

2014 ACT Gambling Prevalence Study Summary of Findings

The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission contracted The Australian National University's Centre for Gambling Research to undertake a comprehensive study of gambling and problem gambling in the ACT. *The 2014 Survey on Gambling, Health and Wellbeing in the ACT* surveyed 7,068 ACT residents in late 2014 and early 2015 and reports in detail on the prevalence of gambling in the Territory. The previous prevalence surveys on gambling in the ACT were undertaken in 2001 and 2009.

A summary comparison table between 2009 and 2014 findings is on page 2.

Major findings at a glance

Gambling Participation:

- participation in gambling activities has continued to fall over the last decade;
- total gambling expenditure fell by 19% from 2009 to 2014;
- around 45% of adults had not gambled in the last 12 months, up from 30% in 2009; and
- 20% of adults gambled on gaming machines at least once in the last year however less than 2% gambled on them once a week or more. In 2009, 30% of adults gambled on gaming machines at least once in the past year while 3% gambled on them at least once a week.

Gambling Harm (where relevant, 2009 figures are included in brackets after each 2014 figure for comparison):

- since 2009, the percentage of the ACT population reporting symptoms of moderate risk/problem gambling fell by about 0.8% but this change was not statistically significant;
- the level of problem gambling in the ACT, as measured by the widely used Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), is 0.4% (0.5% in 2009) which compares to 0.8% in New South Wales, 0.5% in Queensland, 0.6% in South Australia and 1.0% in Victoria;
- A further 1.1% (1.5% in 2009) of adults were found to be moderate risk problem gamblers, 3.9% (3.4% in 2009) low risk problem gamblers and 48.7% (62.1% in 2009) were non-problem gamblers;
- 10% (7.9% in 2009) of gamblers had at least one symptom of problem gambling, with 2.9% (2.9% in 2009) being classified as moderate risk or problem gamblers;
- problem gambling was fifteen times more common in high frequency gamblers (gambling weekly or more) compared to medium frequency gamblers (gambling monthly or more);

- over 26% (22.1% in 2009) of people losing \$5,000 or more annually were moderate risk or problem gamblers;
- of those that were identified as moderate risk or problem gamblers, 76% (92% in 2009) reported playing gaming machines (but not necessarily exclusively);
- moderate risk/problem gamblers tend to bet on a range of products – the average being four different products;
- compared to the rest of the population, a problem gambler is more likely to be male and less well educated;
- poor physical and mental health, smoking, and alcohol consumption were associated with problem gambling;
- less than 10% of people ever having gambling problems had ever received professional help for issues related to their gambling with a further 5% trying unsuccessfully to get help and 5% wanting but not trying to access help;
- people with gambling problems typically do not seek help until the consequences of their gambling are serious, the most common predictor of help seeking was feeling suicidal; and
- 15.8% of ACT adults have ever had a close family member with gambling issues.

The table below provides a comparison of key gambling prevalence statistics from the 2009 and 2014 ACT gambling prevalence surveys. The 2009 survey did not administer the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) to participants who gambled less than 12 times a year and lost less than \$2000. The 2014 survey included this group to gain a more complete picture of harms experienced from gambling. The *adjusted* 2014 results exclude this group to facilitate accurate comparison of results between the two surveys.

Comparison of key statistics 2009-2014

Category	2009 survey	2014 results (adjusted)	2014 survey	Number of ACT adults*
Problem gambling				
problem gamblers	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	1,110
moderate risk problem gamblers	1.5%	0.8%	1.1%	3,053
low risk problem gamblers	3.4%	2.1%	3.9%	10,825
total reporting symptoms of problem gambling	5.3%	3.3%	5.4%	14,988
non-problem gamblers	62.1%	50.9%	48.7%	135,171
non-gamblers	30.2%	45%	45%	124,901
Frequency of gambling				
high frequency gamblers (48+ times last year)	17.6%		12.1%	33,585
medium frequency gamblers (12-47 times last year)	17.1%		12.8%	35,527
low frequency gamblers (less than 12 times last year)	35.2%		30.2%	83,823
non-gamblers	30.2%		45%	124,901

Category	2009 survey	2014 results (adjusted)	2014 survey	Number of ACT adults*
Gambling expenditure (self-reported estimates)				
positive net expenditure (profit) in the last year	1.8%		3.6%	9,992
net expenditure (loss) of less than \$103 in the last year	65.1%		71.1%	197,344
net expenditure (loss) between \$103 and \$999 in the last year	22.8%		17.2%	47,740
net expenditure (loss) between \$1,000 and \$9,999 in the last year	9.0%		7.7%	21,327
net expenditure (loss) over \$10,000 in the last year	1.4%		0.4%	1,110

*Based on 2011 ACT ABS Census data, 277,558 persons over 18 years of age.

Findings in more detail

Gambling prevalence, frequency and expenditure

Between 2009 and 2014 the percentage of non gamblers rose from 30% to 45%. The number of people who gambled at least once in the last 12 months fell 3% between 2001 and 2009 and has fallen a further 14% since then. The percentage of people who gambled more than monthly fell from 17% to 13% between 2009 and 2014 and those who gambled weekly or more fell from 18% to 12%.

Participation rates for most types of gambling have fallen except sports & special events betting and bingo. There has been a corresponding drop in gambling expenditure across all activities amongst ACT adults (19%). The extent of the decrease suggests this is a result of changing spending patterns of individuals.

Problem gambling was strongly related to more frequent gambling. Gamblers who gambled at least weekly were twice as likely to be moderate risk gamblers and problem gambling was fifteen times more common compared to those that gambled at least monthly. This association was markedly stronger for gaming machine gamblers, strong for gambling on other activities excluding lotteries and scratch tickets and consistent with 2009 findings.

On average, gaming machine gamblers gambled for 47 minutes per session and 16 hours each year in 2014. High frequency gaming machine gamblers were three times more likely than other gaming machine gamblers to gamble for 2 hours or more per session and on average gambled for 120 hours per year.

Problem gambling amongst gaming machine gamblers was also strongly associated with the length of time of gambling sessions. Of those who gambled for less than an hour per session 3.3% were moderate risk/problem gamblers, rising to 10% for those playing between one

and two hours and 19.2% for those playing from more than two hours at a time in 2014. For 2009 these percentages were 2.4%, 11.1% and 26.3% respectively.

Half (51%) of the gamblers surveyed reported gambling on two or more activities and 11% of this group gambled on four or more activities. For high frequency gamblers this increased to 24% gambling on four or more activities in 2014 down from 32% in 2009.

Losing more than \$1,000 a year gambling was reported by 8% of ACT adults and 1% reported losing more than \$5,000. For high frequency gamblers these figures increased to over 50% losing more than \$1,000 a year and 9% losing more than \$5,000. In 2009 10% of adults lost more than \$1000 and 3.4% lost more than \$5000. These dollar figures are not adjusted for inflation.

Problem gambling

Problem Gambling Severity Index results indicated that:

- 0.4% of the ACT adult population were problem gamblers;
- 1.1% of adults were moderate risk problem gamblers;
- 3.9% were low risk problem gamblers; and
- 48.7 % were non-problem gamblers.

However, care must be exercised when assessments of risk or harm are based on the entire population, as this includes infrequent and non-gamblers. As the Productivity Commission's 2010 report on gambling notes, assessments should focus on the specific products most related to harm and the people who regularly use them.

Gambling on gaming machines in the last year was reported by 76% (92% in 2009) of moderate risk/problem gamblers compared to 36% (38% in 2009) of other gamblers. Compared to the rest of the population, problem gamblers are more likely to be male and less-well educated.

The 2014 adjusted prevalence results show a significant increase in the number of non-gamblers and significant decreases in the number of non-problem gamblers and low risk problem gamblers since 2009. During the same period, the proportion of moderate risk/problem gamblers has fallen from 2% to 1.2%. However this is a small change in a relatively small group of people and as such is not statistically significant.

Impacts of problem gambling on family

A close family member ever having a gambling issue was reported by 15.8% of ACT adults with 6.1% saying this had been in the last 12 months.

Where the gambling issue had occurred in the last 12 months, 38.8% of family members said the issue had affected them. Family members reported relationship and family impacts (92.7%), emotional impacts (86%) and financial impacts (47.8%).

The family members with gambling problems were often parents (27.6%) and spouses/partners (19.1%).

Gaming machines

In 2014, 19.9% of the ACT adult population gambled on gaming machines, down from 30.2% in 2009. Other gaming machine related findings include:

- 14% (16.8% in 2009) of gaming machine gamblers gambled weekly or more;
- 3.1% of gaming machine players reported losses of \$5,000 or more in the last year;
- 15.7% (15.2% in 2009) of gaming machine gamblers reported symptoms of problem gambling and 5.8% (6.6% in 2009) were moderate risk/problem gamblers;
- 76% (92% in 2009) of people identified as moderate risk/problem gamblers played gaming machines and this was the most common activity reported by this group;
- 61.2% of high frequency gaming machine gamblers reported losing more than \$2,000 in the last year and 29.1% lost \$5000 or more; and
- amongst gaming machine gamblers, non-problem gamblers accounted for:
 - 92.5% of low frequency gamblers;
 - 74.9% of medium frequency gamblers; and
 - 50.9% of high frequency gamblers.

Internet gambling

The survey provides the first comprehensive estimate of internet gambling in the ACT. The report revealed that 8.4% of adults used the internet to gamble. However, only 2.1% of ACT adults do so weekly or more often. The most common forms of online gambling were sports or special events gambling, horse or greyhound racing, and buying lottery tickets. Less than 1% of adults gambled on gaming machines or table games online.

In addition:

- 22% of high frequency internet gamblers lost \$2,000 or more in the last year including 11% who lost \$5,000 or more; and
- 23.7% of people using the internet to gamble reported at least some problem gambling symptoms compared to 7.4% of other gamblers.

Help seeking and service use

As in other Australian jurisdictions, the report found that receiving professional help for gambling problems is uncommon. Of those who self-identified as ever having problems with gambling, 17.9% had wanted help, 14% sought help and 8.9% received professional help. Although 58% of moderate risk/problem gamblers self-identified as having gambling-related problems in the last year, even when people recognised a problem with their gambling, a large proportion did not seek professional help.

People often wanted help for more than one issue:

- 89% wanted help cutting back or stopping their gambling;
- 66% wanted help with feelings of stress, anxiety or depression;
- 53% wanted help for financial issues; and

- 35% wanted help for relationship or family issues.

The report found that feeling suicidal was the most common predictor of help-seeking for gambling problems. 8 out of 10 people who sought help because of feeling suicidal received help.

Community attitudes

The survey also asked a number of questions relating to participants' attitudes towards gaming activity:

- the percentage of people agreeing that gambling does more good than harm continued to decrease, 11.6% in 2001, 9.1% in 2009 and 7.3% in 2014;
- gaming machines and gambling over the internet were seen to be harmful with 86.2% and 84.1% of adults respectively disagreeing that these activities did more good than harm;
- 53.7% of people agreed that ATMs should be allowed in gaming machine venues up from 24% in 2009; and
- 86% of respondents supported an ATM cash withdrawal limit of \$250 or less, per card, per day.

Knowledge of the ACT's self-exclusion from gambling program was reported by 45.5% of gaming machine gamblers. This rose to 72.3% for low-risk gamblers and 77.6% for moderate risk/problem gaming machine gamblers.

Support is available

Anyone experiencing problems with their gambling is encouraged to seek assistance. Confidential help is available anytime at no charge by phoning the national gambling helpline on 1800 858 858 or through the national online help service at:

www.gamblinghelponline.org.au