



Gambling and Post Secondary Students

Trends and impacts from changing legislation

Presented by:

Healthy Campus Alberta &
Responsible Gambling Council

October 2026



Land Acknowledgement

The Responsible Gambling Council was founded on the traditional lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit, Anishnabek, the Chippewa, Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat Peoples.

Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work and live on this land. We recognize and deeply appreciate their historic connection to this place. We also recognize the contributions that Metis, Inuit, and other Indigenous Peoples have made, both in shaping and strengthening this community, the province and country as a whole.



What We'll Cover Today

1. Introductions

2. Gambling Overview and Insights

3. Comorbidities, Context & Risk Factors

4. Campus Considerations & Trends

5. Questions & Wrap Up



Meet the Presenter



Lisa Couperus she/her

Associate Director
Education and Programs

Who We Are

Our Vision: A world where gambling never comes at a human cost.

Our Mission: We unite people and organizations to minimize gambling's human impact by driving knowledge, dialogue and action.

Founded in 1983

Independent, non-profit organization

2001/02: First evidence-informed gambling prevention programs for post-secondary students created by RGC

20+ years of Ontario Ministry of Health support for high school and post-secondary **educational programs**

40+ years

research, prevention education, accreditation, training, and policy guidance



Who We Serve

Youth under 18

Focus on digital health, gaming mechanics like loot boxes, and safer online behaviors.

Young adults 18–24

Focus on online gambling, sports betting, social pressure, and illusion of control.

General population

including adults 25+ and seniors.

Ethnocultural communities

with tailored messaging and co-designed resources.

Interest Holders

in public health, treatment, education, and community organizations.





How Might Gambling or Betting Show Up in Your Campus Work?

Financial aid

i.e. missed rent/tuition, skipping meals

Skipped classes

i.e. declining grades, missed deadlines

Counselling visits

i.e. sleep deprivation, conflict w roommates

Mental Health concerns

i.e. anxiety, depression, shame

Residence Life conduct issue

i.e. broken tv

Athletics

i.e. conflict w teammates, scholarships



Prevalence

(General Population)

Those who gamble:

66.2%

in Canada

(18-29 years old)

Those who gamble:

57.3%

in Canada

Problem gamblers

0.6%

(General population)

0.8%

(18-29 yr olds)



Why Young People?

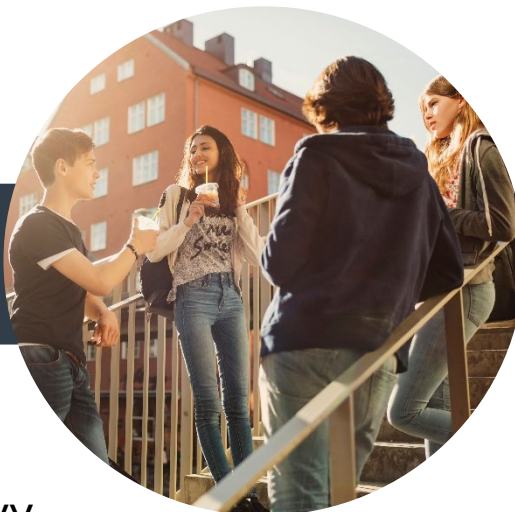
1. Youth (12-17) and young adults (18-24) face a **higher risk** of gambling harm
2. 21% of youth have gambled, typically starting at age 12; 1.9% had a gambling problem in the last three months, with males at higher risk (4% vs 1%)
3. 60% of young adults have gambled in their lifetime, with **higher participation** among older young adults (21-24) and 7.1% had a gambling problem, with rates highest among young men and ages 21-24
4. Risk to young adults **increased** during the COVID-19 pandemic
5. Gambling is **expanding, changing**
6. Gambling is considered one of the **least serious** health issues



Vulnerable to Harm

Youth (Ages 14–17)

- Brain is still developing
- Active Internet users/technologically savvy
- Blurring of video gaming and gambling
- Ubiquitous advertising and marketing
- Earlier age of first gambling engagement predicts greater problems
- Mental health concerns



Young Adults (Ages 18–24)

- Neurological development
- Tech savvy
- How young adults gamble
- Illusions of control fallacy
- Social pressures
- Mental health concerns
- First independent living experiences





Priority Populations: Ethnocultural Communities

Past year gambling across some ethnocultural communities:

- Indigenous Peoples 72.4%
- South Asian 39.8%
- Chinese 45.6%
- *Black 56.6% (RGC-identified emerging population)
- Immigrants 51.9%

Gambling Activity and Behaviour	Chinese	South Asian	Indigenous
Youth (15–17 years old)			
Gambled online 2–3 times per month or more	51%	48%	71%
High-risk	71%	70%	77%
Young Adults (18–24 years old)			
Gambled online 2–3 times per month or more	80%	73%	92%
High-risk	73%	78%	88%
General Population			
Gambled online in the past 16 months	76.1%	88.4%	71.1%
High-risk	18.6%	32.3%	15.7%



Parent-endorsed Gambling

Why this Matters

~50% of youth who have ever gambled did so with their parents' approval

“ They told me it can be fun as long as I’m responsible and don’t waste my life savings. ”

– Lily (16–17)

“ I use Stadium Live. It’s a free app that lots of people use, and it doesn’t have real money—it uses coins as the currency. ”

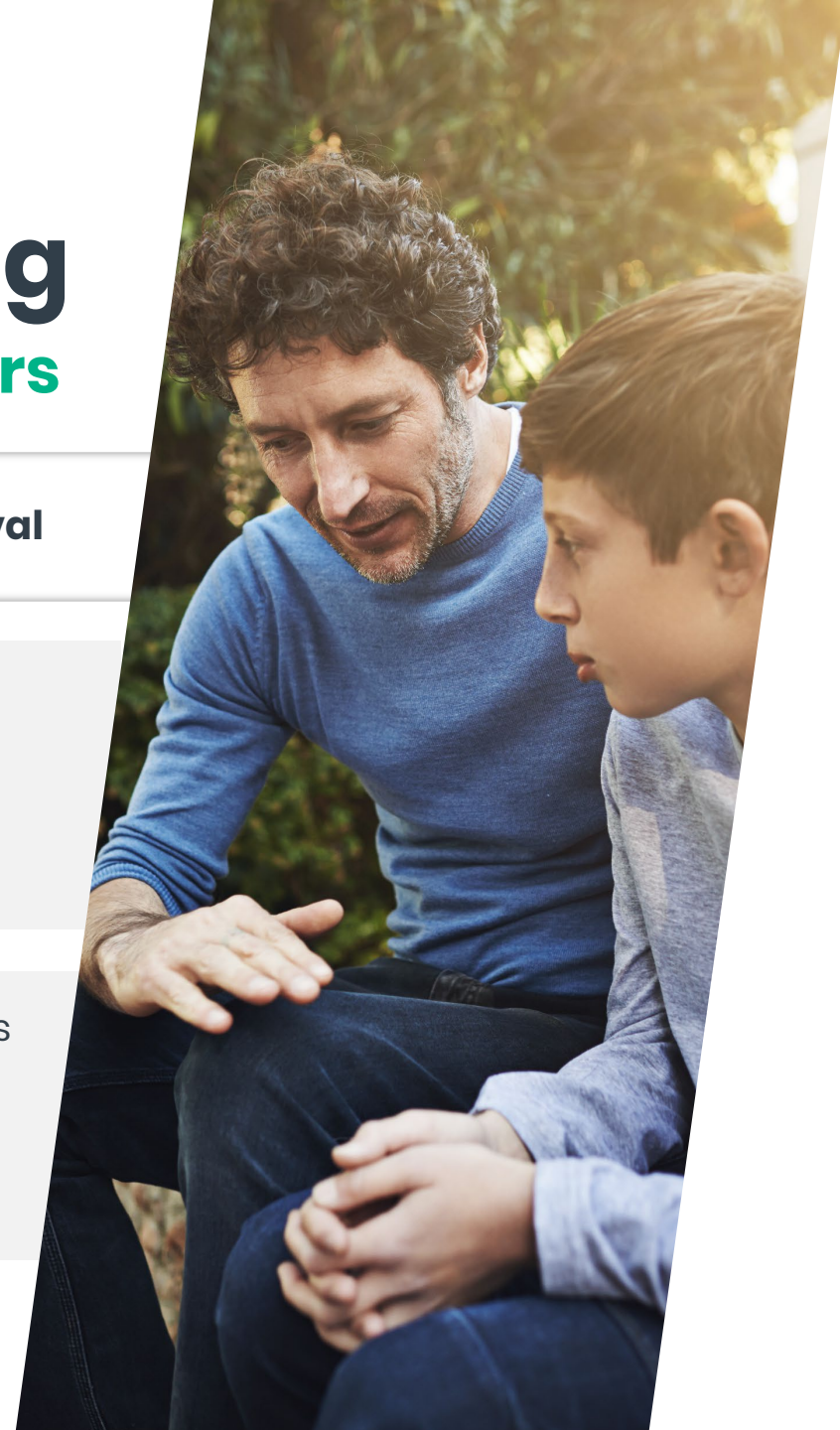
– Thomas (12–13)

“ My dad makes bets on the Superbowl or Derby and lets me pick a team... it feels like I have something on the line. ”

– Wren (14–15)

“ I started online betting at 13 years old....my dad tells me what to do on some bets. ”

– Dorian (12–13)





Expansion of Online Gambling & Sports Betting in Ontario and Alberta

August 2021

*Canada legalizes
single-event
sports betting*

April 2022

*Ontario expands
iGaming (online) market*

September 1, 2026*

*49 licensed operators
offering 84 online sites*

July 2026

*Alberta opens
iGaming market*

September 2026#

31 online sites

The Rise of Online Gambling



**Social
Aspect**



**Technology
Focused &
Gamification**



**Accessibility &
Convenience**

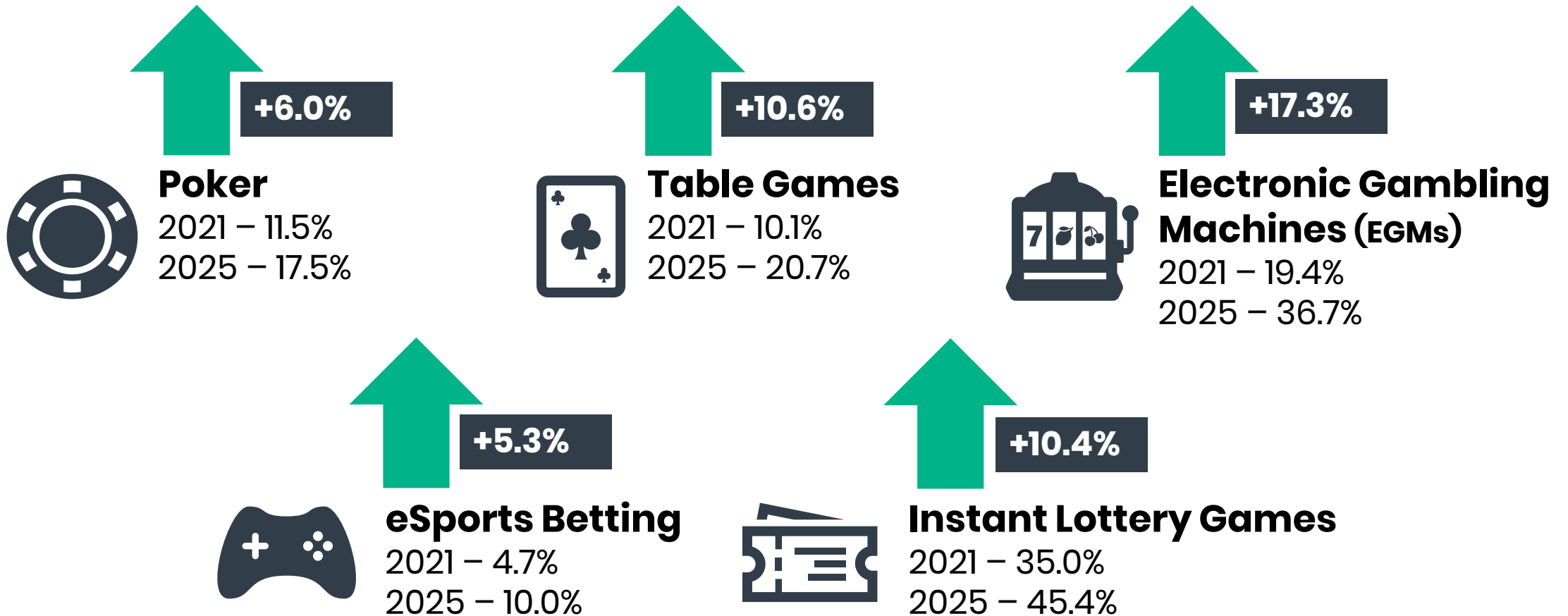


**Emergence of
esports**



Is Gambling Participation Increasing?

Canadian – Participation in Online Gambling Activities (2021 to 2025)





Is Gambling Harm Increasing?

After the expansion of private online gambling in Ontario



Gambling-related helpline contacts among males aged 15 to 24 were estimated to have increased by about 144 percent compared with a scenario where private online gambling had not been introduced.



When compared with a scenario where **neither PlayOLG nor private online gambling existed**, contacts in this age group were estimated to have increased by more than 330 percent by 2025.



Emergency department visits in which a gambling disorder was recorded as either the main or a contributing factor for the visit were 154% higher than expected among males aged 10 to 29.

Gambling and Risk Factors



Betting under the influence of substances (like alcohol, cannabis, or illicit drugs) is linked to greater gambling engagement and the experience of **gambling-related harms**.



Young adults are more likely to almost always gamble under the influence of **alcohol** (12%) or **cannabis** (11%).

Gambling and Risk Factors



Having **family members who gamble** heavily is a strong predictor of developing gambling problems but may also contribute to the normalization of gambling.



Despite **cultural acceptance** of gambling, in some communities, there is **stigma of gambling harms**, posing a challenge for accessing support.

Mental Health and Gambling

- Those who present high risk of problem gambling are more likely to report mental health concerns
- Younger people are more likely to say that their mental health symptoms impact their ability to function:
 - 16-17 years-old: 43%,
 - 18-34 years-old: 44%
- 16% of 16-34 yr olds most likely to experience high anxiety with 17% most likely to experience high depression
- Students are more likely to report missing days of school or work, or that their productivity was reduced because of their mental health (39%)





Let's Talk About Sports Betting

- Sport has deep **cultural value** around the world
- **Advertising and marketing** are highly influential and integrated into sporting events
- **Technology** has made sports betting more accessible and available



The Popularity of Sports Betting

Participation in Sports Betting Activities
– 2021 to 2025



+2.6%



Sports Pools with Friends

2021 – 15.4%

2025 – 18.0%



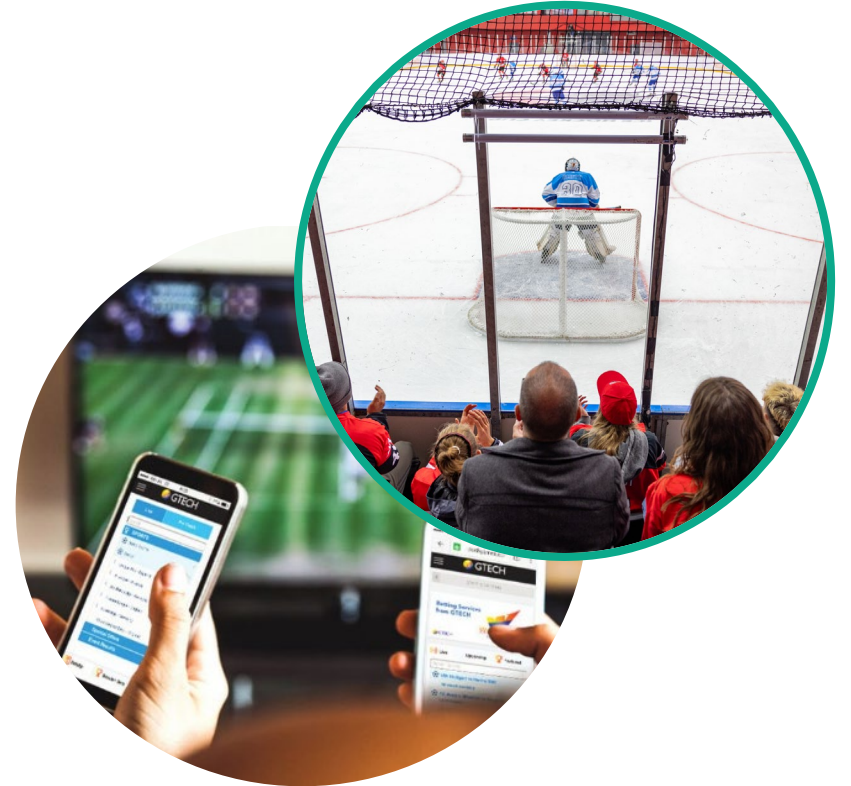
+164.0%



Online Single-event Sports Betting

2021 – 8.6%

2025 – 22.7%





RISK: Social Pressures

Having friends who bet on sports can also place young adults at **greater risk of gambling-related harm.**

Over half (56%) tend to **bet more with friends/family.**



RISK: Illusion of Control

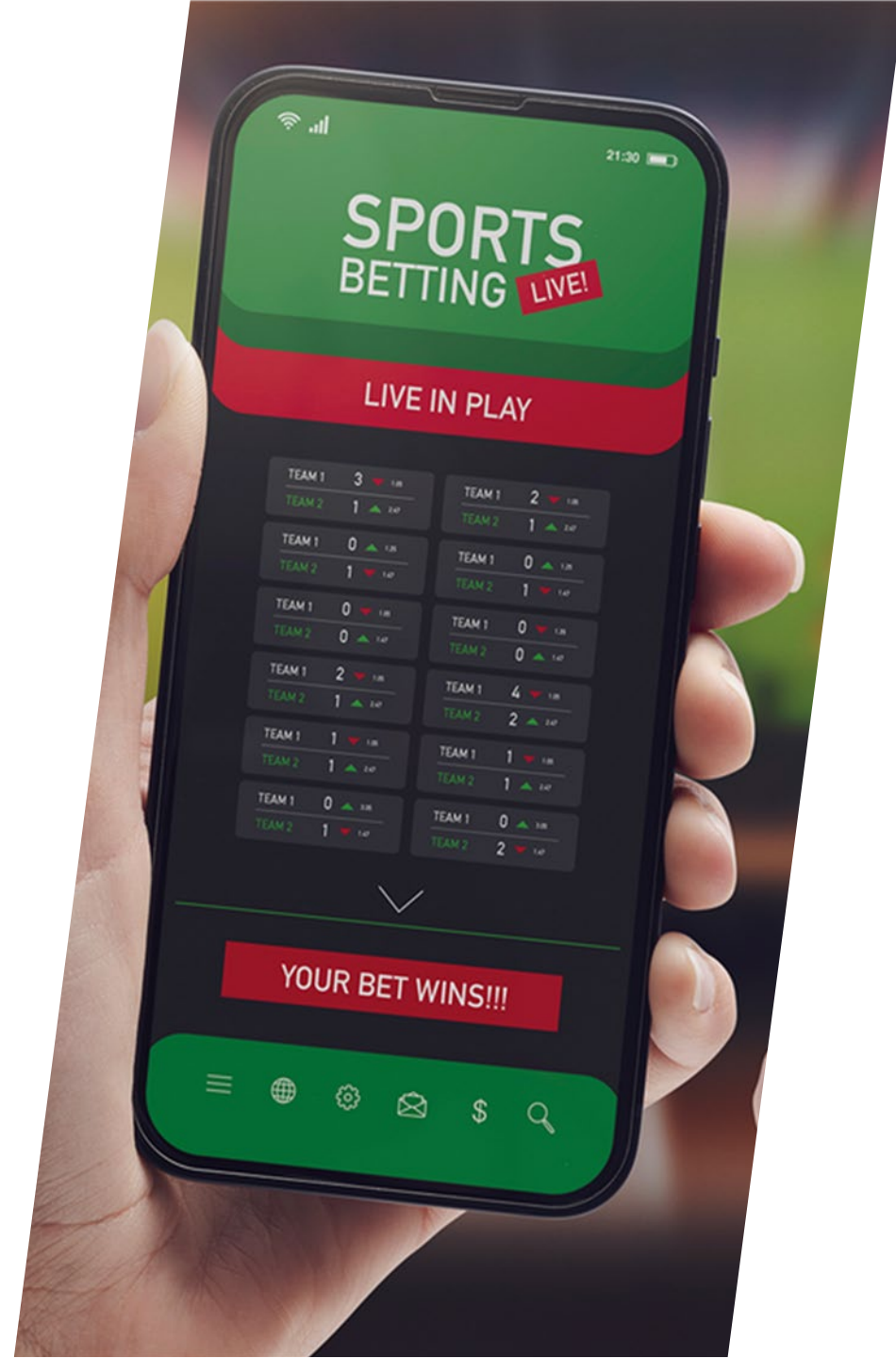
- Many young adults who bet on sports **falsely believe** that if they have enough skill, knowledge, or invest enough time, they will win.
- These beliefs reflect the **illusions of control** – beliefs that players can control or predict complex or random outcomes.

Over half (54%) of young adults hold illusions of control for sports betting.



RISK: Not All Bets Are Created Equally

- Pre-game betting are the most frequently placed bet across bet type
 - Remained consistent across all gambling-risk levels.
- **High Risk betting** was associated with:
 - In-play / live bets (63%)
 - Parlays / multi-bets (53%)
 - Micro-bets (34%)





- 34% of young adults placed on online sports bet during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Young adults are more likely to bet on sports than older adults
- Sports bettors tend to be young men who are:
 - single
 - educated
 - tech savvy

Young men are also at the highest risk of experiencing gambling related harms from sports betting





Putting a Human Face on the Numbers



National Supports and Resources



Free, confidential support services for kids, teens & young adults

Call 1-866-925-5454
Text 686868



Support for youth & families

416-285-9944
1-833-294-8650
(Toll-Free)

Hope for Wellness Helpline

Mental Health support for Indigenous peoples

1-855-242-3310



Mental Health support for Muslim youth & others

1-866-627-3342



Call 9-8-8
Text 9-8-8



Parents whose children are experiencing/experienced gambling harms.

parentsstandingtogether.org



Peer support and resources for 2SLGBTQ+ young people

647-694-4275
askus@youthline.ca



Offering direct emotional and financial support to trans people in crisis

(877) 330-6366



Youth-and-Young-Adult-centered information and resources; links to supports

Responsiblegambling.org/for-youth-and-young-adults/



Local Supports



Provincial information about gambling including specific to young people

myhealthalberta.ca

Alberta Addiction Helpline

1-866-332-2322 — 24/7, confidential, includes gambling

Alberta Mental Health Help Line

1-877-303-2642 — 24/7 support, information and referral

211 Alberta

Dial 2-1-1 or ab.211.ca — gambling supports and community services

AGLC Self-Exclusion Program

GameSense Info Line 1-833-447-7523
<https://www.selfexclusion.ca/s/>

Gamblers Anonymous Alberta

albertaga.ca

Gam-Anon

gam-anon.org

CMHA AB Recovery College Courses

alberta.cmha.ca/what-we-do/cmha-in-albertas-projects/alberta-recovery-colleges/

Recovery on Campus

ucalgary.ca/commitments/recovery-on-campus

ucalgary.ca/about/commitments/recovery-campus/alberta-wide-supports

Other Supports:

- Friendship Centres
- Elders
- Faith-based organizations
- Community non-profit organizations
- Credit Canada (financial counselling)
- School counsellors
- Campus health services
- Peer educators
- Coaches
- Residence Life staff



Preventing Harm Starts with Action

Prevent

Identify Harm

Support

Shape the environment





Campus Considerations

Prevent

- Lead now; action gambling harm prevention work earlier rather than later
- Use current data to develop and implement gambling awareness and prevention initiatives
 - Confirm your campus' involvement in the 26/27 Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey
- Involve all areas of student life in prevention messaging and programming
 - Students and student-athletes, health services, student services, peer education, hospitality, residence life, etc.
- Connect to community organizations with specializations with at-risk populations i.e. public health, treatment agencies, non-profits, etc.
- Develop and embed health promotion, harm reduction programming and messages into events in conjunction with student leaders, peer educators i.e. Sport games, Health Promotion, Orientation and Frosh Week events
- Mandate professional staff, student staff (peer educators, RA's) and student volunteers training on gambling

Identify Harm

- Equip professional staff and student leaders to recognize signs
- Give them supportive strategies they can use
- Make referral options clear and easy to find

Supports and Resources

- Integrate gambling resources and tools into counselling, health, athletics, financial aid, accessibility
- Include it in crisis pathways
- Get to know specialized services in the community and be able to make warm referrals

Shape the Environment

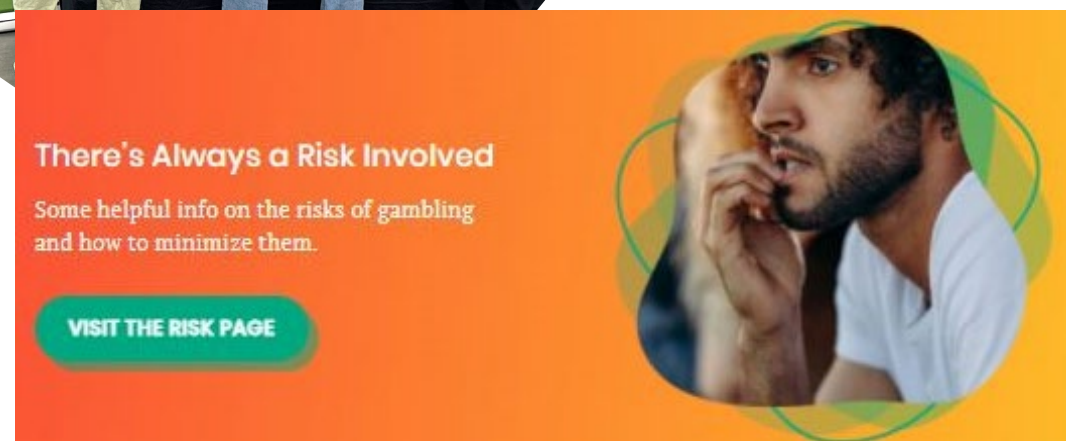
- Review your campus gambling policy i.e. sponsorships, advertising, events and vendor relationships
- Examine athletic practices and residence programming
- Does Health Services, Wellness use/need a screening/intake tool

Examples of Education Programs for Young Adults

- Turn-key, staffed campus activations i.e. [The Randomizer](#) or [The Random Tower](#)
- Books Before Bets [Peer Education Program](#)
- [Website](#) for Youth, Young Adults & Parents/Caregivers
- *The Update: Your Source for Information on Young People and Gambling e-newsletter*



The Update e-newsletter
Scan to subscribe and stay up to date on current issues about young people and gambling





Trends

A focus on:

- Athletes and gambling
 - Blurring of gaming and gambling
 - Digital Currencies i.e Crypto, Bitcoin, Market Speculation, Prediction Markets i.e. Wealthsimple, Polymarket, Kalshi
-

Changes in gambling advertising policy and practice:

- Use of celebrities, athletes in advertising
 - Use of online platforms like Twitch, Kick, and TikTok to promote gambling to younger audience
 - Use of influencers in these platforms and their effect on younger audiences
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Emergence of social media as a predictor of gambling problems:

- May be something to anticipate in the coming years, particularly with young women



Discussion

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