



University of
Lethbridge

NEWS RELEASE

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AGRI researchers find gambling and problem gambling on the decline, yet troubling numbers still exist

Despite more gambling options being available to Canadians, the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling is on the decline throughout the country according to recent Statistics Canada data from the 2018 Canadian Community Health Survey. A recent study out of the Alberta Gambling Research Institute (AGRI) indicates that while these numbers are positive overall, troubling trends still exist.

In their study, *Gambling and Problem Gambling in Canada in 2018: Prevalence and Changes Since 2002*, the University of Lethbridge's Dr. Robert Williams and colleagues, including fellow U of L researchers Rhys Stevens and Drs. Yale Belanger, Carrie Leonard and Darren Christensen, observed a 45 per cent decrease in the overall presence of problem gambling from 2002 through 2018.



“We looked to provide an updated profile of gambling and problem gambling in Canada in 2018 and examine how this profile compares to 2002, the last time gambling and problem gambling had been comprehensively assessed on a national basis,” says Williams. “The relative popularity of the different types of gambling in Canada in 2018 is very similar to 2002 with the main difference being decreased gambling participation in 2018.”

Williams says this is particularly true for electronic gambling machines (EGMs), which saw a 46 per cent participation decrease, and bingo, a 53 per cent decline. In fact, almost all types of gambling except casino table games saw a significant decrease in

participation. He speculates the increased popularity of poker drove the enhanced table game numbers. And while online gambling numbers increased, it is still uncommon relative to in-person participation.

“The overall decrease in gambling participation is something that has occurred in most western countries since the early 2000s,” adds Williams. “The overriding thought as to why that’s occurring is due to the novelty having worn off and more people becoming aware of the potential harms of gambling.”

Gambling is still quite prevalent, with about 66.2 per cent of the adult population engaging in one or more types of gambling in 2018. However, the majority of that participation is through the purchase of lottery and raffle tickets.

The intensity of gambling involvement among gamblers is also low, with the large majority only gambling occasionally and engaging in just one or two different types. This pattern is also very similar across provinces.

“One anomaly we did discover is some significant interprovincial variation, with perhaps the most important one being a higher rate of EGM participation in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan,” says Williams.

Overall, Williams says the current level of problem gambling in Canada, despite the expansion of legal gambling opportunities, is among the lowest that has been reported worldwide. There are some troubling numbers though, as commercial gambling revenue per adult has not changed significantly from 2002 to 2018, indicating that revenue per gambler has increased.

“We know that gambling revenue is disproportionately derived from problem gamblers, so these numbers could indicate the expenditure per problem gambler has increased over the years,” he says. “Thus, the lifetime prevalence of problem gambling continues to increase steadily, and, as these gamblers age, marry and have children, there is a much higher prevalence of people who have been harmed by gambling.”

Drs. David Hodgins (University of Calgary), Daniel McGrath (University of Calgary), Fiona Nicoll (University of Alberta) and Nady el-Guebaly (MD, University of Calgary) also participated in the study.

This study is part of the AGRI National Project, which is a comprehensive investigation of gambling and problem gambling in Canada, jointly funded by AGRI, the Canadian Consortium for Gambling Research, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, and Gambling Research Exchange Ontario. The main results of this national investigation will be profiled at AGRI’s upcoming virtual conference (Apr. 27-29, 2021).

Attached Photo: Dr. Robert Williams, University of Lethbridge

To view online: <https://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/agri-researchers-find-gambling-and-problem-gambling-decline-yet-troubling-numbers-still>

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