

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF OTTAWA CARLETON
 MUNICIPALITÉ RÉGIONALE D'OTTAWA CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf. RC
 Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 16 April 1998

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator, Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Medical Officer of Health

SUBJECT/OBJET **CSC INQUIRY NO. 06(98): THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT
 OF CASINO GAMBLING AND EXPANDED GAMING AND
 THE ABILITY OF PROGRAMS TO RESPOND TO THE
 HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF ADDICTION TO GAMBLING**

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

That Community Services Committee recommend that Regional Council approve the following recommendations:

1. That this report be forwarded to the Minister of Health, the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations and Management Board Secretariat;
2. That the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations increase the number of Alcohol and Gaming Commission inspectors in Ottawa-Carleton from four to six;
3. That the Management Board Secretariat amend the Alcohol, Gaming and Charity Funding Public Interest Act so that slot machines and video lottery terminals are only allowed in casinos and other controlled casino-like settings;
4. That the Ministry of Health undertake a public awareness and education strategy as an important first step in helping people understand and talk about the addictive nature of gambling and the potential consequences;
5. That the Ministry of Health permanently fund counselling positions and allocate additional financial resources for treatment and prevention as the availability of gambling increases.

PURPOSE

This report is in response to an inquiry made by Councillor A. Munter at the Community Services Committee meeting of 19 February 1998 regarding the Public Health Impact of casino gambling.

BACKGROUND

Gambling is a very common activity in Ontario with an estimated 52% of the population having gambled during the past year.ⁱ According to the Canadian Foundation of Compulsive Gambling, the most popular gambling activities for people who gambled in Ontario in 1992 were: lottery tickets (91%), instant lotteries (71%), bingo (19%), casino games (19%), race track (15%), Sport Select (12%), video lottery (4%), and betting through a bookmaker (3%).ⁱⁱ It is likely these percentages would vary according to the accessibility and range of gambling options available to the residents of a specific region.

Two permanent casinos are proposed for Ottawa-Carleton and are dependent upon a municipal council passing a resolution approving the operation of the casino.ⁱⁱⁱ The Province has also made available slot machines for casinos and racetracks. At the present time, the provincial government has indicated that slot machines will not be located in other community venues and video lottery terminals are no longer scheduled to be introduced.

PROBLEM GAMBLING

The majority of people gambling in Ottawa-Carleton do not have a gambling problem. Some people however spend their time and money gambling in a manner that is harmful to them, their partners, families and friends. This report refers to people with serious gambling problems as problem gamblers.

The exact number of problem gamblers in Ottawa-Carleton is unknown. We have reviewed a number of Canadian studies that estimate the percentage of adults with current serious gambling problems and recommend caution in making comparisons because of differences in the survey designs. The studies range from a low of 2.7% in Saskatchewan to a high of 5.4% in Alberta.^{iv} While data for Ontario is not comparable due to different scoring systems, a survey of 2,600 adults in Windsor, Ontario (before the opening of the casino) revealed that 4.1% of adults were problem gamblers.^v

Problem gamblers can experience a number of consequences. Immense financial debts can lead to depression, suicide and money generating crime. In a study of 162 members of Gamblers Anonymous, 13% had attempted suicide. Physical symptoms are often stress-related including hypertension, loss of appetite and sleep, high blood pressure and anxiety attacks. Problem gamblers often lose control of their lives and are unable to stop gambling. When attempting to quit, they experience withdrawal symptoms.^{vi}

Problem gambling can also affect both the family and the community. Interpersonal conflict and family breakdown often occurs. Children in these families are more likely to have problems with substance abuse and addiction and experience tremendous difficulty in coping with their parents' problem. From a community perspective, two-thirds of compulsive gamblers in one study admitted to committing illegal acts to support their gambling. Crimes are largely non-violent including bad cheque writing, loan fraud and embezzlement.^{vii}

CASINO GAMBLING AND EXPANDED GAMING

There are very few studies examining the impact of casinos on communities and problem gamblers. In Great Britain and the United States, researchers have recognized a direct relationship between the rate of addiction and increased availability of gambling.^{viii} In Ottawa-Carleton, some Gamblers Anonymous groups quadrupled in size after the opening of the Hull casino. This appears to be consistent with Gamblers Anonymous Groups in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, where numbers tripled since the Atlantic City casinos opened.^{ix} The number of problem gamblers in Ottawa-Carleton is likely to increase after the introduction of the new casinos however it is difficult to estimate the impact given the prior existence of the Hull casino.

While all forms of gambling can be addictive, video lottery terminals merit special attention. Video lottery terminals are different from other forms of gambling because of the rapid transactions and the potential for locating the machines in close proximity to neighborhoods and facilities accessible by both youth and adults. There is nothing within the machine itself that is addictive. It is their randomness combined with fast actions and outcomes that tend to produce a "gambling high" fostering reinforcement of the behaviour. A person is able to gamble and see the outcome within a few seconds and then gamble again.

In studies commissioned by Manitoba and Nova Scotia, VLTs appeared to be most closely connected to problem gambling in youth and adults. Both Manitoba and Alberta have placed limits on the number of VLTs they will license and Nova Scotia has removed them from corner stores, gas stations and bowling alleys.^x In Manitoba, "almost 92% of pathological gamblers who sought help from the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba reported VLTs as their most frequent form of gambling."^{xi}

Slot machines are similar to VLTs and the recent provincial decision to locate slot machines (in lieu of VLTs) in casinos and race tracks appears to be a reasonable option. Any initiative to locate them in other community venues could pose similar concerns to VLTs in terms of access by youth and the potential for addiction.

Are Programs In Place To Deal With The Health Consequences Of Addiction To Gambling?

Responding to the health consequences of addiction to gambling requires an approach that incorporates treatment, prevention, enforcement and research. These four categories are used to discuss the services currently in place to serve the residents of Ottawa-Carleton.

Treatment

Addiction Assessment Services (located in the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre) has been designated by the province as the “Problem Gambling Treatment Site” for Ottawa-Carleton. They have received funding for up to two full-time counselling positions for 1998 and 1999. One full-time counsellor has been hired and is providing counselling services to a full caseload of people. They are waiting for approval from the Ministry to allocate the remaining resources. Addiction Assessment Services is developing local expertise in treating problem and compulsive gamblers and has sponsored training workshops for health professionals.

In addition to the designated treatment site, the following services and initiatives are in place for the residents of Ottawa-Carleton: Three Gambling Anonymous groups per week; One Gamanon support group for friends and family members of problem gamblers; and a counsellor working one and half days per week on a fee for service basis at Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services.

Ottawa-Carleton residents also have access to two province-wide services: A Problem Gambling Crisis and Referral Helpline established by the Ontario government is advertised in the front page of the 1998 telephone book and a provincial phone counselling service for both the public and health professionals is offered by the Donwood Institute.

While the Ontario Substance Abuse Bureau has proactively established a number of mechanisms to help deal with problem gambling, there are additional treatment resources required. Using the estimates discussed earlier on in the paper, there may be between 14,650 and 29,300 problem gamblers in Ottawa-Carleton. If the rule of thumb is correct and only 10% of all adult problem gamblers seek professional help, it is possible that between 1,465 and 2,930 adults could be seeking treatment services in any given year in Ottawa-Carleton.^{xiii} While this estimate is very preliminary and does not include teenage gamblers, it is reasonable to anticipate that additional full-time counselling positions will be required when services begin advertising and when the casinos and slot machines come to Ottawa-Carleton.

Prevention

Research into public perceptions reveals that problem gambling is perceived more as a moral weakness stemming from enjoyment of the activity rather than an addiction with serious consequences. Public awareness and education campaigns are an important first step in helping people understand and talk about the addictive nature of gambling and the potential consequences. Prevention initiatives would not only help prepare young people to deal responsibly with gambling, it would help remove some of the stigma and shame attached to problem gambling and result in more people coming forward for treatment of their addiction.

Outside of the limited materials produced by casinos, there are very few public education materials and prevention initiatives.

Enforcement

Bill 75 created the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (ACGO) through the merger of the Liquor License Board of Ontario and the Gaming Control Commission. Under the new ACGO, there are three liquor inspectors for Ottawa-Carleton and a portion of Eastern Ontario extending down to Casselman. Each inspector currently is responsible for between 400 and 500 licensed establishments and thousands of special occasion permit events. The inspectors will also be required to enforce legislation pertaining to break open tickets sold in bars and convenience stores and to ensure compliance with the regulations for the two proposed casinos including video lottery terminals. One additional inspector has been hired and is being trained to work with casinos.

The current heavy workload and increased responsibilities of the inspectors raises concerns about the ability of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission to adequately monitor and proactively work with alcohol and gaming related issues.

In addition to Alcohol and Gaming inspectors, there may also be a role for Police services. In Windsor, crime rose sharply in the area around the casino in the first year of operation. It fell after the provincial government funded an additional twenty-five police officers. The most frequent offenses were car theft, credit card and cheque fraud, shoplifting and passing counterfeit money.^{xiii} According to the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Services, these offenses are not unique to casinos and can occur with any large new commercial development.^{xiv}

RESEARCH

The Ontario Substance Abuse Bureau is planning to establish a new "Centre of Excellence" to conduct ongoing research into gambling. This centre may take the form of a consortium of agencies working together to provide research. In Ottawa-Carleton, the local designated Problem Gambling Treatment Site has funded research into Asian gambling in the Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian communities. The working group comprised of Addiction Assessment Services, Chinese Social Services, Somerset West Community Health Centre and the Addiction Research Foundation will soon be releasing the results. Finally, the District Health Council has released a preliminary study to develop a model for treatment services for problem gamblers.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The following organizations were consulted during the preparation of this report: Alcohol and Gaming Commission (regional branch), Addiction Research Foundation, Addiction Assessment Services, Citizens Against Gambling Expansion, OCEDCO, Ontario Substance Abuse Bureau, Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Services, Ontario Restaurant Association, Ottawa Tourism and Convention Authority and Somerset West Community Health Centre.

Community organizations involved in research and service delivery felt the report concisely and accurately summarized the relevant health issues. While OCEDCO and The Ontario Restaurant Association have not taken formal positions on the issue of gambling in Ottawa-Carleton, Citizens Against Gambling Expansion does not support any expansion of gambling because of the impact on people and the social costs involved. Initial consultations with the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Services indicate that they are in the process of consulting widely across Ontario and examining different operational protocols of other Police Services. The Ottawa Tourism and Convention Authority concurs with this report. It supports the upscale casino in Hull but would need to examine any expansion of gambling in Ottawa-Carleton before taking a formal position. All groups were invited to attend and/or present at the May meeting of Community Services Committee.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

CONCLUSION

Gambling appears to be very similar to other addictions both in terms of the number of people affected and the impact on peoples' health. Studies suggest that the accessibility of casinos and other forms of gambling is likely to increase the number of problem gamblers in the community.

From a public health point of view, video lottery terminals and slot machines are of particular concern due to the potential for addiction and accessibility by minors. Video lottery terminals and slot machines belong in casinos and controlled casino like settings and not in other community venues. Whether or not additional forms of gambling come to Ottawa-Carleton, it will be important to address the needs of problem gamblers and to develop strategies to prevent young people from becoming problem gamblers.

*Approved by
Robert Cushman, MD, MBA, FRCPC*

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- ⁱAddiction Research Foundation, (1996) Problem And Compulsive Gambling Workshop Literature Review, Toronto.
- ⁱⁱ Canadian Foundation of Compulsive Gambling (1993). Toronto.
- ⁱⁱⁱOntario Casino Corporation Act, 1993. Section 7 sets out the criteria for the location of a casino in a municipality. There are five criteria including public consultation and a municipal council resolution.
- ^{iv}National Council of Welfare (1996) Gambling in Canada. Ottawa. These studies used variations of the South Oaks Gambling Screen - an assessment tool for identifying gambling problems. Original studies also reviewed include:
- Canadian Foundation on Compulsive Gambling (1993). Prevalence of Problem and Pathological Gambling in Ontario Using the South Oaks Gambling Screen. Toronto.
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- ^vProblem Gambling Research Group (1994). Impact of the Windsor Casino on Recreational, Problem and Pathological Gambling. University of Windsor.
- ^{vi}Custer, R.L. and Milt, H. When Luck Runs Out. New York: Facts on File Publications, 1985
- ^{vii}Addiction Research Foundation, (1996) Problem And Compulsive Gambling Workshop Literature Review, Toronto. Original studies also reviewed include:
- Abott, D.A. and Cramer, S.L. (1993). Gambling attitudes and participation. Journal of Gambling Studies, 9(3), 247-263.
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- ^{viii}Ernst and Young Management Consultants (1993). Casino Gambling And Impacts On Pathological Or Problem Gambling. Toronto.
- ^{ix}Fulcher, 1982.
- ^xOmnifacts Research Ltd (1993). An Examination of the Prevalence of Gambling in Nova Scotia. Alberta Lotteries and Gaming (1994) Gambling and Problem Gambling in Alberta: Final Report. Edmonton
- ^{xi}Working Group Report. Manitoba Lottery Policy Review p. 31 reported in the National Council of Welfare's report Gambling in Canada.
- ^{xii}Calculations based on 1996 Census data for adults 19 years of age and over in Ottawa-Carleton. The 10% rule of thumb is based on estimates used by some drug and alcohol treatment facilities to calculate demand for services.
- ^{xiii}Statistics reported in The Globe and Mail, Tuesday March 17, 1998.
- ^{xiv}Response to the draft report by Staff Sergeant Gary N. Meehan, April 13, 1998. Internal memo. Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Services.