

ACT GAMBLING SUPPORT SERVICE

ANNUAL EXTERNAL REPORT

2021-2022



The ACT Gambling Support Service

The ACT Gambling 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 AGSS 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.

AGSS 24/7 telephone support: 1800 national gambling helpline - All calls to the 1800 national gambling helpline originating in the ACT are answered by the AGSS 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.

The ACT Gambling Support Service is funded by the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission through the Gambling Harm Prevention and Mitigation Fund.

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 2021-2022 CLIENTS

OUR CLIENTS

2021-22



365
people engaged in
counselling support



Provided **3 254** instances of support for people in need

2253 casework sessions 827 counselling sessions 46 peer support sessions 81 gambling support enquiries



Average number of counselling appointment attended
2.3 appointments per person

53% aged 25 to 44 years

Majority age group of people who sought our help



More men sought our help than women

61%
224 men

39%
141 women



Counselling sessions we provided were

362
Gambling Counselling

78
Counselling for Family & Friends

387
Financial Counselling

WHAT OUR NEW CLIENTS TOLD US

31% Said gambling had been problematic for them for over 2 years before they sought help

85% New clients report they gamble at least once a week

35% Of new clients find out about the ACT Gambling Counselling and support service online

30% of new clients reported that they usually gamble online

68% Two thirds of our clients seek help due to financial concerns. Relationship issues account for 23% of new clients seeking help

33% of new clients reported that they usually gamble in clubs

54% Reported poker machines were the most problematic type of gambling for them

20% Reported online gambling was the most problematic type of gambling for them

WHAT WE ACHIEVED AGAINST OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES IN 2021-2022

WHAT WE ACHIEVED AGAINST OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

2021-22

1

Preventing gambling harm

Where harms caused by gambling are minimised through early intervention and provision of help services

Community Engagement

Training, education and engagement

- Delivered 69 workshops / presentations for organisations that support people experiencing gambling harm co-occurring issues
- Activities for employees and their clients
 - › Alcohol and other drug treatment and rehabilitation services
 - › Mental health services
 - › Alexander Maconochie Centre

Industry Engagement

Provide effective, timely and relevant communication, support and training for gambling industry workers

- Attended 2 face to face GCO training sessions
- 12 meetings with ACT gambling venues to discuss training and peer support
- Met with Canberra Community Clubs and Clubs ACT

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

- Direct provision of resources to 5 gambling venues, additional material distributed by the GRC

AGSS Other Engagement

Support of gambling related research

- supported and/or participated in 3 gambling harm research projects
- Australian National University: PHD research project *Systematic review of Gambling intervention*
- Engagement with University of Sydney regarding school education project

2

Promoting understanding 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 7 expos / events / forums in the ACT community, including schools and tertiary institutions

Promoting the AGSS through media and other channels

- AGSS website used to highlight gambling harm and AGSS activities
- 10 radio, TV and print interviews and to discuss gambling harm and the ACT community
- 1 podcast - Transforming Perceptions
- 19 social media posts to promote awareness of gambling harm

Distributing targeted AGSS information and resources

- 36 informal presentations, information sessions and informal communication, sharing information about the AGSS and gambling related harm with:
 - › Tertiary and vocational education settings
 - › Worksites
 - › Alcohol and other drug treatment and rehabilitation services
 - › Mental health services
 - › Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services
 - › Other support services

Industry Engagement

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

- Continued Employment Assistance Services for 7 gambling venues

AGSS Other Engagement

Promoting Gambling Harm Awareness Week

- AGSS Gambling Harm Awareness Week Round table participation
- Promotion of Gambling Harm Awareness Week, including social media and interviews.

3

Providing help and support services

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

ACT Gambling Support Services

24/7 support in the ACT – 1800 858 858

- 245 calls answered from people calling the national gambling helpline (1800 858 858) from the ACT
- 184 instances of telephone counselling to people in the ACT calling the national gambling helpline
- Supported 81 callers to answer gambling harm related enquiries
- 85% of calls answered within 20 seconds

Delivery of counselling services

- 827 sessions of counselling provided
- 365 people accessing counselling support

Delivery of other support services

- Provided 2253 sessions of case work to support AGSS clients
- Peer support services providing 46 sessions for people experiencing gambling harm

AGSS group programs

- Developed and promoted group program for family and friends

Evaluation of therapeutic client counselling services

- Therapeutic counselling post service client survey completed by 23 clients (target 10% sample size)
- Financial counselling post service client survey completed

AGSS Other Engagement

Self-exclusions

- Referrals for 36 people interested in self-exclusion received from the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission
- 36 people contacted to provide support information as part of the self-exclusion process.

AGSS CASE STUDIES FROM THE 2021-2022 YEAR

Case study 1: Gambling counselling

Peter contacted the ACT Gambling Support Service to seek help for his gambling. At his first appointment with his counsellor Peter scored 14 in the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), the standardised measure of at risk behaviour for gambling. A score of between 8 and 27 indicates that a person is experiencing problematic gambling.*

Peter shared that he gambled on horses and sports games and felt unable to stop or control his gambling behaviours. Gambling was costing him more than he wanted to spend. Peter wanted to be able to save for a boat and to pay off his car loan.

Gambling was also negatively impacting his relationship with his wife and two school aged children, to whom he was devoted. He was worried about the money he was spending on gambling that couldn't be used for the family. This was contributing to feelings of anxiety, depression, and causing him stress.

Peter had tried self-exclusion in the past but was unable to make it work. He shared that all the adults in his family are social gamblers, and he'd grown up gambling and has fond memories of family gambling outings. As well as improving his mental health and family relationships Peter said he wanted to feel he could control how much and when he gambled.

During the next few months Peter attended 5 counselling sessions. His counsellor used a variety of counselling tools, including Motivational Interviewing, Behavioural Activation, CBT, and Psychoeducation. Peter reported that he had stopped gambling after the first counselling session. At the third session Peter shared he'd had a lapse when out with his brother as they usually gamble together. The counsellor and Peter were able to explore the lapse to understand what happened and ways to manage this in the future.

A second PGSI assessment was conducted in the 5th counselling session. Peter scored 4/27, indicating he had reduced his gambling harm (scores of 3 to 7 indicate moderate level of experiencing gambling harm, leading to some negative consequences). This showed a significant change in a short period of time and was consistent with Peter reporting feeling more able to control his desire to gamble.

Case study 2 – Peer Support

Brian is a 49-year-old male and is currently in full time employment. He had previously been mandated by the courts to receive gambling counselling and had previously participated in counselling sessions at the ACT Gambling Support Service with a gambling counsellor. In addition he had self-excluded from clubs at various times as part of this process.*

Brian's case manager (corrective services) supported him to re-engage with the ACT Gambling Support Service peer support worker who had lived experience of gambling harm. Brian had shared he wasn't sure if he wanted to start counselling again at the ACT Gambling Support Service but liked the idea of talking with someone who also had lived experience of gambling harm.

When Brian presented he was open with the peer support worker and explained that his criminal activities had funded his gambling, he had been in prison for a lengthy period of time as a result, and that he was mandated by corrective services attend the ACT Gambling Support Service. Brian shared his criminal activities and gambling had been a complete surprise for his family when he was arrested. His custodial sentence had led to a complete breakdown of his family unit and he had also lost long term friendships which had impacted him deeply. He also mentioned that he had seen a counsellor here some two years ago that had assisted him however he had been mandated to continue counselling reluctantly.

Brian shared he had started gambling at an early age. At first he gambled in social circles with friends at local clubs where gambling was the norm and was enjoyed by his friends and himself. This was normal to Brian and initially saw no harm in it. Over time his gambling debts and lying had led him to embezzle amounts of money from clients' accounts to sustain his increased need to chase firstly his loses and feed his need to gamble.

Brian spoke of consequences of his gambling and incarceration and that his father and family had little contact or time for him. Brian spoke of the deep impact after being handed a custodial sentence, and the effect this had on his relationship with his partner & family, breaking trust for which they had not forgiven him. He disclosed that he still felt shame and guilt.

Talking with the ACT Gambling Support Service peer support worker helped Brian to reflect on his relationship with gambling, the resulting rift with his family and how important it was to him to try to reconcile with them. Brian talked through his ideas about attempting to build bridges and gaining support of his family. The strategies included involving himself in other activities that may include family, and to surround himself with people that cared and were not there just to gamble and have a good time.

Brian reflected on the connection of ego & money, and the pressure he felt from his peers to gamble. Talking through what ongoing support he would like to manage his gambling and keep himself safe, Brian shared he was open to re-engagement with gambling counselling. The peer support worker was able to make a warm referral to a gambling counsellor at the ACT Gambling Support Service. Brian also asked for details about ACT Gamblers Anonymous groups which the peer support worker was able to share.

Brian has continued attending the ACT Gambling Support Service on a periodic basis, meeting with a gambling counsellor and the gambling peer support worker.

Case study 3: Financial counselling relating to gambling harm and financial stress

Damian contacted Care Financial Counselling after attempting suicide. He was receiving support from his GP, and a specialist mental health team. He has been diagnosed with a mental health condition.*

Damien has a full-time job but has been gambling for many years which has led to the breakdown of his relationship and left him in severe financial stress. He started gambling more frequently following his separation and recently gambled his entire pay on payday. He told the financial counsellor that he wanted assistance to stop gambling and sort out his finances.

2021-2022 ACT Gambling Support Service - External Report

Due to his gambling spending, Damien has become reliant on payday loans and Buy Now Pay Later products to purchase essential goods and pay household bills. Damien noted how easy it was to access these loans and products. However, by the time he approached Care he had so many loans that he did not have enough money to make regular repayments.

He was also in arrears on his electricity bill and private rent so was at risk of eviction.

The Financial Counsellor assisted Damien by doing the following:

- *Applied for ACT Rent Relief Grant*
- *Provided information on emergency relief and food banks*
- *Provided a warm referral to a Gambling Counsellor at the ACT Gambling Support Service*
- *Undertook an assessment of Damien's capacity to pay the debts including an income and expenditure Statement*
- *Discussed debt options and agreed to advocate on his behalf with some of the creditors. This included negotiating a period of no payments for two months whilst they worked together on a longer-term plan*
- *Referred Damien to the utility hardship program where a payment plan was set in place*
- *Discusses a range of budgeting strategies, particularly around setting up payment plans to reduce the amount of funds available for gambling*

Damian obtained support from the Gambling Counsellor and has not been gambling since seeking this support. He received temporary assistance from an emergency relief provider and food banks. He was approved for the ACT Rent Relief Grant (which has now ceased operation) which meant his rent was brought back up to date.

With assistance from the financial counsellor Damien was able to set up an affordable repayment plan on all debts allowing him to repay the amount he borrowed and for interest, fees, and charges to be waived. Damien set up automatic bill payment systems and now has workable budget.

**Name changed to protect client confidentiality*

OUR WORK AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE ACT 2021-2022

During the 2021-22 year the AGSS has continued to raise awareness about gambling harms, gambling support services that are available to help in a confidential and non-judgmental manner and share how the service can work with the ACT community to minimise risk of harm.

The AGSS community engagement activities have focused on:

- Consistent AGSS engagement and outreach for alcohol and drug, family support, and mental health service organisations to improve understanding, integration, and support for gambling harm.
- Enhanced collaboration with the Alexander Maconochie Centre and the Australian National University to develop a post and pre and post Judicial Support Program.
- Enhancing and developing relationships with gambling industry venues throughout Canberra.
- Building relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD people in the ACT.
- Reaching young people via education institutions and in the workplace.
- Focused education to secondary school students.
- Engagement with academic institutions to enhance focussed clinical delivery and education.
- Exploring alternative virtual mediums that support a range of access mediums.

Throughout 2021-22 the AGSS team have focused on holistic wellbeing and creating awareness of co-occurring health issues connected to gambling behaviours. Working with community organisations and clubs there has been an increased enthusiasm for exploring a virtual space that can provide education, service access, education and training for service users and club staff.

Key messaging across all activities has focused on wellbeing and harm minimization, looking what people can do to be safe when gambling and develop an awareness of co-presenting issues associated with gambling harm. A primary action has been on removing deficit-based language and focus on individual and relational strengths. Combining relational experiences with active supports that respond to a range of presenting symptoms with a policy of no wrong door access.

The AGSS has engaged with both the University of Sydney and Australian National University to explore and develop research informed clinical practice that is reflective of both the participant and AGSS feedback. This includes services having the following trauma informed foundation principles:

- Non-judgmental
- Health and wellbeing focused
- Restorative
- Relational

- Safe
- Hopeful

Feedback from organisations we work with

“The Solaris Program is a specialist alcohol and other drug rehabilitation program delivered by Karralika Programs that operates within the Alexander Maconochie Centre.

The ACT Gambling Support Service team with Relationships Australia has been providing participants with education and information for approximately a year and a half.

Through regular visits to AMC, the Gambling Support Service facilitates discussion about gambling and potential harms, provides strategies for management of the issue and information about their support services that can be accessed on release from custody.

Participant feedback has been consistently positive, and regularly notes that the visits allow participants to talk about the issue – either their experiences or those of a significant person in their life – and explore what this might mean and what support is available. We look forward to our ongoing relationship with AGSS and welcoming the ACT Gambling Support Service team into Solaris to provide these invaluable sessions.” **Solaris Program - Karralika Programs Inc**

“The ACT Gambling Support Service have met with the Venue Managers of the Vikings Group to discuss the important role both venue staff and support services play in helping the community manage gambling harm.

Working closely with Vikings Group Sports & Community Manager, Louize Glenn, ACT Gambling Support Service are providing updated information about our services to all Vikings venues.

The conversations our management team have had with Markus have been great. It’s such a positive for everyone, particularly our patrons, when our staff have confidence in the support services we are referring our patrons too. We genuinely appreciate Markus’ time and the work he is putting in to building the relationship with the Vikings Group.” **The Vikings Group**

“RACR is an impressive organisation and the people I have engaged with are equally impressive. Whilst they certainly do a good job as the ACT Gambling Support Service provider, I am most impressed by their eagerness to explore additional ways - outside of the Gambling Support Service contract - in which RACR might be able to work more effectively with the industry to better address the gambling harm issue as well as broader issues relating to the general health and wellbeing of Club patrons. As Clubs we care deeply about the wellbeing of our patrons and we want to play a constructive and effective role in assisting them in this regard. And this where RACR, who have the expertise in these areas, have been so helpful and constructive. They are always open to discussions on what more can be done by Clubs in these areas and are very good at “thinking outside the box”

and proposing innovative ways in which Clubs might improve patron wellbeing. We are currently in discussion with Paul and Markus about one such initiative which I believe will potentially deliver significant assistance to our members.

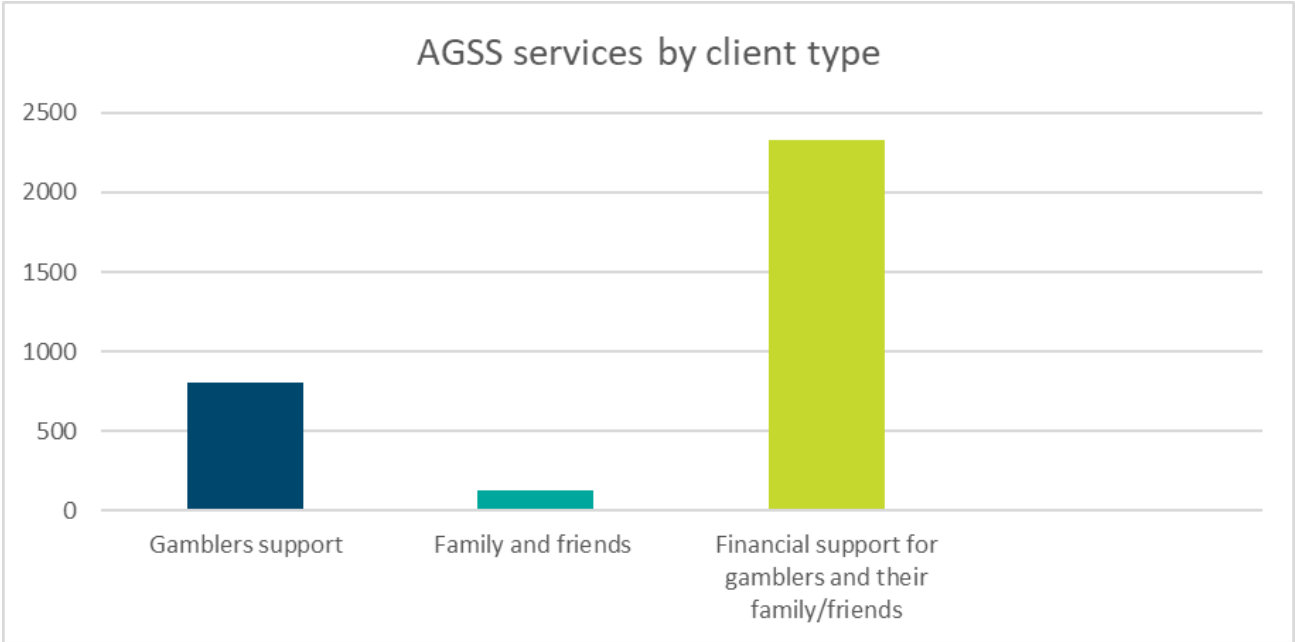
RACR also understand and are supportive of the important contributions Clubs make to our community. As such, RACR seek to ensure that initiatives being proposed or considered to address gambling harm and general wellbeing issues do not come at the expense of Club sustainability. In other words, RACR want to work with us to deliver win/win outcomes.”

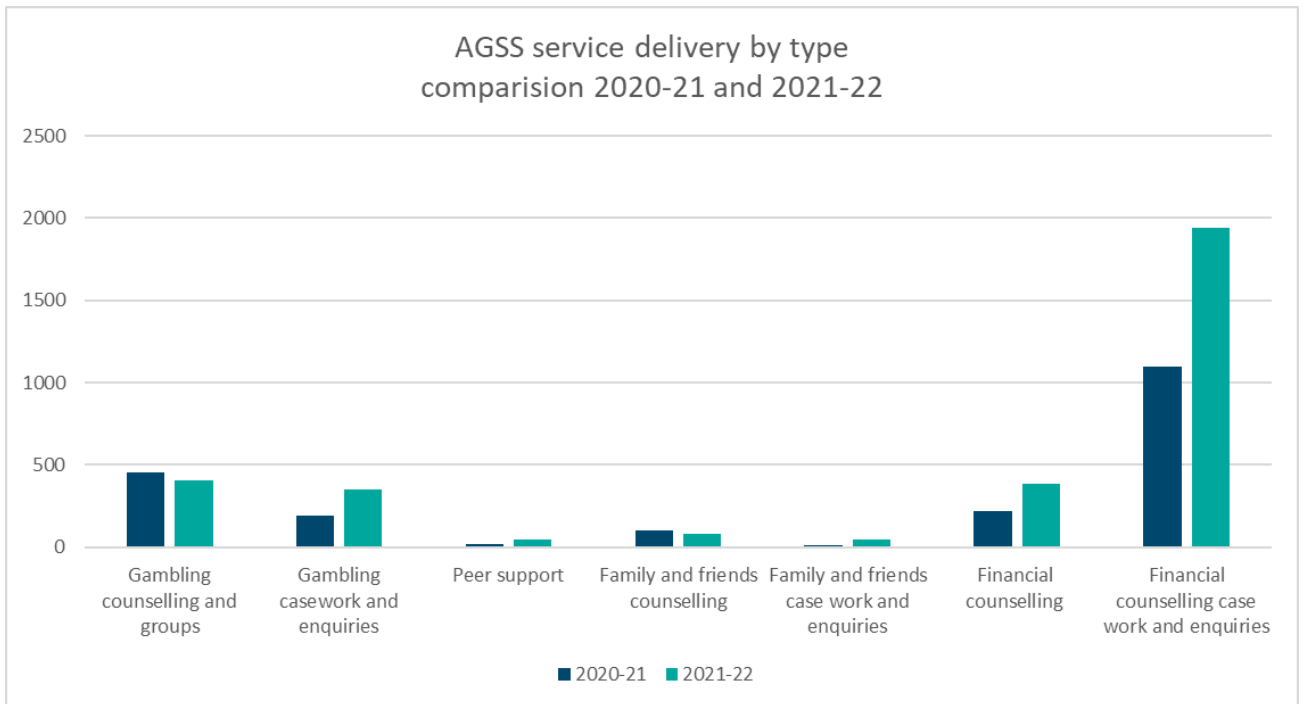
Athol Chalmers: Chair, Canberra Community Clubs and President, Canberra Burns Club

AGSS 2021 – 2022 CLIENT STATISTICS: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

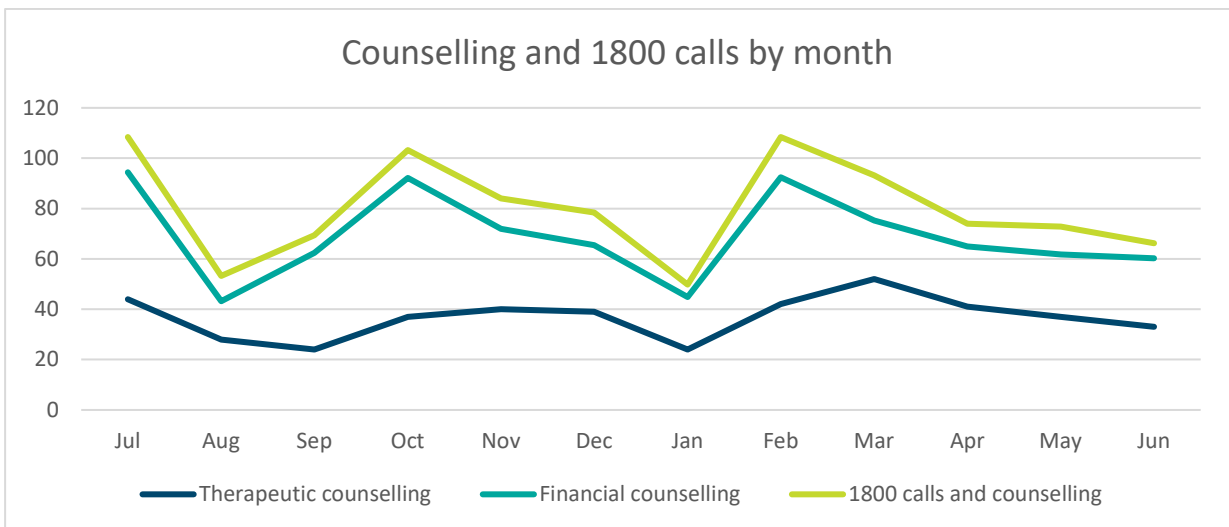
How many sessions we provided?

3254 sessions (assessment, counselling, enquiries, peer support, group work and case work) were delivered throughout this reporting period. The AGSS has concentrated on capturing case work support provided for our clients, directly with them and contacting other organisations with their consent. People presenting with complexity in their lives, including multiple co-occurring issues, often need additional case work support to address this complexity.





As shown below there was a consistent pattern in demand for service peaks and troughs during the reporting period. In pre pandemic years November and February were the peak months for service delivery, this has continued in 2021-22. It is speculated that the August-October 2021 lockdown interrupted demand for gambling support services while face to face gambling services were closed.

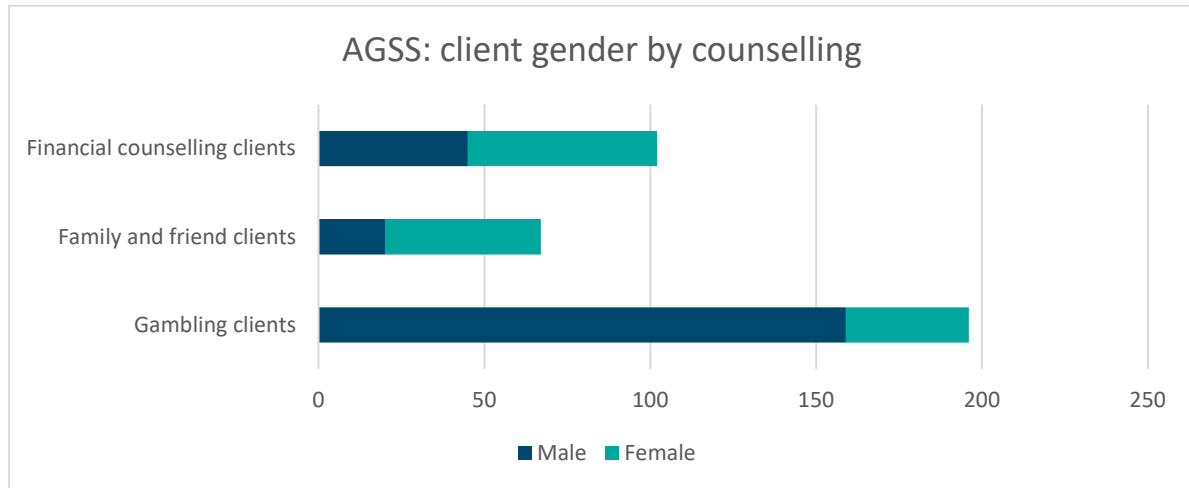


Our clients

The number of clients supported by the increased by 16% from 2020-21. These results are moving back towards pre pandemic numbers. Client demand for service dropped during the ACT 2021 lockdown between August and October 2021, when face to face gambling venues were closed.

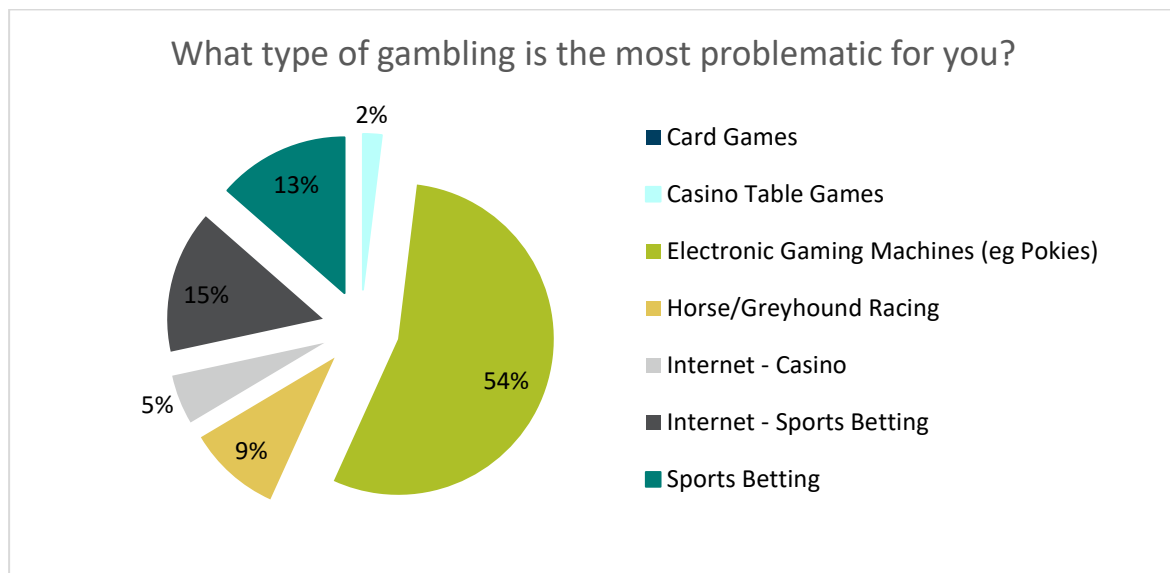
4% of clients identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and 18% of people accessing the service are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

Overall AGSS clients were more likely to be male (61%) as female (39%). This breakdown varies considerably between the different counselling types as shown below. 25-44 year old's make up the majority (53%) of people seeking support from the AGSS. Both these results are consistent with previous years' data.



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

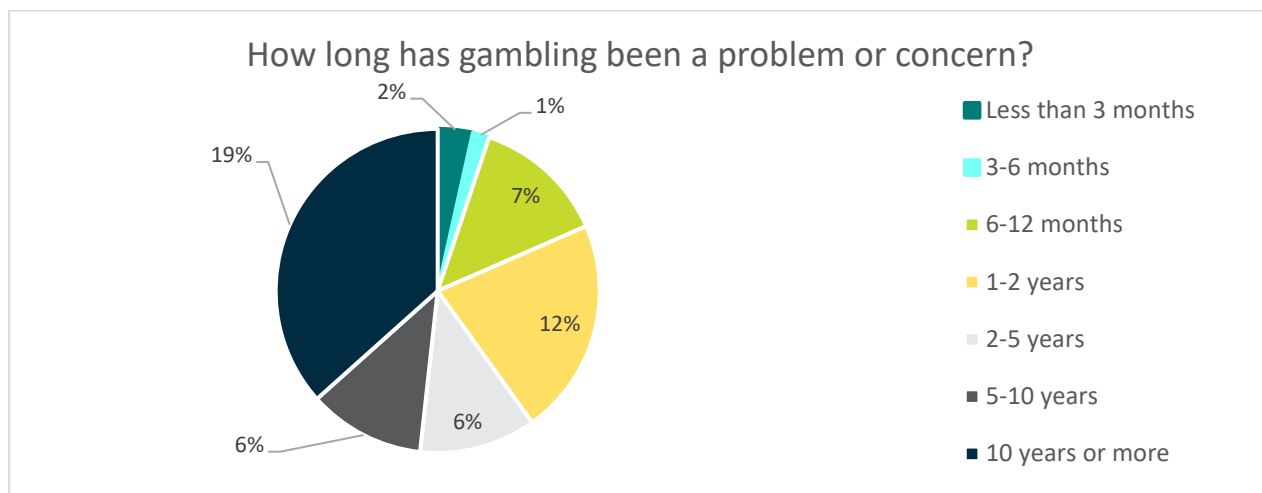
Gaming machines continue to be the most problematic type of gambling for new people presenting to the AGSS despite venue closures, although it has reduced from the 2020-21 year. Online gambling (sports betting and casino) has increased to 20%.



The results from the last 4 financial year reporting periods are shown below for comparison.

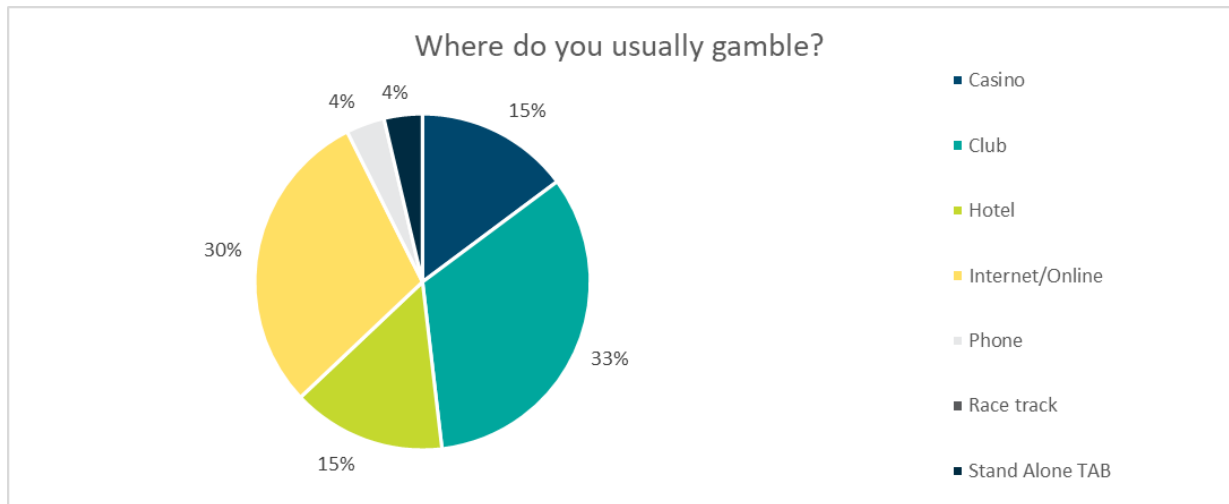
MOST PROBLEMATIC	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Gaming machines	68%	51%	60%	54%
Horse/dog racing	12%	13%	10%	9%
Sports betting	7%	12%	6%	13%
Card games	1%	1%	2%	
Casino table games	5%	6%	7%	2%
Lottery products	2%	1%		1%
Keno	1%			1%
Internet -Casino	1%	5%	4%	5%
Internet –Sports bet	3%	11%	11%	15%

How long has gambling been a problem or concern?



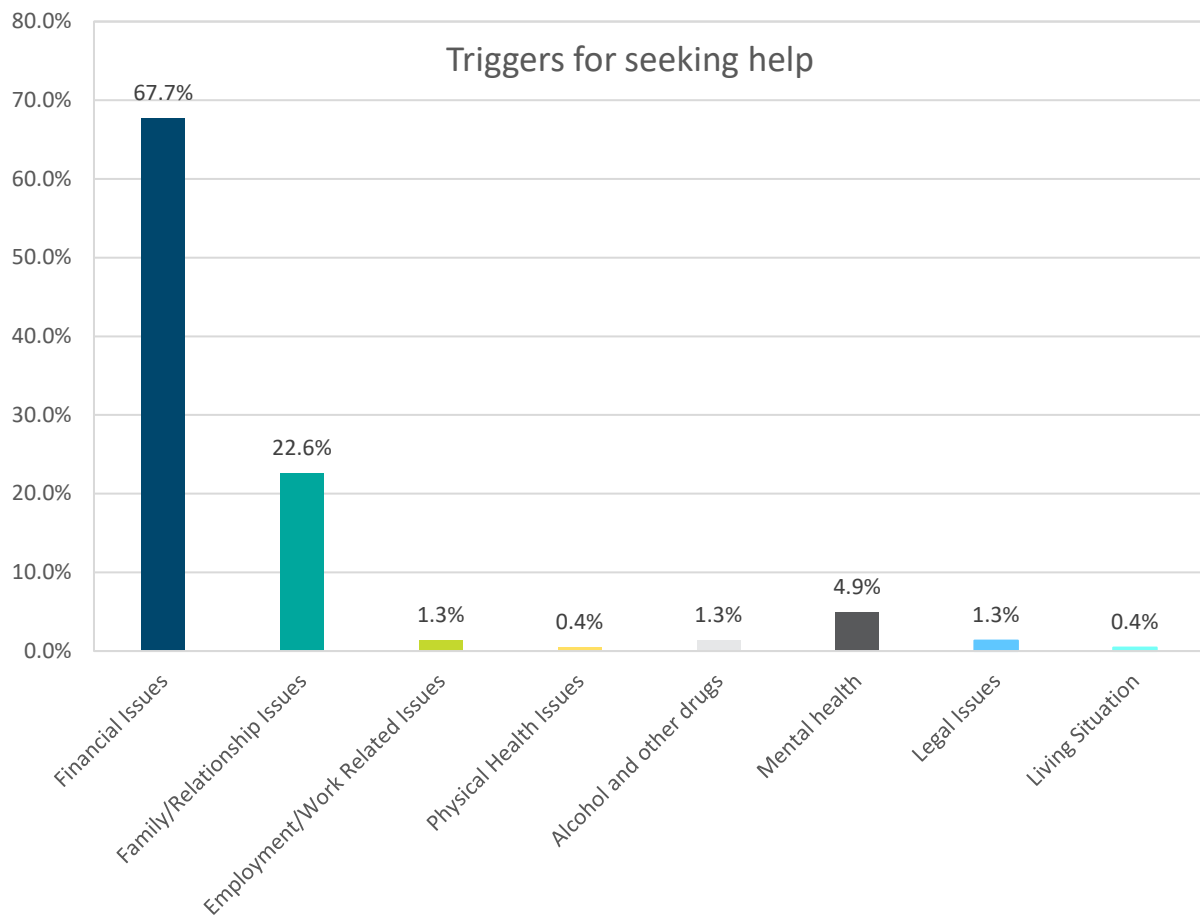
Location and frequency of gambling

The AGSS has asked new therapeutic gambling clients in 2021-22 where they usually gamble. The number of new gambling clients advising they usually gambled in a club (33%) has remained consistent with the previous year (31%). Internet/online gambling has increased (30%) from the previous year (23% of new clients).



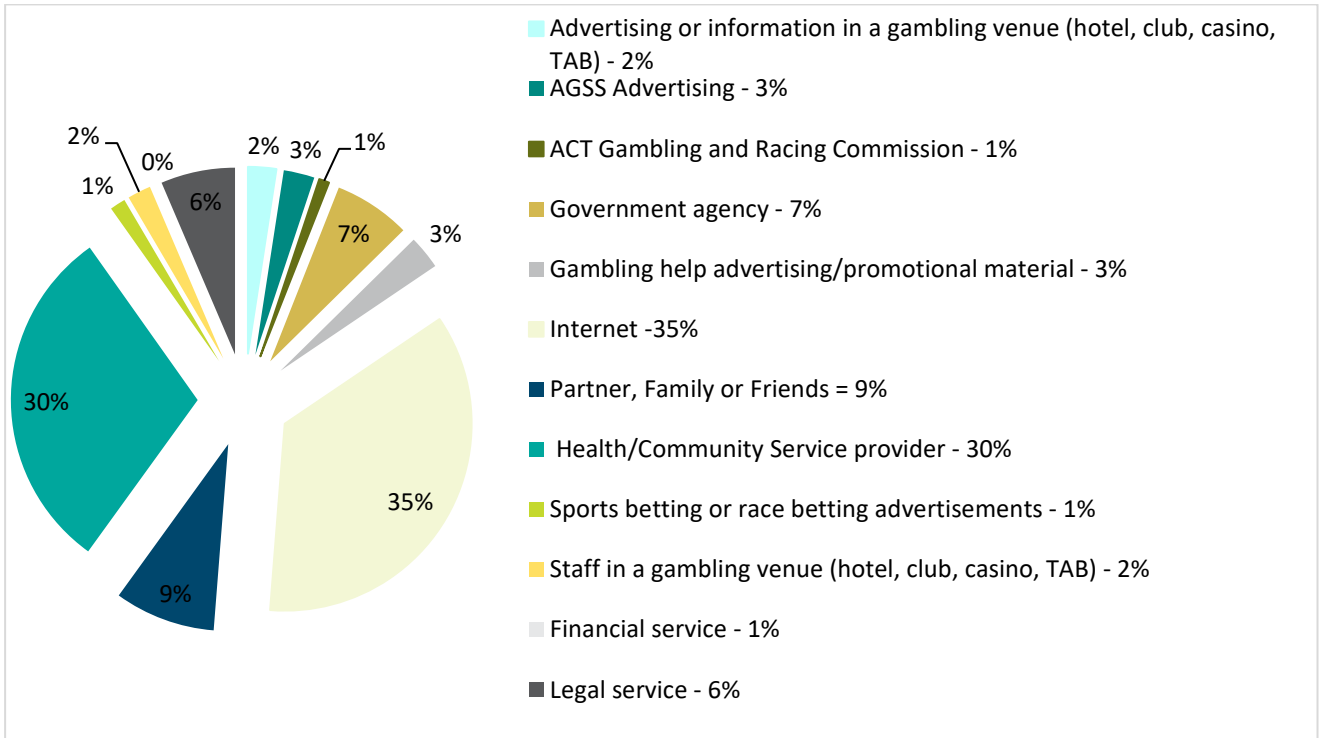
What triggered our clients to seek help?

Financial issues were overwhelmingly the primary cause for seeking help (67.7%), a slight rise from the 2020-21 results. This is followed by family/relationship issues (22.6%).



How did our clients find out about the AGSS?

The majority of people continue to find their way to the AGSS via the internet.



AGSS CONTACT DETAILS

Support for everyone

1800 858 858 — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

AGSS@racr.org.au

<https://actgamblingsupport.org.au/>

Financial counselling (CARE Inc. Financial Counselling)

02 6257 1788 or 1800 007 007 (free call)

Contacts for industry and community partners

AGSS office: 15 Napier Close, Deakin ACT 2600

02 6122 7170 AGSS@racr.org.au



ACT GAMBLING
SUPPORT SERVICE

1800 858 858





ACT GAMBLING
SUPPORT SERVICE



Free Helpline

1800 858 858

Open 24 hours, 7 days a week



ACT GAMBLING
SUPPORT SERVICE

Relationships Australia
CANBERRA & REGION

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