



ACT GAMBLING

SUPPORT SERVICE

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

Delivered by

Relationships.
AUSTRALIA
CANBERRA & REGIONS



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ABOUT US

The ACT Gambling Support Service (AGSS) is a free and confidential support service for people experiencing gambling harm. Through our qualified and experienced team, we support individuals impacted by gambling harm and provide education to increase community awareness of gambling related harms.

The AGSS program is funded by the ACT Gambling & Racing Commission through the Gambling Harm Prevention and Mitigation Fund. It has been delivered by Relationships Australia Canberra & Regions for over a decade.

In partnership with Relationships Australia Queensland and Care Financial, we provide evidence-based therapeutic support, helping hundreds of Canberrans to achieve positive outcomes each year.

We can support you if:

- you are considering your own gambling or concerned about your gambling harm
- you are concerned about someone else's gambling harm
- you are affected by the gambling of someone you care about (family, friend, colleague etc.)
- you are a health or community support worker, working with people impacted by gambling harm
- you are working in the gambling industry and want to better understand and support patrons
- you are interested in understanding more about gambling harms in the ACT community.

Our services include:

Gambling Counselling – flexible, therapeutic support from experienced addiction clinicians. Suitable for anyone impacted by gambling harm – including harm from another person's gambling.

Financial Counselling – specialist support to help individuals and families gain control over their financial situation. Providing guidance and practical advice for those experiencing financial distress.

24/7 Helpline – telephone support with an experienced counsellor available 24 hours, 7 days a week.

Peer Support – talk to one of our team members with a lived experience of gambling, or meet others with similar struggles at a drop-in peer support group.

Community, Education & Engagement – providing education to the Canberra community to increase knowledge and awareness of gambling harm.



WHAT IS GAMBLING HARM?

Gambling harm refers to any negative consequence caused or made worse by gambling, impacting many areas of your life.

Gambling harm goes beyond financial loss. – while money problems are often the most visible sign, gambling harm can impact mental & physical health, relationships, work or study performance, cultural practices, safety and overall wellbeing.

People experiencing gambling harm might feel stressed, anxious, or depressed, struggle to meet their everyday expenses, or find that gambling is taking time and attention away from the people and activities they care about.

Importantly, gambling harm exists on a spectrum. It's not just about people with severe gambling problems – even low to moderate levels of gambling can cause harm to some individuals and those around them.

Gambling harm can impact anyone – regardless of their background, income, or education level. The impact can extend beyond the person gambling, to affecting their partners, children, parents, friends, and colleagues. Family members may experience financial stress, emotional distress, and relationship breakdowns.

OUR SERVICES

GAMBLING COUNSELLING

Experienced gambling counsellors provide specialist, evidence-based support for individuals and affected others, such as family members, friends and community members experiencing gambling harm. This includes 24/7 telephone support, providing brief intervention and connection to ongoing supports.

Our skilled counsellors take a holistic, person-centred approach, recognizing that each client brings unique experiences and circumstances. We work collaboratively to understand not just gambling behaviours, but the whole person, exploring underlying factors and tailoring support to individual goals.

Understanding that relationships are fundamental to wellbeing, we focus on rebuilding trust and connection – helping clients move beyond shame and isolation. Our counsellors support clients to identify triggers, develop personalised strategies for change, and reconnect with meaningful activities that support recovery.

Service delivery options:

- Face-to-face at Deakin and Gungahlin offices
- Telephone counselling
- Online sessions

This flexible delivery ensures accessible support that meets diverse client needs and preferences across the ACT community.

Our team maintains excellence through continuous professional development, ensuring services remain responsive to evolving community needs while delivering consistently positive outcomes for individuals and families affected by gambling harm.

FINANCIAL COUNSELLING

Financial loss, instability or crisis is one of the most frequent harms experienced by individuals and their families in relation to gambling and has the potential to trigger other potential harmful consequences.

A YEAR IN REVIEW

Financial counselling is a key component of the support available through ACT Gambling Support Services. Qualified financial counsellors work with individuals and families to address the financial difficulties that often accompany gambling harm.

They provide free, confidential assistance to help people understand their financial situation, develop realistic budgets, negotiate with creditors, and explore options for managing debts. Financial counsellors can also help with accessing emergency relief, understanding rights and responsibilities regarding loans and credit, and creating practical plans to regain financial stability.

This support is provided in a non-judgmental environment and is tailored to each person's unique circumstances, recognising that financial recovery is an important part of the broader journey toward addressing gambling harm and rebuilding wellbeing.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PEER SUPPORT

The AGSS delivers community engagement activities designed to raise awareness of risks and harms, promote gambling harm prevention and support services, and deliver broader prevention activities.

Lived experience peer workers provide valuable insight into the structures, systems, services and policies that impact those affected by gambling harm, giving testament that recovery is possible. This lens supports a holistic strategy towards harm minimisation and recovery, offering person centred, recovery orientated and trauma informed practice.

To strengthen engagement and accessibility, we work closely with community partners including Yeddung Mura, Ted Noffs Foundation, and Karralika to support individuals facing complex challenges including substance use and/or mental health concerns, and people experiencing incarceration. These strong referral pathways ensure comprehensive, wrap-around support for those affected by gambling harm.



WHAT NEW CLIENTS TOLD US..



REAL STORIES, REAL RECOVERY

JOHN'S* STORY

John* was incarcerated at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, where he was serving a sentence exceeding five years. His gambling had been linked to broader substance use issues and had contributed to the circumstances leading to his incarceration.

Throughout his sentence, John maintained regular contact with his wife, children, and extended family. Upon release, he moved in with his parents to support his community reintegration while continuing contact with his wife and children. John had previously used gambling, alcohol, and drugs as stress management strategies, often withdrawing from family during difficult periods.

AGSS provided counselling support through John's final year at the Alexander Maconochie Centre with monthly sessions, continuing for eight months post-release. This continuity of care was designed to support his transition back into the community. Counselling sessions focused on practical skill development including communication techniques, problem-solving strategies, stress recognition, and healthy coping mechanisms. John expressed strong motivation to change, particularly his desire to be a positive role model for his children.

A significant breakthrough came when counselling helped him separate his genuine enjoyment of watching sport from the gambling advertisements that triggered stress responses. This allowed him to continue engaging with sport as a positive activity without associated distress.

Following his release, John successfully abstained from gambling, drug use, or alcohol consumption. He reported that the ongoing support helped him maintain focus on his values and goals during the challenging transition period.

The intervention's impact extended beyond John individually, contributing to improved family relationships and a more stable home environment. His case demonstrates the value of providing continuous support through major life transitions, particularly for individuals with complex, co-occurring issues.

TANYA'S* STORY

Tanya*, a 35-year-old single mother who migrated to Australia, began visiting her local club for affordable meals and respite. This gradually developed into regular poker machine use during work breaks and childcare hours. When she received an electricity disconnection notice, she contacted AGSS for help.

Her financial counsellor uncovered multiple pressures including:

- Electricity arrears exceeding \$1,000
- Suspended phone account
- Two active buy-now-pay-later arrangements
- Payday loan in default

While gambling initially provided stress relief, Tanya recognised it was now affecting her finances. Motivated by her daughter's wellbeing, she was ready to change. AGSS provided integrated financial and gambling counselling. Her financial counsellor:

- Negotiated with the electricity provider to prevent disconnection
- Established manageable payment plans across all debts
- Secured three-month payment pauses without penalties
- Connected her to emergency relief for immediate needs
- Developed a cash-based budgeting system aligned with her income

Tanya continues gambling counselling and been able to stop gambling. Her finances have stabilised, and she reports improved confidence managing money and stronger connections to community support.

This demonstrates how AGSS's integrated model effectively addresses both immediate financial crisis and underlying gambling harm—providing the comprehensive support needed for lasting recovery.

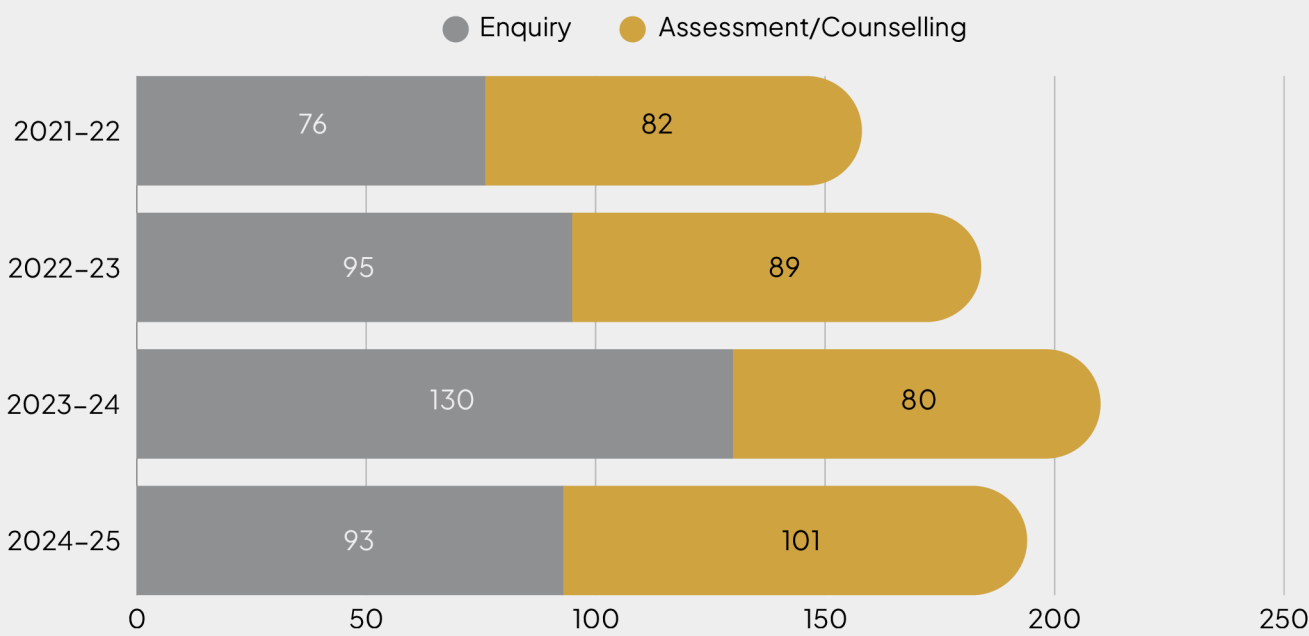
ACTIVITIES

GAMBLING HELPLINE

The National Gambling Helpline (1800 858 858) provides free, confidential support 24/7 for anyone affected by gambling harm. The helpline connects ACT callers directly with RACR's local counselling services, ensuring people receive tailored support when they need it most.

Trained counsellors provide immediate crisis support, assessment, and therapeutic counselling by phone. They help callers understand their options and arrange ongoing support through face-to-face, phone, or online counselling with local practitioners. The service prioritises rapid response times, with calls triaged by risk and urgency to ensure no one waits unnecessarily for help.

In 2024–25, the helpline received 194 valid calls from the ACT, consistent with previous years (184 in 2022–23 and 210 in 2023–24). This steady demand demonstrates sustained community awareness and trust in the service. Notably, while enquiry numbers decreased, the provision of assessment and counselling services increased—indicating callers are seeking more intensive support when they reach out.



COUNSELLING

At AGSS, we recognise that the reason people gamble—and continue to gamble to the point of experiencing harm—are complex and deeply personal. Our work with individuals affected by gambling harm, as well as their families and support networks, continues to affirm that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to counselling and support.

Each person who accesses the ACT Gambling Support Service (AGSS) brings with them a unique set of experiences, histories, and circumstances. Our skilled counselling team takes a holistic approach, working collaboratively with each client to understand not just their gambling behaviours, but their life as a whole. This process allows us to explore the underlying factors that drive gambling urges and tailor support strategies to each individual’s goals and needs.

To provide the most effective and client-centred support, our counsellors draw from evidence-based therapeutic modalities, including Motivational Interviewing, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). These approaches are integrated into counselling as appropriate, based on the client's situation, preferences, and therapeutic objectives.

We believe that relationships are fundamental to wellbeing. Many people affected by gambling harm experience shame, isolation, and a breakdown of trust within their close relationships. As a result, much of our work focuses on rebuilding, strengthening, or maintaining these vital connections. AGSS counsellors support clients in reinterpreting their experiences with compassion, without judgement or stigma, helping them to reconnect with loved ones and regain a sense of belonging, hope, and meaning in their lives.

Understanding the role gambling plays in a person's life is a critical part of the therapeutic journey. Our counsellors help clients identify personal triggers and develop tailored strategies to make meaningful changes. As gambling is reduced or stopped, clients are encouraged to reconnect with life-enriching activities and interests that support their recovery and overall wellbeing—helping to address the emotional and psychological space gambling may have previously occupied.

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To ensure accessibility and meet the diverse needs of our clients, AGSS counselling is available face-to-face in both Deakin and Gungahlin, over the phone and online.

While many clients prefer face-to-face sessions, telephone counselling is also a popular and effective option, offering greater flexibility and comfort for some individuals.

The AGSS counselling team have a strong reputation as a trusted and highly effective service provider.

91%

of clients said they were satisfied
with the service they recieved

100%

felt that they were listened to
and their issues understood

WHAT COUNSELLING CLIENTS TOLD US...

"I am so forever grateful for the assistance I have been given by <counsellor> at the Canberra office. They are amazing!"

"I have been attending with my partner who struggles with a gambling addiction. RACR has made a tremendous difference in their life but also our relationship and healing after gambling harm. Thank you for your continued support."

"Really empathetic and not judgmental which is refreshing."

FINANCIAL COUNSELLING

Financial hardship is a leading trigger for seeking gambling support, with one in three new AGSS clients citing money problems as their primary concern. Through our partnership with Care Financial, clients receive free, specialist financial counselling that addresses the unique challenges of gambling-related debt.

In 2024-25, our financial counselling team supported 179 people through 489 sessions. This specialist service combines financial expertise with deep understanding of addiction recovery, helping clients stabilise their finances while addressing gambling harm.

The team provides comprehensive support including debt negotiation with creditors, budget development, and access to practical assistance like no-interest loans and energy support programs. For those experiencing financial abuse alongside gambling harm, specialist advocacy ensures their safety and recovery go hand-in-hand.

Today's clients face increasingly complex financial challenges. The average person seeking support now requires more intensive casework, juggling multiple debts across buy-now-pay-later services, payday loans, and credit cards. Combined with cost-of-living pressures, these intersecting issues mean gambling often becomes both a coping mechanism and a source of deeper financial stress. Despite this complexity, client outcomes remain exceptional.

93%

of clients were
satisfied

90%

felt better equipped to
manage their situation

98%

felt heard &
understood

WHAT FINANCIAL COUNSELLING CLIENTS TOLD US...

"The Financial Counsellor is helpful, very knowledgeable and provides all the information that suits our situation. We really appreciated it"

"This help has been a huge positive influence on me"

"My financial counsellor is the best caseworker.
I cannot thank her enough"

"I am really grateful for the assistance provided by my financial counsellor. She really played a life saver role in the worst situation I have had in my life."



COMMUNITY EDUCATION, LIVED EXPERIENCE & PEER SUPPORT

Peer support is central to AGSS's approach, connecting people with others who truly understand gambling-related challenges. Our lived experience workers offer practical strategies from their own recovery journeys, providing both guidance and proof that healing is possible.

This year we welcomed two new Lived Experience Workers, expanding the perspectives we offer clients. Together, the team delivered 143 group sessions reaching 1,027 people—a 34% increase in sessions and 45% increase in participants from last year.

Our peer support network spans the ACT, from weekly sessions at Canberra Hospital to monthly drop-in groups in Deakin and Gungahlin, quarterly programs at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, and regular outreach at Yeddung Mura Aboriginal Corporation. Financial counsellors complement this work, delivering 85 community education events across multiple partner organisations.

WHAT GROUP PARTICIPANTS TOLD US...

89%

rated groups as
excellent

90%

felt understood &
respected

91%

valued the
presentation approach

GROUP PARTICIPANTS VALUED....



"Feeling comfortable enough to share our stories and feel connected. Knowing I am not alone"

"Empathy of presenter & unique perspective on addiction. Genuine attitude of support"

"A safe space to disclose my journey and felt very relatable with the gambling harm I have dealt with."

"As a wife of a gambler hearing the lived experience of other people (gamblers) was very insightful and has helped me understand addiction"

"Being able to listen to someone else's journey including the good and bad"



Building on this success, RACR is developing an organisation-wide Lived Experience Framework to embed best practice across all our services, recognising that those who've walked similar paths often provide the most powerful support for recovery.

From the lessons and success of our peer and lived experience work in AGSS, RACR has this year commenced development of an overarching RACR Lived Experience Framework to engender a best practice approach in engaging, employing and working with people who have lived experience across all areas within our services. It recognises the valuable contribution of the lived experience voice and provides principles and practical guidelines to inform day to day work and supports for those individuals who share their stories to help others.

The AGSS team work closely with community organisations in our region to increase awareness of the signs of gambling harm and how individuals can access AGSS support. We regularly connect with other community organisations to maintain up to date knowledge of complimentary supports, ensuring we are able to refer clients who have needs outside of the scope of the AGSS.

These relationships are vital to ensuring that the service is visible and accessible and have led to sustained proportion of people referred into the AGSS through community organisations in 2024–25.

SUPPORTING FIRST NATIONS AND CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE (CALD) COMMUNITIES

AGSS is deepening its engagement with priority communities through relationship-building and culturally appropriate approaches. Our weekly presence at Yedding Mura Aboriginal Corporation demonstrates commitment to meeting Aboriginal communities where they are. Staff there identify gambling harm as causing more damage than alcohol and substance abuse in their community—an urgent concern requiring sustained, culturally sensitive response.

Our Lived Experience Coordinator has become a regular participant in the community's yarning circle, sharing recovery stories and building essential trust. While only 4% of formal AGSS clients identify as Aboriginal, this doesn't capture our broader impact through community education and awareness activities. We recognise that meaningful engagement happens through relationships, not just enrolments.

This year, RACR began partnering with Bagariin Ngunnawal Cultural Consulting to strengthen our cultural responsiveness across all programs. In June 2025, we launched our Cultural Yarning Circle—a confidential space where staff and community members from diverse backgrounds share stories and explore inclusion in practice. Rooted in First Nations wisdom, the Circle provides a confidential, non-hierarchical space for staff and stakeholders from diverse backgrounds—including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and people with disabilities—to share stories, deepen relationships, and explore what inclusion means in practice.

Facilitated by our Diversity and Inclusion Action Group, the Circle promotes mutual respect, cultural awareness, and empowerment through guided conversation, with a focus on listening, understanding, and building community. These community-centred approaches take time but create foundations for culturally safe support that truly meets people's needs.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people face unique risks from online gambling, prompting targeted prevention efforts across the ACT. AGSS is contributing specialist expertise to an ANU Centre for Gambling Research project, partnering with the Youth Coalition to co-design digital resources for young people. This ACT Government-funded initiative will launch a digital hub in late 2025, providing accessible gambling harm prevention information specifically designed with and for young people.

Throughout 2024–25, AGSS maintained an active presence where young people gather. The team engaged directly with students during orientation weeks at CIT, University of Canberra, and ANU, discussing gambling, gaming, and support pathways. We also delivered programs at Bimberi and Ted Noffs, and connected with young people through drop-in sessions at Gunners Place.

These efforts recognise that effective prevention means meeting young people in their spaces, speaking their language, and co-creating resources that resonate with their experiences of digital gambling and gaming.

WORKING WITH THE GAMBLING INDUSTRY

AGSS works collaboratively with the gambling industry to embed harm minimisation practices across ACT venues. Through our work with Clubs ACT, we maintain dialogue with venue staff, management, and boards of directors. Our regular column in the Clubs ACT newsletter reaches 20,000 readers with practical tips and support pathways. This year we participated in the Gambling Harm Minimisation Micro Conference, strengthening connections across the sector.



A significant achievement this year was revolutionising Gambling Contact Officer (GCO) training in partnership with Access Australia. By embedding lived experience at the heart of training delivery, we're helping venue staff recognise and respond to gambling harm with genuine understanding.

Our Lived Experience Coordinator's contribution has been exceptional—83% of participants rated their input as "very" or "extremely useful," with nearly half identifying it as the most valuable aspect of their training. The Gambling and Racing Commission specifically commended this approach, recognising how personal stories transform theoretical knowledge into practical empathy.

Beyond training, AGSS provides venues with updated resources for gaming areas and staff rooms, and works to streamline self-exclusion processes and referral pathways. These efforts foster a culture of shared responsibility, where industry and support services work together to minimise gambling harm.

ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS RAISING

During Gambling Harm Awareness Week 2024, themed 'Let's connect with what really matters,' AGSS co-developed campaign materials and led Canberra promotions. Looking ahead, we're advocating for a public health approach that engages all stakeholders and partners.

Through the Gambling Harm Prevention Community of Practice, we connect quarterly with professionals across government, health, education, and advocacy sectors. Our Lived Experience Coordinator shares case studies and emerging trends, while staff collaborate on improving education, early intervention, and referral pathways across the ACT.

Our participation in the National Association for Gambling Studies Conference and regular engagement with the Canberra Gambling Reform Alliance ensures local service experience shapes state and national reform conversations.

PODCAST

BETS TO BETTER

In November 2024, AGSS launched Bets to Better, a podcast series breaking down stigma around gambling harm through personal stories and expert insights.

Hosted by Markus Fischer, our Lead Lived Experience Peer Worker, the podcast creates a safe space for honest conversations about gambling and recovery.

The first five episodes showcase the breadth of our approach:

- **Episode 1: Taylem** - a young tradie shares his journey from escalating harm to ongoing recovery
- **Episode 2: Associate Professor Aino** (ANU Centre for Gambling Research): explores gambling trends and emerging harms
- **Episode 3: Sue Anne** (Lifeline Canberra): discusses mental health complexities and having difficult conversations
- **Episode 4: Meher** (AGSS counsellor): offers strategies for navigating holiday season challenges
- **Episode 5: Kathleen** (Financial Counsellor): unpacks the path to financial recovery

Produced with Content Grasshopper, the podcast connects people with wraparound support services while promoting help-seeking and instilling hope through recovery stories. Each episode reinforces that gambling harm affects whole families and communities—and that effective support is available.

The series continues in 2025-26 with more lived experience voices, researchers, and community partners sharing insights and pathways to recovery. Tune in by searching 'Bets to Better' wherever you listen to podcasts, or via our website at actgamblingsupport.org.au/podcast/



SELF- EXCLUSION

Self-exclusion is a tool for people who want to regain control over their gambling. It creates an external boundary when willpower alone might not be enough.

In the ACT, when you self-exclude, you're essentially entering into a formal agreement that prohibits you from entering specific gambling venues you've nominated - such as clubs, pubs, or casinos.

You can self-exclude for a period that suits your needs, and while you can request to end your self-exclusion at any time, there's a 7-day cooling-off period before it takes effect which helps prevent impulsive decisions.

If you would like to self-exclude from a gambling venue in the ACT you can contact the Gambling and Racing Commission's Exclusion Support team on 02 6207 0359 (option 3) or exclusionsupport@act.gov.au.

Individuals who self-exclude in the ACT can be referred to the AGSS for ongoing support. In 2024-25, the AGSS received a total of 49 referrals from the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission via the exclusion process and at the end of 2024-25, 28 of these had commenced support with the AGSS. Information about the service was sent to all referrals who did not want to immediately engage with the AGSS, for future reference.

THE NUMBERS

AGSS CLIENTS

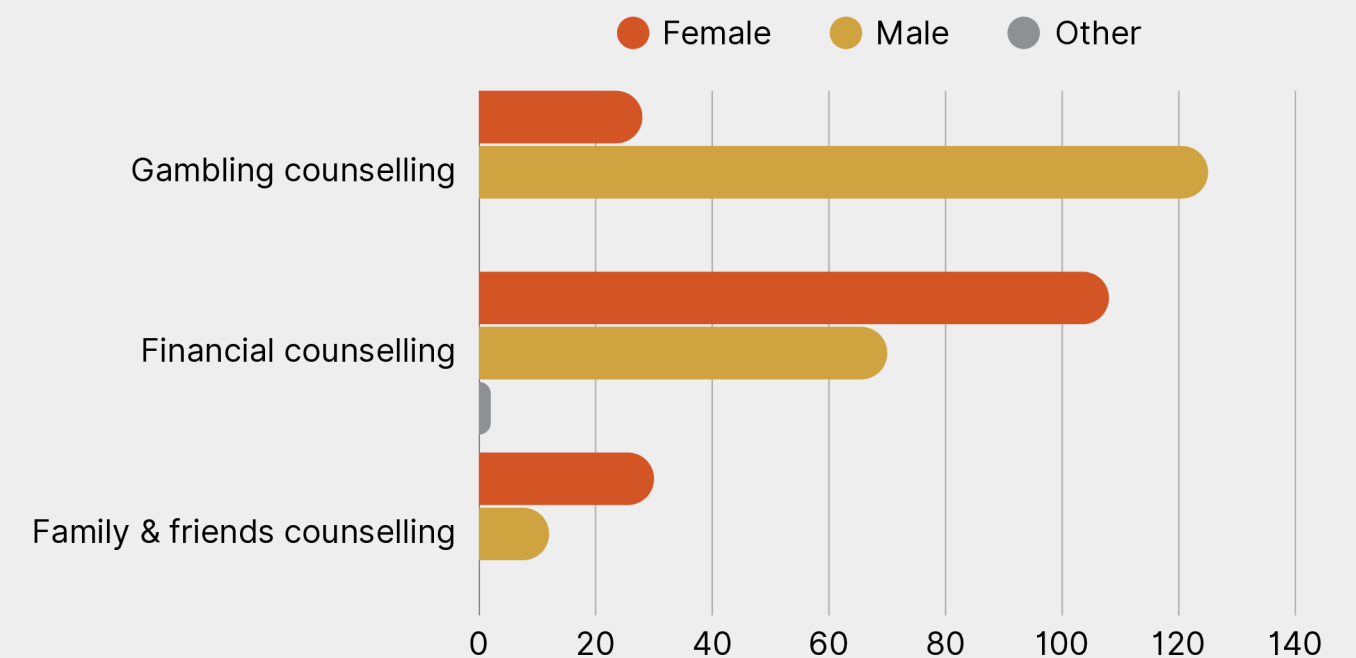
The AGSS supported a total of 373 clients in the 2024-25 year, a 15% decrease from the 2023-24 client numbers.

SERVICES BY GENDER

Stark gender differences across service types reveal distinct support needs - direct gambling support skews heavily male while support services for affected others are predominantly female.

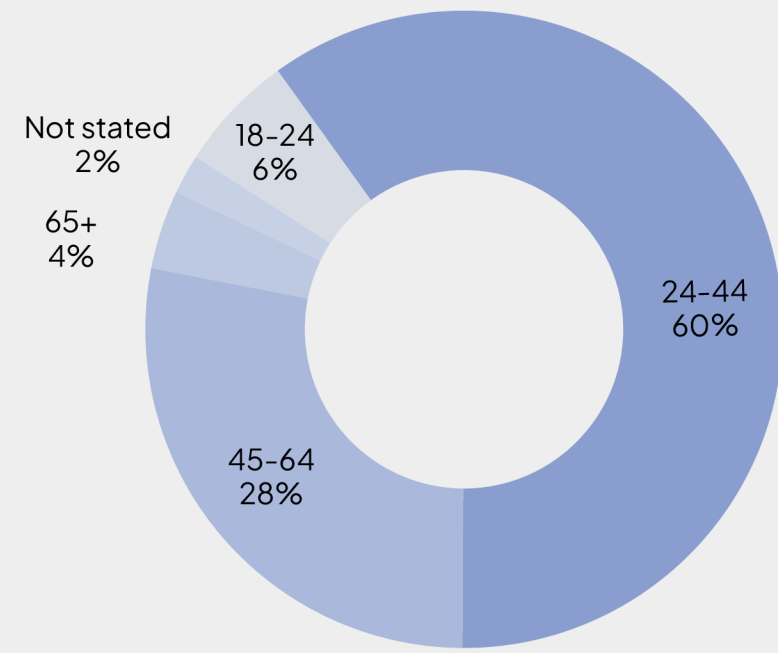
Overall AGSS clients, across all services, were more likely to be male (55.5%) as female (44.2%).

Gambling clients are more likely to be male (83%). However, both family and friends clients and financial counselling clients were more likely to be female (72.5% and 60.3%).



SERVICES BY AGE

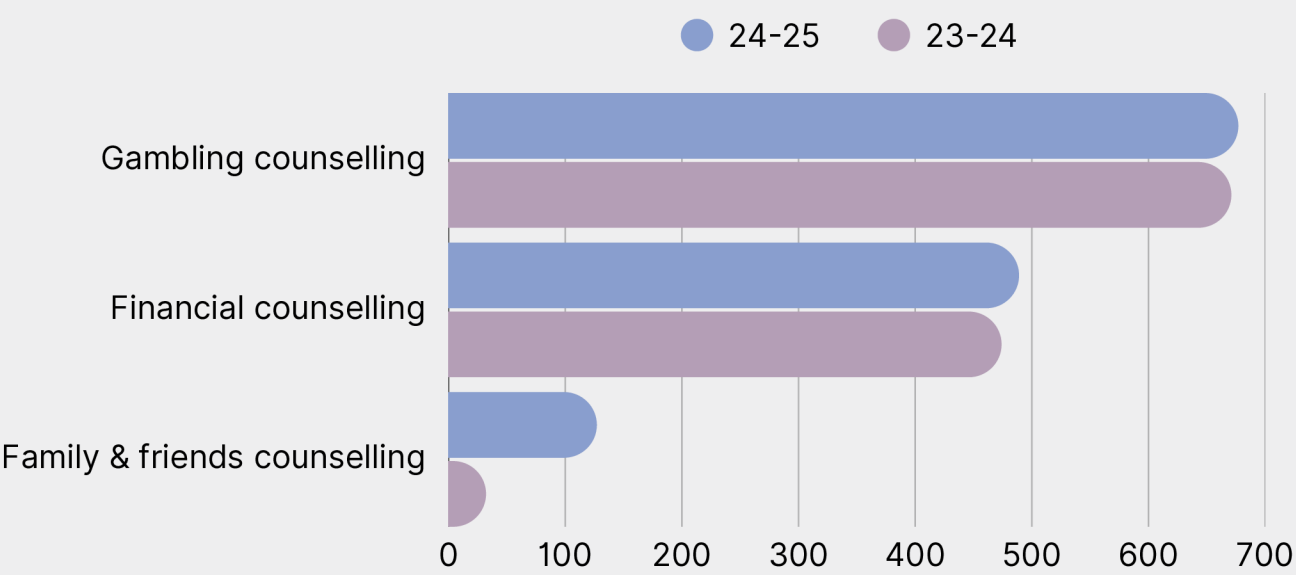
25-44-year-olds make up the majority (60%) of people seeking support from the AGSS which is consistent with previous years' data.



SESSIONS BY TYPE

4,830 sessions (assessment, counselling, enquiries, peer support, group work and case work) were delivered throughout this reporting period, this equates to a small decrease of 6.2% when compared to 2023-24, where 5,147 sessions were delivered.

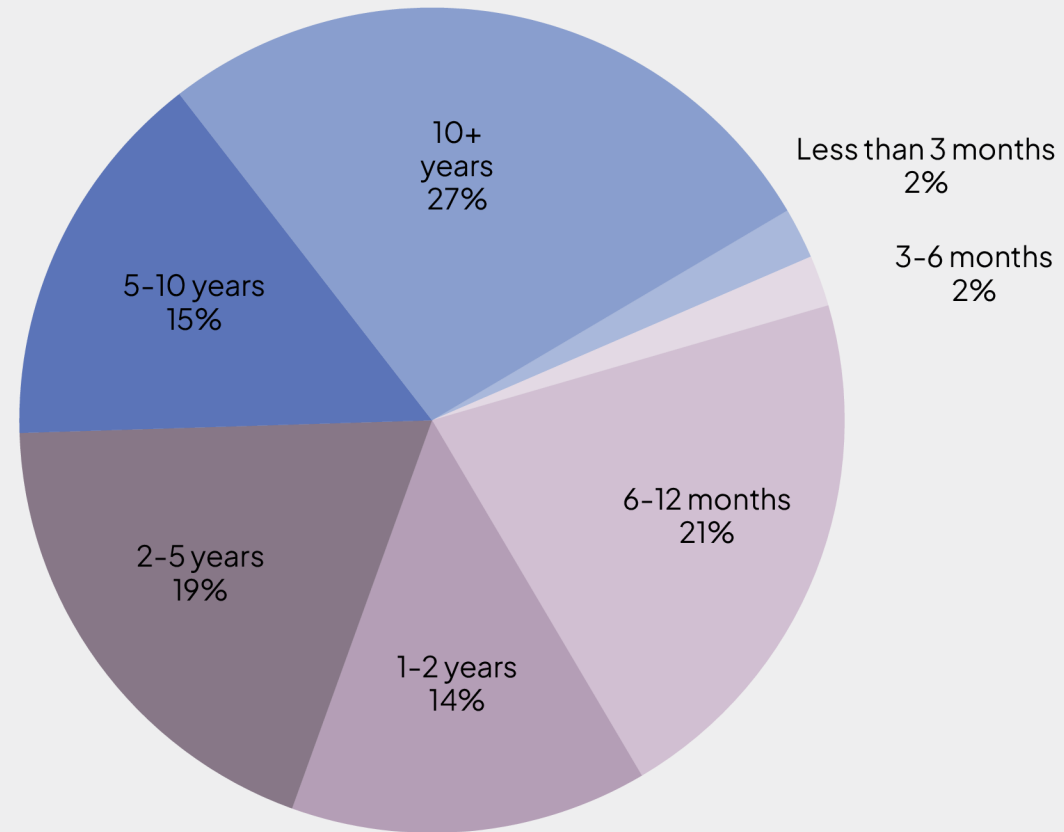
Demand for gambling counselling and groups has increased over time, as has family and friends counselling, case work and enquiries.



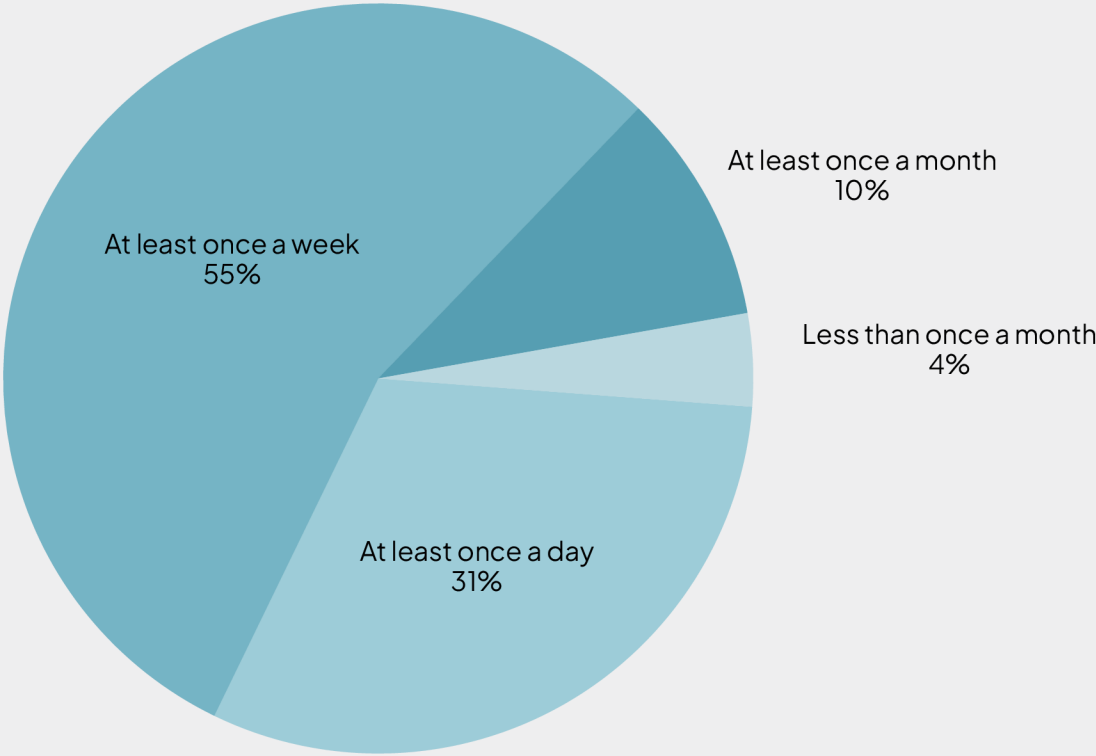
WHAT NEW CLIENTS TOLD US

When new clients access the AGSS service they are asked a series of questions in their intake to help tailor support to meet their needs. This information helps to show trends in gambling behaviours and harms in the ACT.

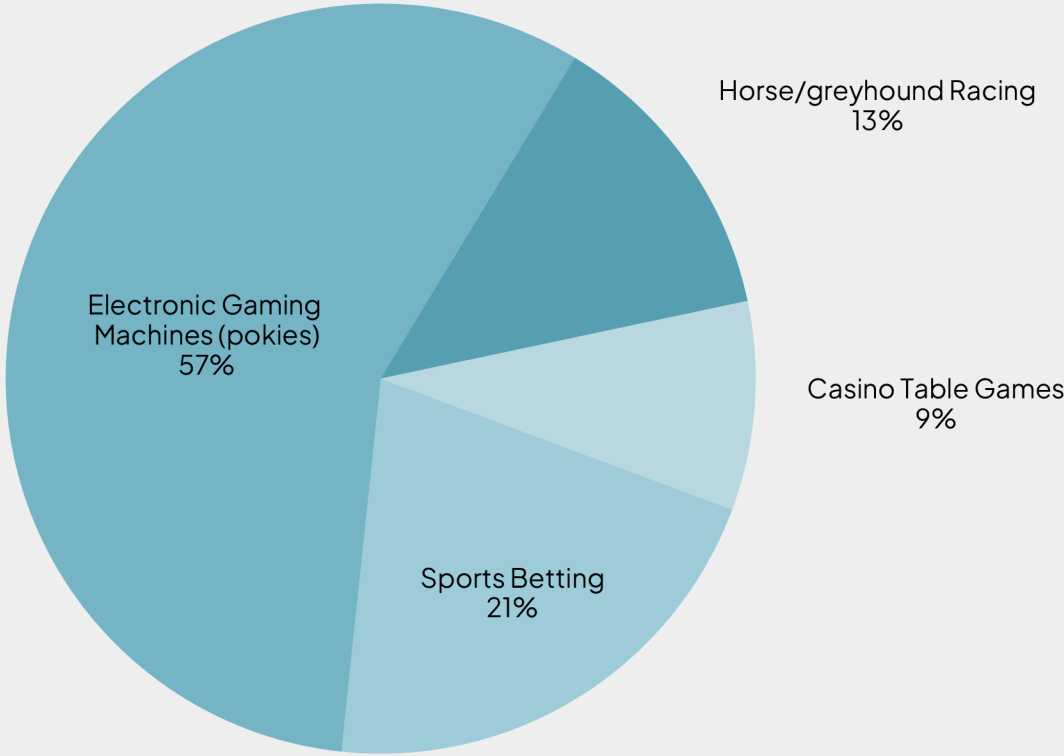
HOW LONG HAS GAMBLING BEEN A CONCERN?



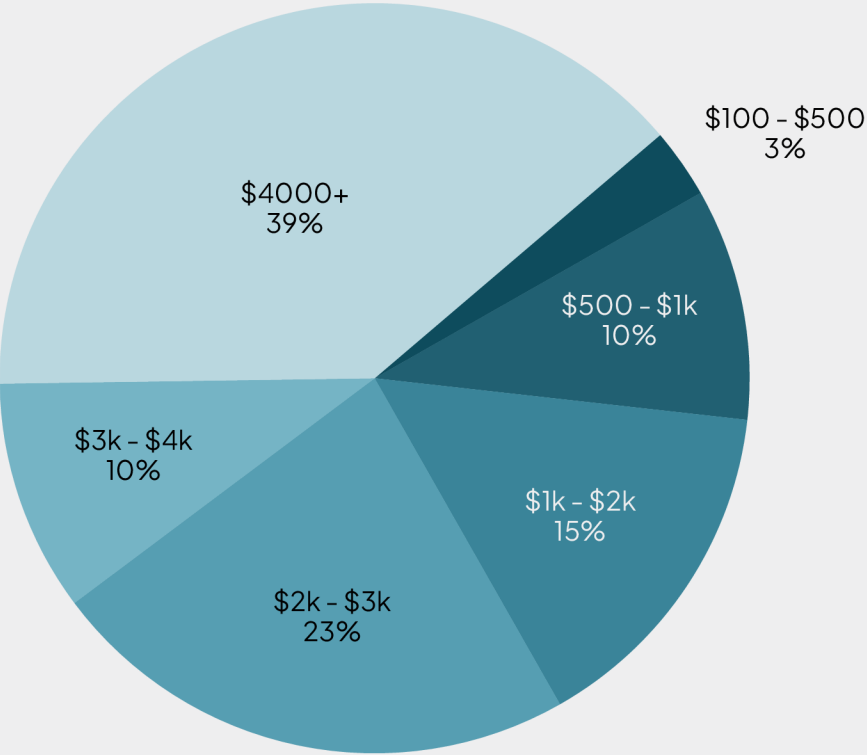
HOW OFTEN DO YOU GAMBLE?



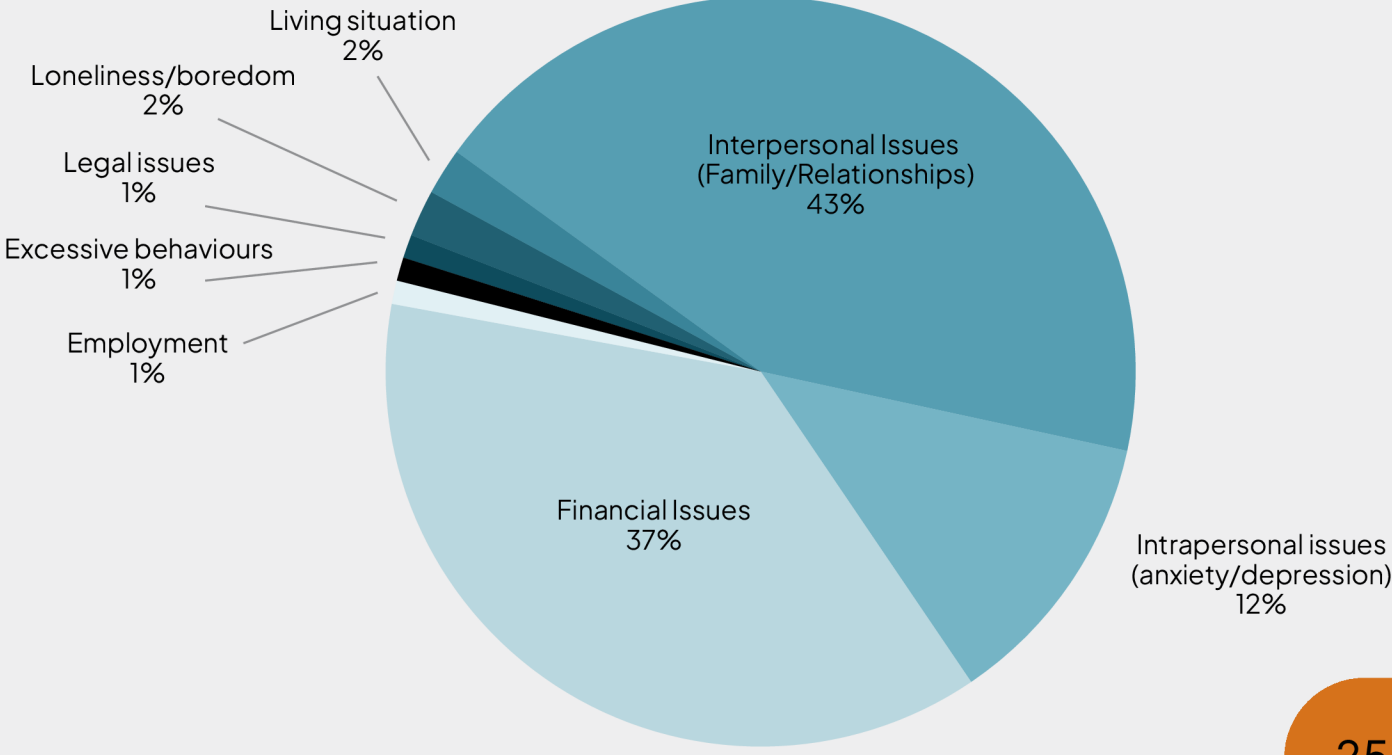
WHAT TYPE OF GAMBLING ARE YOU MOST CONCERNED ABOUT?



HOW MUCH DO YOU SPEND ON GAMBLING EACH MONTH?
(ESTIMATE)



WHAT TRIGGERED YOU TO CONTACT THE AGSS?





ACT GAMBLING

SUPPORT SERVICE

1800 858 858

