MHCC ACT Position Statement:

Gambling in the ACT

MHCC's Position

1. Gambling can cause immense harm in a person's life, including to their mental health, and these harms must be reduced.
2. Gambling harms must be prevented in the first instance, through preventative measures which focus on addressing and strengthening the social determinants of health and reducing loneliness in the ACT community.
3. The ACT community must be equipped with the right service supports, for people impacted by gambling harms and their support networks.

Background

The Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT (MHCC ACT) recognises the detrimental impacts that gambling harms can have on individuals and their support networks. According to the ACT Gambling Survey in 2024, one in six Canberrans were affected by gambling harms, a marked increase from 2019 figures.

Gambling is the engagement in a range of activities where people place money on an uncertain outcome, in an attempt to win something of value, or gain a desired outcome. Gambling can take many forms, including:

- Lotteries
- Electronic gaming machines
- Casino games
- Instant lotteries
- Sports betting
- Horse-race betting
- Card games and Bingo
- Internet gaming

Many individuals who partake in gambling activities are men, aged 18-24, with electronic gaming machines being disproportionately used by this cohort.

The intersection between gambling harm and mental health problems

Gambling harms are the unfavourable consequences that can be experienced, by either individuals who partake in gambling activities, or by others who are connected to someone who gambles.

Gambling harm can take many forms, such as:

- Financial stress
- Relationship issues
- Work-related stress

- Psychological issues
- Health issues

Gambling harms can have significant impacts upon and disrupt people's lives. It can affect one's relationships, employment, financial stability, and daily functioning, and these impacts can often extend beyond the individual, reaching family, partners, children and friends. The addictive nature of gambling and the associated harms and risks can become long-term, leading to ongoing mental health challenges, as well as negatively impacting upon other aspects of an individual's life, such as relationships and financial outcomes.

Research has shown that around 40% of people who experience gambling harm, have depression and/or anxiety, and feelings such as shame, discomfort, and a low self-esteem, highlighting the interplay between low levels of wellbeing, and high levels of psychological distress and gambling. This is supported by research undertaken by the Australian National University in 2025, which highlighted social isolation to be a large driver of risky gambling behaviours. Additionally, the findings identified that if risky gambling behaviours were not addressed, the risk of individuals developing increased levels of loneliness and ill-mental health was amplified.

For many people who seek help, the presenting issue is not the gambling behaviours themselves, but rather a mental health concern that is likely caused by, impacted, or worsened by gambling-related harms. Individuals often do not recognise or notice this connection or may choose to avoid addressing the gambling behaviours due to the stigma associated with gambling, or the belief that the gambling behaviours are not problematic or important.

MHCC's Priorities

To prevent individuals from partaking in risky gambling activities, and to ensure gambling harms can be reduced, actionable steps need to be taken. MHCC is working toward achieving the following priorities:

1. **Increasing social connection within the ACT community**

MHCC will work toward reducing social isolation in the ACT community.

- Social isolation, loneliness, and a lack of social connection are key reasons as to why individuals partake in gambling behaviours. By addressing the need of social connection, individuals will be less likely to partake in risky gambling behaviours.

2. **Accessible gambling free spaces in ACT local areas**

MHCC aims to ensure that gambling free spaces become available in local areas for the ACT community.

- Many spaces in the ACT where people go to connect, socialise and enjoy time with loved ones, are shared with electronic gaming machines. These machines are often visible from the space's entrance, therefore encouraging individuals to partake in gambling behaviours.

3. **Banning of gambling advertisements in the ACT**

MHCC will take steps to work toward a state-wide ban of gambling advertisements in the ACT.

- Gambling advertisements are developed in a way which makes gambling look risk-free, fun and exciting. As well, gambling advertisements are often visible and are created to attract children, teenagers and young adults. Gambling should not be advertised to the ACT community as a glamorous activity.