

# Young People's Evolving Relationship to Gambling:

## Challenges and Opportunities for Mitigating Harm in Our Digital World

**FINAL  
REPORT**  
SEPTEMBER  
2025



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## The Partnership Symposium 2025

The Partnership (formerly the Canadian Partnership for Responsible Gambling) is a network of diverse public interest organizations, who collaborate to build and share knowledge that influences thinking and decision making within its member organizations to advance responsible gambling, support sustainable growth and encourage safer play. As part of its mandate, The Partnership hosts Symposiums structured around a particular issue or topic of interest to its member organizations on a bi-yearly basis.

The 2025 Symposium took place April 16 – 17 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Its focus was on young people and gambling, with the goals of broadening attendees' awareness and understanding of young people's evolving relationship and experiences with gambling, and discussing meaningful and practical strategies, including new collaborations, for preventing and reducing gambling harm among this group.

The 2025 Symposium achieved its objectives and exceeded expectations, hosting 93 participants representing a diverse range of roles and perspectives for two days of presentations and conversations on the latest issues impacting young people's relationship with gambling and how we can make meaningful progress on reducing harm. The Symposium's success is thanks to The Partnership's commitment and hard work, the exceptional presenters who shared leading-edge evidence and insights, and most importantly to the participants who contributed so many passionate, compassionate, and knowledgeable voices to this conversation.

**Thank you to all who participated in the 2025 Symposium!** We look forward to welcoming you at the next Symposium event in 2027.



### A note on young people and gambling

The Symposium recognized the need to include consideration not just of young people aged 18+, but also those under 18. This was important to effectively and truthfully examine the topic of young people and gambling and discuss meaningful solutions.

While The Partnership is supportive of understanding the relationship between minors and gambling, The Partnership does not support minors participating in gambling.

## Final Report Overview

This final report provides a comprehensive summary of the 2025 Symposium. It provides an overview of the topic, integrating the evidence shared in the pre-Symposium evidence brief; summarizes the event's key highlights and knowledge sessions; and proposes a set of strategic priorities based on the discussions and ideas shared over the two days.

The report is organized in the following sections:

- **Evidence Summary**
- **The Symposium**
  - Symposium Overview
  - Symposium Highlights
  - Evaluation Highlights
  - Knowledge Session Summaries
- **Strategic Priorities**
  - Research Priorities
  - Policy Efforts
  - Leadership and Coordination

A Symposium evaluation was conducted following the event. This report includes select results from the evaluation survey throughout. An evaluation report including the full results was submitted separately to The Partnership to help inform improvements to future symposiums.



# Young People & Gambling in Canada

## Youth: under 18

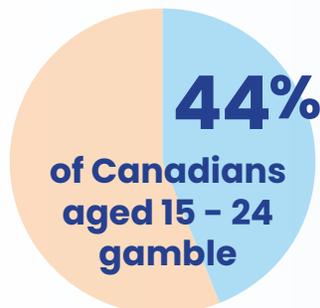


### Key Objectives:

- Education and awareness
- Limiting exposure
- Prevent/reduce risk and harm
- Protection from unlawful gambling

### Key Stakeholders:

- Policy makers
- Schools
- Public/community health



according to the latest  
Statistics Canada data (2018)

## Young adults: 18-24

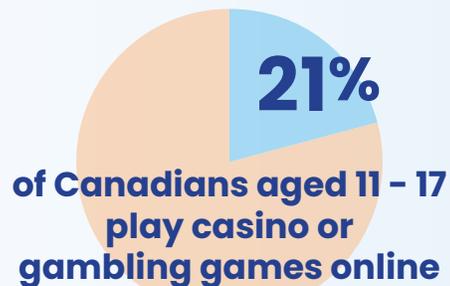


### Key Objectives:

- Education and awareness
- Limiting exposure
- Prevent/reduce risk and harm

### Key Stakeholders:

- Policy makers
- Public/community health
- Gambling regulators
- Gambling operators



(MediaSmarts, 2022)

**Prevalence of problem gambling  
in adolescents ranges between  
0.2% - 12.3%  
consistently higher than among adults**

(Calado et al., 2017)

Adolescent gambling disorder has been linked to anxiety, depression, attention deficit disorder, learning disorders, antisocial behaviours, conduct problems, substance use, delinquent and criminal behaviours, impulsivity, self-injurious behaviours, and suicidality including ideation and attempts.

Derevensky et al., 2019,  
Richard et al., 2020, Riley et al., 2021

## Evidence Summary

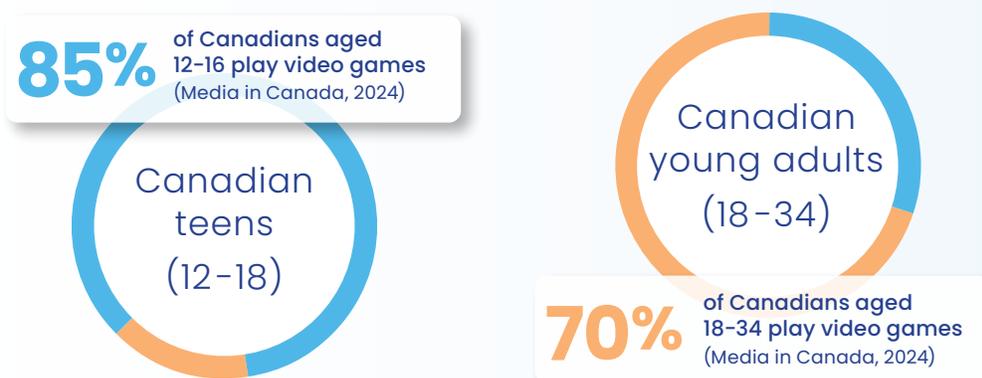
The Symposium's areas of focus were guided by the latest scientific findings and trends related to young people's relationship to gambling. Two concepts emerged: (1) young people are being exposed to gambling in ever-increasing ways, and (2) certain risk factors place some young people at greater risk of harm. Evidence for each of these concepts is summarized below. The Symposium presentations covered and expanded upon many of these topics.

### Young People's Increasing Exposure to Gambling

Young people's exposure to gambling has dramatically increased in recent years, both in its volume and in its breadth of forms. Despite ongoing public and policy debates in jurisdictions worldwide, little meaningful action has been taken to better protect youth and young adults from excessive exposure to gambling. Recent evidence suggests two key issues are driving the unprecedented exposure of gambling to young people: (1) the nexus of video gaming and gambling, and (2) the proliferation of gambling advertising, including unregulated forms such as social media and influencer advertising which specifically target young people.

### The Nexus of Video Gaming and Gambling

It is estimated that nearly 40% of the world's population plays video games. Recent reports from Canada and the U.S. found that among teens under 18, that jumps to 85%. The rate is lower among Canadian young adults aged 18–34, at 70%.



In the past several years, it has become increasingly common for video games to include features that closely resemble gambling activities. These gambling-like features are available, and in some cases aggressively promoted, to players of all ages. Table 1 below lists five ways in which video gaming and gambling have converged, adapted from Mills et al. (2023).

**Table 1.** Convergence of video gaming and gambling

<b>Social casino games (SCGs)</b>	<p>Social casino games (SCGs) are online games that closely resemble gambling games such as table games, slots, poker, and sports betting; however bets and winnings are in the form of game-specific virtual currencies.</p> <p>As players cannot stake or win real-world money, SCGs are not classified as gambling and can be legally offered to underage youth.</p>
<b>Loot boxes</b>	<p>Loot boxes are items players can purchase in-game using real or virtual currency, on the basis that they may contain something of value to the game (e.g., weapons, aesthetic items for player avatars, etc.). However, the contents of a loot box are unknown to players before they purchase and may contain something effectively worthless.</p> <p>Loot boxes are diverse, with some sharing particularly harmful features with gambling games such as near-misses and cash-out opportunities.</p>
<b>Skins betting</b>	<p>Skins are in-game digital items that offer visual enhancements to avatars and have a marketplace monetary value.</p> <p>Certain gambling providers and unregulated websites accept skins as a digital currency for betting, either on eSports or on games of chance such as coin-flips or roulette. Unlicensed operators make these activities available to youth under legal gambling age.</p>
<b>eSports betting</b>	<p>In eSports betting, individuals place bets on the outcome(s) of an organized video gaming competition, using real-world money or virtual currencies, including skins.</p> <p>When eSports betting with skins is facilitated through unregulated, unlicensed providers, it is easily accessible by youth under legal gambling age.</p>
<b>Play-to-earn (PTE) video gaming</b>	<p>Play-to-earn (PTE) games provide monetary rewards for gameplay in the form of cryptocurrency tokens or NFTs (non-fungible tokens), which can be traded on exchanges for cash currency.</p> <p>PTE games are compared to gambling as there is often a fee to begin playing, payable in cryptocurrency. As the real-world value of cryptocurrencies and NFTs fluctuates, it's possible to invest a substantial amount for unpredictable earnings.</p>

Researchers have begun to examine the relationships between certain gambling-like gaming phenomena and gambling problems and harms. Highlights of this growing body of evidence are summarized below. While not all studies examine youth or young adults specifically, the exceptional level of participation in video gaming among these groups suggests they are likely to be disproportionately impacted by its effects.

### ***Gambling-like gaming may be linked to gambling risk and harm***

Studies have explored a number of gambling-like characteristics of video games and their relationship to risk and harm. Findings are summarized below, organized by characteristic.

#### *Social casino gaming*

While social casino games have existed for at least ten years, their relationship to gambling risk and harm has not been studied as extensively as some other features on this list. However, a 2018 study of Canadian adolescents in grades 9–12 (Veselka et al., 2018) found compelling evidence that engaging in SCGs increased the likelihood of experiencing serious problems among those who gamble via other forms.

Veselka and colleagues (2018) found that among adolescents who participated in land-based or online gambling in the past three months, a significantly larger proportion of SCG players versus non-players were classified as exhibiting gambling problems of low-to-moderate severity or high severity. Specifically, among those who played poker SCGs, 18.9% of players versus 2.3% of non-players were categorized as having gambling problems of high severity. This was even more extreme among slots SCGs players, with 32.5% of players versus 2.0% of non-players were classified as having gambling problems of high severity.

#### *Loot box purchasing*

Loot boxes have been particularly studied in recent years for their similarities to gambling. A 2019 survey study led by Symposium presenter Dr. Vivien Wen Li Anthony found that when compared to those who did not purchase loot boxes, loot box purchasers gambled online more frequently, reported more extended online gambling sessions, and endorsed higher levels of problem gambling severity and greater mental distress (Li et al., 2019).

**1 in 4** Ontario students engaged in gambling-like video gaming activity (OSDUHS, 2023)



These findings are supported by subsequent studies. A 2020 study found that regardless of the features present in loot boxes, in-game purchasing of loot boxes for real-world money is linked to problem gambling (Zendle et al., 2020). A 2020 meta-analysis found “significant small-to-moderate positive correlations between loot box spending and gambling symptomology” (Garea et al., 2021). Similarly, a 2022 systematic review found links between loot boxes and problem gambling (Gibson et al., 2022).

Two recent studies examined the relationship between loot boxes and gambling problems among young people. In a survey-based study of British participants aged 16–24, Wardle and Zendle (2021) found that loot box purchasers were more likely to experience harms with gambling those who did not (16.9% vs. 1.8%). Further, loot box purchasing was found to be more strongly related to gambling problems than common gambling forms such as slot machines and online gambling. A 2020 study of Danish youth aged 12–16 similarly found a statistically significant association between loot box purchasing (or selling) and problem gambling severity (Kristiansen & Severin, 2020).

These findings are particularly concerning when considered with the popularity of loot boxes. In their 2022 review, Montiel et al. (2022) found that 78% of adult gamers over 18, and 40.5% of teen gamers between 16–18 purchased a loot box within the previous month.

### *Skins betting*

The evidence on skins betting and gambling problems is more limited. Two recent studies explore this link, with mixed findings. In their 2022 survey study of Australian adults, Greer and colleagues found that betting with skins on games of chance uniquely contributed to being at greater risk of problem gambling and experiencing gambling-related harm when factoring in traditional gambling (Greer et al., 2023). Conversely, a study of British youth aged 11–16 found that skins gambling alone was not significantly associated with at-risk gambling when other forms of gambling activity were considered (Wardle, 2019); however, among youth who had also gambled on other activities, those who bet with skins had significantly higher rates of at-risk and problem gambling than those who did not (23% vs. 8%).

## *Betting on eSports*

Several recent studies have found that more frequent betting on eSports is associated with greater problem gambling symptoms (Gainsbury et al., 2017; Macey & Hamari, 2018; Zendle et al., 2020). This association was confirmed among youth specifically in a recent study of American students in grades 7 through 12, which found that eSports betting was positively correlated with other forms of gambling and problem gambling (Marchica et al., 2022).

Conversely, a recent cross-sectional study of Australian adults found that while betting on eSports with real-world money was associated with betting on a variety of other forms of gambling, there was no unique contribution to problems and harm. Similarly, betting on eSports with skins was not found to uniquely contribute to gambling problems (Greer et al., 2023). This was not the case among youth, however. An overlapping group of authors conducted a cross-sectional study of Australians aged 12–17 and found that past-month eSports betting using both real-world money and skins was significantly associated with at-risk/problem gambling (Hing et al., 2022). This finding was most dramatic among those who bet on eSports using skins, who were over 3 times more likely to meet criteria for at-risk/problem gambling.

## ***It is unclear if gambling-like gaming is a pathway to gambling and/or harm***

Researchers examining the convergence of video gaming and gambling generally agree that engaging with gambling-like gaming features increases the likelihood of experiencing gambling problems, especially among those who gamble through other forms. However, evidence and perspectives are mixed on whether these gambling-like gaming activities may be a pathway to traditional gambling.

In their evidence review, Marchica and colleagues (2022) report that certain studies have suggested a possible migration from early exposure to either loot box purchases or social casino gaming to gambling with real money (Hayer et al., 2018; Macey & Hamari, 2018; Zendle et al., 2019, 2020), while others have cautioned that the pathway hypothesis needs further research for validation (Brock & Johnson, 2021; Delfabbro & King, 2020; Greer et al., 2023; King et al., 2019).

## **The Proliferation of Gambling Advertising**

The second key issue behind young people's increasing exposure to gambling is the unprecedented levels of gambling advertising seen across

many jurisdictions worldwide. Concerns around the proliferation of gambling advertising, and particularly its impacts on young people, are being raised in Canada and beyond. In many jurisdictions, including several Canadian provinces, regulations prohibit gambling advertising from targeting youth. For example, Ontario’s gambling regulator prohibits the use of animated figures or celebrities who would appeal to minors in advertisements, as well as the distribution of advertisements through channels or venues where most of the audience is reasonably expected to be minors.

However, evidence indicates that despite these kinds of regulations, young people are being exposed to unprecedented levels of gambling advertising. Further, recent studies show that gambling companies are increasingly using unregulated, digital forms of advertising such as social media and influencer marketing, that allow them to advertise to youth without any meaningful restrictions. As may be expected, research shows these high levels of exposure to gambling advertising can lead to increased participation and problems.

### ***Young people are being exposed to gambling advertising***

In a 2022 call-to-action report led by Symposium 2025 presenter Dr. Matthew Young, the authors observe that while there may be restrictions on content and distribution, youth and young adults are undoubtedly exposed to gambling advertising while watching sports or other events supported by gambling companies (Young et al., 2024). Supporting this observation, a recent survey study of Australian secondary school students revealed that 81% of students had been exposed to some form of gambling promotion or advertisement in the last month (Noble et al., 2022). Exposure was most commonly through television, social media, and sporting event advertisements. Similarly, an interview-based study of Australian youth aged 11–16 found the same percentage of participants, 81.1%, were able to name at least one betting brand, indicating high recall and awareness of gambling advertising (Nyemcsok et al., 2018).

### ***Gambling advertising is taking new forms***

In addition to the conventional forms of advertising, gambling companies are increasingly promoting their products using minimally regulated forms of advertising, such as social media and influencer marketing. As highlighted in Rossi and Nairn’s (2022) review of social media advertising, these forms of advertising are particularly consumed by, and appealing to,



**“Increased opportunities to legally gamble and increased gambling advertising are likely to result in short- and long-term gambling related harms among Canadians, especially youth, young adults and other vulnerable populations”**

Young et al., 2022, *Gambling Availability and Advertising in Canada – A Call to Action*

young people. Their previous study (Rossi et al., 2021) found that 63.3% of adults (over the age of 25) reported seeing gambling ads on social media at least once a week, rising to 72.4% for 18–24-year-olds. Additionally, they note that most gambling brands' social media followers are under the age of 25 (Rossi & Nairn, 2022). Results from a 2020 Ipsos survey supported these findings, revealing that 66% of British young people under 25 had been exposed to gambling advertisements on social media (IPSOS Mori, 2020).

Influencer-driven gambling promotion is an even less restricted channel of gambling advertising. Influencers and micro-influencers are individuals with significant followings on their social media or streaming platforms. To their followers, influencer-driven promotional content may be perceived as more authentic than traditional advertising. While research is in its infancy, a scoping review by Bolat and colleagues (2025) begins to examine this worrying new form of gambling advertising. The authors found that influencers use subtle, relatable strategies to normalize and glamourize gambling behaviours, with the effect of increasing engagement and lowering perceived risks of gambling (Bolat et al., 2025).

### ***Increased exposure leads to increased participation and harm***

Young people are being exposed to unprecedented levels of gambling advertising through conventional and newer, unrestricted digital forms. Concerningly, evidence demonstrates the high levels of exposure are linked to increased gambling participation and harms. In their survey study of Australian secondary school students, Noble et al., (2022) found that exposure to online gambling advertisements (including websites, pop-ups on websites, and social media) in the last month was significantly associated with gambling in the last month and being classified as an at risk or problem gambler (Noble et al., 2022).

Further, in their umbrella review, McGrane and colleagues (2023) found consistent support for the existence of a causal relationship between exposure to gambling advertising and more positive attitudes to gambling, greater intentions to gamble and increased gambling activity at both individual and population level. Impacts were clear among children and young people, with cross-sectional evidence on children and adolescents showing that higher exposure to advertising is associated with higher gambling rates and severity. However, reviewed research suggested that advertising would not encourage young people to start gambling, but instead generate difficulties for existing young gamblers, especially those experiencing problems.

This distinction was supported in DiCenso and colleagues' review (2024), which found that awareness of, and attitudes toward gambling, as well as self-reported gambling behaviour, were influenced by gambling advertising, while intentions to gamble were not markedly influenced by gambling advertising (DiCenso et al., 2024).

## **Certain Factors Increase Risk & Harm**

The second concept that emerged from the evidence is that there are certain factors that place some youth at greater risk of gambling harm. Young people are often targeted as a population group of interest, including by this Symposium, however it is important to note that they are not a homogenous population. Their experiences with gambling, and their vulnerability to gambling harm can vary significantly based on a variety of factors related to their individual identities; their relationships with families, schools and communities; and their socioeconomic circumstances.

These three categories of factors are described below. While they are discussed separately, these risk factors are often layered, with identities, relationships, communities, and socioeconomic, cultural and historical circumstances intersecting to place some young people at greater risk. The summary below does not examine all the potential factors that can increase risk for young people, but highlights some key characteristics raised in the literature.

### **Individual Factors**

A number of factors related to individuals' identities, including their sex, race/ethnicity, and sexual identity, have been associated with increased risk.

#### ***Young males are at highest risk of gambling harm***

Male gender is the most consistently demonstrated risk factor for gambling harm (Riley et al., 2021). In their global review, Tran and colleagues found that adolescent males engaged in any risk gambling at higher rates (9.3–38.1%) than girls (2.5–25.6%) (Tran et al., 2024). In another systematic global review of 44 studies, Calado and colleagues (2017) found that adolescent boys (10 – 24 years old) were more likely to be problem gamblers and engaged more frequently in all gambling activities (Calado et al., 2017).

### ***Black young people experience more gambling harm***

In Canada, there is a lack of research examining gambling-related risk by race and ethnicity, in adult or youth populations. In the U.S. there is limited research examining gambling differences across race, some of which shows that African American youth have much higher risk than White American youth, particularly males.

Two U.S. studies found that African American males have the highest rates of youth gambling (Barry et al., 2011; Simmons et al., 2016). They report higher rates of past year gambling (Goldstein et al., 2009), and of heavy gambling (24%) compared to White youth (15%) (Barnes et al., 2015). A recent study by Werner and colleagues (2020), including Symposium presenter Dr. Manik Ahuja, drew data from the multi-wave Missouri Family Study of African American and White families. When compared to White males, African American males were not significantly more likely than White males to ever gamble, but their rates of betting (sports, craps) were significantly higher (Werner et al., 2020). In their 2021 analyses using the same dataset, Dr. Ahuja and colleagues found that Black youth are more likely to experience the most severe gambling harms than their White peers (Ahuja et al., 2021). The authors found that gambling initiation predicted suicide ideation among Black youth, while no significant association was found among White youth (Ahuja et al., 2021).

### ***LGBTIQA+ young people have high rates of gambling & comorbidity***

Research has shown that sexual minority groups have higher rates of mental health disorders, such as anxiety, depression, suicidality, and substance misuse. In a representative sample of New Jersey adults, of whom 6% identified as LGBTIQA+, those identifying as LGBTIQA+ had significantly higher problems with gambling, alcohol, drugs, anxiety, depression, and a wide range of behaviours (e.g., binge eating, pornography use) (Li et al., 2019). Additionally, their anxiety and/or substance misuse were most associated with high-risk gambling, and their odds of having gambling disorder (PGSI  $\geq$  8) increased with age (Li et al., 2019).

While most research examines differences between males and females, there is very little research examining differences in gambling among transgender and gender diverse youth. A study by Rider et al., (2019) of 81,000 Minnesota students in grades 9 and 11, showed that transgender and gender diverse youth (TGD) had higher gambling involvement and problems than their cisgender peers. When examining these rates for birth-assigned sex, they found TGD youth assigned female at birth were more

at risk than both male and female cisgender youth, but that TGD youth assigned male at birth had the highest rates and were most at-risk from gambling harm.

### ***Gambling has a rich and complex history for Indigenous young people***

Indigenous populations in Canada consist of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. Indigenous youth are among the fastest growing demographics in Canada (Anderson, 2021). Evidence exploring the relationship of Indigenous young people to gambling is limited, and much mainstream research fails to capture the complex, historical role of gambling in their communities, which dates back to long before colonization. Researchers are increasingly working to recognize this complex relationship, often with the guidance of Indigenous academics.

Existing evidence does suggest Indigenous communities, including young people, are at greater risk of gambling harm. In Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA, Indigenous populations experience higher rates of problem gambling when compared to mainstream populations – 10-20% of the Indigenous population in Canada will experience some gambling problems in their lives (Breen & Gainsbury, 2013), compared to rates of problem and at-risk gambling between 0.6%-3% found in national prevalence studies (Williams et al., 2020). Two additional Canadian studies show Indigenous populations are two to four times more likely to experience problem gambling in comparison to mainstream Canadians (Belanger et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2016). Canadian researchers have demonstrated that increased rates of high-risk and problem gambling for Indigenous people is predicted by communities experiencing racism, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (Dion et al., 2015; Gill et al., 2016).

### **Relationship Factors**

Relationship factors include individuals' relationships with their families, schools and communities. The strongest relationship factor that emerges in evidence is the importance of parental support as a protective factor against risk from gambling (and from many other risky substances and activities).

### ***Parental support is a strong risk and protective factor***

Research has shown that parental support is an important factor in mediating gambling harm. Calado and colleagues (2017) found that greater parental supervision and support, and parental knowledge of problematic gambling in siblings was protective; and that conversely, the

strongest risk was for youth who do not live with parents, have lower family connectedness, and have parents/friends who gamble (Calado et al., 2017). Supporting this finding, Ahuja and colleagues found that childhood maltreatment was associated with all categories of gambling for White and Black youth (Ahuja et al., 2018).

In a large-scale study of 89,000 students from 30 European countries (Colasante et al., 2022), researchers found that at the individual (vs. country) level, the strongest protective factor against problem gambling was stronger parental regulation and higher family support. At the country-level, economic inequalities increased the risk of PG, while benefits for families and children decreased this risk. They concluded:

Supportive family environments, lower country-level economic inequalities and higher government expenditures on benefits for families and children appear to be associated with a lower risk of problematic gaming among European adolescents. (p. 2273)

### **Socioeconomic Inequities**

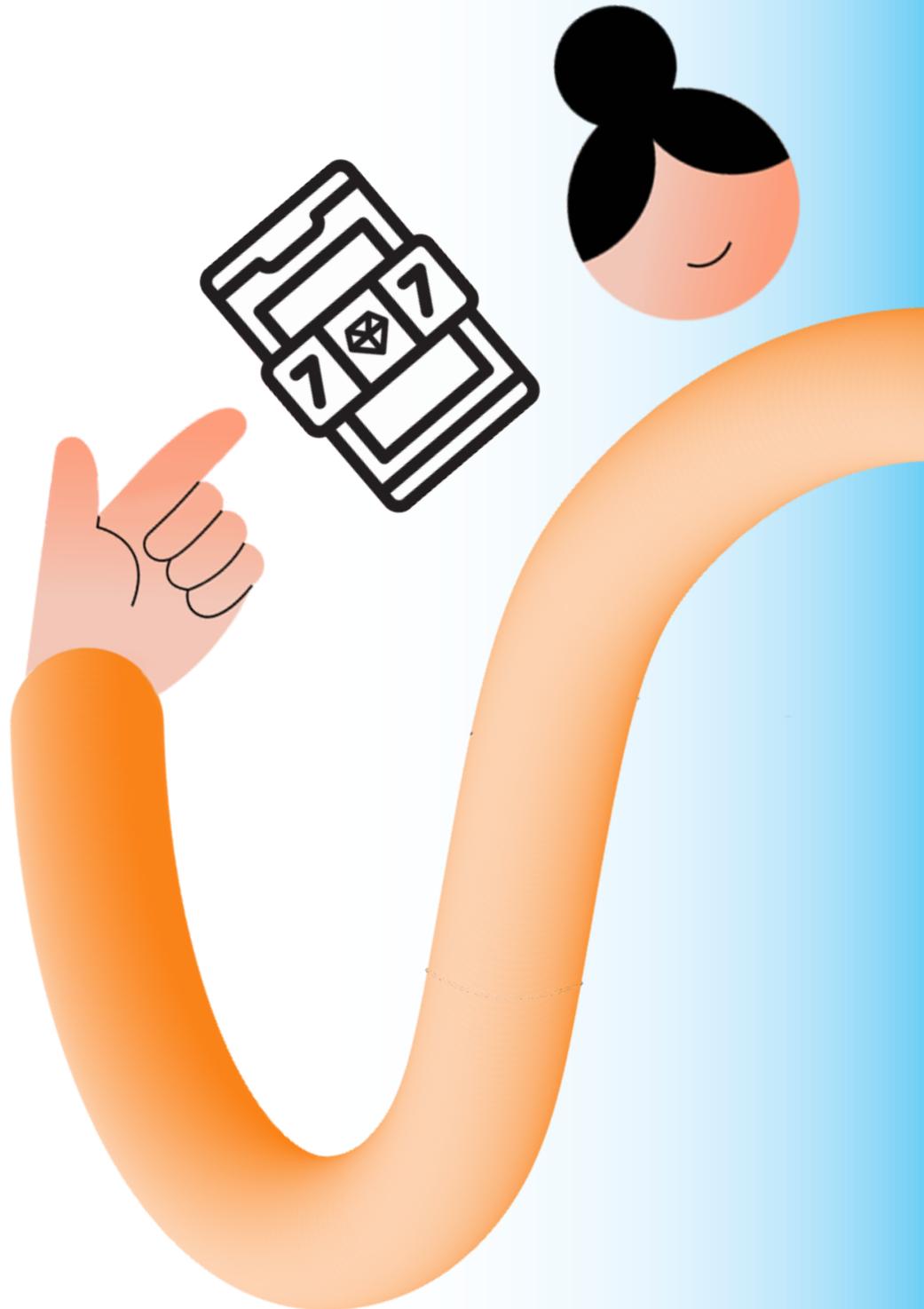
Individuals' socioeconomic circumstances are often linked to vulnerability to risk and harmful outcomes, in many areas of life. Evidence indicates this is certainly the case for socioeconomically disadvantaged young people and vulnerability to gambling risk and harm.

#### ***The burden of gambling harm falls on the least advantaged***

Youth in lower socioeconomic circumstances are at higher risk. Studies have found those from lower social class backgrounds or disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to engage in problem and illegal gambling (Barnes et al., 2015). A study in Italy found the social cost of gambling is increasingly concentrated among those of younger age, lower income, and poorer working conditions (Resce et al., 2019).

Public Health England (2021) also found that gambling is related to health inequities, with the highest prevalence of problem gambling among people with poor health, low life satisfaction and well-being. In a scoping review, researchers found problem gambling is associated with standard poverty measures: being unemployed, having unstable housing or being homeless, having low income, and living in a disadvantaged neighborhood (Hahmann et al., 2021).

# The Symposium



## Symposium Overview

### Objectives

The Symposium had two overarching objectives:

1. Increase participants' knowledge and understanding of the issue of young people and gambling
2. Develop practical strategies and tools to foster progress on the issue

### Learning Outcomes

To meet the Symposium objectives, it was important to establish the learning outcomes participants would gain. The outcomes were divided into two categories which aligned with the Symposium objectives.

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*1. Increase knowledge & understanding of the issue, by learning about:*

---

i. Prevalence of gambling and harms among youth/young people

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ii. Risks associated with youth/young people gambling  
(including vulnerabilities and protective factors)

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iii. Evolving role of gambling in the lives of youth/young adults  
(including new formats and increasing accessibility)

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iv. State of evidence (including key gaps)

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v. Example initiatives in comparable jurisdictions

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vi.. Roles that participants and their organizations could play in  
mitigating harm

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*2. Develop practical tools to foster progress, including:*

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i. Preliminary research agenda to fill evidence gaps

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ii. Preliminary set of practical initiatives

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iii. Collaborative relationships for sharing ideas and solutions

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## **Symposium Highlights**

The post-Symposium evaluation survey results indicate the Symposium was successful in meeting its objectives and generally delivering value to participants. 91% of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the Symposium increased their knowledge and understanding of the topic, and more than 60% agreed or strongly agreed that it helped develop practical strategies and tools. (It is hoped that this report furthers that objective by translating the Symposium's outputs into a practical set of priorities.) Conversations with attendees and survey responses revealed a few highlights that made the Symposium unique and impactful.

### **Real Connections**

The Symposium's size, venue, set-up, and programming were selected to foster an intimate and collaborative atmosphere. This was reflected in the survey results, with many respondents noting the networking and connections they made as important takeaways. Additionally, many attendees noted the participant introductions as useful for understanding who was in the room and setting a tone that encouraged new connections and conversations over the two days.

### **Diverse Population & Perspectives**

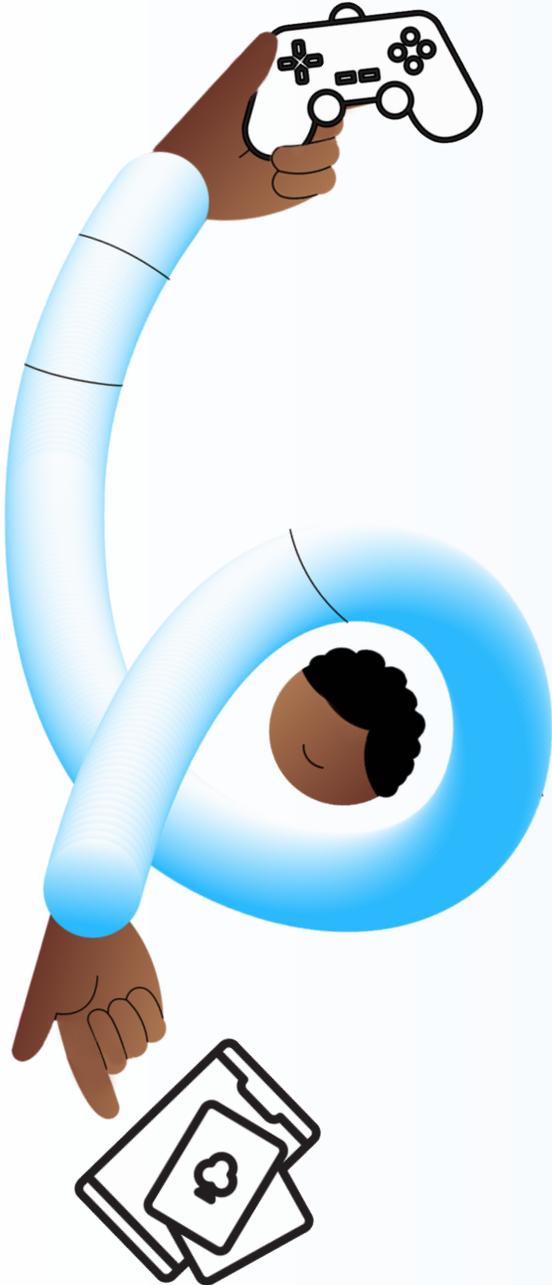
It was important for the Symposium to recognize that young people are a diverse population, impacted by varying risk factors and levels of harm. Survey respondents particularly appreciated the recognition of Indigenous perspectives and efforts to examine impacts on different ethnocultural groups. Many attendees noted the impact of sessions delivered by young Indigenous presenters and expressed the need for including diverse voices of young people in future efforts to address harm. Diversity was additionally reflected in the event's participants, with attendees representing a range of roles including regulators, operators, academic institutions, and community and treatment agencies focused on diverse populations.

### **Current Evidence & Pressing Issues**

As young people's relationship to gambling is constantly evolving, the Symposium covered the most up-to-date evidence and pressing issues. Knowledge sessions addressed emerging topics such as the increasing convergence of gambling and video gaming, the impacts of young people's exposure to gambling advertising, and the concerning new world of unregulated gambling marketing through influencers and social media.

### New Ideas for Progress

A key aspect of Partnership Symposia are the structured, hands-on strategy sessions for sharing and developing ideas for actions, initiatives, and collaborations that will drive progress on the issue of interest. The 2025 Symposium included three such facilitated strategy sessions, each kicked off by a panel discussion featuring relevant presenters to help generate initial ideas and priorities. The strategy sessions were rich with new ideas from a range of roles including front line workers, researchers, and community agencies. The output of the strategy sessions formed the core of the strategic priorities proposed in the final section.



# Evaluation Highlights



## Knowledge Session Summaries

The knowledge sessions covered three topics:

1. Young people's increasing exposure to gambling, specifically:
  - The nexus of video gaming and gambling
  - A vast new landscape of advertising, including unregulated forms
2. Factors placing some young people at greater risk, including:
  - Health inequities
  - Socio-demographic factors
  - Comorbidities
3. Guidance for new strategies and collaborations

Brief summaries are included for each session, organized by topic. For most sessions (except where authors shared confidential data and/or results), presentations are available via The Partnership's [website](#).

### Topic 1: Young People's Increasing Exposure to Gambling

The Nexus of Video Gaming and Gambling: Exploring the Rise of New Gambling Forms



#### Dr. Vivien Wen Li Anthony

Scientific Director of Video Gaming & Esports at the Rutgers Center for Gambling Studies

Dr. Anthony kicked off the knowledge sessions with her presentation on the convergence of gaming and gambling. Dr. Anthony provided an overview of the platforms facilitating this convergence, including Twitch, Kick, and other social media apps, as well as the mechanisms that closely resemble gambling which are increasingly being integrated into video games, such as microtransactions (e.g., loot boxes, skins), freemium models, and in-game/app purchases. She shared recent findings from the Rutgers Center for Gambling Studies demonstrating that purchasing loot boxes and betting on esports with skins is associated with significantly higher risk of gambling problems and harms, and that these behaviours are prominent among young gamers. Dr. Anthony concluded by discussing broader implications for policy and practice, including further research examining these behaviours and pushing for regulators and policy makers to recognize the potential risk of gambling-like in-game features.

*Gambling Availability and Advertising in Canada: Focus on Youth and Young Adults*



**Dr. Matthew Young**

Chief Research Officer, Greo Evidence Insights

Dr. Young was first in a series of three presentations on the evolving gambling advertising landscape, which is raising concerns around the world. Dr. Young described how the federal legalisation of single-event sports wagering (June 2021) and the opening of the Ontario gambling market (April 2022) have resulted in increased gambling advertising and participation, with a 300% increase in amount wagered in Ontario between 2022-23 and 2023-24. He outlined the key concerns raised by excessive advertising, particularly the normalization of gambling to which young people are especially vulnerable, and the inexplicit targeting of young people, particularly males. Dr. Young stressed the need for a pan-Canadian strategy, including national advertising codes such as those in place for the alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis sectors. Specifically, he expressed the need to support and push for the passing of Bill S-211 (An Act respecting a national framework on sports betting advertising; formerly S-269), reintroduced in June 2025 and currently making its way through the legislative process.

*Gambling Marketing Exposure on Television in Canada: Results from an Observational Study*



**Dr. Tara Elton-Marshall**

Associate Professor, School of Epidemiology and Public Health

Dr. Elton-Marshall presented new, unpublished results from a recent observational study examining gambling marketing exposure and marketing techniques and implications for youth. She shared findings supporting Dr. Young's concerns that exposure to gambling marketing is associated with positive attitudes, intentions, and gambling behaviour and normalizes gambling for children and youth. Her study found that 72% of gambling ads aired during programs suitable for children (E-rated), a significant portion employed techniques appealing to children, and that there is a significant integration between gambling advertising and sports broadcasts. Dr. Elton-Marshall echoed Dr. Young's call for action on Bill S-211 to impose national advertising standards.

*Influencer Marketing:  
An Academic and Insider  
Perspective*



**Brady Simpson**

PhD student,  
University of Calgary

Brady delivered a fascinating presentation on the emerging area of influencer-driven gambling marketing – particularly within the video gaming space – based on his personal experience as a gaming influencer as well as ongoing research he is conducting at the University of Calgary. He shared alarming insights into the tactics game developers use to promote the ultra-profitable gambling-like mechanisms within games, including lucrative agreements with influencers and advertising via social media – both unregulated forms of marketing that reach young people more than any other age group. Brady concluded that such tactics will be difficult to stop due to the unbordered nature of the online space, so that focusing on educating young people and fostering critical thinking will be key to limiting their influence.

## Topic 2: Factors Placing Some Youth at Greater Risk

*Confronting Indigenous Rights  
in Gaming: A View from the  
Past to Present*



**Dr. Darrel Maniwabi**

Associate Professor, Northern  
Ontario School of Medicine  
(NOSM)

In Canada, 10–20% of the Indigenous population will experience some gambling problems in their lives, compared to rates between 0.6% – 3% found in national general population prevalence studies. While it's important to acknowledge this disparity, Dr. Maniwabi's presentation highlighted the importance of understanding the historical role of gambling in Indigenous societies, and their relationship to gambling as a right and pathway to decolonizing state relationships with Indigenous societies. Dr. Maniwabi discussed the importance of Two Row solutions for addressing gambling harm, based on mutual respect and recognition of distinct identities and ways of life.

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<sup>1</sup> Bouguettaya et al., 2020

<sup>2</sup> Thomas et al., 2023

## Racial Differences in Gambling-Related Risk Factors and Consequences Among Black Youth and White Youth



### **Dr. Manik Ahuja**

Assistant Professor, Health Services Management and Policy, East Tennessee State University

Black youth are burdened with higher rates of heavy gambling and worse gambling-related consequences in comparison to White youth. Dr. Ahuja presented findings from two US studies examining differences in gambling behaviours and harms between Black and White youth. His findings reveal that Black youth are more likely than White youth to endorse suicidal ideation linked to gambling. Additionally, Black young people who gamble are more likely to engage in other substances including cannabis and alcohol. To begin to address these inequities, Dr. Ahuja stressed the need for community-based, highly localized, and culturally appropriate research and solutions that recognize racial differences.

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## The Evolution of Online Gambling Among Emerging Adults: Insights from New Jersey Prevalence Studies in 2017 and 2023



### **Dr. Lia Nower**

Associate Dean for Research & Director of the Rutgers Center for Gambling Studies

Dr. Nower presented findings on young people's gambling behaviours, risk and harm from two New Jersey prevalence studies published in 2017 and 2023. Their studies found that significant portions of emerging adults engage in risky gambling behaviours, including gambling once a week or more (36%), gambling both online and in land-based venues (41%), and that emerging adults are three times more high risk gamblers (18%) compared to all adults (6%). Analyses revealed that the influence of family and household members who engage in addictive behaviours is predictive of future gambling problems among emerging adults, suggesting that prevention efforts should focus on family systems, particularly targeting parents and siblings who gamble.

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<sup>3</sup> Breen & Gainsbury, 2013

<sup>4</sup> Williams et al., 2020

Integrating the standard life reinforcers theory with risk and prevention literature for youth gambling



**Dr. Kristy Kowatch**

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology & Health Services, University of Saskatchewan

Dr. Kowatch proposed a theoretical extension of the Standard Life Reinforcers (SLR's) theory – originally proposed to develop a fulsome understanding of alcohol use within First Nation groups – to help understand the heightened risk for some populations of young people. Dr. Kowatch used scientific evidence on social determinants of health and risk factors to demonstrate that youth in communities with lower access to meaningful employment, positive family and friend relationships, as well as financial stability, experience increased susceptibility to the immediately reinforcing properties of gambling. Dr. Kowatch highlighted the need to understand this context, integrate lived experience, increase protective factors, and include intergenerational and community initiatives for developing meaningful interventions.

**Topic 3: Guidance for New Strategies & Collaborations**

Designing Effective Gambling Interventions for Young People: What Does the Research Tell Us



**Dr. Jeffrey Derevensky**

Director, International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behaviors

Dr. Derevensky shared insights on designing effective prevention initiatives, based on his 20+ years at the forefront of leading-edge research aimed at identifying and understanding the critical factors related to youth gambling issues. He discussed the most important considerations including focusing on resilience, protective factors, and personal competence; conducting initiatives in school environments; and evaluating effectiveness prior to widespread implementation.

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<sup>5</sup> Spillane & Smith, 2007

Saskatchewan's Youth  
Gambling Awareness Program:  
A Community Approach



**Sabrina Lybeck**

Southern Coordinator,  
Saskatchewan Gambling  
Awareness Program (GAP)

Sabrina presented an overview of the work the Gambling Awareness Program (GAP) does in Saskatchewan, where it has operated for over 30 years. She shared valuable learnings for prevention and education initiatives, particularly the GAP's independence and autonomy in designing and implementing programming, which allows it to be highly adaptable and responsive to emerging needs and populations. Sabrina additionally highlighted the GAP's connection and accessibility to its communities as a key driver of its success and longevity.

The Gamification of Indigenous  
Digital Futures: Learnings from  
a Youth-led Project



**Meschaquin Neekan**

Youth Leader, Indige-Spheres to  
Empowerment

Meschaquin delivered one of the most impactful sessions of the Symposium, sharing his personal experience and perspective on the important role of gaming for some Indigenous young people. He described the ways gaming and other digital spaces can provide a much-needed community, where young people can express themselves, engage with peers, and experience and share accomplishments. Meschaquin stressed the importance of including the voices of young people in efforts to prevent and reduce harm, an approach which has been conspicuously missing from mainstream efforts.

Redefining Power in Gaming:  
A Critical Look at Developer  
and Community Agency

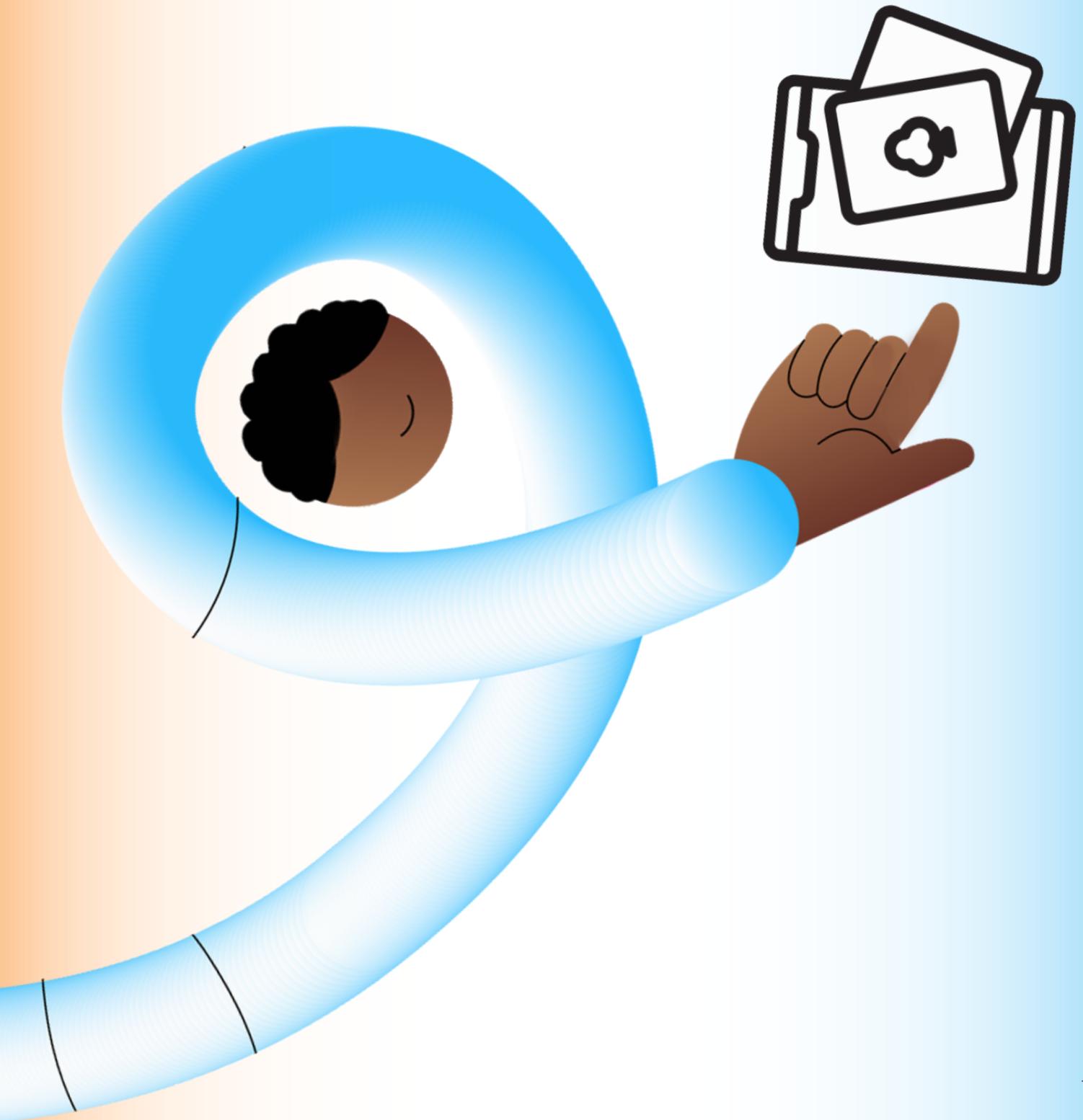


**Cait Salmon**

Digital Artist & Storyteller

Cait provided another unique perspective on gaming from a young Indigenous experience. She discussed the increasing diversity of narratives, including Indigenous stories, being represented in the gaming community through games released by independent developers. Echoing Meschaquin's perspective, Cait described how communities can be empowered through representation in gaming and digital spaces. Cait's presentation further demonstrated the need to include young people in conversations and collaborations for preventing harm, to better understand the context in which it occurs as well as the true experiences of those we are seeking to protect.

# Strategic Priorities



## Strategic Priorities

Three facilitated strategy sessions were held over the Symposium's two days. The purpose of the first session was to begin with brainstorming the most important gaps, both in evidence and collaborations, which may be obstacles to meaningful progress on reducing gambling harm to young people. The next two sessions built on those ideas, with the third and final session featuring in-depth discussions of specific priorities and initiatives for multiple stakeholders and populations of interest. Detailed notes from each strategy session are included as an appendix.

The set of strategic priorities proposed below reflect the rich contributions and discussions that occurred over the Symposium's two days. The priorities include areas of research that should be pursued, efforts to impact policy, and leadership and coordination for the planning and action needed for participants to build on the Symposium's work reducing gambling harm to young people. Next steps, timelines, and accountable stakeholders are proposed for each strategy.

### Research Priorities

Increasing the evidence base is often one of the first suggestions when considering how to make progress on an issue of interest. While it can seem like an obvious step, there are significant challenges to conducting new research. Most importantly, research funding in Canada is increasingly limited. The limited funds available are often committed to large institutions with established research programs and agendas, leaving little room for new priorities or community-based research.

Recognizing the complexity and challenges around funding, it remains important to identify the key gaps in evidence, which could drive progress on reducing gambling harm to young people. Three key research priorities emerged from the Symposium:

1. **Engage young people** to develop a more accurate and holistic understanding of risks and harms, as well as feasible solutions

There was broad consensus that young people have not been adequately involved to date in building the evidence base nor in developing interventions, and that this should change. Engaging directly with young people will provide a better understanding of the influence and impacts



gambling has on their lives, and of the approaches and features that are important in the design of interventions.

**2. Understand impacts to individual populations** (e.g., ethnocultural, Indigenous, gender, 2SLGBTQ+ communities) to inform tailored interventions

We know from research in global jurisdictions that certain communities of young people are more vulnerable to harm. Participants agreed that there is a lack of Canadian research examining gambling harm among specific communities (e.g., ethnocultural, gender, 2SLGBTQ+) within the broader population of young people. This includes a notable gap in our understanding of the context and impacts of gambling among Indigenous young people. To identify which populations are at greatest risk in Canada and develop appropriate interventions that will maximize harm reduction, it is important to enhance the body of evidence with greater population- and community-level data.

\*Table applies to priorities 1 & 2 above

Key Stakeholders	Next Steps
Organizations with mandates to fund/ conduct research on gambling harm or on wellbeing of young people <i>e.g., RGC, Greo, CCSA, CAMH, CMHA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish topics/approaches as priorities</li> <li>• Fund or launch calls for proposals</li> <li>• Prioritize community-engaged research</li> </ul>
Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish collaborations with community-based organizations</li> <li>• Develop proposals, apply for funding</li> </ul>
Community-based organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with researchers to identify priorities, share knowledge, and conduct research</li> </ul>
Indigenous communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to share research and knowledge to help inform appropriate strategies</li> </ul>

### 3. Establish research hubs to enable data-driven regulation and policy

Dr. Nower’s presentation leveraging operator player data analyzed over nine years at Rutgers University in New Jersey revealed the importance of a centralized research hub. Research hubs would monitor the real impacts of gambling on the general population and particularly young adults and enable data-driven updates to regulation and policy to reduce harm.

Key Stakeholders	Next Steps
Legislators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish priority to monitor impact of gambling broadly and on young people in particular</li><li>• Assign funding accountability (New Jersey model requires operators to fund)</li><li>• Incorporate into regulatory framework</li></ul>
Gambling regulators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implement requirement for annual data sharing by operators</li><li>• Establish funding structure</li><li>• Establish relationship with academic/ research institutes for analyses and reporting</li><li>• Work with research partner to establish data collection and reporting protocols/schedules</li></ul>
Gambling operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fund program in accordance with regulator’s structure</li><li>• Submit annual data</li></ul>
Academic/research institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allocate or build technological and human infrastructure</li><li>• Conduct analyses</li><li>• Translate findings into recommendations to inform practice</li><li>• Work with regulator, operators to establish data collection and reporting protocols/ schedules</li></ul>

## Policy Efforts

A strong message from presenters and participants was that the most impactful changes occur at the policy level. In addition to improving the evidence base as described above, two approaches for achieving policy change arose from the Symposium discussions and evaluation feedback. The first was an immediate and tangible action participants could take on the exposure of young people to gambling advertising, and the second was for participants to engage local stakeholders in efforts to prevent and reduce harm to youth and young adults.

### 1. Consider supporting Bill S-211, *An Act respecting a national framework on sports betting advertising*

The impact of gambling advertising on young people is a significant concern, emphasized in multiple presentations and conversations that took place over the course of the Symposium. While there are many aspects of the issue that require urgent attention, Dr. Young and Dr. Elton-Marshall spoke to the importance of expressing support for Bill S-211 (formerly S-269), currently progressing through the legislative process. Speakers proposed that participants could consider reviewing the proposed [bill](#) and contacting their [Member of Parliament \(MP\)](#) to express support.

### 2. Engage local stakeholders to influence policy

The leadership and coordination initiative outlined in the next section proposes a mechanism for advocating for policy change at a national level. To complement and contribute to these efforts, participants were encouraged to continue to engage and educate local stakeholders who may have influence over policy in their jurisdictions. Potential targets may include provincial ministries responsible for the health of young people, youth leadership organizations, etc.

## Leadership and Coordination

Discussions throughout the event and evaluation survey comments revealed a desire to formalize and build on the work of the Symposium. This could be achieved by the establishment of a national, multi-stakeholder structure to coordinate efforts and achieve policy change.

1. **Seek a coordinating body and/or structure** to take forward work on reducing gambling harm to young people.

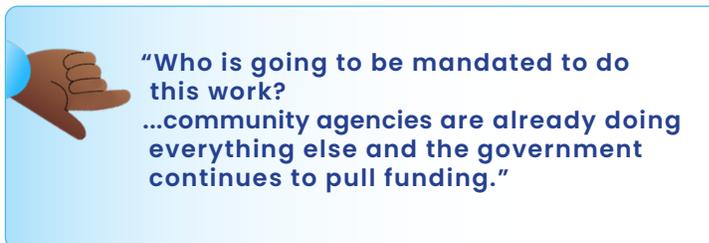
An existing organization or collaborative structure could be identified to lead and coordinate continued engagement of key stakeholders and communities so they can carry forward the broader work that began at the Symposium. This body would be able to raise awareness, underline the urgency, and press for needed changes to reduce gambling harm for young people. A new or existing organization could be identified to provide leadership, infrastructure, and administrative support. The leadership organization could provide initial funding or help identify and facilitate other potential sources of support.

The organization's mandate could include five initial responsibilities:

1. Grow the participant base to include stakeholders who were not part of the Symposium but can play an important role (e.g., colleges and universities, youth leadership groups, etc.).
2. Monitor the evidence for new developments, translate and share with members on an ongoing basis.
3. Develop and share tools to support members in effecting change in their communities, including ongoing in-person/online learning and strategy development opportunities.
4. Support and establish collaborations between researchers and community agencies, as well as other members (e.g., front-line workers).
5. Educate policy makers and articulate/advocate for practical changes they can make to better understand and address the issue.

## Initial next steps to establish such leadership include:

- Identify an organization to act as administrator
  - Possible candidates include RGC, Greo, CAMH, CCSA, CMHA, etc.
- Identify funding source(s)
- Define terms of reference (purpose, scope, working arrangements)
- Define coalition mandate



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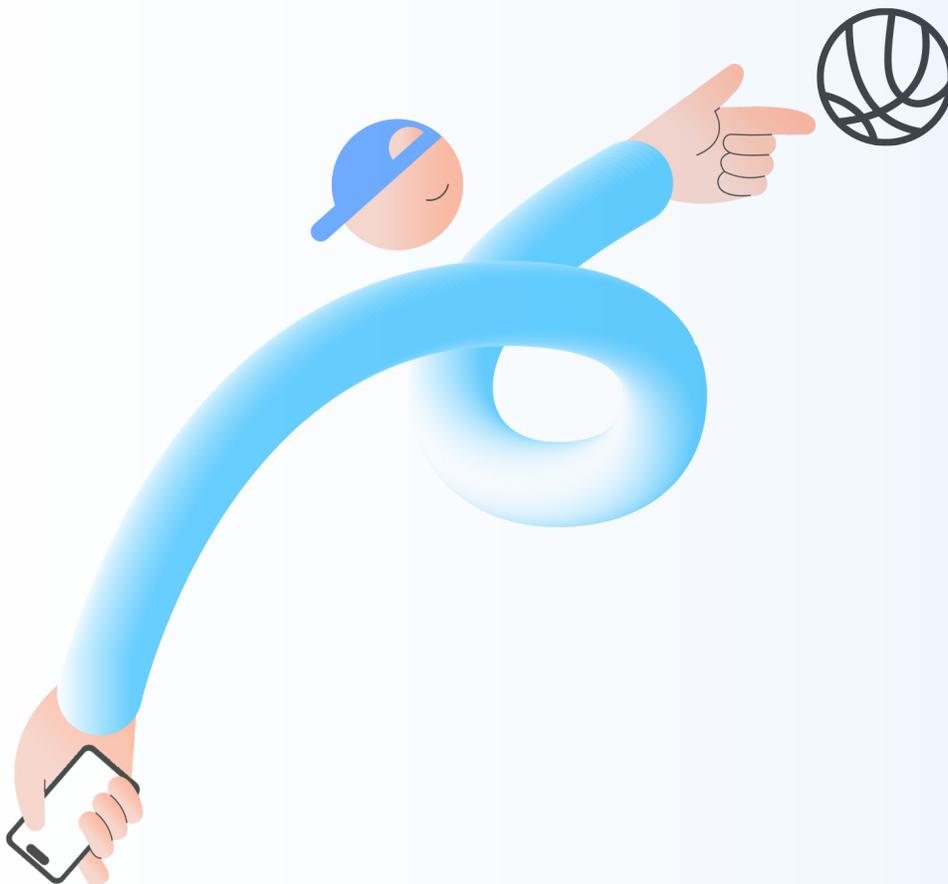
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## Appendix: Strategy Session Notes

### Key Evidence Gaps

- Broadened definition of gambling, including non-traditional activities
- Clearly define age group of interest (youth, young adults)
- Youth-centered research
  - Involve young people directly
- Better data, population surveillance and monitoring - national participation rates, financial/wagering data, etc.
- Explore individual populations
  - Data by race/ethnicity, gender
  - Better understanding of Indigenous gambling (historical context, impacts)
- Participatory research
- Inclusive research
- Better knowledge translation: evidence must be translated in meaningful, usable ways that reach young people, policy makers, community organizations, front-line workers, etc.

### Approaches & Initiatives

#### Elevate youth perspectives through...

- Youth-centred research and experience
- Hearing their stories, perspectives, including potential traumas
  - Isolation and value of virtual worlds
  - Youth are feeling alone, emptiness
  - Impact of pandemic on loneliness and ability to connect in real life
- Bringing young people into conversations, professional gatherings
- Identify what alternatives can be suggested to young people, in place of what is harming them

#### Recognize and respect Indigenous autonomy by...

- Ensuring /prioritizing culturally-informed research and interventions
  - Ensuring cultural safety
  - Encouraging hope meaning purpose and belonging
- Not homogenizing Indigeneity (as done in most research)
- Not looking at harm from the lens of colonialism

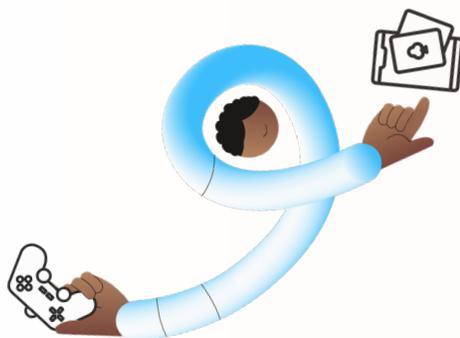
- Accurately reflecting context
- Employing qualitative approaches
- Considering critical voices
- Asking “what is the problem” vs. saying “this is the problem”
- Connecting with Leaders in their own communities
- Land-based activities address digitization and legacy of colonialism
- Seeking a greater insight into the Indigenous experience of gambling

### **Need for racially and culturally informed approaches**

- Seek out ways to work with Indigenous and Black communities, other underserved communities
- Large organizations must reach out to smaller community-based organizations
- Work together, not as heroes, saviours
- Express intention and drive to do things meaningfully
- Acknowledge (and prevent) research being exploitative
- Build resilience in communities through multi-disciplinary approaches

### **Design interventions that...**

- Interact vs. intervene, more reciprocal, desire to work together
- Reach young people in an accessible, approachable way (e.g., social media)
- Emphasize protective factors (over harms)
- Integrate voices of positive players
- Facilitate communication channels with parents, create opportunities for dialogue
- Caution: some school curricula are demonstrated to encourage students to gamble



## **Addressing sports betting among young people**

- Reframe sports for young people, involve coaches
- Crown operators should use sponsorships in a different way – help with resilience, make athletes less vulnerable to predation
- Involve other sporting organizations – Canadian Centre for Sports Excellence, sports leagues
- Training for parents and coaches
- Code of conduct for student athletes
- Note: ongoing RGC research and training module for coaches and authority figures

## **Other general approaches**

- Think about issues in new ways, try new things
- Facilitate relationships among regulators, treatment, prevention
  - Operators and regulators need to be exposed to research and lived experience
- Moving from reducing gambling harm to reducing gambling risk
- Make new connections/collaborations
- Focus on people post-treatment

## **Support front-line workers**

- A lot of networks disrupted after Covid – bringing on new people who need experience
- Find ways to pass on research to drive solutions for individual communities, particularly evaluations
- Explore practice-informed research, collaborations between established researchers and front-line workers
- Establish a community of practice for workers to network with each other
- Advocate for proper training to meet needs, as gambling problems are not being identified soon enough through traditional treatment avenues

## **Work towards changes at the national level**

- Push for Bill S-211 (269), sponsored by Sen. Deacon
- Need to think on a macro level
- Employ big data, GIS mapping
  - Visual depictions of vulnerable populations, to get services targeted to those communities

- Require a portion of gambling revenues be directed to research (New Jersey model)
- U.S. approach to research funding – no federal funding, seek funding from operators, private foundations, internal funding from universities
- Expand nationally as an organization – include providers, researchers, regulators, policy makers to collaborate (NCPG model)
  - Low investment, but need to be able to talk to each other in a meaningful way
- Ideal: national regulatory body like UKGC, standardized regulation across provinces
- Affordability approaches
- Greater enforcement, fines





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