



**ACT GAMBLING**  

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**SUPPORT SERVICE**

# External Annual Performance Report 2022-2023



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

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## ACT GAMBLING SUPPORT SERVICE

The ACT Gambling Support Service (AGSS) provides free and confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for all those affected by gambling in the ACT.

Every year we assist hundreds of people to successfully take control of their gambling.

We support people looking for help with their gambling and the family and friends that are close to them. We can help 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.
- You are working in the gambling industry and want to better support your patrons.
- You are a community member interested in learning more about gambling harms in the ACT community.

All the services that AGSS provides to the community are 100% free of charge.

The AGSS team works with people seeking support by providing:

- **Gambling counselling** – flexible therapeutic support from highly qualified and experienced counsellors.
- **Financial counselling** – financial counselling and practical support for people in financial difficulty.
- **24/7 telephone support** – calls to 1800 858 858 originating in the ACT are answered by the AGSS all day, every day.
- **Peer support** – provides safe spaces for people to come together and share common experiences and concerns.

AGSS tailors support to meet the needs of the individual:

*Every person is different so your needs will be different*

*Counsellors don't tell clients to stop gambling or what to do*

*Counsellors work with you to decide how often you talk and the duration of support*

*Are the bets getting bigger?*

*Is it worth it?*



**ACT GAMBLING**  
SUPPORT SERVICE

**1800 858 858**

*Anxiety?  
Regret?*

*Have relationships changed?*

*The ACT Gambling Support Service is funded through the Gambling Harm Mitigation Fund. Relationships Australia Canberra & Region leads and coordinates delivery of the service in collaboration with Care Financial and Relationships Australia Queensland.*

# OUR CLIENTS

2022 - 23



The average number of counselling appointments attended was

**2.2** appointments per person

**53%** aged 25 to 44 years

Largest age group of people who sought help



More men than women sought support

**61%**  
men (287)

**38%**  
women (179)

**0.4%**  
non-binary (2)

## WHAT OUR NEW CLIENTS TOLD US

**71%** Said gambling had been problematic for them for over 2 years before they sought help

**67%** New clients report they gamble at least once a week

**51%** Of new clients self refer to the ACT Gambling Support service

**21%** of new clients reported that they usually gamble online

**72%** Nearly three quarters of our clients seek help due to financial concerns. Relationship issues account for 18% of new clients seeking help

**42%** of new clients reported that they usually gamble in clubs

**65%** Reported poker machines were the most problematic type of gambling for them

**21%** Reported online gambling was the most problematic type of gambling for them

## AGSS CASE STUDIES FROM THE 2022-2023 YEAR

### Case Study 1: Gambling Counselling

Blake\* started gambling as a teenager. He reported that his sports betting and racing gambling became more frequent as he grew older and got out of control after his mother passed away. At one point, Blake resorted to illegal activity to fund his gambling and because of this, he was required to undertake court mandated gambling counselling. Blake started working with a counsellor at the AGSS and attended 10 sessions over a 7-month period.

During his first session, Blake reported that the effects of his gambling behaviour had led him to commit crime. He had served long periods of sentence in prison. Gambling harm had also led to the breakdown of a number of significant relationships in his life. He reported that he felt alone without the support of his family and friends.

He was weighed down by a lot of guilt and shame as a result of his past actions. His counsellor noticed that he was unable to open up and share this information due to the shame and guilt he carried, so they focussed on his present life and the impacts of gambling harm on him. As the person-centred therapy progressed, Blake expressed that growing up, his father was very strict with him and that the relationship between them had always been rocky. He said that he felt a need to please his father and receive his validation. When things were difficult between them, Blake would take out his frustration by gambling. He felt that it was an escape from reality. He expressed that when he experienced uncomfortable feelings and did not know how to process them, gambling was his getaway.

Blake tried to compensate for his past actions by working over-time to prove himself. This was affecting his physical wellbeing. He expressed that he had self-esteem issues and was anxious about sharing his past with any significant person that might enter his life in the future. The AGSS counsellor used Mindfulness to help Blake stay in the present moment without being pulled down by his past. They also worked with him on self-esteem and self-care to address his anxiety.

After having 10 counselling sessions, using modalities such as person-centred therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), mindfulness, motivational interviewing, psychoeducation, interventions and activities on self-reflection, Blake started to understand the importance of a support system in his life and started reconnecting with his family and building healthy and meaningful friendships. Blake was also supported to understand his vulnerabilities, triggers, and the underlying reasons he turned to gambling as an escape. As a result, he was able to stop gambling completely and he is now discovering the kind of person he wants to be without gambling in his life. He is rebuilding important relationships and has developed a new support system of friends.

He said of his time receiving support from the AGSS, "When I did not have any support system, the ACT Gambling Support Service was there for me."

## Case study 2 – Gambling Counselling

Peter\* is a 60-year-old male who has gambled socially most of his adult life. His two children have grown, left home, and are now bringing up their own children. Peter became a sole parent when his children were in their teens after the loss of his wife.

At the time of presentation Peter was experiencing loneliness and had been diagnosed with depression. His children no longer needed his care, and this further increased his feelings of loneliness and depression. He was able to pay his bills each week but then tended to gamble away the rest of his wages. Peter described often going back another day to try to win back the money he had lost and then feeling self-loathing when he lost more. Peter had repeatedly made attempts to stop gambling and to control his gambling expenditure but was unable to sustain abstinence for any significant period of time.

Peter attended 5 counselling sessions over a 4-month period followed by a further 2 sessions to support him to maintain his abstinence. Peter's initial goal was to stop gambling. He said "I am over it. I just want to be able to stop". He identified that his gambling behaviour got 'out of control' after he lost his wife and after he had a large win on the pokies. With a big win in his pocket Peter had turned to gambling as a way to cope with the stresses of life, and it was fun for a while. Peter worked with his counsellor on psychoeducation around poker machines, gambling, and the odds. They worked on helping Peter find ways to limit access to funds to gamble and strategies to protect his money and establish financial security.

Peter discovered that he was using pokies as a coping mechanism to manage stress in his life. He and his AGSS counsellor explored ways to develop awareness of when he was getting stressed and identified alternative stress reduction strategies such as mindfulness and gardening. Peter was able to identify the times in the week when he was most at risk of gambling and to plan for other activities during those times. This strategy significantly reduced the frequency of urges.

Motivational interviewing was used to support Peter to work towards his goals and CBT to develop awareness of Peter's gambling thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Peter found that by actively engaging in constructive behaviours there was no space for gambling thoughts and feelings, and they quickly reduced in intensity. Instead of spending his free time gambling Peter was able to rediscover enjoyable activities that he used to do in the past. There was more time to spend with his children and grandchildren, more time to potter in the garden, and more time to have dinner out with friends. Peter found that making opportunities to socialise with family and friends resulted in less loneliness.

Peter went from a PGSI of 17/27 at the initial session to a PGSI of 0/27 by session 4. He went from not being able to maintain any savings to regularly saving at least \$300 a week from his wages. He was surprised to find that he now rarely thinks about gambling. When a gambling thought does happen, Peter is no longer distressed by the thought and finds they now pass quickly. Now for the first time Peter is considering what he would like for himself and making plans for his own future.

Peter's children told him they could see that he was happier when not gambling and that they noticed he was now interacting more with his grandchildren. By seeking support to stop his gambling behaviours and taking steps to look after his own needs, Peter and his extended family all benefited from the positive changes.



### Case Study 3: Financial Counselling

Mandy\* is in her thirties and in receipt of a Centrelink Disability Support pension. She lives alone in government housing and is studying part time. For several years, she gambled regularly on poker machines at a range of Clubs following a traumatic event that left her feeling isolated. Over this period, Mandy would go into gambling venues with good intentions, however, she found it hard to step away/leave the machines especially whilst she received free non-alcoholic drinks from the venue. Mandy has lost a significant amount of money through gambling. She stopped a year ago following COVID-19 lockdowns and has self-excluded from all venues in the ACT. She has received support from the ACT Gambling Support Service previously but at the time was not ready to make changes. She also receives support from a specialist alcohol and drug counsellor on a regular basis.

Mandy contacted the ACT Gambling Support Service to discuss several financial matters including:

- A payday loan that she has missed payments on.
- Two buy now pay later accounts. Repayments are made automatically via direct debit, but this leaves her short of funds for food, medication, and other expenses.
- Her car requires an urgent service which she cannot afford.
- A debt from a recent car accident. She had let her car insurance lapse several months earlier because she could not afford the payments.

The financial counsellor assisted Mandy to complete an Income and expenditure statement which showed a budget deficit. Debt options were discussed. Mandy requested the financial counsellor advocate on her behalf for a waiver of the car accident debt and the buy now pay later debts. She wanted to repay the money she borrowed from the payday lender but asked for the interest and fees to be waived.

In addition to debt options, budgeting strategies were discussed to assist Mandy to keep on track in the future. This included support to set up automatic bill payments.

As a result of the financial counsellor's advocacy:

- The car accident and buy now pay later debts were waived.
- An affordable repayment plan was put in place for the payday loan, and the interest and fees were waived.
- A Snow Foundation grant was approved to cover the cost of the car service.
- She received an energy support voucher of \$100 to offset her electricity bill.
- A Centrepay deduction was set up to make automatic fortnightly payment toward the electricity bill and therefore reduce ongoing bill stress.

Mandy was supported to take control of her financial situation through financial counselling. Increased financial stability gave Mandy more time and space to focus on dealing with the root causes of her gambling. She continues to be supported to deal with the addiction and underlying trauma through therapeutic gambling counselling also provided by the AGSS.

*\*Names changed to protect client confidentiality*



## OUR WORK AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE ACT 2022-2023

### OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE WHO USE OUR SERVICES

The ACT Gambling Support Service provides therapeutic services to the ACT community that are accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A client-centred approach is the foundation of our work, as every client experiences gambling harm differently. The issues, concerns and needs of each person are unique, as is the approach to working with each client. Motivational Interviewing, CBT approaches, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Dialectic Behavioural Therapy (DBT) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) have strong evidence bases as effective approaches and are utilised within AGSS therapeutic counselling as appropriate to the individual's goals and needs.

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*“There are at least three dimensions (related yet different) covering level of participation in gambling (e.g., light/heavy, infrequent/frequent), level of harms (i.e., difficulties currently experienced arising from gambling) and level of risk.”*

Final Report 10 February 2015, Preventive Interventions for Problem Gambling:  
A Public Health Perspective

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For individuals, couples and families who are in financial distress as a result of gambling, the AGSS provides financial counselling. Financial counselling services are person-centred and focus on supporting people to take control of their finances by:

- Providing information on financial matters
- Exploring options for dealing with credit and debt stress
- Helping clients to negotiate creditors
- Developing budgets and money management strategies.

The ACT Gambling Support Service delivery model is geared around the delivery of services to best engage with our clients. The AGSS service principles are:

- Multiple entry points in and out of the service (no wrong door)
- Immediate engagement with clients
- Delivery of services at locations that best meet the needs of clients
- A quality, personalised service for each individual accessing services
- Ongoing case management and follow up with clients.

Through the 2022-23 year, the AGSS has seen a significant increase in the number of clients accessing the service as well as in the number of occasions of support delivered. The number of occasions of support provided increased by 20% compared to 2021-22. The number of clients who accessed counselling support also increased by 28% in the 2022-23 year.

The AGSS has reached more clients and delivered more services this year through continuing efforts to:

- **Build strong referral pathways and relationships in the community, and**
- **Maintain a strong reputation as a trusted and highly effective service provider.**

RACR evaluation data shows that 100% of our survey sample were satisfied with the service that they received. One client commented that:

*“I really benefited from your counsellor’s clear expertise in this area. <<They were>> able to draw on that experience to help me reframe issues and to provide a helpful toolkit of approaches/options I could draw on. I felt heard, and well-supported (sic), and will always be grateful for the service you provide.”*

Data from Care Financial’s evaluation showed that over **92%** of respondents indicated they were listened to, were satisfied with the service, and felt better able to deal with their situation after their interaction with Care. Clients who accessed financial counselling commented that:

*“Without the financial counsellor I would have broken down and given up. <<They were>> amazing.”*

*“The assistance was above and beyond my expectations.”*

*“The financial counsellor was able to help in ways I didn’t know existed. It absolutely relieved the burden I was under. <<They>> took the reins every time I was too anxious to do it myself.”*

### **Peer Support and Community Education**

A foundational pillar of the AGSS service is the provision of peer support. Peer support provides emotional and social support and encourages hope for recovery through stories of lived experience. The AGSS Peer Support and Community Engagement Worker uses personal stories of struggles and success to inspire empowerment and self-determination. AGSS Peer Support focusses on holistic wellbeing and provides 1:1 peer support as well as peer support group sessions and information sessions.

Groups ran by the AGSS Peer Support Worker receive highly positive feedback:

*“I felt <<the Peer Support Worker’s>> lived experience story was very powerful and I related to it a lot.”*

*“I valued <<the Peer Support Worker’s>> openness and honesty.”*

*“I liked just hearing the story of <<the Peer Support Worker’s>> experiences and the journey he took.”*

The AGSS team at Care Financial have also attended support groups and delivered information sessions and workshops at numerous organisations.

AGSS groups are supported by experienced Gambling Counsellors as well as the AGSS Peer Support and Community Engagement Worker to ensure that therapeutic support can be provided as required.

## OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY

Our relationships with community stakeholders are vital to ensuring that the service is visible and

accessible. AGSS engagement with the community is also the foundation of our approach to promoting knowledge and awareness of gambling harms.

AGSS financial counsellors hosted a pop-up stand at Canberra's Multi-cultural festival in February 2023, talking to the community, raising awareness and providing resources.

The AGSS continues to work with ACT gambling venues to provide support, information and training to staff and patrons.

The AGSS continues to provide resources and materials that promote the AGSS to gambling venues.



**The team providing information, support and resources at Communities@Work.**



**Markus Fischer, the AGSS Peer Support and Community Engagement Worker addressing Clubs ACT Harm Minimisation Micro Conference.**

*“Several harm minimisation training sessions were held at the Tradies with all our front of house staff members where the AGSS shared lived experience relating to alcohol and gambling.*

*Our staff took a lot out of the sessions and were very engaged. No questions were off limits, the staff are still speaking about the sessions and are more aware when on shift of all that is happening on the gaming floor.*

*(The sessions)...explained the signs of gambling harm and what to look for with patrons in the club, how to approach gamblers and what to say. This has made the staff more confident whilst on shift to deal with issues as they arise.”*

**Dickson Tradies**

*“Clubs ACT would like to thank the AGSS for their participation in the Mirco-conference for Gambling Harm Minimisation and the valuable contribution made on the day. Clubs ACT received feedback from a number of the attendees who were very impressed with the honest, sincere, and informative nature of your perspectives on the issues in this area and the lived experience perspective that you brought to the issues under discussion.*

*We would like to continue to work closely with you to educate and inform the industry and other stakeholders about harm minimisation and effective strategies that could be considered to provide more significant outcomes.”*

**Clubs ACT**

*Throughout 2022 Canberra Community Clubs had numerous meetings and discussions with Markus Fischer in his role as RACR’s Community Engagement Officer.*

*The AGSS works co-operatively and constructively with the gambling industry and is innovative and thoughtful when thinking about how we might do things better and more effectively. Markus’ lived experience background gives him enormous credibility in this space. He talks very candidly about his experiences and learnings which gives us insights as industry people into how we might genuinely improve the way we deal with gambling issues. Our relationship with RACR has never been stronger.*

**Canberra Community Clubs**

### ***Gambling Harm Awareness Week 2022***

Each year the Gambling and Racing Commission dedicates a week to raising awareness of gambling harm amongst the ACT community - Gambling Harm Awareness Week (GHAW). The AGSS collaborated with the Gambling and Racing Commission in preparation for Gambling Harm Awareness Week 2022, by promoting the event through RACR and AGSS networks and assisting in the development of materials for the event. The AGSS helped to develop content aligned with the theme of ‘every story matters’ including a video which shared a personal story of lived experience from the AGSS Peer Support Worker.

The AGSS participated extensively in GHAW 2022, getting out and about in the community to promote the service and raise awareness of gambling harm. The AGSS delivered pop-up events at various locations across the ACT including Gungahlin, Civic and Tuggeranong and participated in industry events hosted by clubs including the Vikings Club Group.

During 2022-23, the AGSS has been involved in the evaluation of the Gambling Harm Prevention Strategy. The AGSS participated in interviews with the consultant developing the Evaluation and Outcomes Framework and provided additional feedback and information to support this important process.

## **FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS**

RACR aims to provide a safe environment for all clients, staff, and visitors at RACR venues and outreach locations. RACR's complaints handling system provides clients with a way to raise and have their concerns addressed. It also provides a valuable source of information to improve our services.

In the 2022-23 year, RACR updated the organisation's Feedback and Complaints Policy and Procedure which outlines the principles, responsibilities, and process for receiving, recording, responding to, and resolving complaints raised by clients or others outside RACR.

Feedback is always welcomed by RACR, and we actively seek feedback through our formal evaluation process. The AGSS team also gathers feedback from group participants at the end of each group and event to ensure that session content and delivery remains aligned with the needs of the community (see page 11).

No complaints were received from service users during the 2022-23 period.

## AGSS 2022 – 2023 CLIENT STATISTICS: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

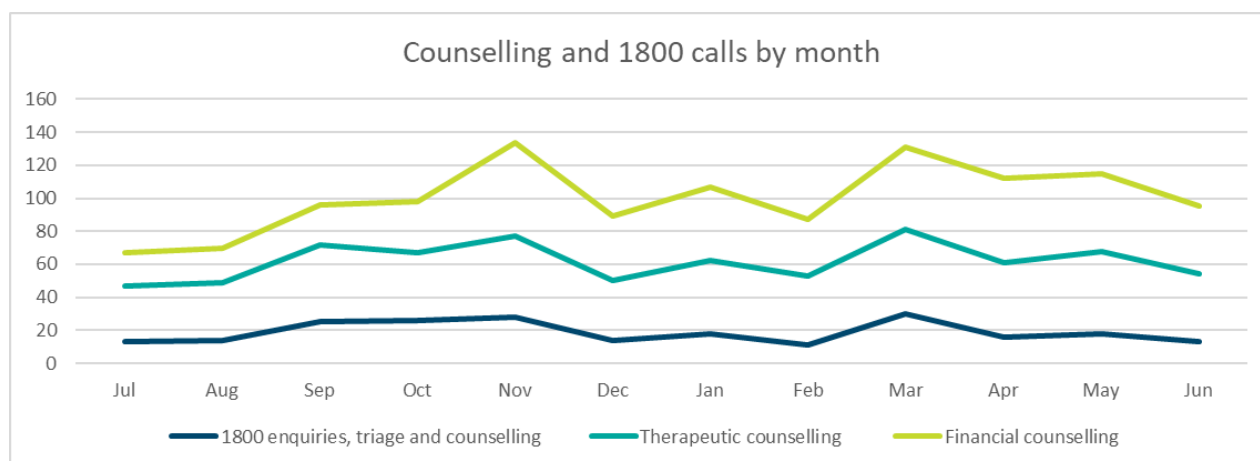
### AGSS CLIENTS AND SESSIONS

#### AGSS sessions

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 is similar in 2022-23 although the post-Christmas peak has occurred later in 2023.

Note: Therapeutic counselling refers to counselling provided for gamblers and their family/friends.

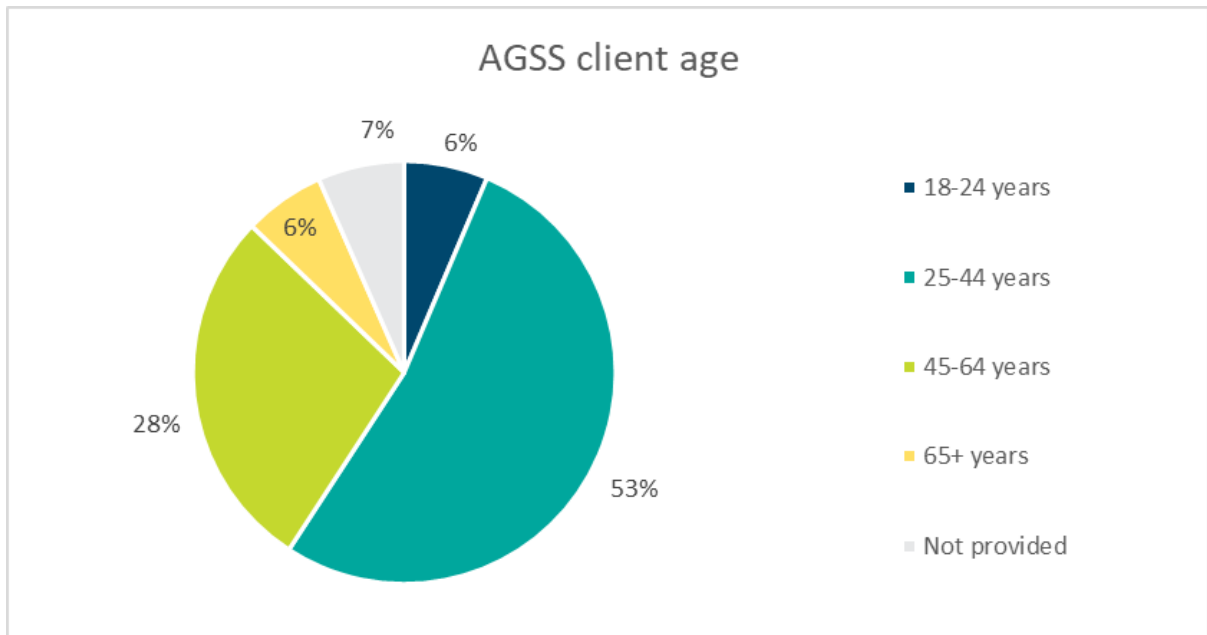


#### AGSS Clients

7% of AGSS clients identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and 13% 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 (38%), consistent with service delivery in previous years. For the first time clients have identified as intersex.

25–44-year-olds make up the majority (53%) of people seeking support from the AGSS. Both these results are consistent with previous years' data.



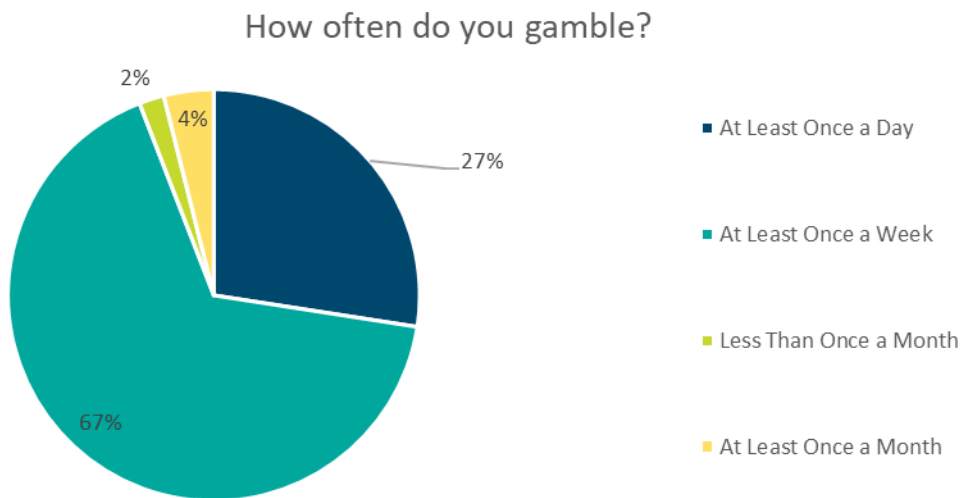
## WHAT OUR NEW CLIENTS IN 2022-2023 TOLD US:

### *How long has gambling been a problem or concern before clients seek AGSS support?*



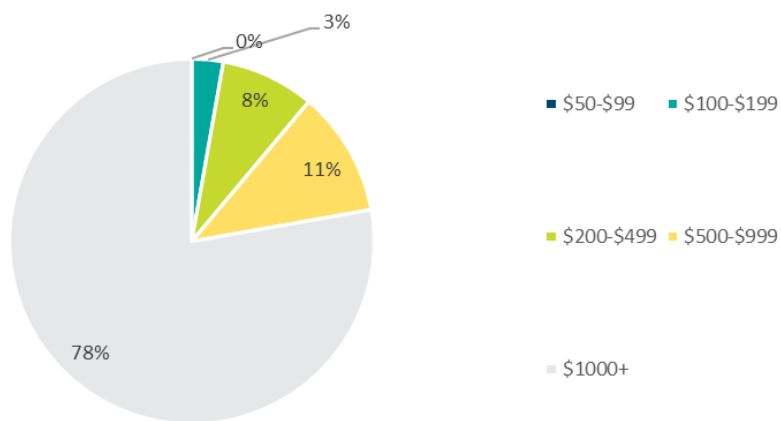


**How often do you gamble?**



**How much do you spend on gambling per month (estimate)**

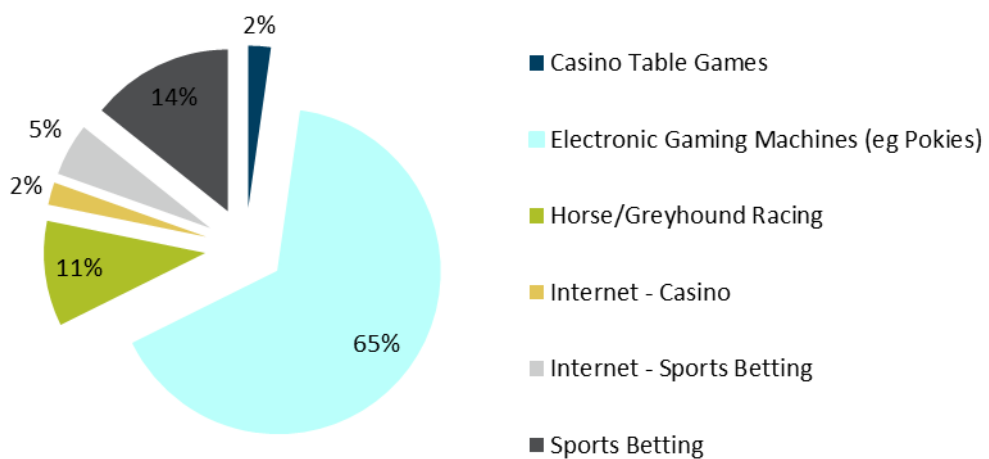
How much do you spend on gambling each month? (estimate)



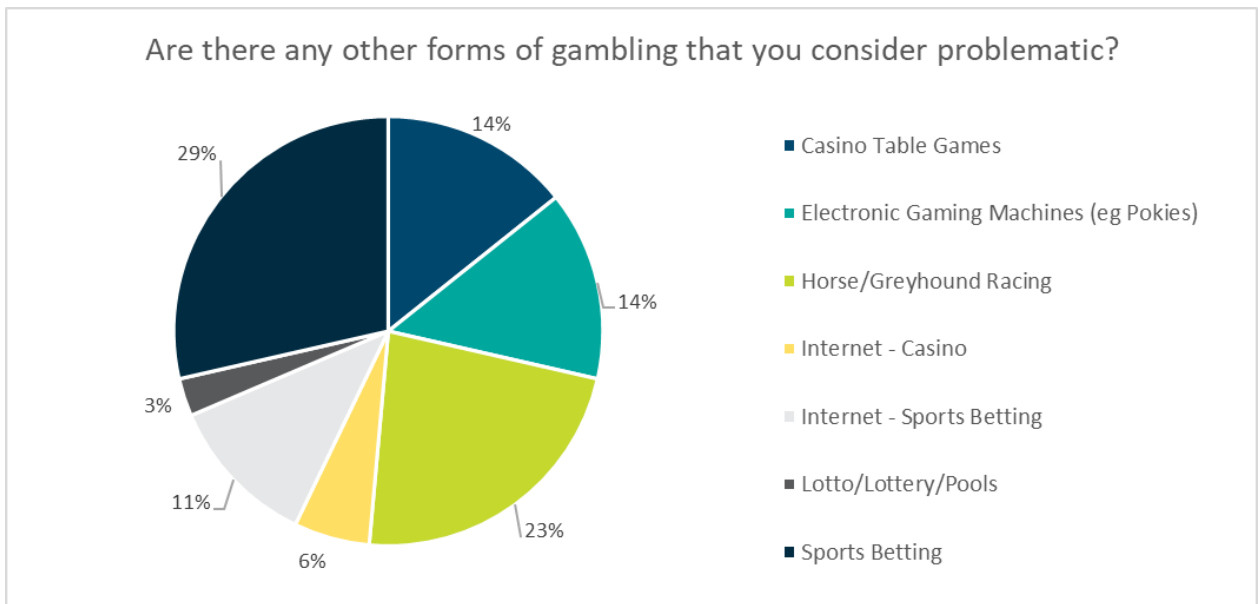
**Most problematic type of gambling**

Gaming machines remain the most problematic type of gambling for people presenting at AGSS.

What type of gambling is the most problematic for you?

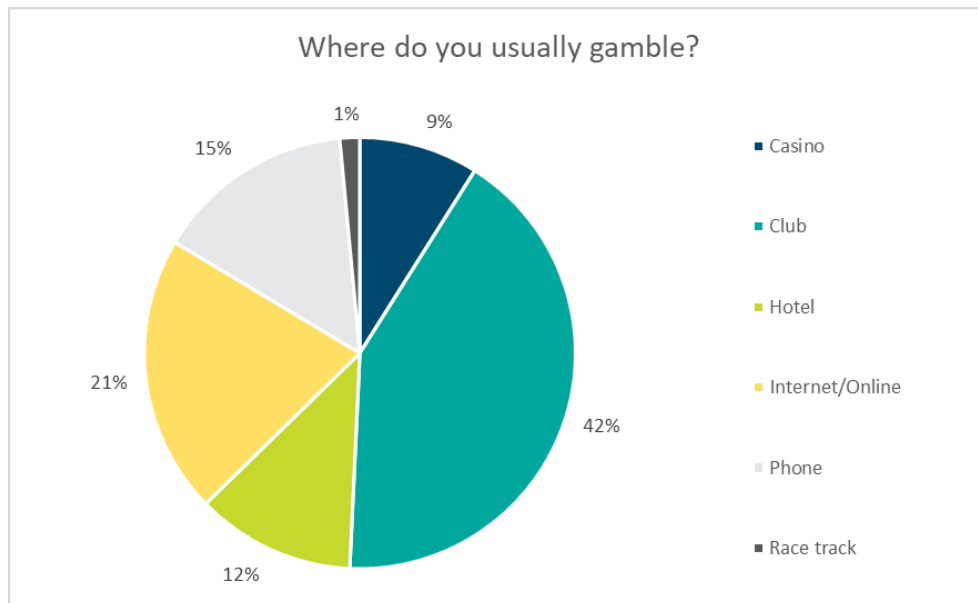


**Other forms of problematic types of gambling**



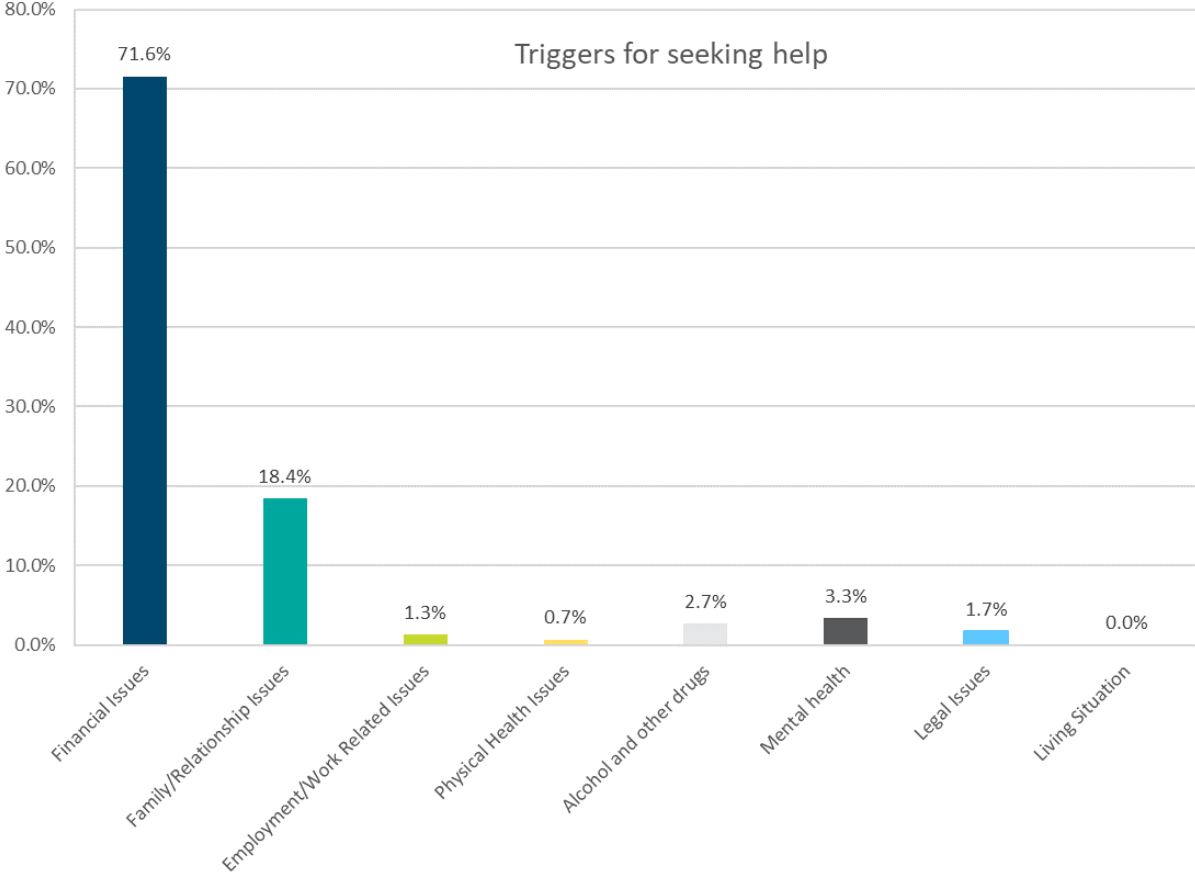
**Location of gambling**

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



**Triggers for seeking help**

Financial issues remain the primary cause for seeking help (71.1%), followed by family/relationship issues (18.4%).



## AGSS CONTACT DETAILS

### Support for everyone

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

[AGSS@racr.org.au](mailto:AGSS@racr.org.au) <https://actgamblingsupport.org.au/>

#### Financial counselling (CARE Inc. Financial Counselling)

Call 02 6257 1788 or 1800 007 007 (free call)

### Contacts for industry and community partners

**AGSS office:** 15 Napier Close, Deakin ACT 2600

Call 02 6122 7170 or email [AGSS@racr.org.au](mailto:AGSS@racr.org.au)

*Free Helpline*

**1800 858 858**

Open 24 hours, 7 days a week



**ACT GAMBLING**  
**SUPPORT SERVICE**

*Relationships Australia*  
CANBERRA & REGION