

GAMBLING RESEARCH

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Canada's Lower-Risk Gambling Guidelines Under Development

In an address to 200+ attendees at the AGLC's Responsible Gambling Symposium in September, Institute Research Coordinator Dr. David Hodgins (U. of Calgary) discussed the development of lower-risk gambling guidelines for Canadians. Developing these guidelines has been a particularly fascinating project for Hodgins as he anticipates they'll help guide gamblers in making well-informed decisions about their gambling behaviours. Creating such guidelines will also help social support networks identify at-risk gamblers and assist casino operators in suggesting parameters for their interested customers.

What Messages are Currently Being Given to Gamblers? Can They be Improved?

In Canada, advice in the messages¹ given to gamblers has typically been quite good according to Hodgins. The best of these messages encourage people to self-reflect



Dr. David Hodgins,
Institute Research Coordinator,
U of Calgary

on their gambling activities and recommend a behavioural indicator to use for this purpose (e.g., set a time limit). Hodgins said that existing messages are provided with the best of intentions but he finds that they're often vague and aren't based upon research evidence. For instance, what is the right amount of time that people should be encouraged to either gamble or refrain from gambling? And if gamblers are being advised to only spend money they can afford to lose, how much is this figure?

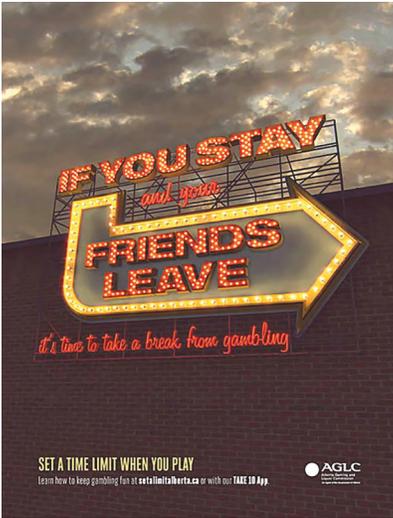
"It isn't unusual, in fact, for public health guidelines to be somewhat vague and the information generic," said Hodgins. He pointed to the *Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines for Canada*² as being one such example. Low-risk guidelines that are far more specific in what they recommend also exist. These tend to be found in established research fields like alcohol studies that have

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The primary aim of the Alberta Gambling Research Institute, a consortium of the Universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge, is to support academic research related to gambling.

MISSION

To facilitate evidence-based broad research that informs gambling public policy and educates Albertans and the wider audience about the effects of gambling.



large existing bodies of research. Hodgins pointed out that *Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines*³ were produced based on research findings and guideline developers were transparent about which parts were

drawn from empirical science and which were consensus-based.

How Are the Lower-Risk Gambling Guidelines Being Created?

The project to create lower-risk gambling guidelines involves researchers and advisors from across Canada. It is being led by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) and funded by the Fondation Mise sur toi. Project team membership involves an advisory committee that includes Eric Baich, Director, Social Responsibility Regulatory Services, AGLC and a scientific working group co-chaired by Dr. Hodgins and Dr. Matthew M. Young (CCSA and Carleton U.). After wrestling with questions about what was meant by “harm” and its measurement and conceptualization, the team set about collecting available research data from studies conducted in Alberta⁴ and elsewhere throughout the world.

A review of data from these studies allowed the team to determine a set of variables to be used as indicators of gambling involvement. Included were spending on gambling per month, gambling session length, and types of gambling formats played. A risk curve methodology was developed that plotted these involvement variables against others that represented reported “harms” from gambling. What the research team discovered was that there was an “upswing” at certain points along this curve which Hodgins said represented places where people tended to frequently develop harms. It is these points that the team will use for their forthcoming recommendations about lower-risk gambling thresholds.

What Are the Next Steps?

Hodgins said that the finalized lower-risk guidelines will include recommendations about specific gambling frequency and expenditure (i.e., total amount spent per month, as well as, amount spent as a percentage of income). At this stage of the project, figures that specify lower-risk gambling ranges are not yet ready to be released without further validation and addressing potential research gaps⁵.

CANADA'S LOW-RISK ALCOHOL DRINKING GUIDELINES

Drinking is a personal choice. If you choose to drink, these guidelines can help you decide when, where, why and how.

For these guidelines, “a drink” means:

 Beer <small>341 ml (12 oz) 5% alcohol content</small>	 Cider/ Cooler <small>341 ml (12 oz) 5% alcohol content</small>	 Wine <small>142 ml (5 oz) 12% alcohol content</small>	 Distilled Alcohol <small>(vodka, rum, etc.) 45 ml (1.5 oz) 40% alcohol content</small>
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▶ YOUR LIMITS

- Reduce your long-term health risks by drinking no more than:
- 10 drinks a week for women, with no more than 2 drinks a day most days
 - 15 drinks a week for men, with no more than 3 drinks a day most days

Plan non-drinking days every week to avoid developing a habit.

▶ SPECIAL OCCASIONS

- Reduce your risk of injury and harm by drinking no more than 3 drinks (for women) or 4 drinks (for men) on any single occasion.

Plan to drink in a safe environment. Stay within the weekly limits outlined above in **Your limits**.

▶ SAFER DRINKING TIPS

- Set limits for yourself and stick to them.
- Drink slowly. Have no more than 2 drinks in any 3 hours.
- For every drink of alcohol, have one non-alcoholic drink.
- Eat before and while you are drinking.
- Always consider your age, body weight and health problems that might suggest lower limits.
- While drinking may provide health benefits for certain groups of people, do not start to drink or increase your drinking for health benefits.

▶ WHEN ZERO'S THE LIMIT

- Do not drink when you are: driving a vehicle or using machinery and tools
- taking medicine or other drugs that interact with alcohol
- Doing any kind of dangerous physical activity
- living with mental or physical health problems
- living with alcohol dependence
- pregnant or planning to be pregnant
- responsible for the safety of others
- making important decisions

▶ PREGNANT? ZERO IS SAFEST

If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, or about to breastfeed, the safest choice is to drink no alcohol at all.

▶ DELAY YOUR DRINKING

Alcohol can harm the way the body and brain develop. Teens should speak with their parents about drinking. If they choose to drink, they should do so under parental guidance; never more than 1–2 drinks at a time, and never more than 1–2 times per week. They should plan ahead, follow local alcohol laws and consider the **Safer drinking tips** listed in this brochure.

Youth in their late teens to age 24 years should never exceed the daily and weekly limits outlined in **Your limits**.



The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction changes lives by bringing people and knowledge together to reduce the harm of alcohol and other drugs on society. We partner with public, private and non-governmental organizations to improve the health and safety of Canadians.

Low-risk drinking helps to promote a culture of moderation.

Low-risk drinking supports healthy lifestyles.

CCSA wishes to thank the partners who supported development of Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines. For a complete list of the organizations supporting the guidelines, please visit www.ccsa.ca/Eng/Priorities/Alcohol/Canada-Low-Risk-Alcohol-Drinking-Guidelines/Pages/default.aspx

Reference:
 Buft, P., Burgess, D., Gakman, L., Paradis, C., & Stockwell, T. (2015). *Alcohol and health in Canada: A summary of evidence and guidelines for low-risk drinking*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.
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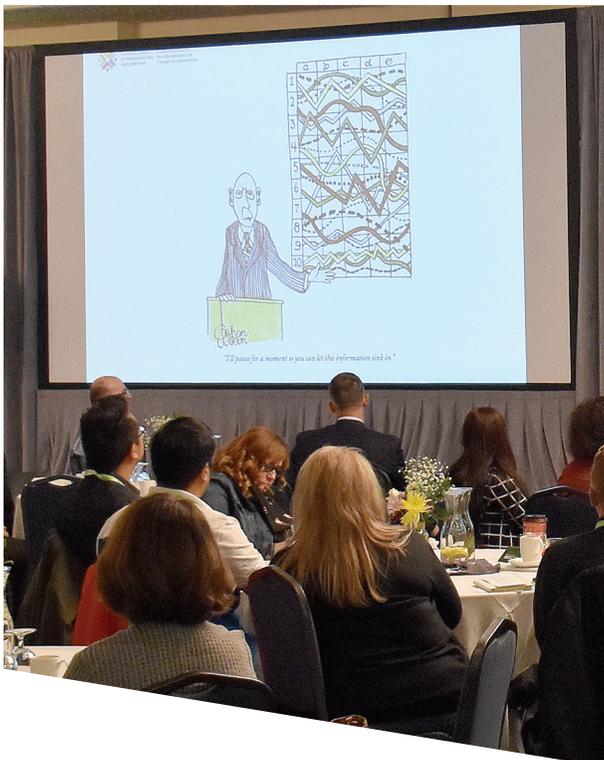
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In addition to the specific figures for guideline ranges, Hodgins said that, “[the team] is also looking at the best ways to present [the guidelines] so they resonate with people and are clear.” To accomplish this, they will continue to undertake focus groups with social gamblers and heavy gamblers to determine if guidelines are understood, whether they make sense, and whether they would be used. To date, feedback from gamblers in focus groups has been positive.

In concluding his presentation, Hodgins reminded attendees that, “The development of lower-risk gambling guidelines is just one strategy for accomplishing the larger goal of preventing and reducing gambling-related harms among the population.”

Dr. David C. Hodgins is a professor in the Program in Clinical Psychology in the Department of Psychology, University of Calgary and a Research Coordinator with the Alberta Gambling Research Institute. The AGLC’s Insight Responsible Gambling Symposium took place on September 24, 2019 in Edmonton. It was hosted by Alberta Gaming Liquor & Cannabis (AGLC) in partnership with Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health. #aglcinsight #gamesense



- 1 Examples include: “If you stay and your friends leave it’s time to take a break from gambling”; “If your last \$20 is never the last it’s time to take a break from gambling,” and; “If you need to keep going back to the Automated Teller Machine (ATM) for money, you’ve probably spent more than you planned, and maybe more than you can afford.”
- 2 [Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines for Canada](#) (2017), Canadian Public Health Association.
- 3 [Canada’s Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines](#) [poster] (2012), Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.
- 4 E.g., the [Lifestyle, Lifecycle Project \(LLL\)](#) which was an Institute-funded longitudinal study that followed 1,808 Albertans prospectively over a five-year period from 2005 to 2011.
- 5 An examples of a gap would be the effect of substance use on gambling behaviour. Another is the risk of harm in certain special populations (e.g., younger people, those with mental health concerns) which may need different guidelines.

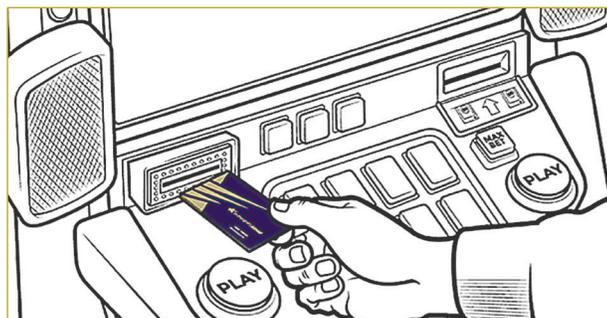


The AGLC's Insight Responsible Gambling Symposium took place on September 24, 2019 in Edmonton.

New Province-Wide Casino Loyalty Program Being Introduced in Alberta



AGLC is introducing a province-wide casino loyalty program called Winner's Edge that it anticipates to be available in all of the province's casinos by the end of 2019. Casino gamblers who enroll in the program will be able to earn rewards for every dollar wagered on slot machines and electronic table games. Points can be redeemed for free play and provide discounts on menu items at venues. The Winner's Edge program also make it possible for cardholders to access GameSense tools at kiosks that allow gamblers to track spending and set spending or time limits on their play. Additional details available from the AGLC Winner's Edge website @ <https://winnersedge.ca>.



Senior Research Fellows Recognized

Drs. Darren Christensen (U. of Lethbridge) and **Dan McGrath** (U. of Calgary) recently completed their terms as Chair in Gambling Research at their respective universities. The Institute recognized their important contributions by appointing them as AGRI Senior Fellows. Both researchers continue to be involved in gambling research investigations funded by the Institute.



Dr. Darren Christensen



Dr. Dan McGrath

Conference 2020

The Institute's 19th Annual Conference on Gambling Research will take place **March 26-28, 2020 at The Banff Centre**, in Banff, Alberta, Canada. Details about the conference theme and presenters will be made available as they are finalized.

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