limited number of comparisons across surveys including:

- Whether or not people gambled on any activity;
- Whether or not people played EGMs;
- Whether or not people gambled online;
- The prevalence of problem gambling as defined by the PGSI; and
- The proportion of people self-identifying as having a problem with their gambling.

None of these rates varied significantly over time except the proportion of people gambling online which increased from 8 percent to 21 percent from 2014 to 2019.

Risk and protective factors for gambling harm

The Principles outlined in the Strategy recognise that products have different degrees of risk in terms of gambling harm and that harm prevention and reduction initiatives should be appropriately targeted and tailored to specific population groups based on their risk.

The survey report includes a wealth of detailed information that can inform the appropriate targeting of messages across the full spectrum of gambling harm. The findings provide invaluable information that can inform efforts to target and tailor initiatives designed to prevent and reduce gambling harm. These include but are not limited to the following risk and protective factors.

Sex

- 64.4 percent of men gambled as compared to 55.7 percent of women.
- Males were twice as likely as females to gamble online.
- Men were more likely to gamble at higher frequencies than women.
- Gambling harm was more common in men (13.0 percent) than women (6.4 percent).
- Problem gambling was also higher in men (1.2 percent) than women (0.4 percent)

Age

- Individuals between the ages of 45 and 59 were most likely to participate in some form of gambling (64.4 percent) compared to all other age groups.
- People under the age of 30 (14.4 percent) were most likely to report harm (30-44: 10.2 percent) with harm rates decreasing with age (30-44: 10.2 percent; 45-59: 8.6 percent; 60+: 4.8 percent).
- Respondents aged 60 or over were less likely than the general population to be classified as problem gamblers based on the PGSI (0.4 percent, compared with 0.8 percent).

Marital status

- The association between relationship status and gambling participation was more complex. Married people gambled at the same level as the general population (60.1 percent). Those in de facto relationships were more likely to gamble (65.7 percent), whereas single (55.7 percent) and widowed (52.4 percent) were less likely to gamble than the general population.
- A slightly smaller proportion of married people (7.0 percent) reported gambling harm than those who were in a de facto relationship (11.7 percent), or who were divorced (13.9 percent) or single (13.2 percent).
- Married people were also least likely to meet the PGSI criteria for problem gambling (0.4 percent). Problem gambling was most evident amongst people who did not currently have a partner - amongst people who were separated (2.7 percent), divorced (2.0 percent) and single (1.4 percent).

Education

- Respondents with education up to year 12 and trade certificates or diplomas were most likely to gamble (67.7 percent and 64.7 percent, respectively), whereas those

with a bachelor (53.9 percent) or postgraduate (48.2 percent) degree were less likely to gamble.

- In terms of education, people with year 12 (12.6 percent) and trade certificates or diplomas (11.2 percent) were significantly more likely to report harms than those with a bachelor degree (8.3 percent) or higher (5.6 percent).
- Education was the clearest protective factor for problem gambling. The higher the level of education, the less likely a person was to meet the PGSI criteria for problem gambling. For instance, problem gambling rates were highest for people without a year 12 qualification (1.2 percent) and lowest for people who had a postgraduate degree (0.2 percent).

Intersections of risk

The survey analyses gave insight into the socioeconomic and demographic risk factors and activities that are most important in terms of risk of problem gambling and gambling. The analyses take into account that many people experience increased risk from a range of different factors and gamble on a wide range of activities.

- Gambling on EGMs, sports and special events, informal games, and online casino and poker games were predictive of gambling harm after taking into account other gambling activities and socioeconomic risk factors. Being male and under the age of 45 were also significant predictors of harm.
- In general, age, education and gender are predictive of who in the population might be at risk of problem gambling. Men who were aged under 45 and had not completed a university qualification were most likely to report at least some problem gambling behaviours and symptoms, with 21.1 percent scoring 1 or more on the PGSI.
- Lower levels of education were a more powerful predictor of problem gambling than gambling harm in these models, indicating that harm may be more equally spread across education groups than problem gambling.

Types of gambling of specific interest

One of the guiding principles of the Strategy is that ‘gambling activities are not homogenous, some products are more harmful than others’. The Strategy states that a balanced approach is needed, that prioritises individual activities based on risk and harm. EGMs and online gambling were targeted as of specific interest in the survey’s objectives.

Electronic gaming machines

EGMs were prioritised because they have consistently been associated with high rates of harm and high levels of expenditure in previous surveys in the ACT and other jurisdictions. In the 2019 survey, 19.7 percent of adults reported having gambled on EGMs in the last 12 months. The proportion of people gambling on EGMs was not significantly different in 2019 than 2014 (19.9 percent). Other key findings include:

- On average EGM players gambled on two other activities.
- Per capita \$534 was lost gambling on EGMs in the ACT – far more money was lost playing EGMs than any other activity².

² Cited in the survey report and sourced industry data : Australian Gambling Statistics, 2016/17

- 26.0 percent of people playing EGMs reported experiencing gambling harm as compared to 15.8 percent of all gamblers.
- Along with online casino and poker games, EGMs were the strongest predictors of gambling harm after taking into account that people, on average, were gambling on multiple activities.
- Playing EGMs was also the strongest predictor of problem gambling after taking into account that people, on average, were gambling on multiple activities.
- 57.9 percent of people who reported that they typically played EGMs for an hour or more had some problem gambling signs or behaviours on the PGSI (scoring of 1+).
- Compared to all gamblers, EGM players were more likely to be male (58.7 percent), born in Australia (81.8 percent) single (29.9 percent) and tended to be younger (below 30 years) than all gamblers.
- EGM players were also less likely to be married (38.6 percent) and more likely to be in a de facto relationship (21.3 percent) than all gamblers.
- They were less likely to have a postgraduate degree (6.8 percent) or bachelor degree (15.7 percent) and were less likely to earn more than \$125,000 (14.0 percent) compared to all gamblers.

Online gambling

Recognising, clarifying and responding to the changing composition of gambling is a high priority for the Commission under the Strategy. Research has found a rapid increase in online wagering expenditure across Australia – which has been estimated as increasing by 15 percent per year since 2004.³ For these reasons, questions and findings about online gambling were prioritised in the survey.

Almost 21 percent of ACT adults - 68,000 people - gambled online in the past 12 months. The proportion was markedly higher in 2019 than 2014 (8.4 percent).

- Amongst people who gamble, 9.7 percent gambled exclusively online, 24.8 percent gambled online and using other methods. The majority of gamblers (65.5 percent) were not gambling online at all - they were gambling using other methods.
- Purchasing lottery tickets online was the most commonly reported online activity, with 13.3 percent of ACT adults reporting having done so in the last 12 months, followed by sports and special events (7.7 percent) and horse and greyhound racing (7.2 percent).
- The report found gambling exclusively online was not associated with problematic or harmful gambling. Instead, having a preference for online gambling – gambling more often online than via other means - was associated with increased risk of harm and problem gambling.
- For instance, gambling harm was more commonly reported by people who gambled more often online (22.5 percent) those who gambled more often via other means (13.5 percent).

³ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Social Services (2015). *Review of Illegal Offshore Wagering*. Report to the Minister for Social Services and the Minister for Communication and the Arts. 18 December 2015, pg46.

- People gambling mostly online were also more likely to meet the PGSI criteria for low risk, moderate risk and problem gambling than people gambling via other means.
- Online gambling was more common amongst:
 - I. men (27.2 percent) than women (14.9 percent),
 - II. those aged under 45 (26 percent) compared to people aged 45-59 (19.3 percent) or older (9.1 percent); and
 - III. people born in Australia (22.7 percent) compared to elsewhere (17.3 percent).
- The association between education and online gambling was complex. The highest online gambling rates were evident amongst people with mid-range qualifications, those who had completed year 12, or who had completed a certificate or diploma compared to people with people with higher and lower qualifications.
- More than one in four people in full-time employment (27.6 percent) gambled online; they were more than 3 times more likely to do so than those out of the labour force (8.8 percent). Online gambling rates also increased across higher income brackets.

Moving forward

One of the ACT Strategy's objectives is to support and build the evidence base for gambling harm prevention activities and initiatives. The survey report raises important questions for further investigation. These include but are not limited to:

- Better understanding the overlap between online gambling and gambling via other means and how this relates to gambling harm.
- Unpacking how attitudes towards cash withdrawal limits and bet limits vary in different population groups, for instance whether people who attend ACT clubs with gambling facilities have different perspectives than people who do not.
- Collating and interpreting the socioeconomic and demographic findings to better target and tailor gambling harm prevention and reduction initiatives.
- Determining problem gambling and gambling harm expenditure shares - the proportion of financial losses from gambling that comes from people experiencing gambling problems and harm.

The Strategy can be found on the Commission's website.

[Strategy for gambling harm prevention in the ACT: A public health approach 2019-2024](#)