



**A project by Youth Coalition of the ACT with ClubsACT**



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The Youth Coalition of the ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. The Youth Coalition of the ACT celebrates Indigenous cultures and the invaluable contribution they make to our community.

At Odds: Young People and Gambling in the ACT Project Final Report

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## Executive summary

Very little research has been carried out on gambling among young adults in the ACT or Australia. Awareness campaigns targeting young people have also been uncommon. The action research project *At Odds: Young People and Gambling* is a first of its type in the ACT. The project was designed to specifically target young adults aged 18 – 30, to raise awareness of the indicators of harmful / risky behaviour in relation to gambling, and to help inform and support peers and family members. The pilot phase of this project ran from October 2015 - March 2017 and was coordinated by the Youth Coalition of the ACT in collaboration with ClubsACT. The project initially entailed a research component, the results of which later guided the development of trial awareness raising materials. The project team engaged with young people, as well as community and industry sector and academic representatives, during the research and trial campaign processes.

Much of the data from the research indicate that the topic is very complex, varied and nuanced, especially as the project focused on all forms of gambling within a broad age range of “young people”. Many differences were revealed between participants in patterns of gambling, characteristics of harmful gambling and help-seeking behaviour. National data suggests that many young people in this age group face more gambling harm than other age groups (Nekich and Ohtsuka 2016). This surprised some participants and stakeholders, as they believed this was an issue that mostly affected older people. There was also a perception among many participants that sports-betting was more common among young adults than Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM)<sup>1</sup> usage. However our survey results and national data suggest that EGM use is the most common form of gambling among young adults in the ACT, even though online sports gambling is rapidly growing within this age group. As most participant’s experiences and reflections were based on EGMs, much of this report is focused on perspectives and usage of EGMs.

Our data suggest that many characteristics of harmful gambling behaviours for young adults are similar in many ways to those reported for adults more generally in national data (Hing *et al.* 2016), e.g. tendencies to be evasive about gambling behaviour, experience of feeling shame associated with gambling harm, and low levels of self exclusion and help seeking. However, our qualitative research indicates that some of these characteristics may be more pronounced for younger people, for various reasons. For example, there may be very strong social pressures on young people to gamble and attend EGM venues and sporting events; certain signs may be less obvious or may be overlooked in young people because of differences in lifestyle behaviour, life goals, financial demands and obligations of young people. In addition there may be differences in expectations regarding emotional regulation, and ways of solving personal problems and communicating with others.

Many participants and some venue staff reported that young adults tend to use EGMs in ways that are “hard and fast” and often on weekends and late at night. Initially behaviour might start

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<sup>1</sup> EGM's are electronic gambling machines with three or more reels which spin when a button is pushed.

<sup>2</sup> Action research starts with research on key issues among affected people, and leads on to “action” informed by the research, e.g.,

as social, but sometimes turns more elusive and independent, and involves moving between different clubs. Participants commonly talked about the normality of gambling in Australian society, and the (contradictory) tendency not to talk about when gambling becomes harmful. There is a lot of shame associated with harmful gambling, yet many people do not perceive harmful gambling as being as serious as other social issues affecting young people, such as substance abuse and mental illness. However, young people who had been exposed to a friend or family member who had been negatively affected by gambling often perceived gambling as very dangerous.

Motivations for gambling were complex and multi-layered. Those who were struggling with gambling often talked about the confusing combination of desire and feelings; there were “parts of them that wanted to gamble and other parts that did not”. The research suggested that many participants underestimated or denied the extent that gambling impacts on their lives, and often felt confident on some level that they could reduce or stop gambling at a later time, and be unlikely to have a relapse. There was strong apprehension about contacting professional help services, and the few participants who had sought professional support did not persevere for long. Many said they needed to hit rock bottom and/or experience other problems before seeking help. Most participants who were facing gambling harm had not told friends or family, or sought other support. Those who thought they had a friend facing harmful gambling said they would like to help them, but felt tentative about doing so. All participants considered this a very sensitive topic, especially as it involves money, and many commented they would want to feel very certain that their friend was struggling before intervening. A few participants explained that they used humour or teasing to broach the subject with certain friends they thought were struggling with gambling.

Participants suggested a broad range of ideas for raising public awareness about the topic. Commonly it was explained that negative or autocratic messages are unlikely to be effective. Participants all believed that stigma needs to be reduced by encouraging more public conversations about the topic and/or raising general awareness. A large proportion of participants suggested this could be through sharing stories of peoples’ gambling experiences or the use of other awareness raising materials. Those who had been impacted by their own gambling, or others stressed the importance of encouraging people to become more aware of their own gambling behaviours and the impact it has on family and friends, as well as helping people to empathetically communicate with others on the topic. There was also a strong call to publicly debunk many of the myths and misperceptions associated with gambling, especially around EGMs. Almost all participants suggested that people need to be more aware of the various signs and nuances of harmful gambling.

Informed by the research, a series of trial campaign materials were developed later in this pilot project, including a website, digital stories, video interviews, social media channels, posters, coasters and wallet cards and an advertisement. These materials were designed with creative young professionals and drawing from feedback from participants and a project reference group.

The communication materials were designed to raise awareness about gambling by young

people, share experiences and to encourage conversations about the topic, and to increase help seeking behaviour. Because they were launched late in this project, it is difficult to evaluate their impact at this early stage. To date there has been a high number of interactions with the website and digital stories. Feedback so far suggests that young people commonly put a strong emphasis on simple, yet engaging design. Videos have been considered important in this project. Most participants expressed they preferred short, humorous, yet impactful films. A range of recommendations around working with young people and engaging on this topic are outlined in Section 6. These include themes considered important to consider and ideas for campaign materials and messages. It is argued that one of the key considerations important in developing a campaign around gambling with young people is to shift away from concepts of individual responsibility, and encourage more community involvement and discussion around harmful gambling.

Helpful insights emerged from this project that can be used to help guide future engagement and awareness-raising on harmful gambling among young adults (18-30 years) in the ACT. It is important to note that this is a complex and evolving topic area that is rapidly changing socially and politically. Any future campaigns should be informed by research that is current or has data collection, analysis and continuous evaluation embedded within it.

# 1. Overview

## 1.1 Project background

In October 2015 the Youth Coalition of the ACT, the peak body for youth affairs in the Territory, received funding under the Problem Gambling Assistance Fund from the Gambling and Racing Commission to implement a “pilot” of the Young People and Gambling in the ACT project—after ClubsACT proposed the project. A partnership was developed between the Youth Coalition and ClubsACT to help support the project.

The Young People and Gambling in the ACT pilot project is designed to specifically target young adults aged 18 – 30, to raise young people’s awareness of the indicators of harmful / risky behaviour in relation to gambling, and to help support their peers.

The pilot phase of this project was run from October 2015-March 2017. The objectives of the Young People and Gambling Project were to:

- Gain a clearer understanding of young people’s (aged 18-30) perceptions of gambling and risky behaviour in relation to gambling;
- Raise young people’s awareness of the indicators of harmful / risky behaviour in relation to gambling, particularly for their age group;
- Provide young people with strategies on how to communicate effectively with a friend whose gambling behaviour may be putting them at risk;
- Develop strategies that help remove the barriers to young people seeking help for or interrupting risky gambling behaviours (de-stigmatise); and
- Engage young people in a campaign to influence their peers to identify and address harmful / risky behaviour in relation to gambling.

## 1.2 Evolution of the project

At the start of this pilot project, the intention was to build upon (where appropriate) and adapt the successful strategies of the Champions ACT project (around binge drinking among young people), which was implemented by the Youth Coalition in 2012-14. Our early analysis indicated that adopting a similar approach for the topic of gambling would be inappropriate, and would be unlikely to be effective as a first stage of this project.

Through carrying out the preliminary part of our research project it became apparent that gambling is a very broad and nuanced topic — and that harmful gambling and help seeking tendencies vary markedly between individuals. Our discussions with stakeholders, review of literature, and analysis of primary data confirmed that this complex topic also varies subtly in different situations, and that gambling harm and addiction is at a very different stage culturally to other addiction issues that affect young people in Australia (e.g. drugs, smoking and alcohol). This indicated to us that special caution should be taken in developing an awareness campaign around this topic for young people, especially where the intention is to borrow approaches from campaigns on other issues that are quite different to gambling.

We decided that an approach that provides a range of solutions and messages and more generally opens up public dialogue sensitively about the topic was more likely to be effective than a specific campaign that provides solutions mainly to one category of gambler. Due to the complexity encountered, and the decision not to use the Champions ACT approach, a request was submitted for an extension to finish the Pilot project by end of March 2017.

### **1.3 Current project status and next steps**

The Pilot project of the At Odds (Young People and Gambling in the ACT Project) was completed at the end of March 2017. Trial awareness raising materials (such as a website, digital stories, wallet cards, coasters, films and social media channels), targeting young adults have been developed and launched. A proposal for more funding has been submitted, which would see the development of further campaign materials- see section 6.5 for information on proposed next steps.

### **1.4 Report outline**

This report summarises the main results of research from this project, and describes the campaign materials developed (and their evaluation), as well as learnings and recommendations for engaging with young adults on gambling.



## **2. Project approach and method**

This project was carried out in an action research<sup>2</sup> approach and comprised primarily a research component, which later guided the development of trial awareness raising materials.

The project team engaged with representatives of the community and industry sectors, academics and institutional representatives, to gather information and advice on the project. At the start of the project a forum was coordinated by the Youth Coalition to understand current perspectives of the community and other sectors. An advisory reference group and youth reference group were established in January 2016 to provide feedback on the project, and these groups continued to be engaged throughout the project. The project team were locally involved in a number of activities, trainings and events relating to the topic. During the project a literature review, semi-structured interviews, surveys and focus groups were carried out with young adults and other affected young people.

### **2.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Twenty one young adults 18-30, and family members were interviewed in through semi-structured interviews in person (and by phone) over an average of one hour each. Interviews were voice recorded (with permission) and notes taken. An interview question schedule was used, and data kept confidential and secure in a locked cabinet. Participants were given an information sheet and consent form with information about the project and the way data would be used. Individuals were remunerated \$30 for their time, unless participants requested otherwise. If participants were gamblers, the Problem Gambling Severity Index was used with participants to help assess whether they were facing gambling harm.

### **2.2 Surveys**

A sample of 351 people (aged 18-30) completed a survey, which provided insight into gambling behaviours, patterns and perceptions. Survey responses were anonymous. A further 23 young people completed a survey providing feedback on the at-odds.com.au website.

### **2.3 Focus groups**

A series of four focus groups were carried out with young participants to discuss the topic, as well as at later stages to help guide the project and development of campaign materials. The focus groups lasted on average for 2.5 hours, and were semi-structured. Notes were taken by the research team. Participants were remunerated \$30 for their time.

### **2.4 Staff interviews and Gambling Contact Officer Peer learning workshop**

Nine semi-structured interviews with club staff were carried out in clubs, and during staff working hours. Interviews lasted about one hour and notes were taken.

ClubsACT requested the Youth Coalition of the ACT to conduct a workshop with 50 gambling contact officers as part of their training program. We designed this workshop as a peer learning

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<sup>2</sup> Action research starts with research on key issues among affected people, and leads on to “action” informed by the research, e.g., awareness raising.

half-day event. A series of short presentations were given, and then participants were encouraged to discuss a series of guiding questions, in small groups with facilitators, and then as a larger group. The results were recorded by hand by Youth Coalition staff.

## 2.5 Other activities

The research team also was involved in a number of engagement activities and events, including CIT community days, and UC and ANU market and open days, engagement at CIT Fyshwick campus with the trades students, and filming presentations to students by former gambler Nathan Hindmarsh. The project team also guided a volunteer CIT film crew to assist in creating digital stories, public video interviews, a Relationships Australia video and short film advertisement for the project.



*Youth Coalition project officer Chloe Mallon and Project manager Lisa Petheram recruiting research participants at University of Canberra market day, 2016.*

*Project officer, Dom Northcott filming Nathan Hindmarsh presenting on Gambling harm at Fyshwick CIT campus, 2016.*



*Project team organising an engagement BBQ for CIT Fyshwick students, with Care Financial and CIT.*



*Project officer Dom Northcott with wallet cards to distribute to CIT Fyshwick students.*



*Dom Northcott video interviewing Relationships Australia with CIT student film crew, 2016.*



*The project team filming the At Odds promotional video with CIT student film crew, 2016.*



## **2.6 Analysis**

The research process involved continuous data gathering and analysis, drawing on Glaser's (1992) Grounded Theory methodology. Analysis of data ("words") was conducted manually and involved "substantive" and "theoretical" coding (Fernandez 2004). Substantive coding led to the identification of main themes and categories, and became the basis for the development of theories and frameworks through theoretical coding—to explain peoples' perceptions as expressed (or grounded) in the data.

## **2.7 Ethical considerations**

The research for this project followed guidelines of ethical standards outlined by the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. The research team compiled an ethical document (based on the Victorian Gambling Harm Awareness Foundation Human ethics form) to outline the ethical considerations for this project and this went under internal review at the Youth Coalition of the ACT. The research team regularly reflected on the research process and any ethical issues that arose. An information sheet and consent forms (for their continuous interviews/workshops and videos) were used, and a reference committee was formed for advice on the project.<sup>3</sup> A risk management document was also compiled and submitted to the ACT Racing and Gambling Commission for review.

## **2.8 Evaluation\***

Continuous evaluation is inherent in the action research process. Thus initial research findings were used in the development of communication materials, and the materials were evaluated to allow improvement. The evaluation process also allows broader evaluation of the project (Program evaluation). \*Further information on evaluation is provided in section 5.

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<sup>3</sup> As this research was carried out by the Youth Coalition of the ACT in the community sector there was no avenue open to submit a formal ethics application to an academic institution. The primary researcher of this project has 12 years (including post graduate experience) in carrying out research projects with formal ethics approval in the academic sector - so is very familiar with ethical codes of conduct required in social research.

### 3. Research results

Data from the qualitative research confirmed that the topic is very complex, varied and nuanced – especially as the project focused on all forms of gambling and on a broad age range of young people from 18-30 years of age. There are many differences in perception among young people, the community sector and the gambling industry about the patterns of gambling, characteristics of problem gambling and help seeking behaviour. The wide variation is related to gender, age, socio-economic and cultural background, education, income – as well as familial and social exposure, involvement in extra-curricular activities, personal and family responsibilities, social roles, levels of social support networks and general personality traits. Stakeholders from within and outside the industry also held widely differing views.

#### 3.1 Young people (\*18-30); target audience engagement

##### 3.1.1 Types and patterns of gambling

Poker machines are the most common form of gambling

Our survey indicates that 94% of young people in this age category had gambled. The main type of gambling in which young people had participated was on electronic gaming machines (EGMs) (80%) and lottery tickets (79%). There was a general perception that online sports betting was quite serious and the most common form of gambling by young participants. However, the results indicate that fewer people participated in sports or online betting, compared to poker machines and lottery tickets. A couple of interview participants claimed that online poker machines were not very appealing compared to real machines. Participants commonly reported that they knew more young men who gambled than women, but many also commented that they knew a lot of women that gamble—especially on EGMs and lottery tickets (and less on sports betting and other forms of gambling).

*“I did not find online poker machines appealing whatsoever. I like to hear the noises, press the buttons, get the whole experience”*

Young adults gamble “hard and fast” and relatively anonymously

There were mixed opinions on whether it was possible to tell if someone is struggling with gambling. Although a large proportion of participants said that gambling patterns for young people are **not** very obvious to others. It became apparent that there are signs, but people don't always know whether these relate to gambling alone, and feel uncomfortable to bring up the topic. It was commented on that young people tend to gamble at different clubs late at night and on weekends. Those who gamble regularly, often said that they try to avoid seeing the same staff or other “punters” regularly. Often it was commented that young people tended to gamble over shorter periods of time. One participant described the gambling pattern of young people as “hard and fast”.

Gambling behaviour can be very hidden among young people

Most participants talked about how easy it is to hide gambling behaviour, especially online phone sports betting. Participants also said that even the regular use of EGMs can be quite hidden from others, especially when people can easily visit different clubs, and late at night.

*“And it is so easy to gamble. And it is so easy to hide.”*



### Gambling frequency commonly increases in response to life difficulties

There were very varied responses about patterns of gambling. Those who currently struggled with gambling, or had done in the past talked about going through patches of gambling, especially when they faced life shocks, or other “co-morbidities”. A few participants commented that they believed they had their gambling under control and had felt they had learnt to manage it to a point where they weren’t doing it excessively, but then a life event would occur and they would go “backwards” again.

### Other life commitments and interests can motivate reduced gambling

Those who had struggled with gambling, or had seen others struggle with gambling said that having family responsibilities, especially a partner and/or children (and a mortgage) or focusing with passion on other activities (e.g. exercise) was helpful in motivating them not to gamble as much or at all. However, a few participants talked about how they had fallen into unhealthy gambling habits through greater exposure to gambling through their partners.

### Gambling rituals are often associated with more prolific gambling

Participants commonly talked of the seemingly irrational rituals associated with gambling among people who gambled often. With poker machines, participants talked about their own or others favourite “themed” machine (e.g. 5 Dragons), and some talked about special routines they would carry out during gambling, e.g. rubbing the machine, or waiting for particular machines they believed would pay out next.

*“It is like a psychosis itself. People think all these weird things, like if they put their hand and tickle the machine in a particular way they will win.”*

### Some participants also face harm from substances and addictive behaviours

All participants who recognised they were affected negatively by gambling talked about having family members who had addictions, usually to substances. A couple of participants also talked of addictions they had at the same time as struggling with gambling, such as addictions to drugs or alcohol. Some people said drinking exacerbated their “need” to gamble, and the reverse also occurred. However, one participant who said he was addicted to drugs at the same time as struggling with gambling, claimed that gambling did not make him want to take more drugs, but taking drugs did make him want to gamble more.

*“Well, I went through substance abuse for a while which didn’t help with gambling at all.”*

*“I like gambling when I’m sober but when I’m on alcohol or drugs, mostly drugs...it’s severe. Especially in myself, I’m an addictive personality to be honest, and drugs amplify that...significantly.”*

*“You can do gambling and not feel like drugs, but you can’t do drugs and not feel like gambling. Drugs encourage gambling in me. Alcohol included by the way.”*

### **3.1.2 Exposure to gambling**

#### Exposure to gambling is high and common in Australia

Gambling appeared to be heavily embedded in many people's lives. A large proportion of participants explained they had grown up being taken to clubs (with gaming machines), or taken to the horse races or TAB by older family members.

*"My brother for example, went through a phase and would put through \$50-\$100 on a regular basis on horses, because my dad used to do it and he was trying to carry on the legacy."*

Several participants talked about their parents giving them money and taking them to poker machines to celebrate their 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays. Participants commonly talked about spending a lot of time at clubs through sport or eating and drinking and gambling with their social groups and families. Of the survey respondents 79% said they had friends that gamble.

*"Regular gambling is...whatever...it's a social thing these days. It goes hand in hand with drinking, especially with young males, coming out of the 18-21 age range myself we'd go down to the club for a night out...we'd gamble, have a feed, drink...it all goes hand in hand. 'Where are we going tonight?' 'We'll go down to the club'"*

*"I've never come across someone with a strong negative view to it. I suppose young people just accept it in the same breath as alcohol. You know, you're 18, you're legally allowed to do it. Until it becomes a problem it's not a problem."*

*"My mother gambles, not a great deal by any means, minimally. But seeing her on the pokie machines peaked my curiosity and I still remember the machine she played, Indian Dreaming. I like Five Dragons...throughout childhood I was always at clubs and always exposed to them."*

Many participants said they had tried poker machines or online gambling before they turned 18.

*"I first used them when I was about 18 - but had used them before that but didn't really understand what I was doing."*

#### Gambling is commonly considered normal and socially appropriate

Participants talked a lot about the fact that gambling is very "normal" and "acceptable" activity. It was considered very normal to use the EGMs at a venue, as they were often there for dinner with friends and family, or at the bar with friends, or involved in sport with that club. Many also talked about strong connections between gambling and sport, and the normality of seeing gambling sport advertisements, and using phone apps to place sports bets. A couple of participants talked about friends being involved in glamorised (and often quite exclusive) poker nights at their friend's houses. Two international students interviewed talked about how it was commonly for international students to travel to casinos in Melbourne and Brisbane.

#### Gambling behaviour is influenced strongly by friends, family and partners

People's gambling behaviour (unsurprisingly) seems to be strongly influenced by their exposure

to gambling from family, friends and especially partners. These factors strongly influence people to gamble more, or less— and also influence their willingness and their preferred support seeking behaviour, and their journey through recovery.

*“So it has a lot to do with relationships and friends, and whether they are into it.”*

*“Also, my girlfriend is very straighty-one-eighty, so I suppose that helps.”*

*“...I tried to help my boyfriend with his gambling problem by going into clubs with him, and then I started developing problems.”*

*“Yeah, I would have a loose plan. But I suppose when you go with friends and then when alcohol is involved your inhibitions are out the window. You know, I might have already gambled three days that week but my friend hasn’t, therefore he goes, ‘stuff it, let’s all chuck \$100 in each’ and things get out of hand a lot quicker. The friends thing is hard.”*

Most participants claimed that pokie use often starts off very socially for young people. A few participants explained that people initially get brought into a venue with friends or partner to play EGMs, and then some start coming in on their own at a later stage or at different times of day, or stay on longer after their friends have left. Participants often said that when people win gambling as a beginner they are often more likely to become “hooked” later.

*“They start coming in on the weekend with a partner or friend/s who teach them and then they start off with \$20 or so, and then later on it is twice as much and then more than that etc., and they start coming in on their own without friends. They might get a drink to make it look like they aren’t there just to play the pokies.”*

*“People are drawn in by the chance of winning big, and those first big wins make you think that it will happen all the time. People trying gambling for the first time often experience “beginners luck”, which give them a false expectation on what gambling is like.”*

People commonly talk about gambling wins, but rarely losses or struggles

Most participants said many of their friends who gamble talk about their wins a lot, but rarely their losses or when it becomes a problem. People often seem to develop a false impression of the likelihood of winning when gambling.

### **3.1.3 Perceptions of gambling behaviour in our society**

Gambling is often perceived as a normal part of life

Most interviewees believed gambling was a normal part of life, and heavily embedded in many people’s lifestyles. Participants talked of the fun and thrill it can give, but at same time recognised the danger it could present to some people. After talking about the topic during interviews, participants commonly seemed very aware of the dichotomy presented by gambling being so normalised, and causing a lot of harm in our society. Those who had family or friends affected by gambling expressed frustration and often anger that gambling is so common and



normalised in our society. Those who didn't gamble commented about feeling annoyed and frustrated that their friends and/or colleagues talked a lot about gambling, and spent a lot of time doing that in their spare time. There were very mixed opinions about whether gambling harm was common among young people. Commonly young people did not initially think gambling was a very serious problem in society compared to other problems (such as drug and alcohol misuse and mental health problems), and believed those that were affected were predominantly older people. Participants said they often get this message in the media.

*"There is a lot of denial and many young people probably think...that it couldn't possibly be a problem for them because they are too young."*

*"It's an Australian culture thing. Previously this may have been an old person's problem but it's not anymore"*

A large proportion of participants said that young people gamble, but they didn't think many young people had difficulties with gambling, especially compared to older people (which is contrary to indications from national data).

#### There are a lot of misperceptions about gambling

Almost all participants were surprised that gambling harm affects younger people as much as, or more than older people. Those who struggle with gambling talked about the frustration they felt that older people were often portrayed in the media as being the only ones affected negatively by gambling. Participants also commonly believed online sports betting is more prolific than pokie use among young people. A few commented that this perception probably arose from media reports, and the fact that this form of gambling is rapidly becoming popular among young people.

There were a lot of other misperceptions about gambling, such as the likelihood of winning in different forms of gambling. In particular there were a lot of misperceptions about the way EGMs work. There were some comments that suggested people thought that particular machines paid out more than others, and would wait for these machines. Some also commented that they thought "near misses" were real near misses. Almost all participants did not understand the pokies sign about percentage that a machine pays back over its lifetime.

*"I use pokies a lot, but don't fully know how they work. Are they rigged?"*

#### Online sports betting is commonly perceived as very dangerous for young people

Most participants perceived sports betting as very dangerous. A couple of participants who struggled with EGMs said they had a higher level of awareness about the potential ease of gambling a lot on sports betting, so were more wary of it.

*"I did do online sports betting for awhile, and I did that because I could do it while I was at work. I nipped that in the bud real quick. I didn't let that one get legs. It was just way too easy. They give you \$100 credit and stuff like that. You can transfer from your personal account to your sportsbet account just like that - and do it at work. I got off that really quick. That's a dangerous one."*

There is peer pressure to gamble among some social groups

A few participants who did not gamble said that they and/or partners or friends often feel quite excluded from conversations or social events that involve gambling: it was said it sometimes can be quite “clicquey” and they can feel left out. They said that they think this might lead some people to getting involved in gambling (i.e. to fit in) where they might not have otherwise been very interested initially.

### **3.1.4 Perceptions of “problems with gambling” and “harmful gambling”**

Lack of clarity around the terms “harmful gambling” and “problem gambling”

People rarely used the term “harmful gambling” and more commonly used the term “problem gambling” or “problems with gambling”. However, there did seem to be a lack of clarity around when people thought gambling became a “problem” or harmful among participants and other stakeholders. A common theme in their classification however, was the impact of loss of money from gambling.

*“Gambling becomes a problem when you start spending more time away from general life activities than not.”*

*“I also think it becomes a problem earlier than that, if you have good friends that go ‘oh my god, why are you putting so much through’ or ‘what are you doing?’ That sort of thing and they [the gambler] are in denial, ‘no, no, it’s fine, it’s only a couple of hundred, it’s all good.’ Its a problem if you are in denial while you have several friends telling you that it’s too much to put in.”*

There is a lot of shame associated with being impacted by gambling harm

Gamblers appeared to feel a lot of shame associated with being negatively affected by gambling. Those who struggle with poker machines said they would often go to different clubs, especially if they realised a staff member was becoming friendly and familiar with them. They talked of the embarrassment of being judged by someone who might think they have a problem with gambling; both strangers and friends.

*“I felt ashamed and ‘too young to be a problem gambler.’ I’d lie because keeping my dignity is more important. You are the first people I have told about this.”*

Harms from gambling can be very hidden

Participants who did struggle with gambling, or had a friend or family member affected, often said that it is initially not very obvious that they are affected; there are not many signs and it can be very easily hidden. After discussing the topic during interviews, a few participants realised in retrospect there were some signs that they may have missed or “ignored”.

*“I didn’t realise he was betting the entire day on his phone. I just thought he was texting.”*

Some people facing gambling harm can act dishonestly and evasively

Research participants explained that people can become very dishonest and evasive when

struggling with gambling. It was commented that this dishonesty and evasiveness can be a sign in itself. Some people who struggled with gambling previously talked about how they had resorted to stealing from family, friends or workplaces.

*“My brother lies too [about gambling], and we don’t talk about it.”*

*“I would borrow money from my mum, saying I needed \$10 for milk, and then gamble with that money that I borrowed. I wasn’t earning much, but the amount I realised I put through was a lot. I think I gambled about \$40 000.”*

#### There is a lot of stigma associated with gambling struggles

Participants commonly mentioned that there are negative connotations associated with being harmed by gambling or being a “problem gambler” or “gambling addict” - even though gambling is so embedded (and accepted) in many people’s lives. Through discussion, some participants explained that gambling was considered so normal that when it becomes an issue, people often think something must be wrong with you. It was further explained that when gambling became an issue, that it was an individual’s responsibility to manage. Stigma appeared to negatively impact on individual’s levels of self worth and feelings of shame; prevented many from seeking help; and contributed towards gamblers hiding their struggles with gambling.

#### There are some signs of harmful gambling, but these can vary widely

Participants talked about varied signs of gambling, especially between different gambling types. Signs include people spending more time away from home (or spending more time on their phone), and inability to afford every-day life expenses, and/or asking to borrow money and/or exhibiting emotional and mood swings. Other signs mentioned that were said to be more obvious were when the person was gambling, especially at a gaming venue - for example increased time and money spent on a machine, being very absorbed in the machine and losing track of time and commitments, chasing their losses, waiting on other people’s machines, not wanting to leave their machines, carrying out rituals at machines, asking other people for money, and becoming aggressive and frustrated at the machines.

#### People commonly underestimate or deny the impact gambling has on their lives

In the survey, 11% of respondents believed they had gambled beyond their means and 9% that they had problems with gambling now or in the past. Literature (and our research experience) suggests people appear to underestimate whether they are being harmed by gambling (Nekich and Ohtsuka, 2016) - so these figures are likely to be higher. Those interviewed who appeared to be impacted by gambling harm often did not seem to be aware of the full extent of their situation. Participants who appeared to be facing harmful gambling often evolved in their opinion from the start to the end of the interview about the seriousness of their situation. A few participants said that they realised through talking about the topic and situation, that the harm they faced was more serious than they originally thought, or admitted they were probably in denial about the impact of their gambling. Participants we interviewed who struggled with gambling and had done the survey said that doing the survey made them really think about their own gambling behaviour — and also whether they would approach friends or others for support. Two participants commented that they believed their gambling could not be a problem, because they felt they were too young and gambling was something that only affected older people.

*“You think ‘that’s not me’...it’s the denial thing, I thought I could deal with things myself until it became an issue and then it was too late, it was breaking point.”*

Those who admitted they had struggled with gambling said they believed they initially underestimated the amount they had spent on gambling and the impact it had on their life. Some participants also talked about how there was a “lag” period of developing awareness about the impact gambling was having on their life.

*“Yeah, I was in denial that it was a problem. Mainly before I went gambling, I told myself it wasn’t an issue and that I was only going to gamble a set amount or have a few beers, etc. Afterwards though, all those thoughts would run through your mind and I suppose in those moments I didn’t embrace those thoughts, it’s more shutting them out, and I suppose that’s denial.”*

*“It became a big problem for me when I was 22 because I was earning more and had more expendable money, and then it was expended! I started recognising that it was a problem at 23, there was a “lag period”.*

#### Young people commonly hit “rock bottom” before fully recognising gambling harm

Participants commonly commented that because of a lack of awareness of gambling harm among gamblers and loved ones, signs of gambling harm are often not fully obvious to a gambler or their loved ones until they reach absolute rock bottom. Many people seemed to think this was more likely to happen to young people, because a lot of the signs and symptoms of gambling harm are perceived to be common among young people who do not face gambling harm, e.g. frequent mobile phone use, erratic and risk taking behaviour, lack of savings, time spent in venues.

*“Young people are unlikely to know they have a problem until it gets really bad and they hit rock bottom.”*

#### Harmful gambling is often not perceived as a “real addiction” or as seriously as other addictions or issues

A common theme that emerged from the research was that gambling addiction is not often perceived as a legitimate addiction. When this was raised and talked about in relation to other addictions, it became apparent that drugs or other addictions were often perceived as more serious than a gambling addiction. A few participants also talked about feeling more comfortable talking with family, friends and professionals about mental health than about gambling. However, through discussion it often became clear to participants with these perceptions that the symptoms of other addictions were often more obvious, and that there is generally more discussion in our society about these other issues in more recent years.

*“I went to a doctor for medication for depression but not for gambling.”*

Only one very open and communicative participant described her gambling problem as an addiction, and this was the first time she had done so (despite being open with her friends about having struggles with gambling). One participant who had experience of being in rehabilitation

for substance addiction, said that a few others in his rehabilitation programme were there for gambling addiction. The people that were there for gambling addiction weren't considered by most of the other people in the programme as having a "real" addiction, and were not supported well by them, and consequently didn't finish the programme.

#### Participants exposed to other's harmful gambling experiences expressed concern about gambling behaviours in our society

Those who had been exposed to friends or family members who had been negatively affected by gambling expressed greater concern and frustration about the dangers of gambling. A large proportion of participants involved in interviews and focus groups also appeared to have come to realisations, through the research process and hearing other's stories, that gambling was much more serious than they initially believed.

A selection of young people who did not gamble had chosen not to, or were very careful about not gambling often, after seeing someone else (e.g. a family member or friend) going through a gambling problem; their caution arose from understanding the negative impact it had on that person's life and others around them. These participants commonly had very strong opinions about gambling being dangerous and were very opposed to the practice.

Through these discussions it was commonly commented on that conversations need to be opened up in public to allow people to feel more comfortable talking about gambling addiction. Despite the belief of many participants that gambling problems are not very common among young people, 34% believed they knew someone with a gambling problem. During focus group discussions in particular, it was commonly commented on that it was important that more people understood about gambling in Australia and the different arguments relating to gambling policy and legislation.

#### Motivations to gamble are often unclear, especially when facing gambling harm

Participants who gambled occasionally often commented that they believed they were gambling for fun and the chance to win "big" money. However, those who appeared to be facing harm from gambling were often not entirely sure why they gambled, and seemed very confused and annoyed by the habit, especially as it was something that they believed many of their peers appeared to do without a struggle. Through discussion it seemed that some of these participants sought gambling (and/or other tools) partly as a distraction or form of dissociation from their lives, and it often occurred when they were feeling stress, emotional disturbance, boredom or a lack of connection in their life.

*"If I get upset I want to go out to the pokies. I know I have a problem, but wouldn't tell others. I hear the sounds of the pokies in the club and I want to play."*

In some participant's cases, gambling seemed to have initially started as a thrill seeking activity. Those struggling with gambling sometimes admitted that gambling did not meet their needs, and in fact created and exacerbated a lot of the negative emotions they were feeling, but they (frustratingly) still felt drawn to gamble. Some talked of the tension of not wanting to be there

playing and of wanting to quit but being unable.

*“Hmm...I can also liken it to when I was doing drugs too often. The perfect answer is ‘absolutely, I’d love to never do it again’.”*

A few even talked about feeling disappointed when they won money, because then they would feel there was an expectation they should stop playing and be happy. In fact they weren’t always happy when they won and wanted to continue to sit there and play. Participants often admitted they didn’t have a strong awareness of their state and needs at the time of gambling and often talked about being in another “zone” or “place”. Participants had also observed that friends and other people can get very absorbed when using a poker machine and get “*sucked into a time warp*”.

*“Sometimes he said he didn’t even know he was sitting there gambling.”*

#### Gambling can have strong negative impacts on loved ones

Even though gambling was often perceived as very hidden, it was admitted by those that had a loved one who had struggled a lot with gambling that it could be very detrimental to affected others and to relationships. Those who had been affected in a negative way by someone else’s gambling were often very opposed to gambling and perceived it as very dangerous and destructive.

*“ I went out with a guy and he would put in \$4000 every night. When he got home he would be in a really bad mood and be stressed about recuperating all the money he lost.”*

*“It affected our family a lot. My two younger kids are affected. He’d be violent and spend our money.”*

*“I’d get worried about him leaving the house in case he would go gambling again.”*

#### It is not always about the money

Participants commonly said that harmful or problem gambling is when someone is spending a lot of money, or more money that they can afford. However, after further discussion, especially during focus groups a large proportion of participants agreed that the amount or proportion of money spent was not indicative of someone struggling with gambling. It was realised that people might not need to spend much (proportionally to their income) to have difficulty. Additionally, during discussions participants who struggled with gambling said that they were not gambling exclusively to win money, even though there was a part of them that did want to win.

### **3.1.5 Reasons for gambling**

#### Reasons for gambling are not always clear or straight-forward

It wasn’t always clear to participants who struggle with gambling (or those close to them), the reasons they gambled. A few stated that having lucky big wins when they first started gambling became a big part of how they became “hooked”. Five participants explained that they started

developing patterns of gambling behaviour with partners, or friends who contributed a lot to them becoming “hooked”. Some reasons for gambling included, it was a “good distraction”, “relaxing” and could give “a sense of achievement”. Although those who were struggling with gambling themselves admitted they did not feel like they had achieved something through gambling, or did not feel relaxed gambling. These participants were often very frustrated that it had a hold over them. Those who struggled explained that a large part of them did not want to be there gambling and there was a lot of guilt, shame, anger, frustration and disappointment associated. Those who struggled with gambling talked about how powerful the sounds and lights of gaming machines were. One participant explained that they noticed the strong pull the lights and sounds had over them, even seeing and hearing them through the television. “Dissociation” or “vagueing out” while gambling was also described by those struggling with gambling, or with friends/family struggling with gambling. One participant explained that while gambling they would get “lost in the moment” for quite sometime, and not realise the time and money they had spent there.

#### Gaming rooms can be alluring

The lure of gaming machine rooms was also commonly commented on. It was explained that the way you get treated well with free drinks late at night in the venues is very appealing. It was also stated that in venues one can falsely feel as though one is connecting with others, even though one is likely to be playing isolated on a machine and not properly interacting with others. A few participants also talked about how those environments were particularly appealing for people on drugs.

*“...it’s not a venue that is governed by daylight - there is always a dark corner for someone who is on drugs to be there. It’s comfortable, safe, has free food and drinks, you are left alone...most of the people there have their own problems and issues...”*

#### **3.1.6 Help seeking and talking with friends**

##### Many people find it hard to talk about gambling with others

In our survey 34% of respondents said they thought they knew someone struggling with gambling. However, the majority of interviewees said they had never talked about struggles with gambling with friends or family and would feel hesitant to do that.

*“No. We are a group of men, we don’t talk about it. And denial has a fair bit to do with it.”*

Some said they would be more likely to talk with their family rather than friends if they were struggling with gambling.

*“In all honesty, I don’t see that as their issue. They shouldn’t care what I want to do. As far as I’m concerned, the only person that has a right to care is my mother, because she does have a reason to be concerned with what I’m doing. I feel like that’s the only person that should care about what I’m doing.”*

Of all survey respondents, 79% said there would be a way that their friends could help support them. However, in interviews most participants said they were unlikely to talk to a friend about their problem as they would be too embarrassed and they weren't sure how their friend could help. They also said there was a likelihood that they might be initially angry and defensive if their friends approached them about their gambling, especially at the wrong time or in the wrong way. By the end of interviews however, most had changed their opinion and said talking with a friend might be helpful for them, and if a friend approached them several times it might help them be more aware of their situation (even if they may initially be angry or defensive).

*"I suppose if friends had told me repeatedly that I had a problem then maybe I would have reached that realisation sooner. Initially you'd get angry and it's a defence mechanism to shut it out, but later on when you are processing thoughts, well you should reflect on everything that has happened in your day so that's something that should stick with you."*

#### Young people are more likely to talk about other issues than gambling

Six participants talked about how they had talked to friends, psychologists or GPs about other problems, e.g. drug addiction or mental health— usually when they had reached a crisis point, yet few had brought up their gambling problem. The few that had sought professional help said that they had done so because of economic, relationship or emotional problems (associated with their gambling). This is a similar trend to findings by Carroll *et al.* 2011 in a study with adults of all ages in the ACT.

Three participants said they had only talked with their partner, or that their partner was aware of their situation. They said it was very difficult when their partner was angry or judgemental about their gambling behaviour. One said it became more helpful when their partner understood that it was "like an addiction" and was able to support them and talk about the issue, without attacking them. Participants that had reached out to others said they had only done so when they became desperate; as one participant stated when they had reached "rock bottom".

*"I went to a doctor for medication for depression but not for gambling."*

*"I only asked for help when I was desperate and had absolutely reached rock bottom."*

*"Yeah. Um they [friends] definitely weren't my first stop. It got to breaking point. It was basically a last option. The cracks were showing, it was basically to offer up an explanation [to friends] to explain to them what was going on."*

#### Many "affected others" said they did not know how to approach someone about harmful gambling

Of the survey respondents, 52% said they would be likely to approach a friend about their gambling, but in interviews most said they were unsure what they could say or do that could be helpful. Most said they would be scared about the confrontation and how the person would react, and some mentioned they would want to be very sure the person had a gambling problem first. A few participants said that it can be uncomfortable to talk about money and how much a person is spending, as it is a personal matter, so would feel embarrassed to bring that up with a



friend. These participants said they would want to feel very certain before bringing up the topic.

*“My biggest thing was I didn’t know what to say him”*

*“I don’t feel comfortable talking with someone about their money - unless it is my boyfriend or parents.”*

A few participants talked about approaches they used to help support friends, family members or partners, which didn’t always work.

*“I tried to help my boyfriend with his gambling problem by going into clubs with him, and then I started developing problems.”*

#### Harmful gambling is often treated as a joke or “put-down”

It was commonly mentioned that if the topic of losing, or developing a problem with gambling is brought up, it is often turned into a joke. It was explained that this can be a helpful way of bringing up a topic, while others believed this was an unhelpful way to deal with a serious matter and was likely to make them feel more embarrassed.

When the research team brought up the topic while engaging with CIT trades students at several events, it was observed that social groups would commonly single out one of the men in the group and laugh and make a joke about that particular person’s gambling habit. That individual would usually look quite embarrassed and deny the accusation, or go along with it.

#### Changing lifestyle habits can help support friends struggling with gambling

Those who admitted they were struggling with gambling or had in the past, said it was very useful for them to avoid venues to aid in abstaining from gambling. So if their friends understood their difficulty with being in or near gaming venues, and of drinking a lot of alcohol, and if they could talk more openly with friends about this and their friends could choose other venues to eat and drink (moderately) at, then this would be helpful.

Three participants talked about their role in helping their friends, through actively monitoring their bank accounts to ensure they weren’t gambling. One participant talked about how she actively asked her friends to help support her with her gambling situation, and asked them to take her wallet away from her and watch her when she is in a gaming venue.

Even though participants said it would be hard to confront friends about gambling, it was admitted that being direct with a friend about their gambling was probably a useful approach, and in these moments it was important not to take angry or defensive reactions personally. One woman explained that she was very direct with her friends about their gambling, and that they didn’t always respond well in the moment, but in the end it would be effective because she didn’t take their anger personally.

*“I used to just hit the collect button when my friends were gambling too much. They would get really angry and we’d get in an argument, but it would work and we would then go.”*

### Better understanding of addiction can help

Those who had friends who had become addicted to gambling said it was really helpful to understand how addiction works so that they could better understand their friend's seemingly "irrational behaviours" in relation to gambling. One participant whose friend had developed a gambling addiction strongly recommended that people need to be proactive in learning about harmful gambling, and addiction more generally for their friends and family who might be affected.

*"Be there for them. The person has to want to help themselves. Learn about addiction...that is the most important part."*

### There is mixed awareness of gambling support services

About half of the survey respondents (52%) did not know there was a dedicated gambling support service in the ACT. About 57% people did not realise this service provided free counselling support for people with a family member or friend facing gambling harm.

### Some participants did not know where to go for help

Some interview participants claimed they did not know where to go for help, or that friends and family could get **free** counselling support relating to gambling harm. Participants commented that finding information online was confusing, particularly online help specific to the ACT. However, one participant said that young people should not have an excuse for being unable to find useful information online.

*"I think in the 21st century, everybody knows that help is there. In the age of information, ignorance is a choice. Everybody knows that you can jump on google and look this up, well they bloody well should know it. Everyone has google in their pockets... It depends how bad you want it. "*

A few the participants (including affected others) talked about feeling frustrated by the lack of immediacy in response when seeking support (e.g. waiting periods and lack of clarity of a pathway to recovery).

*"A part of me was very frustrated because I wanted a fix then and there. I wanted someone to say, 'ok this is what you need to do'. Nobody could tell me what to do, this is who you have to talk to etc."*

A couple of affected others (family members) talked about the helpfulness of counselling and developing a better understanding of problem gambling, once they were able to get an appointment.

### Apprehension in contacting professional help services

Most participants said they had not sought professional help. Some did not recognise they had a problem and those that did said they felt embarrassed to seek help and some said they weren't sure professional help could assist them. One participant didn't think professional help services could assist her, as she believes she is too young and their services are designed for older people. Others seemed confident they could manage and work out solutions on their own

and were not sure what professional services could do to help. Those who had struggled with gambling and not sought professional help said they believed they would be able to reduce or stop their gambling in the future on their own, if they chose. Vasiliadis and Thomas (2016) carried out research with young adults in Victoria and reported that few choose professional services, but in comparison to older participants many tended to have a strong sense of agency in recovery.

A couple of the participants in our research were concerned that they would have to completely abstain from gambling if they sought professional help, and they felt they didn't want to, or in some cases need to do that to reduce the harm they faced from gambling. For example, one participant said

*"Yes I'd like to reduce how often I gamble and manage it better, but I am worried about them saying 'righto, you can never gamble again' and then me thinking, 'fuck, can I even do that?'"*

#### Friends and families can provide support & create pathways for help seeking

The few participants who had sought professional help said that they had done so because of pressure from family or friends. They all said they were unsure they would have done so without being prompted to do this by concerned family/friends. One participant was forced to go to counselling by his workplace after he stole money (for gambling) from the organisation. Some participants said they would be much more likely to talk to their families (including partners) than their friends.

Vasiliadis and Thomas (2016) carried out research with young adults in Victoria and explained that the involvement of trusted and respected family members and friends can strengthen relationships, and reinforce a sense of social connectedness, meaning, and purpose—which are all vital elements to preventing addiction relapse and in effective long-term recovery. In particular they found that family support helped reinforced participants' relationships with their families through further building trust, respect and connectedness—which had often been compromised by harmful gambling. Friends were also shown to play an important role in a young gambler's recovery, but a less interventionist role than family or employers in supporting their recovery.

#### Few young participants knew about, or considered self-exclusion an option

Most of the interview participants in our research did not know that self-exclusion was an option, or how it worked. Only one participant had self-excluded. Many of those that did know about self-exclusion, did not think it would be a very good option as there are many ways around still entering a club, e.g. using another members card, or entering a different club. One mother expressed frustration that her son was still easily able to enter clubs that he was self-excluded from.

#### Young people have different help-seeking tendencies

As previously mentioned, fewer young people seek professional help than older people. Most participants said they would prefer to look up information online first. Those who were aware

that they did struggle with gambling said that it took them a while to become aware that there was a problem (e.g. they had reach rock bottom first). In addition to feeling that help services are designed for older people and having some misperceptions and uncertainty about what professional help services would involve, it was commonly expressed by participants that they could manage their problems on their own.

### ***3.1.7 Young participants ideas on supporting others and developing an awareness campaign***

#### Suggestions for awareness-raising were broad and varied

There was an extremely wide range of suggestions in response to our request for ideas in developing an awareness campaign. Suggestions about how to support other young people ranged from joking about the topic with friends, directing friends to professional help through handing them cards with a professional hotline, to physically preventing friends from gambling. Overall, it was commonly suggested that there needs to be greater and more open public conversation and recognition of harmful gambling in society, which would make it easier to talk about the topic.

#### Avoid negative and autocratic messages

Most cautioned the need to be careful not to direct information “at” young people, especially any negative or autocratic messages.

#### Encourage people to talk more openly about gambling to reduce stigma

As mentioned above, it was commonly thought that it was very important to promote public discussion specifically about harmful “gambling and young people”, to help reduce the stigma associated. Some suggested that a website and/or forums may help promote these discussions, and documentary or digital stories could be helpful to expose people real people’s experiences, as well as those of affected others.

#### Help debunk myths and misperceptions and raise awareness on the topic

It was suggested that providing more information to help more people understand about gambling, as well as addiction more generally (and that it affects young people, not just older people) would be helpful. Providing information aimed at “busting myths” about gambling and making people more gambling aware would be helpful. It was commonly believed that there are many misconceptions and superstitions surrounding gambling, and little understanding of how EGMs work, or on the extremely low odds connected of winning in most forms of gambling, especially EGMs. It was also commonly suggested that education programs need to be run in schools, and also there need to be more policy and venue mechanisms in place to discourage people from gambling (e.g. spend limits and consumer monitoring). It was also often raised that there needs to be more information raised among young people about harmful gambling in Australia generally.

#### Provide tools for raising awareness of gambling behaviour

It was recommended that it would be important to encourage people to keep a tally of their spending and to provide suggestions on how to do this. Many recommended it would be

important to always have a limit in mind before going gambling and being strict with that. They said it would be important to provide people with information about typical symptoms of gambling problems and how to help friends, as well as information about alternative things people could be doing or spending their money on instead of gambling.

#### Provide suggestions on how to approach friends and family

Commonly people thought it would be useful to learn how to talk to friends with gambling problems, but few participants had many ideas on the most helpful approaches. It was felt most important to first explain that gambling can be a serious problem for many young people, and that this is would be best done by raising awareness of negative impacts of gambling - and especially how it can affect loved ones. It was also suggested that learning more about addictions generally could help people understand gambling addiction. Two older former gamblers (over 30) said that, in retrospect, the most useful information to help their friends and family talk to them about the topic, would have been information helping them to understand the problem better, and to talk sensitively to them without blaming or attacking them. They said sometimes in the past aggressive conversations with their partners had led them to gamble more. It was suggested that it would be helpful to raise awareness around ways to approach friends about difficult topics (like gambling), without being overwhelmed by the fear of confrontation or rejection.

*"I'd advise talking to them really...not accusing them...but by asking them questions and really showing your support."*

*"And get out of the anger, it doesn't help and it's a dangerous emotion in this situation."*

#### Encouraging greater connection to people and other activities

The importance of keeping busy and connected to other parts of life to avoid gambling was also raised. For example some stressed the need to be involved in extra-curricular activities, such as sport or going a gym to avoid the need to gamble. Some said that if a friend had struggled with gambling they would try to remind them of the things they love in their life, like their children and other interests, e.g. music or sport.

*"I'd encourage them to try remember other things that they love."*

One participant said the key to his long pathway to recovery was learning mindfulness for becoming more aware of his gambling behaviours (and triggers to gamble), as well as other factors in his life that led him to feel disconnected. He believed this also was helpful in learning how to engage with soothing behaviours and choosing alternative lifestyle activities and ways to interact with others.

#### Communications materials

A diversity of communication materials was suggested by participants, such as coasters (in venues and bars), posters (at tertiary institutions, venues, toilets, doors), and wallet cards, postcards and stickers (at tertiary institutions, cafes and other public spaces and venues. It was also recommended that a website be developed to house content (such as information about

signs of harmful gambling, and suggestions on how to approach friends on the topic) and digital stories of people's experiences. It was suggested digital stories and other media could also be shared on social media sites.

### **3.2 Stakeholder engagement (including reference group)**

*(See Appendix 2 for a list of Stakeholder reference group members.)*

#### Many community service organisations had low awareness of harmful gambling issues

An extensive range of ACT support services, as well as informal youth support groups were contacted regarding the project. Many groups and individuals were interested in the project, but admitted they had no or little exposure to the topic of gambling through their work with their clients (except the ACT Gambling and Support Service: Relationships Australia and Care Inc.). Some said they had a sense that some of their clients may have gambling addictions, but the clients were usually seeking support for other "issues", and so the topic of gambling did not often emerge. Some organisations had more recently started screening people for gambling, or were planning on instigating screening soon after engagement from the ACT Gambling Support Services (e.g. Ozhelp, CIT support services).

#### Few young clients seek professional help

Relationships Australia and Care (as part of the ACT Gambling Counselling Support Service) said that they believe youth gambling could be a very big (and very hidden) issue, and that people don't often talk about it. They get very few young clients coming to them. The staff said that they had a sense it is quickly growing, and there is little recognition of the problem. Gambling addiction could be quite easy to miss, especially among those who do online gambling, which is not well regulated. They said for clients it usually emerges as a financial problem first, rather than as a gambling problem specifically. Many people don't initially self identify as being harmed by gambling. ACT Gambling Counselling Support Service said it would be useful to try to engage with affected others (e.g. parents, or girlfriends) in this youth focussed project.

#### Young people often are not aware of the seriousness of harmful gambling and seldom follow through with professional help

A counsellor from Relationships Australia said that young people are generally very positive in receiving help when they do seek it, but they often do not tend to follow through or continue with sessions. Young people often fail to realise how bad it is and think it's fun to gamble — and they seem confident in thinking they have a handle on it and can manage it on their own. Most of the young people who have gone for gambling counselling services have been told or asked by someone close to them (usually family) to go to RA for counselling. The counsellor said the decision to go for counselling is "...never on their own accord." Young people who have sought help tend to have better support networks than older people, whereas older people may have isolated themselves from family/ friends or have experienced relationship breakdowns. Young people are also more likely to see gambling as a way to earn money. If friends want to support a friend who is facing gambling harm, they need to be prepared to have a real and honest conversation with each other, and be prepared to be the "punching bag", at least at first. Friends

need to realise that the best time to approach someone about this topic is when they are affected by it (e.g. have just gambled and lost a lot of money).

#### Gambling needs to be better integrated into health policy and approaches in the ACT

Academics from different schools of ANU, as well as those from institutions in NSW, Queensland, SA and Victoria were also consulted in the project. Researchers from the Centre for Gambling Research at ANU explained that gambling is not well integrated into health policy and approaches in the ACT. They suggested that a public health approach that facilitates help-seeking is important. The Centre made a submission that suggests there needs to be an ACT Health taskforce on gambling. They emphasised in initial consultations and later advice for the project (as part of the project reference group), that gambling is a complex topic, and varies a lot between different forms of gambling. People use gaming spaces very differently according to age and background. Some people go into gaming space for social connection, whereas online gambling is usually done alone.

#### Patterns of gambling vary a lot between gambling types

Another researcher at the Fenner School explained that co-morbidities often occur with gambling addiction, as well as mental health, family problems and domestic violence. The more someone gambles, the worse their other problems get and it becomes a vicious feedback cycle. The researcher explained that in the ACT, EGM use is the main offender; the predominance of online and sports betting is less known. The researcher suggested that because patterns around poker machine gambling differ so much from other types of gambling, it will be difficult to focus this research project on all types of gambling.

#### Gambling is very different from other social issues

A number of researchers said they were doubtful the intended project could be carried out (while focusing on all forms of gambling among young people) in the period of time allocated, and were very wary that there would be insufficient time or resources to test awareness campaign materials. Some researchers explained that gambling is at such a “different” cultural stage in our society, that it would be difficult to draw on other campaigns from other topics, e.g. around drugs and alcohol. One researcher explained that she believed gambling is at a stage now that binge drinking was at 20 years ago, when it was not appropriate to comment on how much someone drank. Most of the researchers consulted did not think drawing from the Champions ACT project for an awareness campaign would be very appropriate for the case of gambling.

#### Young people may be less obviously impacted by gambling

A researcher from Melbourne with some experience doing research with young gamblers said that younger people were sometimes less obviously impacted by the negative effects of gambling because they were living at home and not paying for accommodation and food etc. She also said that older people tended to avoid access to cash, venues and so on, whereas young people did not: they tended to construct brand new narratives, rather than focus on stopping. They prefer to focus on the things they want to bring into life. However, she also explained that younger people have more difficulty articulating themselves around the topic too. A lot of them talk about spontaneously recovering — but recovery is far from spontaneous.

There could also be an important role for employers and families, in identifying the problem for young people.

### Gambling behaviour is complex. It is helpful to understand concepts of multiplicity in understanding gambling addiction

A psychologist from NSW with a specialty in gambling addiction explained that people with poker machine gambling addictions can often have mixed episode depression when gambling, where their body is shutting down, but their mind is racing. This can be very confusing for them. Gambling on poker machines is not relaxing, it is very stressful and unhealthy for one's mental and physical health. The psychologist also explained that when understanding addiction, it is important for people to realise (and normalise) the concept of multiplicity, where there are some parts of themselves that want to gamble, and other parts that do not.

## **3.3 Venue engagement**

### ***3.3.1 Observation and perception of young gamblers***

#### Diversity in opinion among venue staff

There was high diversity in opinion between venue staff about the patterns of young gamblers and young problem gamblers. This seemed to be partly influenced by their work venue, age, experience on the floor, as well as recent time spent on the floor. Some Gambling Contact Officers (GCOs) said young people seldom use gaming machines, and many of these GCOs said young people were more likely to use TAB and online gambling. However, other GCO participants claimed that many young people gambled very often in their venues. Older GCOs in more management-related roles tended not to believe young people used gaming machines in venues often. Initially most GCOs thought the patterns of young and older gamblers were similar, but more discussion revealed that some believed younger patrons tended to be more boisterous and often came in with groups of friends into certain clubs. Some observed though that sometimes younger patrons could come in quietly on their own. They said they believed gambling was more social for the "young" than for older people and that this was often at night, and in some cases younger people would stay on after their friends had left, or would return later on their own. It also became apparent that younger gamblers tended to come in at busier times, usually weekend evenings, and would often "binge" (quickly) and between venues.

There was quite a lot of debate about gender. A large proportion of GCO's believed it was mostly men who gambled, especially trades people, while others believed equal numbers of females and males gambled. This opinion seemed to depend a lot on the club at which the GCO worked. Some said that young men tended to come in more often in groups, and young women in pairs.

Many GCO's believed young people used gaming machines because they are relaxing and were seeking a way to unwind. Some believed alcohol consumption was closely linked and was an enabler to increased gambling. It was explained that many young patrons drink alcohol, but some only gambled and drank non-alcoholic drinks. Some GCOs believed that some young



people faced gambling harm as a symptom of other problems in their lives. Some believed that lack of purpose or direction could lead people to be affected by gambling harm.

#### Younger people are more likely to visit venues late at night on weekends

Some staff said it was less obvious whether young patrons were affected by gambling, compared to older people, who tended to come in alone during the daytime and to the same venues. Through discussions it seemed possible that many younger people hid their gambling more effectively, by going to different clubs rather than the same ones. Sometimes they would visit a venue with different groups of friends. Some GCOs said older people were more open in talking about their losses and in building relationships with GCOs. Older people were also more likely to self-exclude. These discussions revealed that some young people may have more shame around having a problem with gambling than older people, and may also be better at hiding harmful gambling even to GCOs.

#### Few young people self exclude

The point was commonly raised that young people were less likely to self exclude from venues with EGMs because a lot of their lives probably revolve around the venue, and self excluding would mean dramatically altering their social lives, e.g. not joining friends or family for dinner or drinks at a venue, or watching or being involved in sports or other events.

#### Gambling behaviour of venue staff is mixed

There were very mixed responses about whether staff (and ex-staff) gamble. Some said they only do sports betting or casino gambling. Others said some staff use EGMs in other venues, and sometimes a lot. Some felt that their experience working in venues and exposure to EGMs had put them off gambling. Some talked about seeing patrons win and initially feeling excited, and then later realising the huge amounts of money people lost.

*“Oh I would definitely feel excited, a little bit jealous...it makes me want to go ‘oh maybe I’ll put a little bit in’...but two seconds later you would see someone else punch their machine because they’d put more money in that machine than the other person. So...there is no way of knowing whether you are going to win or not.”*

*“Yeah, you get people that win large jackpots and you get really excited for them, but they tell you that they have put the same amount through the machine to win it.”*

### **3.3.2 Opinions on venues and Gaming Machines**

#### Many participants perceived sports betting as a more serious threat than EGMs

During the forum, many of the GCOs were somewhat defensive about gaming venues receiving criticism from the public and media around harmful gambling and gambling addiction. Many talked about the “contributions” clubs made to the community, and the relative “harmlessness” of gaming venues. Online gambling was brought up as a more real and dangerous threat to people in developing gambling addictions. However, some of the GCOs, particularly younger staff did talk about their concern about the addictive nature of gaming machines. They said

some clubs are trying to appeal to younger generations by becoming more “trendy” and upbeat and through menu changes and events.

#### Some believed EGMs were very addictive and there needs to be better legislation and/ regulation

A few ex-staff commented that it was misleading that clubs were seen as “wholesome” places that parents could trust their young adult children to attend — as the reality was that they weren’t— as poker machines are so addictive. Some staff admitted they found it very difficult to watch people in gaming rooms, especially those that were addicted, and they thought there should be tighter regulation and legislation. These staff members explained the issue was highlighted to them from some of the extreme behaviours they saw in venues. For example it was explained that sometimes they had to clean up bodily waste from people who did not want to leave their machines. A few staff suggested EGMs should have spend limits and that maybe the minimum gambling age should be increased to 25.

### **3.3.3 Role of GCOs**

#### GCO’s rarely approach patrons that might be facing harmful gambling

GCO’s commonly explained that their role was to notice if people were exhibiting symptoms of problem gambling and to be a support person for patrons who might want to seek their help to self exclude, or seek more information about professional help. It was believed GCOs need to be available and ready when asked. The importance of the role of the GCO was widely acknowledged by the GCOs. However, when asked if they had approached a young person they thought were exhibiting symptoms of problem gambling, all said *no* — only if the person was being violent, e.g. “*smashing a screen.*”

#### As a GCO it is difficult to approach patrons that may be facing gambling harm

Most said it is very hard to approach someone if they think they have a gambling problem, and some were concerned that younger people might be more aggressive or they might scare them away from the venue. Some said there was a code or mentality at their workplace that it was not appropriate to approach someone, as it would be bad for business. Some said an important part of their role was building rapport and trust with the customers, especially those who come in often, so they can understand what is happening for them. There was some frustration felt that they were not equipped to deal with people affected negatively by gambling, or that there were expectations that they needed to do this.

#### There are mixed opinions on the signs of gambling harm

It was commonly stated, especially by older staff members that it was difficult to tell if anyone had a problem with gambling (regardless of age), whereas some younger staff said it was extremely obvious, for example by “...*the way they looked at the machine, and pressed the button*” and the frustration they were exhibiting.

Some GCO’s believed that if a person was spending a lot of money gambling, but could afford it, then they were not negatively affected by gambling.

### **3.3.4 Ideas around supporting young people harmed by gambling**

Some said it is important to make sure people understand the risks involved with gambling. It was said that friends usually see the problem first generally, so are the best ones to approach a gambling friend who may be struggling. It was also said that some young people came in pairs and self-excluded together in solidarity, so perhaps young people could be encouraged to do that more. Some younger staff suggested that a system could be set up so that people could still come into a venue, and choose to be excluded only from the gaming room, which could help a lot of young people whose lives revolve around clubs—so they would be more likely to exclude. However, some older staff explained this had already been trialled and was logistically difficult.

Some staff were concerned about the amount and quality of professional support available. Many thought that educating the community to talk about the topic is important, so the public can talk more openly about it.

*...even one discussion can change a lot”*

## 4. Campaign materials

Campaign materials were developed through guidance received during the research process from young people involved in the project, as well as staff members at the Youth Coalition, and young communication professionals. These materials and tools included a website ([atodds.com.au](http://atodds.com.au)), [digital stories](#), [video interviews](#), [wallet cards](#), (see Appendix 1), social media channels ([twitter](#) and [facebook](#)), a [video](#) about professional support from Relationships Australia, a [video interview](#) with Nathan Hindmarsh, and an At Odds website [video advertisement](#). (See Appendix 2 for video and website links)

The content of the website and videos were compiled by the project team, which worked with young creative professionals to develop and design the site and its components.

The materials were based around key messages derived from the research process:

### **1. Many young Australians (18-30) face harmful gambling, and this is very hidden.**

- Many think gambling harm is only an older person's issue.
- Young Australians are among the biggest gamblers in the world; it is considered very "normal" in Australia to gamble"

### **2. Very few people are talking about when gambling becomes harmful, especially in relation to young people.**

- As a consequence, gambling and harmful gambling is very misunderstood, and there are many misconceptions about it
- Problem/harmful gambling is very stigmatised and hidden
- Gambling addiction is a "real" and serious addiction. It is not often perceived as serious as other substance based addictions

### **3. There are options for managing harm from gambling, e.g. improving awareness, and seeking help from friends, family and professional support.**

- Talking with friends and family and/or getting professional support can help
- There are ways to increase awareness of gambling behaviour
- Understanding harms from gambling (and gambling as an addiction) can help friends and family more effectively support a loved one

### **The call to action**

In this campaign (through materials and social media and other messages), we are trying to encourage people to:

- Discuss the issues and learn more about it
- Be more aware of their own (and/or friends gambling)
- Talk to a friend or family member that may be struggling

## 5. Evaluation to date

The project awareness raising materials developed from the research findings were distributed late in the project so there was insufficient time to fully evaluate these. We recommend that more time and resources be devoted to evaluating and then refining these materials. While assessment of the communication materials has started by monitoring the website use and by various other means, gathering of further data over a longer period of time will be essential in harnessing the full potential value of this project. The types of evaluation data and outcomes of data collected on current campaign materials are summarised under the headings below.

### 5.1 Outcome evaluation

#### 5.1.1 Website

Large number of visits to, and interactions with, the website – mostly from facebook

Our website analytics suggests that there have been 6,840 visits to the At Odds website by 2,149 different people since the site was launched in late October 2016. The “video stories” and “how pokies work” pages are the most visited pages. Most visitors have come across the site through facebook.

Website content and structure is easy to understand and navigate. Design needs improvements in layout and imagery

A focus group was run in November 2016 with a group of young people who gave feedback on the website. The group considered the website content useful and easy to understand, the navigation easy. Most believed that the website could be improved through enhanced design that is simple, yet striking and interesting. Participants liked the colour palette of the website, but found some of the symbols and diagrams used too simple and the layout a bit plain.

23 young people have completed a survey to date about the website. Feedback on the purpose and content of the website has been positive, with useful comments for improvement particularly on design. Of the respondents 83% claimed found the content “useful”, and 18% found the information “alarming”. In terms of navigation 67% found the navigation of the website easy.

Favourite aspects of the website (from feedback survey)

*“Easy to use, a good resource I only just found out about. I like the resources sections and the suggestions for apps and challenges.”*

*“The layout and design are less convoluted than other similar sites”*

*“It has big icons and easy links”*

*“Easy to use, simple wording”*

*“That the information on the website is easy to understand and read”*

Least favourite aspects of the website (from feedback survey)

*“The layout was a bit plain, maybe a change to make it appear more*

*professional/sophisticated to grab people's attention"*

*"It has a certain government vibe that may discourage young Australians from engaging"*

*"Images - very staged, not much variety. I understand that the target demographic is young males but wonder if there could be more variety."*

### **5.1.2 Digital Stories & Youtube Videos**

The video stories page and has been one of the most popular page visited. The Youtube videos have had 80 complete views. 82% of respondents of the online survey answered that they would share a digital story video from the website with a friend or family member. The advertisement video and video interviews will be released in late February 2017.

### **5.1.2 Other communication materials**

#### Wallet Cards

To date 200 wallet cards have been distributed as the print materials part of the awareness campaign. Participants from the focus group and other stakeholders have given positive feedback on the wallet cards. People said they like the discrete, convenient size, and the simplicity of the card, as well as the combination of imagery, and the relevant information.

#### Social media

The twitter page which was started in November 2016 is gaining momentum and now has 112 followers. The facebook page has 50 followers which is not considered very high.

Continuing needs for information for evaluation include:

#### **1. Feedback on the website and its use**

- a. From hit statistics (continuous data)
- b. From online feedback survey
- c. From focus groups

#### **2. Feedback on videos**

- a. Youtube views
- b. From online feedback survey
- c. From focus groups

#### **3. Feedback on social media**

- a. Twitter followers, likes and interactions
- b. Facebook followers, likes and interactions

#### **4. Feedback on other communications materials**

- a. From focus groups

## **5.2 Program evaluation**

While this document represents a comprehensive account of the Project to date, a full and final evaluation has not been undertaken. Continuous assessment and improvement of materials, and development of new material, is advised, but outside the scope of the Pilot project. The performance and value of Project have has received positive feedback from project collaborators and stakeholders, and encouraging recognition in the broader ACT youth sector. In November 2016, the At Odds project team were recognised for work on this project and won the Research and Evaluation Award at the ACT youth sector awards.

During interviews and focus groups we sought feedback from participants about the experience of being involved in the project. Interviewees, focus group and participants commonly gave positive feedback and many expressed that the topic was interesting and new to them and it was not something they had often discussed. Those who felt they had been harmed by gambling commonly stated it felt healthy and helpful to talk about the issue. Gambling contact officers who were involved in our workshop gave very mixed responses about being involved. Some said they found it very interesting to discuss the topic among each other and others did not see the value of having the discussions.

We have incorporated feedback from participants, stakeholders and project collaborators about the experience of being involved in this project and their views on future steps, into our proposal for future work.

## 6. Reflections and recommendations

### 6.1 Engaging young people on this project

#### The importance and difficulty in recruiting young participants

Working on this participatory project has strongly reinforced to us the need for young people to be involved in developing effective messages and materials, and providing feedback on the resonance of messages and materials. However, it was not always easy to engage with young people as much as we desired, primarily because of the highly stigmatised nature of the topic of gambling. Participants were more willing to meet for one-on-one interviews, and generally found meeting in focus groups confronting. Recruitment was slow and difficult even when payment for time was offered. It was particularly difficult to recruit young males working in trades, who are apparently a category of young people that frequently gamble, especially on EGMs. Recruitment into the project particularly of young people who had experienced gambling harm was often thwarted because of the continual life struggles being experienced by such affected individuals.

#### Alternative engagement methods

The project team worked with Care Financial in late 2016 to visit CIT campus regularly to get to know and build rapport on a more casual basis with trades students. This was helpful in exposing students to this project and the help services available, as well as the awareness raising communications material. Having a presence and being involved in presentations given by Nathan Hindmarsh about his gambling journey was also helpful. The project team attended UC, CIT and ANU open days and engaged with student groups on the topic. Additionally, a CIT community development class that already knew each other well and were familiar with addiction issues from their course, was recruited to be part of a focus group. Recruiting young creative professionals was also an effective way to involve young people in developing communications materials.

#### Effective avenues for advertising the project

We found that paying for Facebook advertisements was particularly useful in drawing a wide range of young people to this project, e.g. for responding to surveys. Also engaging university and sporting groups directly has also been helpful. Additionally, using the CD-Net email list was very effective in exposing the project to a wide range of individuals and groups interested in community development.

#### Recommendations on exposing this topic and engaging with young people

The experience of conducting this project highlighted for us many challenges in working with young people affected by gambling, and therefore important difficulties inherent in developing recommendations on how to engage with young people on this topic. The project also showed that attempting to work on all forms of gambling and across a broad age range of young people from different backgrounds, adds to the difficulties. Clearly, the stigma associated with this topic markedly increases the challenge in developing recommendations and a campaign strategy.

Our research showed there are very few private and public conversations about harmful gambling in society; and this silence means public awareness is very low about the spectrum of



gambling harm that people and society can face. There is little recognition of the extent of negative impacts that even lower levels of gambling harm can have on young people's lives. Nekich and Ohtsuka (2016) explain that harm minimisation and public health messages in Australia have largely been dismissed by young adults, as they do not see the relevance to their situation. Although young gamblers are often aware of gambling risks, their understanding of harmful gambling is hindered by the normality of gambling in society and the perceived distinction between themselves and older problem gamblers. They tend to perceive that young people have "immunity" to harmful gambling; and this could prevent them from developing awareness of their gambling and from seeking help (Sullivan 2001). Any campaigns on youth gambling need to be distinctively designed in ways to which young people can relate, and to highlight that harmful gambling is highly prevalent among young people.

We suggest that first steps in engaging with young people on this topic need to focus on encouraging more conversations around the nuances of harmful gambling. An effective way to do this is to share narrative stories of people's experience, and to provide tips and insights into ways of becoming aware of harmful gambling, and on how to approach loved ones, friends and colleagues about this topic. Further recommendations are outlined in the sections below.

## **6.2 Key themes important to consider in developing an awareness campaign**

In developing any campaign it would be important to consider that gambling is considered very socially appropriate in Australia and there is little awareness and knowledge of gambling harm, and its broad spectrum. As there is a high degree of stigma (and associated shame and concealment) associated with gambling harm, especially among young people it would also be important to tread very carefully in developing any campaign. As previously discussed, awareness of gambling behaviour is often very low and denial very common. Thomas *et al.* (2016) explain that research into stigma in other areas of addictions suggest that individuals perceive addiction as a condition associated with personal responsibility and control, and that individuals feel personally to blame for their condition. Some gambling researchers also argue that messages around personal responsibility from governments, the gambling industry and media may strongly shape negative public perceptions of "problem gamblers" in our society, and gamblers' own perceptions of themselves (Carroll *et al.* 2013; Miller *et al.* 2015). Thomas *et al.* (2016) also explain that no gambling campaigns in Australia specifically focus on the impact of stigma on individual gamblers, or encourage support, or broader community discussions about "problem gambling" stigma as a primary message. Future campaigns need to consider taking a framework and approach that encourages a broader perspective that goes beyond focusing on individual responsibility and one that includes the encouragement of discussion on the impact of stigma. A campaign that encourages more community, friend and family involvement and a focus on discussions around stigma would help move towards this approach.

It would also be vital to take into account the high level of social pressure young people often face, which can strongly influence their tendency to modify behaviours and seek help. Many young people feel like gambling harm among young people is uncommon and that help services aren't designed for them, so any awareness campaign would need to be specifically designed to speak and resonate with young people and the types of issues they face in their lifestyles, which can be quite different to older adults.

### 6.3 Some ideas for awareness campaign materials to target young people

Discussions with young participants suggest that a combination of social and online media and printed materials would be most effective in reaching this broad audience. It became apparent, especially from feedback from the project website, that engaging yet simple design (not too plain), is crucial to encouraging young people to interact with the materials. During later stages of our research, participants also suggested that campaign materials printed on stickers and coffee cups would be appealing to many young people, and would be helpful in drawing attention to the project. Also, short, amusing, yet impactful videos would be helpful in conveying key messages about gambling, and in advertising the project. Humour and impact are likely to encourage young people to share material through social media channels.

Many research participants thought creating visual or podcast documentaries would be helpful in communicating stories and facts on gambling and harm. These would need to be professionally developed and carefully tested. It will also be important to craft powerful catch phrases and slogans, each framed for particular audiences, using humour where possible. Our participants emphasised that careful choice of “the right visuals” is important in sharing messages on social media. Also suggested were approaches that encourage open interaction and involvement of the public in conversation on gambling and risks.

### 6.4 Potential topic areas for campaigns

We suggest that future awareness raising should be targeted more specifically on particular areas and calls to action<sup>4</sup>. For example, our research indicates that messages are particularly needed to raise awareness of:

- The need for community discussion around gambling harm and the stigma associated with it, especially among young people
- Ways for young people to assess and raise awareness of their own gambling trends and risks. “Are you still having fun?” “How much are you really spending?” “What could you buy instead?”
- The importance of being supportive to a friend struggling with gambling. How to be more aware of friends’ difficulties with gambling and the associated stigma, and making changes to social interactions to help support them
- Ways to approach friends or family members, and how to have difficult conversations about harmful gambling and its stigmatisation — without taking reactions personally
- Other activities and options are available, instead of gambling, e.g. see “Choice not Chance” recent campaign around Whanau Time (family/other non-gambling activity time, which asks the public what they think are healthy alternatives to gambling)
- How EGMs really work and busting gambling myths
- How gambling harm seriously impacts on affected others
- The fact that gambling harm is complex and on a broad spectrum. It can negatively affect people to different extents (without always reaching the stage of addiction)
- The way harmful gambling can affect young people differently to older people
- What “professional help for gambling” involves, and why can it be helpful. “It’s ok to seek

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<sup>4</sup> The *At Odds* website is based on many of these messages, but the messages a more strategic communications plan needs to be developed, as well as further supporting materials

help for gambling”

## **6.5 Other broader recommendations**

### Targeting school aged students on gambling

The importance of engaging with young people at schools about gambling was often raised by participants and interested community members from the education sector. This need is reinforced by research showing that young people are increasingly gambling from a young age (Phillips 2013). Research indicates that around two thirds of Australians 10-14 years old have gambled in the last year; and rates of problem gambling are up to four times higher among adolescents than in the adult population (Keen *et al.* 2016). While it is clearly important to engage with students and encourage conversations on this issue as early as possible, any approach would need to be well researched, theory driven, comprehensive, appropriately timed, socially-culturally relevant and evaluated thoroughly.

### Further research

It would be helpful to collect more large-scale quantitative data on the proportion of young people affected by gambling harm in the ACT, including information about awareness of harmful gambling, and other co-morbidities—and demographic factors. The ANU Gambling Research Centre has collected data on the broader adult population, but the sample size of people in the 18-30-age category was very small.

It would also be helpful to better understand the stigmatisation of harmful gambling among young people, and understand how health campaigns in other areas have effectively worked towards destigmatisation.

It seems that friends and family can play an important role in a young person’s journey to seeking professional help and their pathway to recovery. Further research to investigate these roles and pathways would be valuable in providing greater insight into how to better support young people and affected others. It would also be helpful to better understand young peoples’ tendencies for engagement and disengagement from seeking help from friends and family, and professional support.

### The need for a public health approach

Increasingly research is indicating that gambling harm is not limited to those at the problem end of the gambling spectrum. People at the moderate and even low-risk end of the spectrum are experiencing harm from gambling. As the number of people who face low and moderate risk from gambling is higher, the total impact is greater than the impact from gamblers with severe problems (Browne *et al.* 2016). Consequently it seems that a broadening of focus from preventing “problem gambling” to lessening gambling harm is important. In any program to raise awareness around gambling it would be important to take a holistic public health approach that considers the broad spectrum of gamblers and addresses both severe harm faced by some gamblers, co-morbidities and potential detriments facing gamblers more generally. A public health approach adopts a framework of shared responsibility, from individuals and community groups to businesses, corporations and governments at all levels. It acknowledges that everyone has a role to play in supporting a holistic and integrated strategy, as well as the range

of social, economic and environmental factors that impact on peoples' physical and mental health beyond individual level of lifestyle choice. As Rodgers *et al.* 2015 suggest, specific preventative interventions are more likely to be effective if incorporated into a coordinated approach rather than carried out in isolation.

#### Proposed future research by the Youth Coalition

The Pilot project of the At Odds (Young People and Gambling in the ACT Project) finished at the end of March 2017. A significant amount of knowledge, capacity and stakeholder relationships and communication materials have been built through this project, and we strongly recommend that funding be granted to allow the momentum of this work to. The awareness raising materials developed and now launched on a trial basis (e.g. website, digital stories, wallet cards, coasters, films and social media channels) fill a very much-neglected niche for targeting young adults at risk in the ACT. To maximise the value of this project, we suggest the continued refining, distribution, and evaluation of these materials, as well as a roll out of more of the communication ideas suggested by young people involved. In continuing this project we would like to specifically improve, maintain and evaluate the website, create more short films and communication materials, digital stories, and a unique audio podcast documentary. These materials would be targeted towards needs of young people and encourage more community support and discussion around the stigmatisation of harmful gambling.

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## Appendices

Appendix 1: Wallet cards, front and back



Concerned about  
**your own**, or a  
**mates** gambling?



AT-ODDS.COM.AU

Appendix 2. List of video, website and social media links:

**At Odds website**

[at-odds.com.au](http://at-odds.com.au)

**Digital stories**

<http://www.at-odds.com.au/stories/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnaN3Cqiczc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLHVMGnVVsg&t=22s>

**Nathan Hindmarsh video interview:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oucAhCN9Ug>

**Public video interviews:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUaVWUfNGIU&t=2s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pwgH52DluQ&t=2s>

**Relationships Australia - ACT Gambling Counselling Support Service**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imWD6CCJ4PY&t=10s>

**At Odds Video advertisement**

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/qvh8k14k6hix1vt/At%20Odds%20-%20Ad.mp4?dl=0>

**At Odds twitter**

<https://twitter.com/OddsACT>

**At Odds facebook**

<https://www.facebook.com/AtOddsACT/>