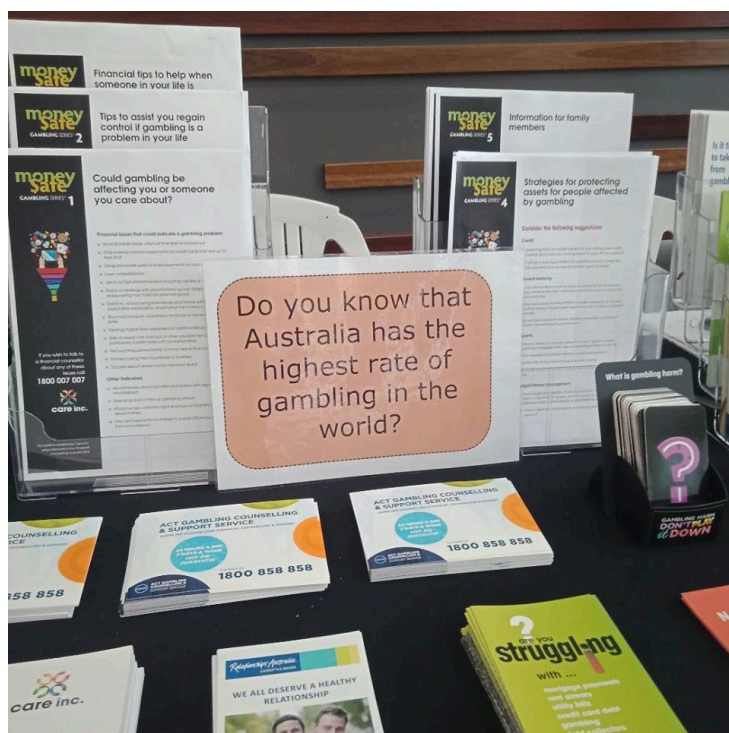


## ACT GAMBLING COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT SERVICE

# ANNUAL EXTERNAL REPORT

## 2019-2020



## ACT Gambling Counselling and Support Service

The ACT Gambling Counselling and Support Service works with people to make the changes they want in their lives. Rebuilding and establishing positive connections, with people, activities, finances, work and lifestyle are key components of this work. Strategies are used to address the role of gambling in their life and how the client would like it to look. These, along with other aspects of their life that may act as a stressor or trigger for causing gambling harm are explored.

Recovery involves a major change in their thoughts feelings and behaviour, and such changes require support to help them find hope and reconstruct their lives. Resisting and changing habits is hard work and we work to help our clients reinterpret or reframe the situation, without shame or judgement. Rebuilding and reconstructing positive connections in a person's life, including their relationships, is an integral part of this support.

The AGCSS works with people seeking support by providing:

**Therapeutic counselling** – Flexible therapeutic service delivery

**Financial counselling** (through Care Financial Counselling Services) - financial counselling and practical support for people in financial difficulty, due to, or exacerbated by gambling.

**AGCSS 24/7 telephone support: 1800 national gambling helpline** - All calls to the 1800 national gambling helpline originating in the ACT are answered by the AGCSS 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**Peer support by people with lived experience** - Provides safe pathways for people to come together and share common experiences and concerns so seeds of belief in hope can grow, which can remind and inspire us that life will not always be this way.

## Who we are, what we do. How we do it

ACT Gambling and Support Service (AGSS) is free and confidential support for people experiencing harm as a result of their or someone else's gambling.

We offer 24/7 support over the phone, virtual meetings or face to face appointments. We have online gambling and financial counselling services available and peer support (one to one, couples, families or groups).

All our practitioners are qualified and experienced. Our team helps you to navigate your options by sharing useful tips and information. We will assist you to identify and make the changes you want.

We also aim to increase knowledge and awareness to reduce the stigma associated with gambling harm within the community. Our Community and Engagement team offers education and prevention initiatives for gambling harm and referrals to other community agencies when necessary.

We can support you if:

- ♦ you are concerned about your gambling
- ♦ you are affected by the gambling of a family member or friend
- ♦ you are a health or community support worker, working with people affected by gambling harm
- ♦ you are working in the gambling industry and want to understand more to support your patrons
- ♦ you are a community member interested in understanding more about gambling harms in the ACT community

All services provided by the AGSS are free for people living in the ACT and surrounding region.

## OUR 2019-2020 CLIENTS

# OUR CLIENTS

## 2019-20



**418**  
people sought  
our help



Delivered 1,682 counselling sessions for people in need



957 telephone  
sessions



725 face to face and  
online sessions



Average number of counselling appointment attended during the year  
**4** appointments per person

**68%** 25 to 44 years

Majority age  
group of people  
who sought our  
help



More men sought our  
help than women



**54%**  
227 men



**46%**  
191 women



Counselling sessions  
we provided were

**544**  
Gambling Counselling

**139**  
Counselling for  
Family & Friends

**999**  
Financial Counselling

### WHAT OUR NEW CLIENTS TOLD US

**35%**

Said gambling had been problematic for them for over 2 years before they sought help

**53%**

New clients report they gamble at least once a day

**21%**

Of new clients find out about the ACT Gambling Counselling and support service from their family or friends

**87%**

New clients display high levels of gambling harm at presentation.

**44%**

Just under half of our clients seek help due to financial concerns. Relationship issues account for 36% of new clients seeking help

**46%**

Reported that they gamble in clubs

**51%**

Reported poker machines were the most problematic form of gambling for them

**23%**

Clients report they usually gamble online



## WHAT WE ACHIEVED AGAINST OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES IN 2019-2020

# WHAT WE ACHIEVED AGAINST OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

## 2019-20

1

### Preventing gambling harm

Where harm caused by problems with gambling are minimised through early intervention and provision of help services

#### Community Engagement

##### Training, education and engagement

- Delivered 6 workshops / presentations
- Facilitated Gambling Harm in the ACT 1 Day Training on behalf of the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission.

#### Industry Engagement

##### Work with industry to provide resources and other early intervention tools for their patrons

- Participated in 6 planning and strategic meetings with key industry groups.
- Provision of resources to over 8 gambling venues
- CEO Attendance at Canberra Community Clubs Board meetings

##### Training, education and engagement

- Attendance at 3 GCO training sessions

2

### Promoting awareness about gambling harm

Where there is a good understanding of gambling harm and possible impacts amongst the ACT community

#### Community Engagement

##### Community events and forums

- Attendance at 26 expos / events / forums including schools and tertiary institutions

##### Promoting the AGCSS through media and other channels

- 23 print and email advertisements media including community guides and community network communications
- Gambling harm animation promoting gambling harm awareness - 100 radio advertising slots
- 6 week social media advertising campaign
- Social media promotion
- 2 radio interviews about gambling harm
- AGCSS website developed

##### Raising awareness about impact of gambling on family and friends

- 8 Gambling Harm Pop Up stalls in ACT venues
- Gambling harm questionnaire
- Information sessions outlined under Strategic Priority 4

#### Industry Engagement

##### Build stronger connections with gambling industry venues through Relationships Australia's Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

- Engaged 11 gambling venues to deliver Employment Assistance Services

#### AGCSS Other Engagement

##### Promoting Gambling Harm Awareness Week

- ACT Government Gambling Harm Awareness Week subcommittee Member
- AGCSS Gambling Harm Awareness Week conference presentation and panel member

3

### Providing help and support services

Where there is a high awareness of support services that are readily accessible to the ACT community

#### AGCSS Counselling Services

##### 24/7 support in the ACT - 1800 858 858

- 277 calls answered from people calling the national gambling helpline (1800 858 858) from the ACT
- 90 instances of telephone counselling support to people in the ACT calling the national gambling helpline
- 85% of calls answered within 20 seconds
- Average call time of 8.5 minutes for valid calls

##### Focus on quality of data collection

- Client data collection forms reviewed and updated

##### Delivery of counselling services

- 1682 sessions of counselling provided
- 418 people accessing counselling support
- 202 new clients accessing AGCSS services
- 37 people re-presenting to the AGCSS for support

##### COVID-19 gambling questionnaire

- 17 responses - 53% of respondents are gambling online

##### Evaluation of client counselling services

- AGCSS pre service client survey - completed by 58 therapeutic clients
- Post service client survey - completed by 51 therapeutic clients (target 10% sample size)
- Financial counselling evaluation completed by 103 clients

#### AGCSS Other Engagement

##### Self-exclusions

- Referrals for 25 people interested in self-exclusion received from the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission

4

### Building participating communities

Where the ACT community can make educated decisions about gambling activities

#### Community Engagement

##### Distributing targeted AGCSS information and resources and

##### Networking and collaborating with other organisations to address gambling harm

- Over 126 presentations, information sessions and informal communication, sharing information about the AGCSS and gambling related harm with
  - > Tertiary and vocational education settings
  - > Early education - with a focus on parents and wider school communities
  - > Alcohol and other drug treatment and rehabilitation services
  - > Mental health services
  - > CALD services
  - > Seniors services
  - > Other support services

#### AGCSS Other Engagement

##### Support of gambling related research

- Reference group member - COU research project The relationship between gambling and domestic violence against women
- Board member - National Association for Gambling Studies (NAGS)
- ANU Centre for Gambling Research: Prevalence study and Partners Support Research - Advisory group

## OUR WORK AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE ACT 2019-2020

The AGCSS has continued to grow, adapt and improve during 2019-2020, in response to the changing community and policy environment, the latest research and thinking about gambling harm, and the evolving needs and behaviours of clients.

AGCSS activities have been impacted by the COVID-19 shutdown of all non-essential activity in March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a fast-changing situation, requiring the AGCSS to develop alternative service delivery and engagement plans within a limited time. The AGCSS is focussed on remaining nimble to support the ACT community as the impact of COVID-19 continues to evolve.

RACR and Care Financial were delighted to be the chosen tenderer, to continue providing the AGCSS from July 2020. Our service delivery model builds on RACR's proven gambling support services in order to provide an integrated and effective suite of support programs, including case management, gambling counselling, financial counselling, group work, community education and referral.

The 2021+ model of service will also focus on building working alliances with community groups, industry, government, academia and service providers to deliver more targeted, purposeful, evidence-based and culturally accessible services to reduce gambling harm across the ACT. In particular the AGCSS will focus on targeting families, recognising co-morbidities, focus on men, especially young men, and specific vulnerable / overrepresented groups.

Our planned future program will also introduce additional strategies tailored to address the increasing prevalence of online gambling as well as the changing demographics of those who experience the greatest harm. These include integrating a peer support worker model of service, enhanced targeting of young people, and working with justice agencies. We will continue the focus on increasing visibility and reach in the digital world that was started in the 2019-2020 year through the AGCSS stand-alone website, online advertising, social media presence for people living in the ACT.

### COVID and implications on service delivery

The shutdown of face to face services due to COVID-19 resulted in the cancellation of many community engagement activities. Where possible, community engagement activities were moved to online delivery, but this was not feasible for many activities. Moving forward the AGCSS will work with organisations in identifying specific risks for different groups in the community, and new plus emerging community engagement challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Counselling services were moved online or by telephone at the end of March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially many clients cancelled or postponed their appointments, citing reluctance to receive services by telephone or online services. Most of these clients rebooked once it became apparent that face to face services would not be quickly resumed, causing a small spike in



gambling and financial counselling demand. Online counselling will remain part of the service delivery model even when face to face services resume as it increases the flexibility and access for our clients. We will continue to explore options for remote service delivery, including chat services.

The AGCSS will continue to monitor how the COVID-19 pandemic impacts on gambling presentation to the service. Social distancing both protects the ACT community and simultaneously creates challenges with isolation, mental health, distress, family violence, drug and alcohol misuse and financial concerns, that can exacerbate or be exacerbated by gambling harm. As stated, "Alcohol, gambling, debt, isolation, and economic uncertainty are a toxic mixture which may precipitate a wider mental and physical health crisis."<sup>1</sup>

The coordinated AGCSS intake, assessment and support process has continued to be provided by Relationships Australia Queensland, helping members of the ACT community when they call the 1800 gambling helpline 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There has been a noticeable drop in the number of legitimate callers to the AGCSS since COVID-19 restrictions were implemented, this has been reflected in calls to the QLD Gambling Helpline, also operated by Relationships Australia QLD.

### **Our relationships with community**

The AGCSS continues to raise awareness about the impact of gambling related harm and the support available. AGCSS staff attended stakeholder education and engagement activities in the ACT region; including meetings, service promotion, networking and community events. Over 23 advertisements were placed to raise awareness about gambling harm and the support services offered through the AGCSS and 100 instances of advertising on ACT radio.

The AGCSS has continued to target other service providers to increase their understanding of the continuum of gambling harm and how it impacts on people's lives. This will help service providers ask appropriate questions of people accessing their services to identify hidden gambling harm and work with them to get the support they want. 6 training workshops were presented during the 2019-2020 financial year, including for education institutions, the community organisations and facilitating the one day *Reducing Gambling Harm in the ACT* training program

The 2019 ACT Prevalence Study indicated that even when people recognise they are experiencing significant harms from their gambling, the availability of awareness about help seeking is low amongst ACT residents. The AGCSS community and stakeholder engagement offerings have been expanded to regularly reach the wider ACT community using a digital platform, including e-newsletters, social media, targeted online advertising using the AGCSS gambling harm animation designed in 2019 and radio advertising. A dedicated AGCSS website has been designed and is currently in pre-production, providing a dedicated landing point for this promotion.

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<sup>1</sup> Covid-19: we must take urgent action to avoid an increase in problem gambling and gambling related harms. May CI van Schalkwyk, NIHR Doctoral Fellow, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Danny Cheetham, Expert by Experience and member of the Gamvisory Panel, Aaron Reeves, Associate Professor, University of Oxford, Mark Petticrew, Professor of Public Health Evaluation, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. April 2020.

## Relationships with people who use our services

The AGCSS model focuses on the individual assessment and uniquely tailored responses for each client, recognising that different tools and interventions will be needed throughout their journey. When tailoring engagement, practitioners consider research that identifies factors that might influence help-seeking, engagement with the service and the likely pathways of change. Our clinical model includes opportunities for personalised follow up which is a key strategy for continued engagement and relapse prevention. **1682 counselling sessions** were delivered throughout the 2019-2020 year.

Relationships Australia Canberra & Region continues to work towards implementing DOORS (Detection Of Overall Risk Screen Framework), a universal screening tool for all gambling counselling clients, including people impacted by their own gambling and their families and friends.

As part of the AGCSS commitment to minimize barriers to engagement, **119 sessions of counselling** have been delivered at accessible outreach locations throughout the ACT, including Belconnen Health Centre, Karralika, Directions Health Service in Woden and the Australian Catholic University in Watson.

The AGCSS remains focused on the efficient data collection and collation to better understand the people who access our service and their unique situation, and to inform research. Both Care Financial, Relationships Australia Queensland and Relationships Australia Canberra & Region have introduced new software in the 2019-2020 year to better interact, record and report on client interactions.

## Our relationships with the ACT gambling industry

The AGCSS continues to have ongoing engagement to build relationships with ACT gambling venues and industry groups. The team welcomes opportunities to meet with 6 gaming venues/groups and supply AGCSS promotional material for venues

The AGCSS was pleased to participate in the 2019 Gambling Harm Awareness Week Conference organised by the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission. Alison Brook, Relationships Australia Canberra & Region CEO, participated in a panel at the event, this was a great opportunity to talk about gambling harm and the related harms that can result and emphasise the importance of working together to address these harms as a community issue.

The AGCSS team is available to attend any GCO, Board and wider industry employee training programs to outline the support services available, talk about referral pathways and how the AGCSS can support industry employees working with gambling patrons.

## Our relationships with Government, research and peak bodies

During 2019-2020 the AGCSS has supported research organisations conducting research projects through promotion of the research project, referring potential participants and being part of the project reference group. The AGCSS has also continued to participate in the National Association of Gambling Studies and support ACT Government policy review.

## AGCSS CASE STUDIES FROM THE PAST YEAR

### Case study 1

*John\* is a 35 year old man with a history of long term gambling, punctuated by more intense episodes/periods of gambling. He was living and working in the ACT but had a limited local social and support network. John had a complicated relationship with his surviving parent, and John's ex-wife lived in another state with primary custody of their child who he saw infrequently.*

*At the time of presentation John was experiencing relationship and self-esteem issues, this stress was compounding to cause his gambling to become out of control. John was already engaged with his GP who had put him on anti-depressant therapy. John was also experiencing some financial stress and was also referred to Care for financial counselling support in managing his finances.*

*The gambling counsellor used a variety of counselling interventions to support John over a 9 month period. The AGCSS counsellor initially saw John weekly to help stabilise him, spreading the appointments out to monthly appointments towards the end of the counselling. The latter appts were focussed on helping John feel more comfortable with himself as low self-esteem was assessed as a risk for future episodes of gambling.*

*At the end of the 9 months John reported he had ceased gambling, and only gambled once in that time. John was able to recognise cognitive distortions in relation to gambling e.g.- that gambling would not solve his short term financial difficulties or alleviate his stress. He learnt strategies and was able to look at exercise and other activities if feeling stressed rather than gambling.*

### Case study 2

*Michael\* is in his late twenties and sought help due to relationship, financial and alcohol issues. His partner of several years was diagnosed with Border Line Personality disorder and he was struggling with this relationship. Michael reported feelings of shame, anger and depression, and was using gambling and alcohol to help fill the void, each exacerbating the consumption of the other. He was unemployed at the time and was experiencing financial issues.*

*Michael was given a referral to a drug and alcohol service but felt one service was enough to engage with at the time. Care Financial counselling was also suggested but not pursued by Michael.*

*Michael chose to abstain from gambling as part of his strategies to control his alcohol and gambling consumption. He also stopped drinking for two months and introduced strategies to control his drinking after this time. He reported that this has helped him not to gamble.*

*After ten months Michael is now employed and has not gambled for seven months. He chose to end his romantic relationship and returned to football training. Michael has reported an improvement in his overall mood, self-confidence and self-esteem.*



### Case study 3

*Jack\* is a male, married with a young child and working two jobs. At the time of presentation, he and his wife were separated, but still living in the same house. For several years Jack had been gambling on pokies, at the TAB and online. He grew up in a family where gambling was prevalent. Jack's gambling had increased since their child was born.*

*The Jack approached Care seeking assistance to work through his financial situation. The deposit for the mortgage was made up of his wife's inheritance and money from her parents. His wife is paying the mortgage and rates. Jack had borrowed money from a previous employer to cover his losses and this employer was now wanting the money to be repaid. Jack's priority was to pay money back but he was also seeking information on his options to deal with his credit cards and mobile phone debt. Jack also wanted to know what could be done to protect the property, so his wife did not lose the house.*

*The financial counsellor:*

- *Undertook a thorough assessment of Jack's financial situation, including completing an Income and Expenditure statement.*
- *Provided information on debt options including advantages and disadvantages of each option.*
- *Assisted him request in writing, the financial hardship option he chose with his creditors.*
- *Provided information about strategies he can put in place to take and keep control of his money.*
- *Made a warm referral to Relationships Australia for Jack and his wife to receive gambling and relationship counselling.*
- *Referred Jack and his wife to the Public Trustee for advice around protecting the family home.*
- *Referred Jack to a free legal service for legal advice regarding a property settlement.*

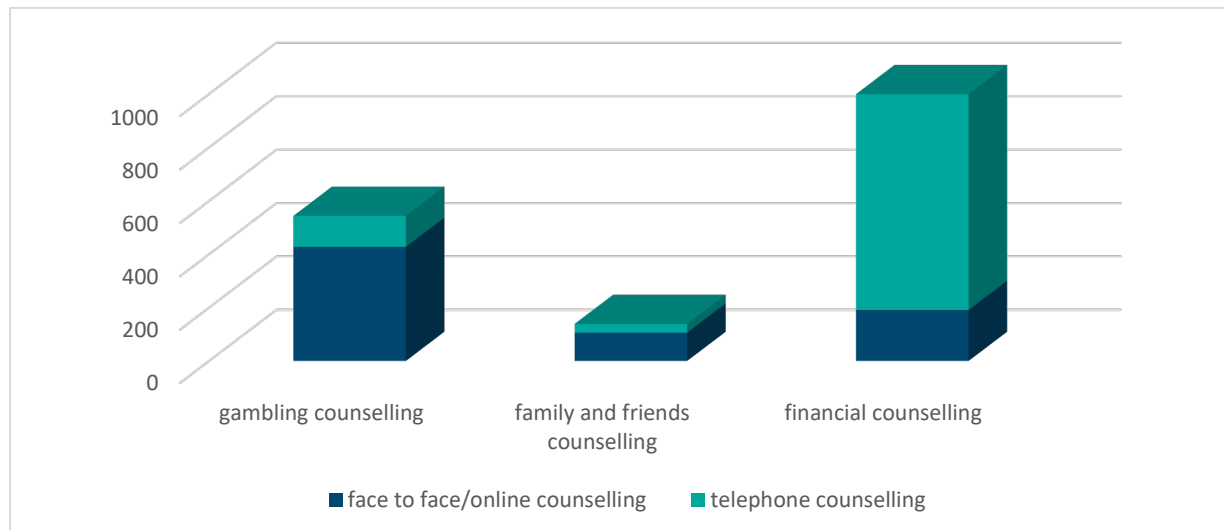
### Outcomes

- *Jack's request for financial hardship was approved by his creditors and he was able to repay the accounts at a rate he could afford whilst also continuing to repay his previous employer.*
- *Jack received gambling counselling and reported he has ceased gambling at this time.*
- *Jack obtained legal advice regarding a property settlement and the process is in train. He has been able to maintain a civil relationship with his wife during this period.*
- *Jack and his wife received information from the Public Trustee and have changed ownership of the property so he is unable to access any equity for gambling purposes.*

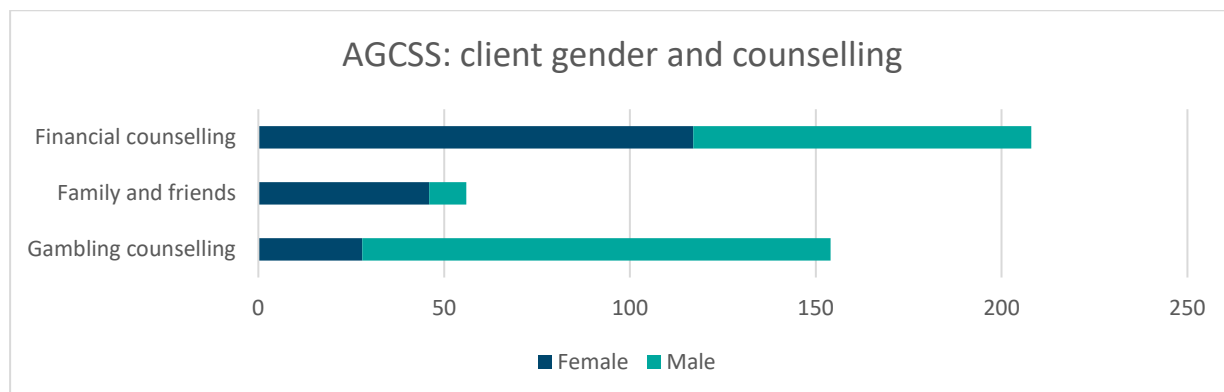
\* All case studies are de-identified to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of our clients.

## AGCSS 2019 – 2020 CLIENT STATISTICS

### How many hours of counselling we provided



### Our clients

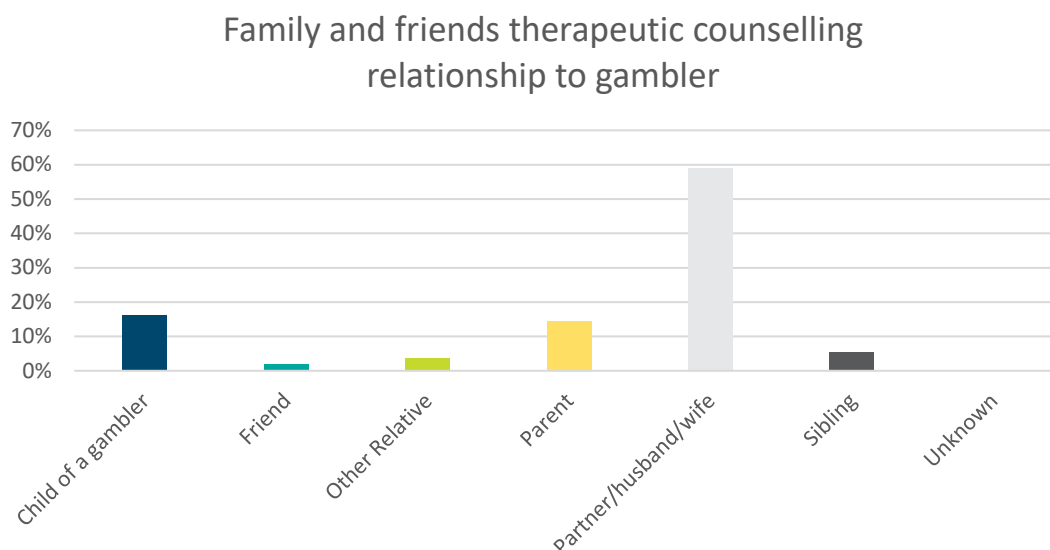


As with previous years, people aged between 25-44 years make up the majority (68%) of people seeking support from the AGCSS.

#### ***Relationship to gambler***

59% of family and friends of gamblers seeking counselling support identify as their partner or spouse.

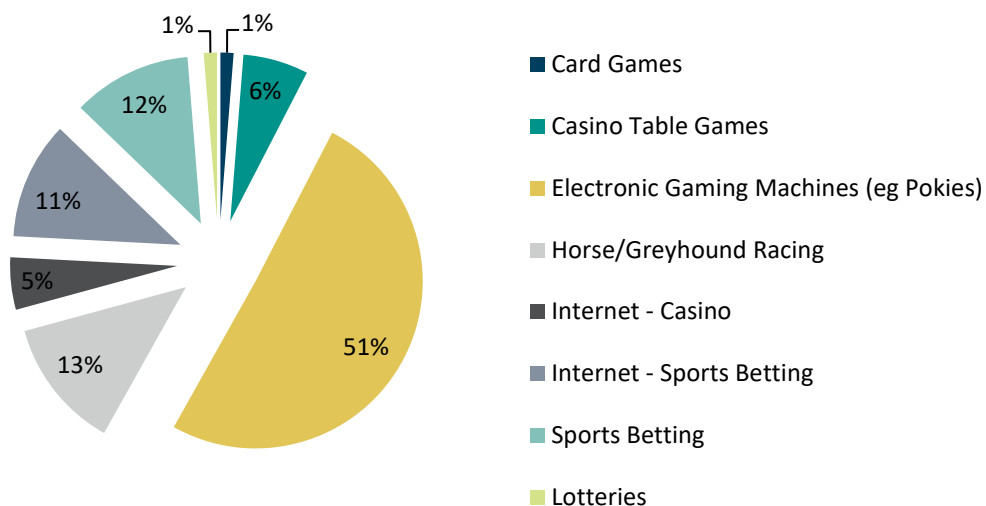
## What type of gambling causes the most harm for our clients?



## What type of gambling causes the most harm for our clients?

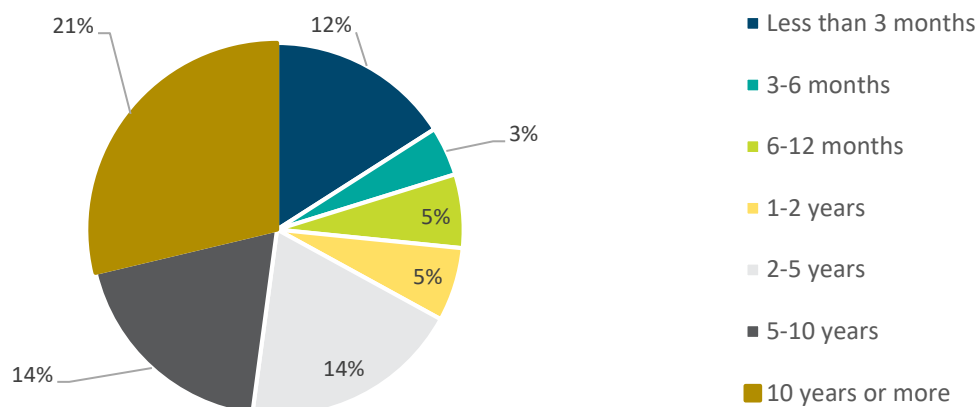
In line with the 2019 ACT Prevalence Study, the majority of AGCSS new and representing clients said that gaming machines were the most problematic type of gambling for them. Sports betting (internet and other) has continued to increase as the primary concern, from 14% in 2017-2018, to 21% in 2018-2019, and 23% in 2019-2020.

### What type of gambling is the most problematic for you?



## How long has gambling been a problem or concern?

How long has gambling been a problem or concern?

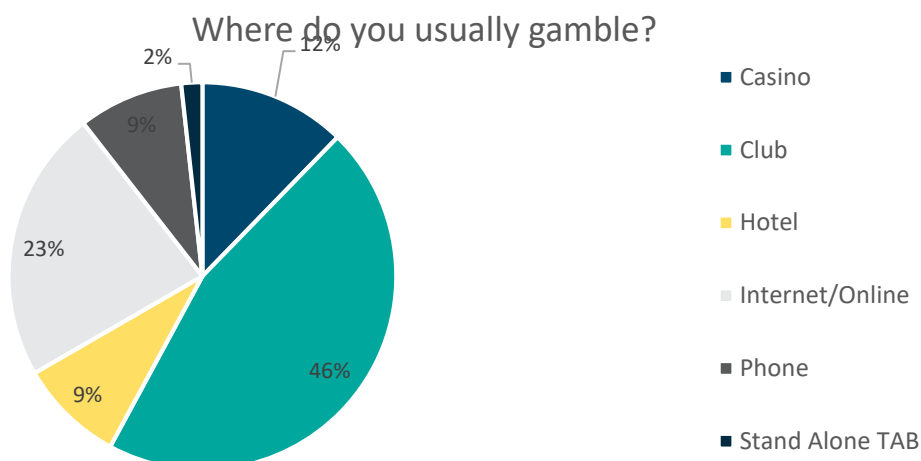


## Location and frequency of gambling?

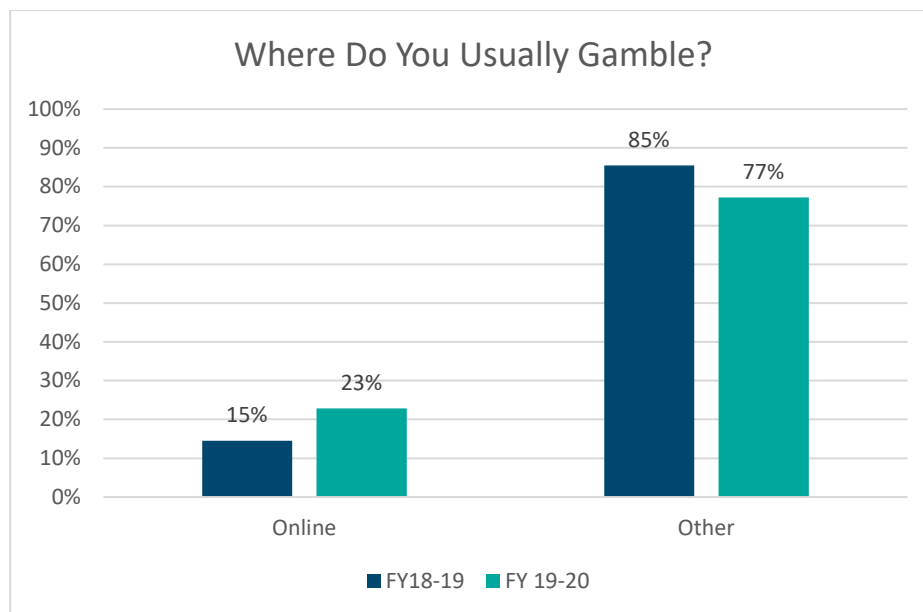
The AGCSS has asked new gambling clients where they usually gamble.

### *Location of gambling – new therapeutic clients*

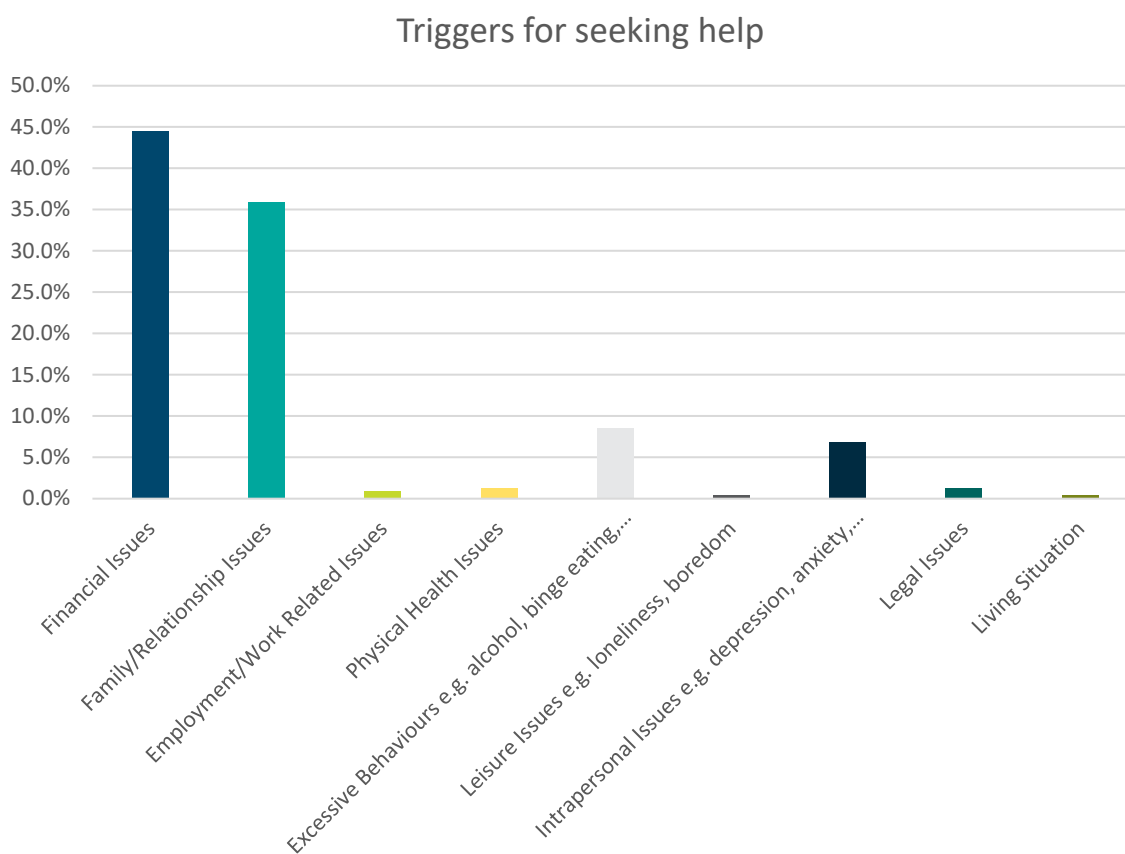
The AGCSS has asked new gambling clients where they usually gamble. In line with previous years, nearly half (46%) of new gambling clients advised they usually gambled in a club, followed by internet/online gambling (23%). There has been an 8% increase of clients reporting they usually gamble online.



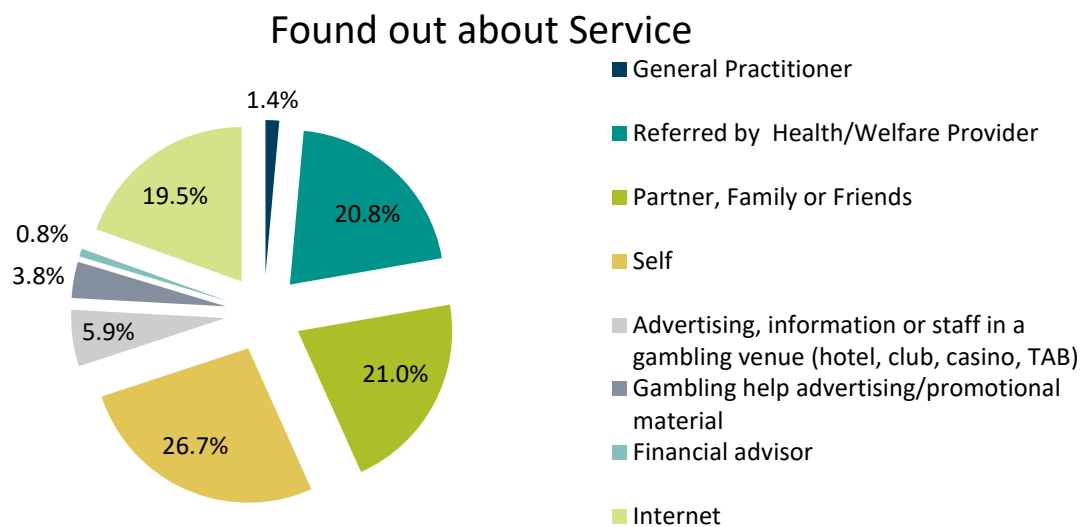




## What triggered our clients to seek help?



## How did our clients find out about the service?







**AGCSS  
CONTACT DETAILS**


**Support for all affected by gambling**  
1800 858 858 – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week  
[agcss@racr.org.au](mailto:agcss@racr.org.au)

**Financial Counselling (CARE Inc.)**  
02 6257 1788 or 1800 007 007 (free call)

**Contacts for industry and community partners**  
AGCSS office  
02 6122 7170  
[agcss@racr.org.au](mailto:agcss@racr.org.au)

 **ACT GAMBLING  
COUNSELLING &  
SUPPORT SERVICE**

 **care inc.**

 **Relationships Australia.**  
CANBERRA & REGION

This service receives funding from the ACT Gambling Harm Prevention and Mitigation Fund.