GAMBLING RESEARCH REVEALS

ALBERTA GAMBLING RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Provincial Gambling Statistics Being Collected as Part of Institute's National Project

Anyone who has ever searched for statistical information about gambling in Canada will tell you that it can be a particularly tricky proposition. What often appears on the surface to be a straightforward question (e.g., "how much money did Canadians spend on gambling in 2019?") usually requires far greater effort to find an accurate answer than one might anticipate. In additional to clarifying what is meant by spending on gambling (i.e., total amount wagered by gamblers vs. the total amount wagered after prizes), one soon comes to the realization that there's no single federal government department — including Statistics Canada — that reports aggregate gambling statistics for the entire country.

Canada's Provincial Gambling Landscape a Patchwork

A primary reason for this paucity of Canadian gambling statistics is because each of Canada's provinces and territories are responsible for the provision of gambling[1] within their jurisdiction. Each province has their own menu of legalized gambling formats which has resulted in a patchwork of gambling availability across Canada. For instance,

certain provinces (e.g. Newfoundland & Labrador) allow Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs) but not casinos while others (e.g., Ontario, B.C.) allow casinos but not VLTs. Even those provinces that appear to offer the same formats don't offer them in exactly the same way (e.g., online gambling in Atlantic Canada includes lottery but not casino-style games; most other provinces offer both types; others neither type).
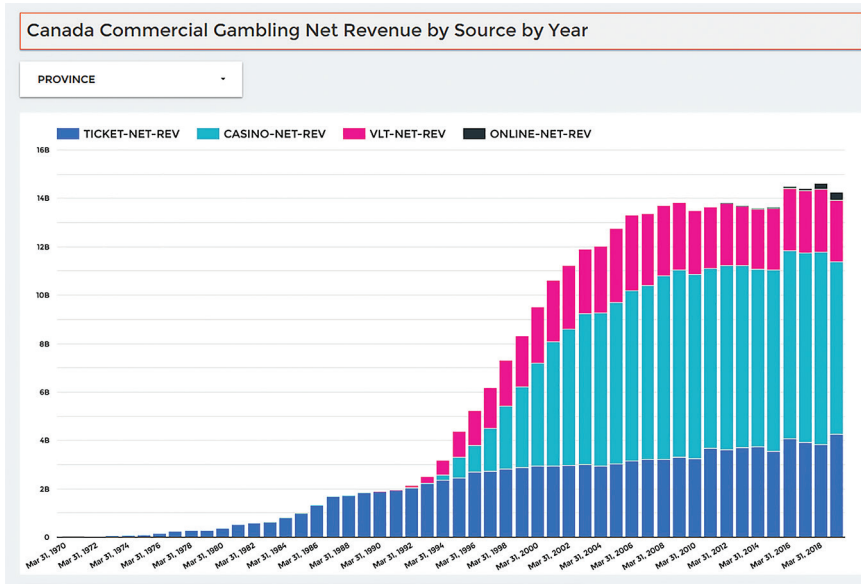
Furthermore, most provinces have their own organizations that regulate, manage and operate various gambling formats. In Saskatchewan, for example, the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority (SLGA) regulates and licenses all forms of commercial and charitable gambling and co-regulates horseracing with the Canadian Pari-mutuel Agency. Operationally, Saskatchewan's gambling providers include the Western Canada Lottery Corporation (ticket lotteries), SLGA (VLTs), SaskGaming (traditional casinos), and Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority (First Nation casinos). Therefore, in order to obtain gambling statistics for just a single province such as Saskatchewan, it is necessary to first understand the provincial gambling landscape and then track down annual reports and other official reporting sources.

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.

Canada Commercial Gambling Net Revenue by Source by Year

An example of the visualizations being developed by Rhys Stevens which will be included as part of the Institute's National Project.

It is anticipated that these background materials will provide context for the data collected from the two major surveys and key informant interviews that represent the bulk of the project. These statistical and background materials will also help fill an information deficit that appeared when the Canadian Partnership for Responsible Gambling ceased updating its Responsible Gambling Digest[3].

To date, Mr. Stevens has amassed a database of 750+ recent and historical annual reports and other publications containing gambling statistics about gambling in Canada's provinces and territories. Much of the statistical information has already been extracted from these sources and he is currently cleaning, organizing and assembling the data into tabular formats. He anticipates that the end product of this research will be a series of data tables and graphical visualizations that will be available to researchers and the general public.

Rhys Stevens is a Librarian III at the University of Lethbridge Library in Lethbridge, Alberta. He has been the Institute's Librarian & Information Specialist since 2001. He welcomes inquiries about the collection of background information and statistics about gambling by email rhys.stevens@uleth.ca *or telephone (403) 329-5176.*

Other Challenges Associated with Provincial Gambling Statistics

If the above complications weren't daunting enough, the reporting of gambling statistics (especially gambling revenue and expense figures[2]) differs slightly between Canadian provinces. A main reason for this is due to variations in accounting practices and/or the timing of the adoption of new accounting standards. In some instances, certain gambling metrics aren't reported publicly at all. This means that using aggregated statistics collected from the provinces for comparison purposes can be problematic though they are still extremely relevant for understanding trends over time.

What Statistical Information is Being Collected?

Despite the aforementioned challenges, one of the research objectives of the ongoing Institute-funded project "Gambling and Problem Gambling in Canada: A National Study" is to comprehensively document the gambling landscape in each of Canada's provinces. This part of the national investigation is being led by Institute Librarian & Information Specialist Rhys Stevens. It involves the collection of details about current legal and regulatory frameworks, types of legal gambling, revenue generation and its distribution, harm minimization strategies, and the historical development of gambling policy.
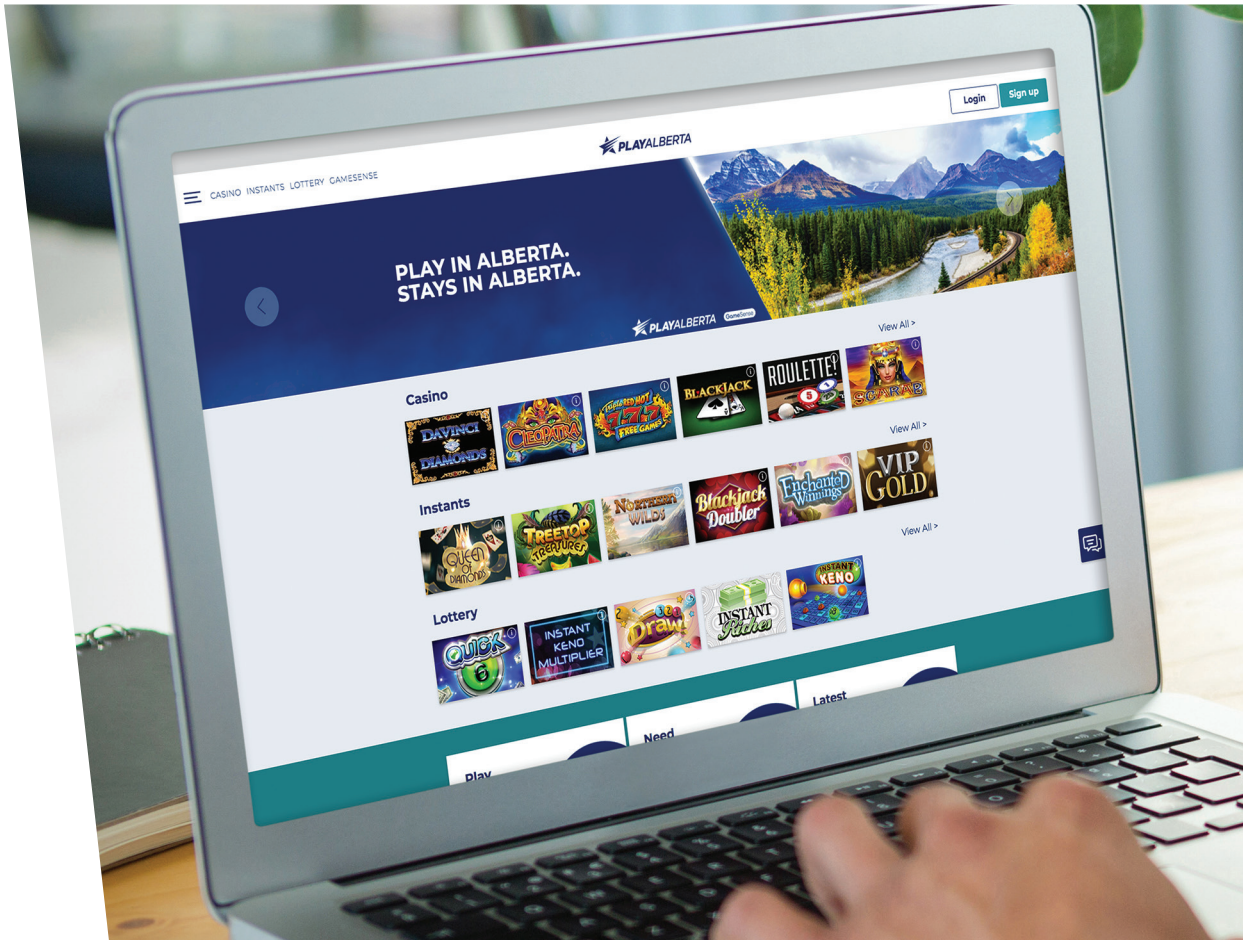
1 With the exception of wagering on horseracing which is overseen by the federal Canadian Pari-Mutuel Agency.

2 For instance, ancillary net revenue generated by casinos is difficult to separate in some provincial reporting from the more usual gambling spending on slot machines and table games.

3 The most recent data and information in the *Responsible Gambling Digest* is for fiscal year 2016-2017.

Alberta's Online Gambling Website Launched October 1st

Gamblers have had the ability to place bets online since the first online casinos and sportsbooks began to appear in the mid-1990s – not long after the birth of the Internet itself. The first such sites were often hosted outside of Canadian territory in places like Antigua, Malta, the Isle of Man, and Khanawake Mohawk Territory. Canadians citizens have been eager participants in online gambling despite Canada's Criminal Code stating that only the provincial governments are permitted to conduct and manage lottery schemes. As a result, starting ten years ago, Canada's provinces gradually began providing their own provincially-regulated online gambling sites to repatriate the tens of millions of dollars estimated to have left the country via offshore online gambling sites.

With the launch of the PlayAlberta.ca website, Alberta becomes the ninth Canadian province to offer online gambling, leaving only Saskatchewan and the Territories without a government-sanctioned site. The new platform will be open to Albertans over the age of 18 who are physically located within the province's borders. **PlayAlberta.ca** integrates the province's GameSense responsible gambling program which aims to promote healthy gambling behaviour. The platform was developed by NeoPollard Interactive (NPi), a global online gambling provider with a Canadian head office in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

In a recent interview with CBC Radio, Niaz Nejad, AGLC's chief operating officer, said that "British Columbia has been in this space for ten years… as have Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec. Their data

has shown they are not turning people into new gamblers. Rather they are repatriating some players from unregulated gambling sites… [for Albertans who gamble], we want you to have access to the Responsible Gambling tools and all of the programs available to you."

In the same CBC Radio program, Dr. David Hodgins, Institute Research Coordinator at the U. of Calgary stated that, "One of the features that is currently available [in PlayAlberta.ca] is the ability to set personal deposit limits. This is a good feature but it is much less effective if it's voluntary as opposed to being mandatory." He mentioned that he personally would have preferred that deposit limit-setting features be mandatory as they are in some European jurisdictions (though not mandatory on other provincial sites).

For additional information about Alberta's PlayAlberta.ca online gambling site:

- **Alberta's online gaming site raises the odds of creating new problem gamblers, expert says** (2020, October 3, CBC News).

- **Alberta at Noon with Judy Aldous - Oct. 2, 2020: Online gambling in Alberta** (CBC Listen) [Interviews with Niaz Nejad, AGLC's COO and Dr. David Hodgins, Institute Research Coordinator @ U. of Calgary].

- **AGLC launching PlayAlberta.ca to offer Albertans expanded entertainment options** (2020, October 1, AGLC News Release).

- **AGLC unveils new online gaming site in bid to keep money in the province** (2020, October 1, Edmonton Journal).

Responsible Gambling Features on PlayAlberta.ca include:

- **Age Verification (18+)**

- **GameSense responsible gambling program; prominent links to other general responsible gambling information.**

- **Self-exclusion option (six months, one year, two years and three years) synchronized with land-based exclusion.**

- **Current self-excluded gamblers are not eligible to sign up for PlayAlberta.ca until their agreement expires.**

- **Account deposit daily, weekly and monthly limits (players will set their own limits).**

- **Reality check "pop-up" windows informing players with details about their play (win, loss, time).**

Meetings were held between AGRI and AGLC advising AGLC of Responsible Gambling tools for the on-line platform, some of which were implemented. According to AGLC, other RG feature enhancements are planned for inclusion at a later date.

Dr. David Hodgins Recognized as Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (CAHS)

The Institute is pleased to announce that Institute Research Coordinator Dr. David Hodgins (U. of Calgary) was selected as a Fellow by the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (CAHS). CAHS recognizes excellence in health sciences. Fellows have demonstrated, through their careers and lives, that they are committed to their field of expertise in many ways.

Dr. Hodgins is a world-leading scientist in the field of addiction studies. His creative work has profoundly changed the way in which scholars, practitioners, and policy makers understand both the etiology of disordered gambling, its comorbidity with other disorders, and its natural course, treatment and recovery. Through creativity and outstanding leadership, Dr. Hodgins has advanced the science and practice of clinical psychology in gambling and other addictions. Dr. Hodgins' brief treatment and relapse prevention interventions have influenced mental health services around the globe. A leader of several collaborative international initiatives, he has set directions for treatment of gambling disorder.

Speaking to the new Fellows, the Chair of the CHAH Fellowship Committee, Dr. Proton Rahman, said, "Congratulations on being elected as a Fellow in the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. Your induction is a reflection of your vision, innovation and sustained excellence in your field and, undoubtedly, your expertise will further enrich our Academy. We are looking forward to your engagement in CAHS' activities."

Dr. Paul Allison, CAHS' President, congratulated the new Fellows and mentioned, "Your dedication to health sciences is what is recognized today. Our Fellows understand that being elected to the Academy carries with it a covenant to serve the Academy and the future wellbeing of the health sciences, irrespective of the Fellow's specific discipline."

Sources:

- **Seventy-seven new Fellows elected into the Canadian Academy of Health Science**
- **Introduction of new Fellows September 18, 2020 [CAHS]**

First Journal Article Publications from the AGRI National Project

A forthcoming article co-authored by Drs. Carrie Leonard, Rob Williams and Dan McGrath was accepted for publication in *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*. It marks the first of the many planned publications that will report findings from the Institute-funded research project "**Gambling and Problem Gambling in Canada: A National Study.**"

Leonard, C. A., Williams, R. J., & McGrath, D. S. (in press). Gambling fallacies: **Predicting problem gambling in a national sample**. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors.*

Objective: The relationship between the level of gambling fallacy endorsement and type of gambler was assessed both concurrently and prospectively in the AGRI national online panel cohort of Canadian adults.

Results: There were three main findings. The first is that gambling fallacies are common in all types/categories of gamblers but somewhat more prevalent in problem and pathological gamblers. Second, multivariate analysis determined that gambling fallacies are significant concurrent and prospective predictors of the problem/pathological gambling category, but not strong predictors relative to other variables. Third, problem gambling and heavier gambling involvement are also predictors of a future higher level of gambling fallacies.

Conclusions: Collectively, these results show that gambling fallacies have some etiological relationship to problem gambling but are not the main cause of problem gambling and should not be the exclusive focus of problem gambling treatment. Gambling engagement also serves to increase gambling specific erroneous cognitions. As such, early intervention programs should include training to inoculate people against these false beliefs.

Two additional articles recently accepted for publication:

Williams, R. J., Leonard, C. A., Belanger, Y. D., Christensen, D. C., el-Guebaly, N., Hodgins, D. C., McGrath, D. S., Nicoll, F. & Stevens, R. M. G. (in press). **Gambling and problem gambling in Canada in 2018: Prevalence and changes since 2002.** *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry.*

Williams, R. J., Leonard, C. A., Belanger, Y. D., Christensen, D. C., el-Guebaly, N., Hodgins, D. C., McGrath, D. S., Nicoll, F., Smith, G. J. & Stevens, R. M. G. (in press). **Predictors of gambling and problem gambling in Canada.** *Canadian Journal of Public Health.*

COVID-19 and Gambling

Covid-19 and Casino & VLT Availability in Canada

This past March virtually all of Canada's casinos, bingo halls, VLT networks and lottery ticket retailers were closed to limit the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Venues started to re-open in June though facilities in some provinces remain closed. In order to better track the status of re-openings across the country, Institute Librarian Rhys Stevens put together the document **COVID-19 Closures and Re-Openings of Canadian Casinos and VLT Venues** (2020, September 28) which is available from the Institute **web site**.

Responding to the Pandemic: AGRI National Project Online Panel-COVID-19 Supplement

In mid-April, the Institute approved a research proposal submitted by Drs. Carrie Leonard and David Hodgins to supplement to the AGRI National Project (ANP). This study is currently underway and examines the impact of the pandemic on gambling in Canada. It is a two-wave panel study being administered by Leger[1] which re-recruits ANP Online Panel participants.

A COVID Wave 1 survey was conducted in May/June 2020) while the provinces were enforcing widespread social and economic restrictions. The COVID Wave 2 survey will be administered in Fall 2020 after the easement of most COVID-based restrictions. The COVID Wave 2 data collection is necessary to determine if pandemic related changes are enduring. Together with the ANP Online Panel Year 2 data as a baseline, this study becomes an ABA design[2], with a large and stratified sample. COVID Wave 2 data, as an added benefit, will also provide the ANP with an appropriately timed Year 3 data collection.

1 Leger is a Canadian market research and polling firm.
2 ABA design in Psychology follows the order: A (baseline) B (change introduced) A (return to no change/baseline).

Announcement of Graduate Scholarship Recipients 2020/21

The Institute is pleased to announce fourteen Scholarship and Research Allowance Award Recipients for 2020/21:

- **Albright-Tolman Jami**
  (Health Sciences, U. of Lethbridge)

- **Baxter, David**
  (Political Science, U. of Alberta)

- **Brazeau, Bradley**
  (Psychology, U. of Calgary)

- **Cowie, Megan**
  (Psychology, U. of Calgary)

- **Dorchak, Danika**
  (Neuroscience, U. of Lethbridge)

- **Gorenko, Julie**
  (Clinical Psychology, U. of Calgary)

- **Laskowski, Catherine**
  (Neuroscience, U. of Lethbridge)

- **Leslie, Diandra**
  (Psychology, U. of Calgary)

- **Novakowski, Dallas**
  (Business, U. of Calgary)

- **Russell, Gillian**
  (Psychology, U. of Lethbridge)

- **Schluter, Magdalen**
  (Psychology, U. of Calgary)

- **Sharif-Razi, Maryam**
  (Clinical Psychology, U. of Calgary)

- **Trottier, Maegan**
  (Health Sciences, U. of Lethbridge)

- **Wilcox, Sean C**
  (Cultural, Social & Political Thought, U. of Lethbridge)

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