



**DEAKIN
UNIVERSITY**

DEAKIN INSTITUTE FOR
**HEALTH
TRANSFORMATION**

GHLEE

GAMBLING HARM LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERTS



The normalisation of gambling for women in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT): A public health approach to gambling harm prevention

5 August 2026

Prepared by:

Professor Samantha Thomas¹, Dr Simone McCarthy¹, Dr Hannah Pitt¹, A/Prof Gemma Crawford²,
A/Prof Jonathan Hallet², Emeritus Professor Mike Daube², Dr Grace Arnot¹, Anna Bardsley³, Shonica
Guy³, Kate Seselja³.

1. Institute for Health Transformation, Faculty of Health, Deakin University.
2. Curtin School of Population Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University.
3. Gambling Harm Lived Experience Experts

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the funding provided by the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission for this project. We sincerely thank all participants who contributed their time and insights to the research.

We also extend our appreciation to the advisory group and Gambling Harm Lived Experience Experts for their generous contributions and ongoing collaboration with the research team.

Table of contents

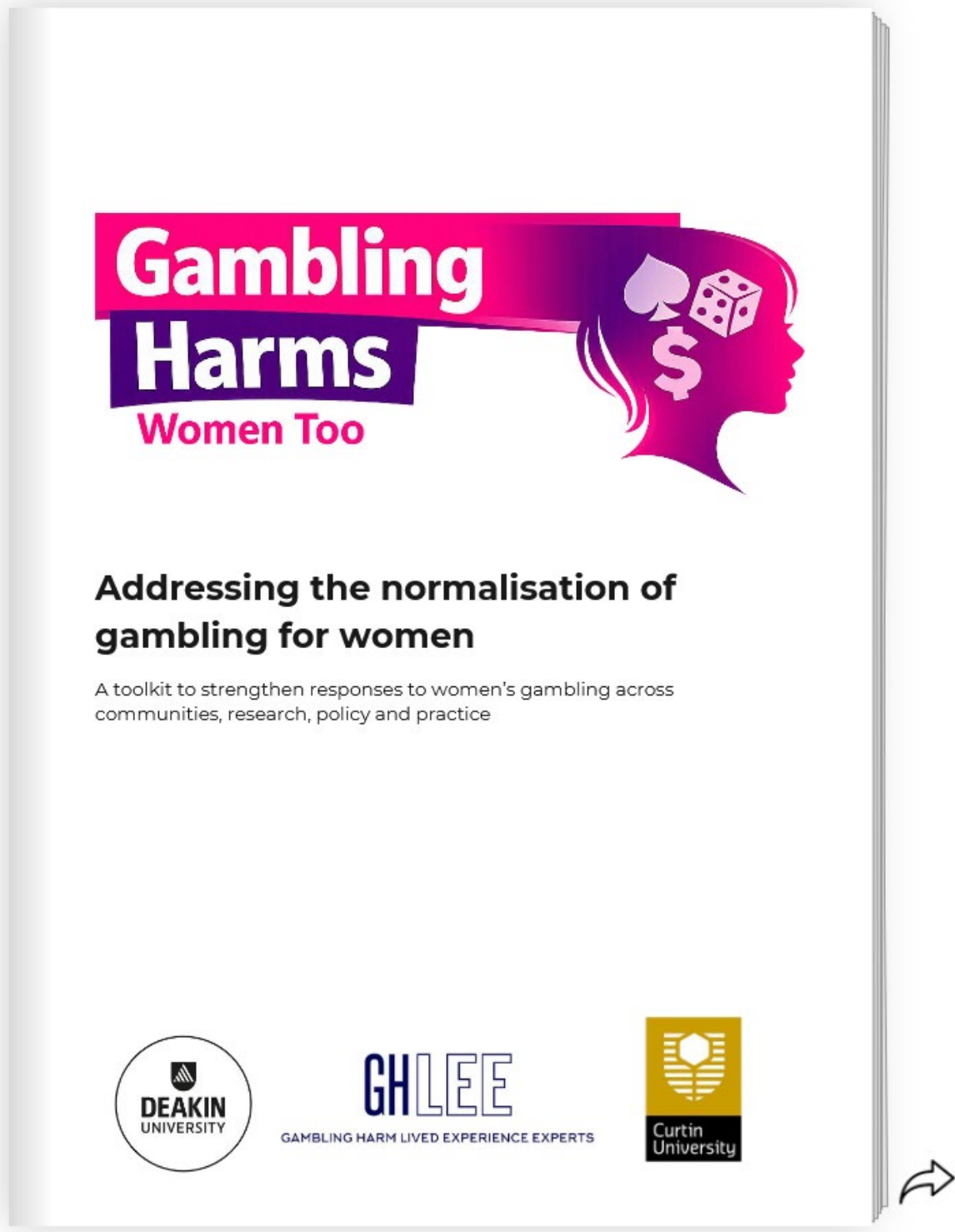
Acknowledgements	2
Phase one: Online qualitative survey of women's gambling attitudes, experiences, and practice 9	9
Aim and research questions	9
Methods	9
<i>Approach</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Sample and recruitment</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Data collection</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Data analysis</i>	<i>11</i>
Results	12
Phase two: Marketing appeal strategies to women	20
Aim and research questions	20
Methods	20
<i>Approach</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Sample and recruitment</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Data collection</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Data analysis</i>	<i>21</i>
Results	21
Phase three: Online focus groups with key informants of gambling harm and normalisation ... 24	24
Aim and research questions	24
Methods	24
<i>Approach</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Sample and recruitment</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Data collection</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Data analysis</i>	<i>25</i>
Results	26
Discussion	32
Conclusion	36
Gambling Harms Women Too:	37
References	38

List of Tables

Table 1: Participant socio-demographic characteristics (n=516)	12
--	----

The Gambling Harms Women Too Toolkit:

Access the toolkit and associated resources at www.GamblingHarmsWomenToo.com



Women and gambling

Gambling Harms Women Too

Gambling is frequently perceived as a men's issue, despite many women participating in gambling activities.³

One in two women in Australia participate in some form of gambling each year.⁴

Younger women in particular gamble across a range of products including poker machines, sports betting, and lotteries.⁵

Women have often been overlooked in gambling research, policy, and public awareness campaigns.^{5,6}

Participation at a glance

Nearly

30%

of Australian women gamble weekly.

Of that population, **young women aged 18 to 34** are the most at risk of gambling harm.⁷



"Gambling is becoming a more normal and regular part of younger women's lives than we've ever seen in previous generations."

- Dr Simone McCarthy

09 A toolkit to strengthen responses to women's gambling across communities, research, policy and practice

Women and gambling harm

Gambling Harms Women Too

Gambling harm refers to any negative impact or adverse consequence of gambling on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, and the wider community.⁸ Gambling harm can affect many areas of life⁹ and can extend beyond the individual to impact family members, friends, and others around them.¹⁰



Women are often underrepresented in gambling harm campaigns, which can have unintended consequences, including reinforcing the perception that women are not at risk of gambling harm.¹¹



10

Explore different collections



Background

Gambling is a significant public health issue that contributes to a range of health, social, and financial harms and can exacerbate existing health inequities [Marionneau, Egerer & Raisamo 2023]. Public health and health promotion scholars recognise that these harms are not experienced equally across the population. Instead, they are shaped by the social, commercial, and cultural contexts in which people live, resulting in different patterns of gambling participation, risk, and harm for different population groups [Latvala et al. 2021]. Increased attention has therefore been paid to understanding the processes through which gambling becomes embedded and accepted within everyday life, and how these processes may influence attitudes, behaviours, and experiences of harm [Thomas et al. 2018]. Thomas and colleagues [2018] defined the normalisation of gambling as:

“The interplay of socio-cultural, environmental, commercial and political processes which influence how different gambling activities and products are made available and accessible, encourage recent and regular use, and become an accepted part of everyday life for individuals, their families, and communities” [Thomas et al. 2018, p. 54].

This definition has been recently updated to place more emphasis on the interconnected determinants that drive normalisation:

“A socially, culturally, commercially and politically shaped process. It occurs when interconnected determinants increase the availability, accessibility and visibility of gambling across physical and online environments, encourage recent and regular use of gambling products, and position gambling as an accepted part of everyday life for individuals, families and communities.” [Murray et al. 2026].

While much of the research examining gambling normalisation has focused on the role of advertising [David et al. 2020; Nyemcsok et al. 2018; Nyemcsok et al. 2021; Pitt et al. 2022b], evidence demonstrates that normalisation is shaped by a broader range of interacting social (e.g. peer behaviours); environmental (e.g. accessibility to gambling venues); commercial (industry products and public relation strategies); and political (government policy and framing) determinants [Pitt et al. 2022b; Thomas et al. 2018; Thomas et al. 2023b]. These determinants embed gambling within everyday life, reinforcing perceptions that gambling is a common, socially acceptable, and legitimate leisure activity [Marko et al. 2022; Thomas et al. 2023c; van Schalkwyk et al. 2021]. They include the availability and accessibility of gambling opportunities across both physical and online environments, the design and promotion of gambling products, and broader social and cultural narratives that position gambling as an accepted part of community life [Thomas et al. 2018]. Researchers have

shown that these factors shape how people experience and perceive gambling, influencing attitudes towards gambling, perceptions of risk, and the extent to which gambling becomes normalised within different population groups [McCarthy et al. 2020; Nyemcsok et al. 2023a; Pitt et al. 2022b].

There has been a significant focus in the gambling literature on the normalisation of various gambling products in relation to children [Nyemcsok et al. 2021; Pitt et al. 2023b; Pitt, Thomas & Bestman 2016; Pitt et al. 2017; Pitt et al. 2016; Thomas et al. 2023a; Thomas et al. 2023b], young men [Nyemcsok et al. 2022, 2023b], and older adults [Johnson et al. 2022; Pitt et al. 2023b; Pitt et al. 2022a]. This research has advanced understanding of the social, environmental, commercial, and political determinants that contribute to the normalisation of gambling within these population groups. Comparatively less is known about the normalisation of gambling among women [McCarthy et al. 2020]. This gap is important because it may limit understanding of the ways in which gambling products, promotions, and environments are increasingly engaging women.

Researchers have demonstrated that the gambling industry employs many of the same commercial strategies used by other health harming industries, including the tobacco and alcohol industries [Cowlshaw & Thomas 2018; Hill & Friel 2020; McCarthy et al. 2023a]. Historically, these industries initially focused their marketing on men before expanding their customer base through products, promotions, and branding designed to appeal to women [Atkinson, Meadows & Sumnall 2024; Feeny et al. 2021; Hill & Friel 2020; Lyons et al. 2024]. During this period, public health responses were slower to recognise and address women's experiences, with prevention initiatives often developed around male patterns of use [Hill & Friel 2020]. These examples highlight the importance of understanding how gambling is becoming normalised among women so that policies and public health responses are informed by women's experiences and remain responsive to changing industry strategies.

While men and women often report comparable rates of gambling participation, gambling research, policy, and practice have historically focused more heavily on men [McCarthy et al. 2019]. Researchers have argued that this has limited understanding of women's gambling experiences and contributed to prevention strategies that are primarily informed by men's patterns of gambling and harm [McCarthy et al. 2019]. As a result, there has been limited attention given to the ways in which gambling products, environments, and public health responses may influence women's experiences and potential pathways to harm. Although gambling has traditionally been perceived as a male-dominated activity, gambling participation among women is common across Australia. The 2024 ACT Gambling Survey found that almost half of women (49.3%) had gambled in the last 12 months, while more than one in five (21.6%) had participated in online gambling [Rockloff et al. 2025]. Women were also more likely than men to report harm associated with another person's gambling,

particularly younger women. Recent estimates further indicate that women account for almost one-third (29.6%) of the total burden of gambling harm to self in the ACT [Rockloff et al. 2025].

Researchers have demonstrated that women's gambling behaviours differ from men's and are becoming increasingly diverse. Women are more likely than men to participate in venue based gambling [Suomi 2024], and in products such as lotteries, instant lotteries, and bingo [Rockloff 2020]. However, emerging evidence suggests that younger women are increasingly engaging with a broader range of gambling products, including sports and race betting, and are more likely to gamble across multiple products than previous generations of women [McCarthy et al. 2018]. Researchers have also identified shifts in the environments where women gamble. Gambling venues, online betting platforms, and digital technologies are increasingly designed and promoted in ways that appeal to women, with marketing strategies, social media, celebrity endorsements, and technology contributing to the routinisation and social acceptability of gambling among different groups of women [McCarthy et al. 2026; McCarthy et al. 2023b; Thomas et al. 2022].

Despite this growing evidence, public health research and practice have continued to focus predominantly on young men and online sports betting, with comparatively limited attention given to the normalisation of gambling among women [McCarthy et al. 2020; McCarthy et al. 2023b; Thomas et al. 2022; Thomas 2020]. Experts, including researchers, support services, health promotion experts, and policymakers have also acknowledged limited understanding of women's gambling experiences and have highlighted the need for gambling harm prevention initiatives that are responsive to women's gendered experiences, pathways to harm, and support needs [McCarthy et al. 2022]. Addressing these evidence gaps is important for understanding the factors that contribute to the normalisation of gambling among women and for informing public health policies and prevention strategies that are responsive to women's experiences.

Using novel qualitative methods, this study aimed to explore the range of determinants that contribute to the normalisation of gambling for women in the ACT, and the public health strategies that can be developed to respond. The project was guided by three key research questions:

1. What are the range of social, environmental, and commercial determinants that contribute to the social acceptance and regular and routine gambling practices of women in the ACT?
2. How do gambling industry marketing, promotional, and public relations strategies contribute to the normalisation of gambling for women in the ACT?
3. How do key informants in the ACT conceptualise the risks facing women who gamble, and the range of tailored strategies that could be used to respond?

Phase one: Online qualitative survey of women's gambling attitudes, experiences, and practices

Aim and research questions

This research aimed to examine how women living in the ACT viewed the normalisation and sociocultural acceptance of gambling in Australia, including within their local communities.

Phase one of this study was guided by the following overarching research question:

RQ1) What are the range of social, environmental, and commercial determinants that contribute to the social acceptance and regular and routine gambling practices of women in the ACT?

Methods

Approach

An online qualitative survey was conducted to explore participants' perceptions and experiences related to gambling normalisation. Online qualitative surveys are increasingly recognised as a rigorous and efficient method for gathering rich qualitative insights from large and diverse participant samples in public health research [Braun et al. 2021; Thomas et al. 2024]. This approach was selected for its ability to generate detailed open-text responses while facilitating the rapid recruitment of a broad demographic sample. The online qualitative survey provided an anonymous and accessible method for exploring a sensitive and stigmatised topic, encouraging honest responses, reducing social desirability bias, and minimising power imbalances between researchers and participants [Thomas et al. 2024]. This approach reportedly enables efficient recruitment of a large, diverse sample within a short timeframe, strengthening the credibility of the findings and their relevance for informing public policy and practice [Thomas et al. 2024].

Ethical approval was obtained by Health Ethics Advisory Group at Deakin University (2025/HE000201)

Sample and recruitment

The sample comprised 516 women aged 18 years and over residing in the ACT. The target sample size of approximately 500 women was informed by previous online qualitative survey studies with women [McCarthy et al. 2024; Pitt et al. 2023a], and the concept of information power [Malterud, Siersma & Guassora 2016]. The sample provided sufficient depth and breadth of data to address the research questions.

Participants were recruited via Qualtrics who distributed survey invitations to individuals who met the inclusion criteria (self-identified as woman, aged 18 years or older, living in the ACT) through its affiliated Australian panel networks. Participants received a link to the survey along with a Plain Language Statement outlining the purpose of the study and their rights as participants. Consent was implied through participants' voluntary decision to commence and submit the survey.

Data collection

Data were collected in May-June 2025. Prior to full launch, the survey underwent a soft launch (pilot phase) with approximately 50 women (10% of the target sample). The pilot was used to assess the clarity, accessibility, and functionality of the survey questions and platform. The research team reviewed the pilot data and did not make any changes and progressed with the full survey launch on June 2nd. Following a two-week data collection period n=503 participants completed the survey. The research team reviewed the responses, and 18 participants were flagged for nonsensical or poor-quality responses. Qualtrics replaced these participants which resulted in a final sample of n=516. The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

The survey development was co-designed with women who had a lived experience of gambling harm from Gambling Harm Lived Experience Experts (GHLEE). The co-design process involved two 60-minute online workshops. Following the first session, the research team developed the draft survey, which was presented in the second session for feedback and refinement. This participatory approach ensured that the survey reflected lived experience perspectives and used language that resonated with the target population. The final survey included a series of categorical questions to capture socio-demographic information (e.g. age, education, geographic location, employment) and gambling product engagement.

The survey was organised around five key topic areas, with each comprising a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth qualitative responses. These topic areas explored:

- 1) Participants' reasons for engaging in or avoiding gambling;

- 2) Perceptions of the factors contributing to the normalisation of gambling for women in the ACT;
- 3) Experiences of social exposure to gambling behaviours, products, and promotions in various settings across the ACT;
- 4) Attitudes towards commercial marketing strategies perceived to target women; and
- 5) Suggestions for strategies to raise awareness and prevent gambling harm among women in the ACT.

This report uses data from four open-text response questions in the survey:

- Do you think gambling is part of Australia's culture? Why or why not?
- Do you think gambling has become normal for women in the ACT? Why or why not?
- Can you provide examples of how gambling is embedded into social activities, events or settings that you might attend?
- Do you believe certain types of gambling are more socially accepted for women than others? If so, which ones and why?

Data analysis

Quantitative data from the discrete-choice questions were downloaded into SPSS and analysed using descriptive statistics and frequencies to provide an overview of participant characteristics. Qualitative data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke [2021]. First, the research team familiarised themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the entire dataset and documenting initial reflections. Throughout the analysis, the research team met regularly with an advisory group which included female lived experience experts (n=3). These collaborative meetings provided critical guidance and interpretation grounded in lived experience. Coding was conducted by identifying both semantic and latent features of the data (*e.g. explicit descriptions of gambling as a regular social activity and broader assumptions about how commercial and cultural practices normalise gambling*). Responses were labelled with initial codes capturing key concepts and patterns of meaning (*e.g. normalised/part of the culture, family and social traditions, sport and alcohol, and gambling advertising*). These codes were then organised into broader themes that reflected shared patterns across the dataset, which underwent a rigorous process of review, refinement, and definition to ensure distinction between themes. Once final themes were developed and named, the research team prepared a written synthesis of the findings as part of this report.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics

The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in [Table 1](#). The survey was completed by n=516 women aged 18-89 years (M=38.8 years, SD 14.2 years). The sample was slightly younger with most participants below the age of 44 (n=363, 70.3%). One fifth of participants were born outside of Australia (n=94, 18.2%) and primarily spoke a language other than English at home (n=97, 18.8%). The sample was highly educated with n=299 (57.9%) having a university qualification. Over half (n=300, 58.1%) were currently in full time employment.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (N=516)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (n=516)
Age		
18-24	78	15.1
25-34	150	29.1
35-44	135	26.2
45-54	72	14.0
55-64	46	8.9
65-74	30	5.8
75+	5	1.0
Country of birth		
Australia	422	81.8
Outside of Australia	94	18.2
Do you use a language other than English at home		
Yes	97	18.8
No	419	81.2
Highest level of education		
Below year 10	3	0.6
Year 10	12	2.3
Year 12	78	15.1
Certificate I, II, III, IV	64	12.4
Diploma/ Advanced Diploma	60	11.6
Bachelors Degree	184	35.7
Postgraduate Degree	115	22.3
Current employment status		

Working full time	300	58.1
Working part-time or casually	88	17.1
Unemployed but looking for work	19	3.7
Full-time student	22	4.3
Homemaker	25	4.8
Retired	49	9.5
Other	13	2.5
Household composition		
Couple with dependent children	184	35.7
Couple with no dependent children	121	23.4
Single household living alone	89	17.2
Living with parent/s	46	8.9
Single with dependent children	35	6.8
Sharing with house mates	31	6.0
Other	10	1.9

Gambling characteristics

Three quarters of women (n=389, 75.4%) had engaged in some form of gambling in the last 12 months. Approximately a third of women (n=162, 31.4%) were gambling regularly (at least once a month) which included over one in ten women (n=74, 14.3%) gambling at least weekly. The most used product by women in the sample was lotteries, with over half (n=251, 64.5%) of participants indicating gambling on lotteries in the last 12 months. This was followed by scratchies (n=190, 48.8%), electronic gambling machines (EGMs) (n=160, 41.1%) and sports betting (n=107, 27.5%). A third of the sample (n=174, 33.7%) indicated having a negative experience from their own or someone else's gambling.

Women's perceptions of the normalisation and sociocultural acceptance of gambling in the ACT

Theme One: Gambling as an accepted part of Australian culture, traditions, and everyday life

Participants consistently described gambling as a normal and socially accepted part of Australian

culture. Participants reflected on broader cultural narratives, describing Australians as “*laid-back*” and “*relaxed*”, and also “*competitive*” and “*optimistic*”, and suggested that these characteristics reinforced the stereotype that Australians “*love to bet on anything*”. There were mixed views about the ACT specifically. Some participants reported gambling to be less common because of the ACT’s highly educated population and large public service workforce, while others suggested that gambling represented an affordable leisure activity compared with other forms of entertainment. Despite these differing perspectives, participants consistently described gambling as an accepted and familiar part of everyday life.

Having a punt seems to be part of the happy go lucky Aussie style. – 36 years old

Participants described gambling as being embedded within their everyday social relationships and routines. Although a small number stated that gambling was not part of their own social circles, most described regular exposure to gambling through family members, partners, friends, and colleagues. Many viewed gambling as “*ingrained*” within older generations, particularly through electronic gaming machines, while others perceived younger generations to be increasingly exposed through online betting and gambling apps. Gambling was commonly described as a social activity that “*brings people together*”, providing opportunities to connect with others and participate in social occasions.

Half the events I attend, such as family gatherings, work after hang outs, and so on, somehow always end up with someone mentioning gambling. – 23 years old

Participants also described gambling as embedded within family traditions, celebrations, and social rituals. Gambling was frequently incorporated into birthdays, Christmas, Mother’s Day, and other celebrations through activities such as going to the casino or poker machine venues, particularly for 18th birthdays as a “*rite of passage*”, or by giving lottery tickets and scratch cards as gifts. Others reflected on routine family practices, including choosing lottery numbers together or betting on horse racing as a regular weekend activity. These experiences often began in childhood and were described as longstanding family traditions.

My family would always ask all the kids to pick a lottery number for the week. Then we use our birthday [dates]. It was a Saturday morning routine to buy a paper and get the lottery with our parents. – 49 years old

Participants also linked gambling to broader Australian traditions and nationally significant events. Many described activities such as playing Two-Up on Anzac Day (“*played in the trenches in World War 2*”), betting on the Melbourne Cup (“*the race that stops a nation*”) and the Spring Racing

Carnival and wagering on major sporting events as longstanding cultural practices that reinforced gambling as a normal part of Australian life. These events were perceived to create shared expectations that gambling was an accepted component of social participation.

If it is a national sporting game or event such as Melbourne Cup then it is definitely part of the experience and culture Australians carry and partake in. – 28 years old

Theme Two: The role of sport, alcohol, and community venues in normalising gambling

Participants consistently described gambling as being closely intertwined with sport, with many viewing this relationship as a key reason gambling had become socially accepted in Australia. Australian Rules Football, horse racing, and other major sporting events were frequently discussed as settings in which gambling was expected and encouraged. Participants attributed this relationship to a range of factors, including the widespread availability of online betting, longstanding sponsorship arrangements between gambling companies, sporting organisations, and broadcasters, and the extensive promotion of betting during sporting events. Gambling was also described as enhancing social engagement with sport, through activities such as “footy tipping”, “sweepstakes” or “betting pools” in the workplace, as well as informal bets between friends.

Sports betting as become just as important as watching the game/event. – 21 years old

Participants also described gambling as closely connected with alcohol consumption and broader socialising practices. Many reflected on the association between “a beer and a punt”, describing gambling, drinking, and watching sport as interconnected activities that together formed a familiar Australian social experience.

It is baked into the whole Australian stereotype built on mateship, drinking and sports. – 60 years old

Pubs and clubs were identified as key environments in which these relationships were reinforced. Participants described these venues as places where food, alcohol, sport, and gambling were routinely brought together, making gambling a highly visible and accepted part of social life. They described exposure to gambling through gaming rooms, Keno displays, sports broadcasts, venue signage, and promotional activities such as raffles. For many, gambling was perceived as being “just everywhere” within these settings, regardless of whether they intended to gamble.

Pubs and clubs offer gambling machines, providing a good social atmosphere, also family and friends tend to play poker, casino and lot more gambling. – 32 years old

Importantly, participants described pubs and clubs as more than gambling venues. They were viewed as accessible community spaces where people gathered to eat, socialise, celebrate, watch sport, and spend time with family and friends. Several participants reflected on childhood experiences of visiting these venues with their families, with one participant recalling their experiences of them and their siblings “*drawing on the Keno papers*”. Others described them as safe and welcoming spaces, particularly for people experiencing loneliness. For example, pubs and clubs offered a place to go or “*a way to get out of the house on payday*” and the presence of other patrons and being “*surrounded by people*” eased their loneliness and represented a “*safe environment*” for women in particular. As a result, participants suggested that gambling became normalised not only because it was available, but because it was embedded within environments that served a broad range of everyday social and community functions.

I live in an area dominated by clubs, which are one of few 'third place' options for people to spend times. All of the clubs have poker machines and often have raffles and other types of gambling as well. They also screen sporting events that heavily feature gambling ads. It's hard to find public spaces outside of working hours to spend time that do not feature the promotion of gambling and alcohol. – 43 years old

Theme Three: Recognising the widespread availability and visibility of gambling in ACT communities

Participants consistently described gambling promotions as highly visible within their lives. They recalled seeing gambling advertising across shopping centres, newsagents, billboards, pubs and clubs, sporting venues, television, radio, social media, betting websites, and through influencer and celebrity endorsements. Participants also described receiving direct marketing through physical flyers, emails, special offers, and inducements. Collectively, these experiences contributed to perceptions that gambling promotions were difficult to avoid.

It has become worse because of advertising and normalising it. – 69 years old

Participants also described gambling products as being increasingly accessible across both physical and online environments. They identified opportunities to gamble through poker machines, Keno, sports and race betting in pubs and clubs, betting facilities at sporting and racing venues, online betting platforms, and convenient products such as lotteries and scratch cards purchased while grocery

shopping. Many reflected on the increasing diversity of gambling products, suggesting there was “*something for everyone*” regardless of age, interests, or preferences.

There are so many different things to gamble on that appeals to different people. – 54 years old

Participants perceived that the availability of gambling varied across communities and settings. While many reflected on the large number of pubs, clubs, and RSLs offering pokies and Keno throughout Canberra, others described gambling, particularly poker machines, as playing an even more “*central*” role within other regional and rural communities. Several participants also recalled gambling products being positioned within highly visible areas of venues, including near entrances and dining areas of family-friendly establishments.

I read a statistic that in my regional NSW hometown (near the ACT), \$1 million is spent a week on gambling. And the town is not big too. – 26 years old

Theme Four: Gendered expectations and changing gambling practices among women

While a small number of participants stated that gambling was not common among women in their own social circles, most perceived that gambling had become increasingly normalised for women. Participants recognised that women may engage with gambling differently to men, but also reflected on changing social norms, gambling products, and marketing strategies that they believed had contributed to the growing social acceptance of gambling among women.

I think women just prefer quality time with friends, talking, having wines, going for a walk, gambling just doesn't seem to be a way I bond or spend time with my friends, I could be the minority though. – 31 years old

Some participants recognised that gambling marketing was increasingly reflecting stereotypical interests and activities associated with women. Examples included betting markets linked to reality television programs, influencer and celebrity endorsements, and the promotion of horse racing events as fashionable and glamorous social occasions. Participants described how women were more likely to participate in “*feminine*”, “*classy*” and “*glamorous*” types of gambling. The Melbourne Cup was frequently discussed as an event where fashion, socialising, alcohol, and gambling were intentionally combined to create an appealing experience for women.

The build up to Melbourne Cup with the advertising of fashion and selling it as a fun, classy event with celebrities, when the entire day is based around gambling. – 35 years old

Some participants held differing views about whether gambling remained a gendered activity. Some continued to perceive sports betting as predominantly masculine, describing how male partners and friends were more likely to discuss betting odds and sporting outcomes than their female friends. Others argued that gambling had become increasingly “gender neutral” and suggested that women now participated in many of the same gambling activities as men, including sports betting. Several participants linked these changing patterns to broader social change, arguing that women's increased financial independence and greater gender equality meant that gambling was no longer viewed as inappropriate or taboo for women.

I think gambling is normal for anyone and is not rooted in gender. Where men are more likely to partake, is it no longer taboo for a woman to gamble. – 22 years old

A few participants also reflected on the financial circumstances shaping women's gambling. They described how women, particularly single mothers and primary caregivers, often carried significant financial responsibilities and could be drawn to gambling through aspirations of improving their financial situation. The rising cost of living was frequently discussed as increasing the appeal of gambling, with some participants suggesting that the possibility of winning a large prize represented financial security, retirement, or a means of coping with economic pressures. The current cost-of-living crisis was described as a motivation for women to use gambling as a “means for survival”.

The cost-of-living is rising and the chance of winning money definitely provides an appeal. – 38 years old

Theme Five: Commercial and political influences on the normalisation of gambling

While many participants described gambling as a socially accepted part of Australian culture, others reflected on why gambling had become so deeply embedded within Australian society. Participants considered the close association between gambling and community activities, and whether these relationships had been actively shaped by commercial interests seeking to increase gambling participation and profits. Several participants compared these approaches with those previously used by the tobacco industry to embed harmful products within everyday life.

It doesn't need to be [normalised] but it is. It is a similar platform to tobacco smoking, an observed normalised behaviour that can be removed from popular culture. – 43 years old

Participants also reflected on the role of governments in shaping the normalisation of gambling. Many believed that insufficient regulation of gambling products, promotions, and marketing had contributed to gambling becoming increasingly visible across traditional and digital media. Some participants suggested that gambling's place within Australian culture had become reinforced through commercial and political influences, rather than reflecting a core cultural value.

To some extent, gambling can be regarded as a part of Australian culture. Gambling is merely a commercial and social phenomenon in the cultural context, not a core cultural element. – 31 years old

Many participants drew particular attention to the relationship between gambling and sport. They questioned the financial relationships between gambling companies and sporting organisations and suggested these partnerships had contributed to gambling becoming an expected part of watching and participating in sport. Several participants contrasted the community and health benefits associated with sport with the commercial objectives of the gambling industry, arguing that the widespread promotion of betting had fundamentally reshaped sporting culture.

I think sport is part of Australia culture. I think gambling is only popular because of the constant advertising and availability. If the advertisements weren't constantly bombarding people while they watched sport, and even other tv and streaming services, I don't think it would be anywhere near as big a part of Australians lives. – 27 years old

A smaller number of participants situated gambling within broader historical, political, and economic systems. They reflected on Australia's "history" and the longstanding commercialisation of gambling, suggesting these legacies had shaped contemporary gambling practices and contributed to ongoing harms for some communities, particularly First Nations peoples and other marginalised groups.

The stereotype is largely created by our Anglo-Saxon history and sadly imposed upon minority and vulnerable communities and our First Nations brothers and sisters. – 60 years old

Phase two: Marketing appeal strategies to women

Aim and research questions

The aim of this phase was to identify and analyse gambling industry marketing, promotional, and public relations strategies that may appeal to women, and to examine how these strategies may contribute to the normalisation of gambling in the ACT. Phase two of this study was guided by the following research question:

RQ2) How do gambling industry marketing, promotional, and public relations strategies contribute to the normalisation of gambling for women in the ACT?

Methods

Approach

An online scan was conducted to examine marketing strategies associated with gambling venues and gambling companies that would appeal to women. This included reviewing how venues that also contain gambling products promote attendance and engagement through their online presence, alongside an examination of gambling company websites and social media sites to identify how gendered marketing strategies are used across different gambling products and providers. This study was informed by an existing typology developed by Thomas and colleagues [2020], which was originally designed to examine how gambling marketing, particularly in horse racing contexts, may appeal to women. In the current study, we used the typology as a guide to help identify examples of gendered marketing across a broader and more contemporary range of gambling products and settings, while remaining open to new or emerging forms of marketing that may not have been captured in the original framework.

The study did not aim to quantify the frequency of specific marketing strategies, or the specific companies or providers that promoted these. Instead, it sought to identify and analyse a diverse range of examples that illustrate how gambling, and gambling venues, are positioned as appealing, relevant, and socially acceptable for women. The focus was on the meanings embedded within marketing materials, and how these may contribute to the normalisation of gambling for women within everyday contexts.

Sample and recruitment

The sample included the websites of all venues authorised to operate gaming machines in the ACT.

These venues were selected to examine how settings that co-locate gambling facilities and non-gambling activities such as hospitality, entertainment, and community events, may use strategies and promotions that may appeal to women and contribute to pathways into gambling environments. In addition to that, a supplementary sample of websites and social media feeds of major wagering companies and lottery products operating in Australia were also included. This was to provide further examples of how the gambling industry may be promoting and appealing themselves to women and provide a broader context of the gambling industry in Australia. The sampling approach was purposive and non-exhaustive.

Data collection

Data were collected between August and October 2025. When looking at websites we examined homepages, subsequent tabs, and embedded content, including event listings, dining and entertainment promotions, membership information, and downloadable materials. Websites and social media feeds of wagering and lottery providers were reviewed between 8-10th of October 2025. The social media feeds were examined from 1 July to 10 October 2025. Relevant content was identified through manual browsing and captured using screenshots or downloads where possible. The frequency of examples or times that an appeal strategy appeared was not recorded. Materials were included where they contained features, imagery or messaging aligned with appeal strategies.

Data analysis

Each screenshot was examined following initial screening. Data were coded using a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive coding was guided by the typology developed by Thomas and colleagues [2020], which identified a range of strategies used to appeal to women (including feminisation of the product, empowerment, strategic associations, and social connection and acceptance). Inductive coding was used to capture additional or evolving strategies not reflected in the original typology. Coding was applied to both visual and textual elements of the screenshots. Once coding was complete, the data were grouped into broader thematic categories that reflected patterns in how appeal strategies were used. These themes were developed by organising similar codes together and reviewing them across the dataset to ensure consistency and clarity.

Results

Theme One: Creating environments and experiences that appeal to women

Club and pub websites presented venues as welcoming social spaces for women. Across homepage images, promotional videos, employment pages, and community engagement materials, women were

frequently depicted attending venues with partners, friends, and family members, or participating independently in leisure and community activities. Promotional content commonly featured women participating in activities such as barefoot bowls, dining, entertainment, and race day events. Horse racing and Spring Carnival promotions were particularly prominent, regularly depicting younger and older women attending events individually or in social groups. Venue imagery frequently portrayed women participating in attractive and aspirational leisure experiences. Promotional material showed women dressed fashionably while attending race days, weddings, restaurants, bars, lounge areas, and entertainment events, positioning venues as desirable places to socialise and celebrate. Some promotions also highlighted luxury and exclusivity through premium dining experiences, special events, and waterfront or yacht club settings. Alongside these social and lifestyle appeals, websites also portrayed women in leadership, employment, sporting, and community roles. Women were featured as employees, community members, conference attendees, scholarship recipients, and sporting participants, presenting clubs as places where women belonged across a range of social and professional settings. Promotional imagery often showed women celebrating sporting achievements, participating in community events, and engaging confidently with venue activities.

In contrast, sports betting and lottery websites adopted a different approach. These websites were primarily functional and product-focused, with relatively limited use of gender-specific imagery or promotional strategies. Where women were featured, they generally appeared in banner images associated with horse racing or brightly coloured lottery promotions. These visual elements were secondary to the primary purpose of facilitating gambling participation and product use.

Theme Two: Embedding gambling within everyday life and social occasions

Venues were promoted as places that could support a wide range of everyday activities, celebrations, and community events, extending well beyond gambling. Promotional images and videos featured life stages and milestones including weddings, bachelorette parties, birthdays, Christmas celebrations, graduations, work functions, team building events, and celebrations of life. Venues also promoted a diverse range of activities designed to encourage visits and appeal to different interests. These included creative workshops such as paint and sip events, tarot reading nights, dance classes, musical performances, farmers markets, trivia nights, community raffles, and horse and dog racing events. Rather than focusing solely on gambling products, these activities presented venues as places for entertainment, leisure, and social connection. Venues also promoted themselves as informal places to socialise. Websites advertised girls' nights, cocktail specials, pop-up cocktail bars, and coffee and cake catch-ups, while some venues offered childcare facilities and 'kids eat free' promotions to attract families with young children. Promotional imagery frequently featured families dining together, young children celebrating birthdays, or groups of women spending time together, reinforcing clubs as welcoming community spaces for women across different life stages. Websites also demonstrated

efforts to engage women across different age groups. Younger women were featured participating in sport, attending community events, receiving scholarships, and socialising with friends, while older women appeared in promotions for community activities, social events, and recreational pursuits such as bowls and archery. While venue websites focused on embedding venues within community life, lottery social media content extended this positioning into everyday routines. Women were frequently shown checking lottery results on their phones, sharing outcomes with family and friends, or incorporating lottery participation into everyday activities. Stories of lottery winners reinforced these messages by linking lottery participation to important life aspirations, including supporting family members, relieving financial pressures, purchasing a home, or travelling. These narratives positioned lottery participation as a routine, low-effort activity that could be easily incorporated into women's everyday lives.

Theme Three: Women's community participation and inclusion in non-gambling activities

Venue website content frequently featured women participating in hospitality, management, and board positions associated with the venue. Women's participation in sport (including associated with the venue) was particularly prominent. Websites featured women's football, soccer, golf, bowls, tennis, and combat sports, with imagery showing female athletes training, competing, celebrating victories, and supporting teammates. These images reinforced women's active participation associated with the venue and highlighted achievements across a range of sporting codes. Sports betting companies also incorporated messages relating to women's participation in sport, although less frequently. Sports betting websites occasionally featured women athletes, commentators, and patrons. Partnerships and initiatives that supported women and local communities were also highlighted. These included collaborations with women's businesses, organisations supporting women and families, and community fundraising initiatives. These initiatives emphasised community engagement and support for women's health and wellbeing.

Phase three: Online focus groups with key informants of gambling harm and normalisation

Aim and research questions

The aim of this phase was to engage key informants in the ACT to explore how gambling among women is understood, including perceptions of risk, gaps in current responses, and opportunities for prevention and harm reduction. This phase also aimed to inform the development of a contextually relevant public health toolkit.

This phase was guided by the following research question:

RQ3) How do key informants in the ACT conceptualise the risks facing women who gamble, and the range of tailored strategies that could be used to respond?

Methods

Approach

A qualitative study design was employed using online focus groups with key informants to explore a range of perspectives through group discussion [Chand 2025]. Findings from phases one and two were presented to participants to prompt discussion and inform a deliberative dialogue about priorities for action [Plamondon, Bottorff & Cole 2015]. Focus groups were chosen as this method is well suited when exploring a range of ideas and opinions on a broad topic and encourage interactions between participants to generate discussion.

Sample and recruitment

We aimed to conduct six online focus groups comprising two to three participants in each. This design reflected the relatively small number of individuals with relevant expertise in the ACT and the study's focus on recruiting participants from specific professional and lived experience backgrounds. Small online focus groups also provide opportunity for meaningful interaction and in-depth discussion of participants' perspectives [Marques et al. 2020]. Participants were key informants working across sectors relevant to gambling harm, women's health, and public health in the ACT, including financial and therapeutic counselling, community health, local government, policy, advocacy, and women with lived experience of gambling working as advocates. Participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling, including through an established ACT professional network. Email invites specified that individuals working for, or funded by, the gambling industry would not be included in the study. Participants were allocated to online focus groups based on availability, with a dedicated

lived experience focus group conducted in collaboration with the Gambling Harm Lived Experience Experts group (GHLEE). Potential participants received a Plain Language Statement and Consent Form before participation.

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (2025/HE000891).

Data collection

Focus groups were conducted online via Zoom between November 2025 and March 2026 and lasted approximately 90 minutes each. Findings from Streams One and Two were used as discussion prompts to encourage reflection on women's experiences of gambling and gambling marketing practices. Focus groups were facilitated using a semi-structured discussion guide and audio recorded and automatically transcribed using Zoom. Topics for discussion included:

- 1) Perceptions of the normalisation of gambling for women, and potential strategies to disrupt this;
- 2) Key determinants of gambling harm among women, including social, cultural, environmental, and commercial influences;
- 3) Risk perception and communication, including barriers and facilitators to engaging women in discussions about gambling harm; and
- 4) Priorities for policy, practice, and research, and input into the development of a public health toolkit for the ACT.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's [2021] reflexive thematic analysis. Focus group recordings were transcribed using Zoom's transcription function and reviewed for accuracy. In the first phase, the research team familiarised themselves with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and noting initial observations and patterns relevant to women's experiences and the normalisation of gambling. Data were coded using a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. Codes were organised into themes, which were reviewed, refined, and developed into an analytical narrative addressing the research question. Separate themes were also developed to capture participants' recommendations for policy, research, and practice. Throughout the analysis, the research team met regularly to refine codes and themes and ensure interpretations remained grounded in the data.

Results

Six focus groups were conducted with 17 key informants representing counselling services (n=3), community and social services (n=8), health promotion and advocacy organisations (n=3), and lived experience experts (n=3). Five focus groups included three participants, and one included two participants.

Theme One: Embedding gambling within everyday environments and community spaces

Key informants described access and availability as one of the primary determinants contributing to the normalisation of gambling for women. They explained that gambling products were readily accessible across a range of everyday environments, both in person and online. Physical environments included the purchase of lottery tickets and scratchies at shopping centres and newsagents, and access to poker machines and Keno within clubs and pubs. Informants also noted that sports betting increasingly occurred across both physical and digital environments, with women able to watch sport in venues while simultaneously placing bets through mobile betting apps. Online betting platforms were also described as expanding into novel betting markets, including reality television programs, creating additional opportunities for women to engage with gambling. Several informants reflected that these changes had become particularly apparent following the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that increased time at home, combined with greater reliance on digital technologies, may have increased women's exposure to online gambling.

“I think COVID really did a number on it, because particularly women who'd had babies, like on parental leave, and would normally be going to parent groups and activities, suddenly stuck at home with a newborn. The online access, I think did kick up then.” – Focus Group 1

Informants also described how the availability of gambling within clubs and pubs reinforced its normalisation. They explained that these venues served as community spaces where people gathered for meals, drinks, live music, trivia, and social events, while also providing immediate access to gambling products. Within the ACT, participants perceived there to be relatively few alternative venues offering similar opportunities for social connection without gambling. They also suggested that the way clubs were presented contributed to gambling being viewed as acceptable, with clubs perceived as safe, familiar, and welcoming environments despite housing harmful gambling products.

“I think with poker machines in particular, it's the fact that they are in clubs that are perceived to be a safe space, which is fairly ironic when you're engaging with a harmful product.” – Focus Group 2

The widespread accessibility of gambling products was viewed as making gambling part of everyday life. Participants described how gambling could be incorporated into ordinary activities, such as shopping, meeting friends for coffee, or catching up at a local club, requiring little additional effort or planning. They suggested that this high level of access and availability contributed to gambling being perceived as a normal social activity, while also creating challenges for people experiencing gambling harm. For example, some stated that individuals who self-excluded from gambling venues could also lose access to important community spaces for social connection, potentially reinforcing feelings of isolation and stigma.

“To me, it's probably the accessibility of those modes of gambling... because women who talk to us say they're so common, it's easy, you can do it in 2 seconds... you might meet up for a scratchie and a coffee, you might go to the pokies to have a drink and catch up with a friend, so accessible and normal.” – Focus Group 6

Theme Two: Social acceptance of gambling through everyday social practices

Key informants described gambling as a socially accepted part of everyday life in Australia. Gambling was perceived to occur alongside social activities such as meeting friends for coffee or drinks, attending community events, watching sport, and celebrating milestones. Informants reflected that these repeated social experiences contributed to gambling being viewed as a normal part of Australian culture, particularly within the ACT where clubs played an important role as community gathering spaces, with relatively few affordable alternatives for connection outside of clubs and pubs.

“In the ACT in particular, the place of the clubs are unique, providing social spaces for workplace events, private celebrations, etc. There aren't a lot of spaces outside of that that are cheaply available for people. So, I think that's particularly a major issue.” – Focus Group 2

Participants also described gambling as becoming incorporated into everyday routines. Clubs and pubs were viewed as places people visited regularly, particularly among older adults. Gambling was also embedded within more routine household activities, with lottery tickets and scratchies commonly purchased while grocery shopping or completing other errands. Informants suggested that lotteries and scratchies carried relatively little stigma because they were viewed as low-risk products. As a result, these products were often not recognised as gambling in the same way as poker machines, contributing to their social acceptance.

“I don't know where they come from, but I know with my husband, he doesn't gamble, but yet he was putting money on Tattslotto. He didn't consider that gambling... It's so normal, so much advertising out there, that people think, yeah, it's like a raffle ticket.” – Focus Group 6

Key informants further described gambling as being closely connected with social interaction and companionship. They explained that gambling often occurred alongside broader social experiences, such as sharing a drink with friends, rather than being the primary reason for attending. Some also reflected that these venues fulfilled important social needs for women experiencing loneliness or isolation, making gambling difficult to separate from the broader social environment.

“I think some women see it as a social thing, where they can meet their friends, have a drink, have a cigarette, and gamble, you know, \$50, whatever it is, not realizing that it can actually become addictive over time. Also, some women go there because they're lonely. When I was gambling, I met quite a few people. And they spent most of their time there, and I still see them going to those venues because they are lonely.” – Focus Group 6

Theme Three: Commercial strategies contributing to the normalisation of gambling for women

Key informants described gambling normalisation as being actively reinforced through commercial marketing strategies. While they acknowledged that gambling had long been embedded within Australian culture, they argued that contemporary advertising and promotional activities had strengthened and expanded the social acceptance of gambling, particularly among women. Several informants suggested that the scale of gambling marketing had contributed to gambling becoming an increasingly accepted part of everyday life.

“The normalisation is pushed predominantly by advertising, like, significant amounts of advertising. I believe it's well over \$250 million now.” – Focus Group 1

Participants also described a shift in the way gambling products and promotions were designed and marketed towards women. They reflected that gambling had historically been marketed to men, however, they believed gambling companies were increasingly developing products, environments, and marketing strategies that appealed specifically to women. Examples included betting markets linked to reality television programs, promotions centred on horse racing and race day events, and advertising that aligned gambling with social connection and glamour.

“There are certain forms of gambling that are certainly seen as quite normal for women. But then I feel like there's other forms which are potentially more harmful, which the industry is strongly pushing for women to move into those forms of gambling, and I think they're doing that through advertising.” – Focus Group 1

Several informants compared these strategies with the historical marketing approaches used by the tobacco and alcohol industries. They suggested that gambling companies were adopting similar approaches by developing different marketing strategies for different groups of women. Key informants believed the gambling industry was creating multiple pathways that made gambling products and activities appealing to different groups of women.

“Maybe it's even, you know, quite different cohorts of women that get targeted in different kinds of ways. Because obviously there's the feminisation of it... but then there's also that, sort of, rejection of feminine roles that also picks up particular cohorts of women that can be really effective... and I think we've seen that with things like alcohol and tobacco that have been historically marketed to men... and then carve out these really different niches... I think gambling is doing some of the same things” – Focus Group 1

Identifying priorities for action across policy, research, and practice

Strengthening gambling regulation in the ACT

Key informants identified stronger gambling regulation as the highest priority for reducing the normalisation of gambling for women. While recognising that gambling regulation varied across Australia, many believed the ACT had unique challenges because of the central role clubs played in community life and the comparatively limited availability of alternative venues for social activities. Informants suggested that the close relationship between clubs, community organisations, and local sporting groups meant that gambling was routinely encountered across everyday life in the ACT.

“Anyone who's raised kids in the ACT, we'd know it's almost impossible to avoid the sort of gambling advertising that comes with that.” – Focus Group 2

Several informants believed stronger regulatory approaches were required to reduce women's exposure to gambling products and promotions. They called for more robust consumer protection measures, including mandatory pre-commitment, strengthened self-exclusion systems, breaks in play, and venue shutdown periods.

“We, you know, we've got some of the worst... regulation internationally... we need robust self-exclusion, we need mandatory pre-commitment, we need breaks in play, we need closed-down periods, all those things.” – Focus Group 2

Increasing public awareness of gambling normalisation and harm

Informants also emphasised the need to increase community awareness about the ways gambling had become normalised for women. They believed many gambling products, particularly lotteries and scratchies, were rarely recognised as gambling. While gambling more broadly was frequently framed as a routine, social activity rather than a product associated with harm. Informants suggested there was a need for education that challenged these perceptions and increased public understanding of gambling industry strategies directed towards women.

“Yeah, I would just say that there's nothing there to say that it's not normal. Probably the most, or an important thing, it comes across as being quite a normal, social, interactive event.” – Focus Group 6

Participants also highlighted the importance of developing public education campaigns that reflected women's lived experiences and recognised the unique ways gambling affected women, including as people who gamble themselves and as people harmed by someone else's gambling. Several suggested that awareness campaigns should draw attention to commercial strategies used to market gambling to women and use accessible information to help women recognise harm and identify available support.

Strengthening support systems for women

Informants highlighted the importance of strengthening support systems for women experiencing gambling harm. They described a need for greater investment across the entire support pathway, including increasing awareness of harms, strengthening referral pathways, ensuring services were adequately staffed, improving workforce capability, and providing ongoing care. Informants also emphasised that support services should recognise the diversity of women's experiences and preferences, including culturally appropriate approaches and different ways of accessing information.

“What do you do if you're watching somebody else get harmed by gambling and it's bouncing back on you? Where do you go?... We better make sure that the help's there at the other end as well, because it's all very well to tell people how to get help, but if no one picks up the phone... then it's not much use, is it?” – Focus Group 1

Informants also suggested that prevention efforts should extend beyond specialist gambling services into settings frequently accessed by women, including workplaces, community organisations, healthcare settings, and parenting groups. They highlighted opportunities to embed gambling awareness within existing health and community services, while also emphasising the need for greater investment in affordable, welcoming, and gambling-free community spaces that provide opportunities for social connection without exposing women to gambling products. Informants stressed that these broader community supports should complement specialist services and provide women with a range of accessible pathways for information and support.

“If you ask the question, are you prepared for a yes? And what do you do with that?” – Focus Group 1

Discussion

This study aimed to understand the range of factors that may contribute to the normalisation of gambling for women in the ACT, and to raise awareness of these issues. There were three key areas of discussion that related to the research questions.

What are the range of social, environmental, and commercial determinants that contribute to the social acceptance and regular and routine gambling practices of women in the ACT?

This research demonstrated that the normalisation of gambling for women in the ACT was produced through the interconnected operation of social, environmental, commercial, cultural and political determinants that worked together to embed gambling within women's everyday lives. These findings reinforce Thomas and colleagues' [2018] and Murray and colleagues' [2026] conceptualisation of gambling normalisation as the interaction of social, environmental, commercial, and political processes that shape gambling availability, accessibility, and social acceptance. The present research extends this work by demonstrating that gambling was not only accessible, but also made visible, socially legitimate, and routinely available through the places, activities, relationships and responsibilities that formed part of women's everyday lives. Across all three phases of the study, gambling was portrayed as occurring alongside ordinary social activities rather than as a discrete gambling behaviour. Consistent with emerging research suggesting that gambling normalisation extends beyond advertising alone [Pitt et al. 2022b; Thomas et al. 2018], women and key informants described gambling as embedded within community venues, celebrations, shopping, workplaces, and family routines. Importantly, the findings suggest that the ACT context may present unique challenges for gambling prevention. Participants consistently described clubs as providing much more than gambling opportunities and key informants further described a lack of alternative third spaces where women could gather without being exposed to gambling products or promotions in the ACT. This creates an important tension for public health. Clubs may provide valued social, recreational and community benefits, including affordable meals, entertainment, sport, family activities and places for social connection. However, these benefits can sit alongside, and at times help to legitimise, environments in which gambling products are highly accessible and routinely encountered. The issue is therefore not that community connection, hospitality or leisure activities are harmful in themselves, but that these positive functions may be co-located with gambling products that are associated with significant individual, family and community harms.

This finding extends previous research on gambling normalisation by demonstrating that the integration of gambling within valued community and leisure infrastructure may create additional

barriers to reducing routine exposure. Where gambling is embedded within places that are understood as safe, familiar, affordable and community-oriented, the determinants of normalisation become mutually reinforcing: social connection draws people into venues, environmental design enables exposure, commercial strategies promote attendance and loyalty, and political or regulatory settings allow gambling products to remain part of everyday community spaces. The study also highlighted the importance of considering gender within discussions of gambling normalisation. Gambling was often embedded within routine practices linked to women's everyday roles and responsibilities, including grocery shopping, caregiving, organising family celebrations, and maintaining social relationships. These findings build on previous research demonstrating that women engage with different gambling products, environments, and practices than men, and that women's gambling behaviours are becoming increasingly diverse over time [McCarthy et al. 2018; Suomi et al. 2024]. By illustrating how gendered social roles, everyday routines, and community environments contribute to women's gambling practices, this study reinforces the importance of understanding gambling normalisation through women's lived experiences. These findings have important implications for policy and practice. Efforts to reduce gambling normalisation should extend beyond advertising restrictions to consider the broader environments in which gambling occurs. Policymakers should consider the co-location of gambling products with community facilities and invest in affordable, accessible, and gambling-free community spaces that provide genuine opportunities for social connection. This does not mean dismissing the social value that some venues provide but rather recognising that communities should not have to rely on gambling environments to access affordable leisure, hospitality, sport, entertainment or social support. Future research should continue examining how gendered roles and environments interact to shape gambling practices over time.

How do gambling industry marketing, promotional, and public relations strategies contribute to the normalisation of gambling for women in the ACT?

This study demonstrated that gambling environments were marketed to women through a broad range of non-gambling experiences, activities, and identities, positioning clubs and pubs as desirable destinations for everyday social life rather than as places to gamble. Rather than promoting gambling in isolation, venue websites emphasised dining, bars, live entertainment, women's sport, community events, charitable initiatives, and family-oriented activities. These strategies presented clubs as welcoming, inclusive, and community-focused spaces for women. In doing so, venue marketing appeared to normalise routine exposure to gambling by embedding gambling environments within everyday leisure, social, and community activities. These strategies also illustrate how commercial, social and environmental determinants may operate together. Marketing draws attention to positive social experiences, venue environments provide the physical setting for those experiences, and the co-location of gambling products means that women may be exposed to gambling while engaging in

activities that are not primarily gambling-related. These findings build on research demonstrating that gambling normalisation is shaped by a range of interacting environmental, social, and commercial determinants [Pitt et al. 2022b; Thomas et al. 2023b]. While previous research has primarily focused on sports betting advertising across TV and social media, this study suggests that venue marketing itself may function as an important normalising mechanism by encouraging women to engage with gambling environments for reasons unrelated to gambling. In this way, clubs were promoted as community hubs that supported belonging, family life, recreation, health, and connection. This broadening of venue identity may strengthen the legitimacy and social acceptance of gambling environments while increasing routine exposure to gambling products. Again, this creates a complex public health tension. Many of the activities promoted by venues, such as meals, entertainment, sport, charity events and family celebrations, may be experienced as positive and socially valuable. However, when these activities are used to bring people into settings where gambling products are available, they may also contribute to the normalisation of gambling environments and reduce critical attention to the harms caused by gambling products.

Online gambling companies employed distinct marketing strategies. Lottery promotions frequently linked gambling with financial security, supporting family members, and achieving lifestyle aspirations, while sports betting increasingly expanded into products and events perceived to appeal to women. Consistent with research examining other health-harming industries [Atkinson, Meadows & Sumnall 2024; Feeny et al. 2021; Hill & Friel 2020; Lyons et al. 2024], these approaches reflected increasingly sophisticated strategies that aligned gambling with women's identities, interests, and aspirations, rather than treating women as a single consumer group. The findings suggest that gambling companies are increasingly tailoring commercial strategies to engage different groups of women across a range of physical and digital environments. Together, venue-based marketing and online gambling marketing show that normalisation is not produced through a single channel or message. Rather, it is reinforced across interconnected environments, including community venues, digital platforms, sporting contexts, family-oriented activities and aspirational consumer messaging.

These findings have important implications for policy and practice. Regulatory approaches should extend beyond direct gambling advertising to also consider the broader ways gambling environments are promoted to women through community activities, entertainment, sponsorship, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Public health responses should similarly move beyond countering individual gambling advertisements to challenge the broader narratives that position gambling venues as essential spaces for community life and social connection. Such responses should seek to preserve and strengthen the positive functions that communities need, including connection, recreation, inclusion and affordable leisure, while separating these functions from gambling products and commercial gambling interests. Future research should continue investigating how venue marketing,

alongside emerging digital marketing strategies, contributes to women's routine exposure to gambling and the normalisation of gambling environments, as well as the implications for other at risk groups in the community.

How do key informants in the ACT conceptualise the risks facing women who gamble, and the range of tailored strategies that could be used to respond?

This research demonstrated that key informants conceptualised gambling normalisation and harm as structural public health issues that required coordinated responses across policy, practice, and research. Participants consistently identified broader social, commercial, environmental, and political factors as shaping women's gambling experiences. These findings reinforce growing public health evidence that gambling harms are produced through the interaction of commercial, social, and structural determinants, and are experienced unequally across the population [Latvala et al. 2021; Marionneau, Egerer & Raisamo 2023]. Rather than viewing these determinants as separate influences, key informants described them as mutually reinforcing. For example, limited access to gambling-free social spaces may increase reliance on venues for connection, venue marketing may frame these spaces as inclusive and community-oriented, and regulatory settings may enable gambling products to remain embedded within these environments.

Informants also emphasised that existing prevention approaches had not adequately reflected women's experiences. They described ongoing stigma associated with women's gambling, limited women-specific public health messaging, and support services that did not always recognise the diversity of women's circumstances, preferences, and pathways into gambling. Participants also highlighted the need to strengthen awareness of gambling harms among women, improve workforce capability, increase investment in specialist services, and embed gambling prevention within broader community and healthcare settings frequently accessed by women. These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that gambling research, policy, and practice have historically focused on men's gambling experiences, with comparatively limited attention given to women's pathways into gambling and experiences of harm [McCarthy et al. 2019; Thomas 2020]. They also reflect broader evidence from the tobacco and alcohol fields, where women were increasingly targeted by industry marketing while prevention initiatives remained largely centred on male patterns of use [Hill & Friel 2020]. Importantly, participants advocated for strengthening gambling regulation, improving public awareness of commercial industry tactics, embedding lived experience expertise across policy development and service design, and creating safer community environments that reduced routine exposure to gambling. These recommendations also point to the need for responses that address the tension between the valued social roles played by some venues and the harms associated with the gambling products located within them. Prevention strategies should not only remove opportunities

for social connection, but should support communities to access social, cultural, recreational and family activities in environments that are not dependent on gambling revenue or routine exposure to gambling products. These recommendations align with previous calls from researchers, policymakers, and support providers for gambling prevention initiatives that reflect women's experiences and respond to the changing strategies used by the gambling industry [McCarthy et al. 2022]. They also reinforce broader public health approaches that recognise gambling harm as a consequence of interacting structural determinants [Thomas et al. 2023c]. The findings suggest that reducing gambling normalisation for women requires more than individual behaviour change or improved awareness. It requires coordinated action on the social, commercial, environmental and political conditions that make gambling visible, accessible, legitimate and routine in women's everyday lives.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that the normalisation of gambling for women in the ACT is shaped by interacting social, environmental, commercial, and cultural influences that embed gambling within everyday life. Gambling was routinely encountered through community spaces, social practices, cultural traditions, and commercial marketing strategies that positioned gambling as an ordinary and socially acceptable activity for women. At the same time, women and key informants recognised the important role that commercial and political interests play in reinforcing gambling's place within everyday community life. The findings highlight the need for comprehensive public health approaches that recognise women's experiences and extend beyond individual behaviour change. Reducing the normalisation of gambling for women will require coordinated action across policy, research, and practice, including stronger regulation of gambling products, promotions, and environments, greater investment in prevention and support initiatives, and the creation of accessible community spaces that do not contain gambling products. Public education should also strengthen understanding of the commercial strategies used to promote gambling and support women to recognise and respond to gambling harms. Finally, this study reinforces the importance of ensuring that women, particularly those with lived experience of gambling harm, are central to the development of future policy, research, and practice. Their expertise provides critical insights into how gambling has become normalised within women's lives and offers an essential foundation for developing more effective and equitable approaches to preventing gambling harm among women.

Gambling Harms Women Too:

A Toolkit for strengthen responses to women's gambling across communities, research, policy and practice

The Gambling Harms Women Too Toolkit was developed as the project's primary knowledge translation resource to ensure the findings could be accessed and used by a broad range of audiences beyond academic and policy settings. Co-designed with women with lived experience of gambling harm and key informants, the toolkit was informed by findings from the stakeholder and lived experience focus groups, alongside ongoing collaboration with lived experience experts on the project advisory committee. Through multiple rounds of discussion and feedback, advisory committee members contributed to the development and refinement of the toolkit's content, messaging, and presentation. The toolkit was created to increase awareness of the ways gambling has become normalised in women's everyday lives, challenge common misconceptions about gambling harm, and support evidence-informed conversations, education, advocacy, and policy action.

The toolkit brings together a suite of free, practical resources tailored for community organisations, health professionals, policy makers, researchers, advocates, and community members. Resources include plain language evidence summaries, fact sheets, short educational videos, social media resources, a podcast series featuring lived experience and professional perspectives, and downloadable materials designed to support community engagement and knowledge sharing. All resources are freely available through the Gambling Harms Women Too website at: www.gamblingharmswomentoo.com. By translating research into accessible and practical resources, the toolkit aims to strengthen understanding of gambling harm among women and support actions to prevent and reduce gambling-related harm across communities.

Reach and uptake of resources

The Gambling Harms Women Too website and associated resources were launched in June 2026. Early website analytics indicate strong initial interest and engagement. In the first 30 days, the website attracted 164 unique visitors across 278 site sessions. While the majority of visitors were from Australia, the website has also been accessed internationally, including by users from the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Denmark. Users engaged with a range of resources across the website, including downloading the interactive toolkit and accessing the project's fact sheets, videos, plain language summaries, and other knowledge translation materials. Early engagement also extended to the project's podcast, which has received a combined 40 views, plays, and downloads across Spotify and YouTube during the reporting period. The project's Instagram account has also attracted a small following, providing an ongoing platform to share research findings, resources, podcast episodes, and future project updates.

References

- Atkinson, A, Meadows, B & Sumnall, H 2024, '“Just a colour?”: Exploring women's relationship with pink alcohol brand marketing within their feminine identity making', *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 125, p. 104337.
- Braun, V & Clarke, V 2021, *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*, SAGE Publications.
- Braun, V, Clarke, V, Boulton, E, Davey, L & McEvoy, C 2021, 'The online survey as a qualitative research tool', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, vol. 24, no. 6, pp. 641–54.
- Chand, SP 2025, 'Methods of data collection in qualitative research: Interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis', *Advances in Educational Research and Evaluation*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 303–17.
- Cowlshaw, S & Thomas, S 2018, 'Industry interests in gambling research: Lessons learned from other forms of hazardous consumption', *Addictive Behaviors*, vol. 78, pp. 101–6.
- David, JL, Thomas, SL, Randle, M, Pitt, H & Daube, M 2020, 'Parent and child perceptions of gambling promotions in Australian sport', *Health Promotion International*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 362–72.
- Feeny, E, Dain, K, Varghese, C, Atiim, GA, Rekve, D & Gouda, HN 2021, 'Protecting women and girls from tobacco and alcohol promotion', *BMJ*, vol. 374.
- Hill, SE & Friel, S 2020, '“As long as it comes off as a cigarette ad, not a civil rights message”: gender, inequality and the commercial determinants of health', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 17, no. 21, p. 7902.
- Johnson, RH, Pitt, H, Randle, M & Thomas, SL 2022, 'A critical qualitative inquiry of the social practices of older adult gamblers: implications for public health risk prevention', *Ageing & Society*, pp. 1–22.
- Latvala, TA, Lintonen, TP, Browne, M, Rockloff, M & Salonen, AH 2021, 'Social disadvantage and gambling severity: a population-based study with register-linkage', *European Journal of Public Health*, vol. 31, no. 6, pp. 1217–23.
- Lyons, AC, Kersey, K, Emslie, C, Dimova, E & Burrows, A 2024, 'Digital alcohol marketing and gender: A narrative synthesis', *Drug and Alcohol Review*, vol. 43, pp. 1361–1387.
- Malterud, K, Siersma, VD & Guassora, AD 2016, 'Sample size in qualitative interview studies: guided by information power', *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 26, no. 13, pp. 1753–60.
- Marionneau, V, Egerer, M & Raisamo, S 2023, 'Frameworks of gambling harms: a comparative review and synthesis', *Addiction Research & Theory*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 69–76.

Marko, S, Thomas, SL, Pitt, H & Daube, M 2022, "“Aussies love a bet”: Gamblers discuss the social acceptance and cultural accommodation of gambling in Australia', *Australian New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol. 46, no. 6, pp. 829–34.

Marques, ICDS, Theiss, LM, Johnson, CY, McLin, E, Ruf, BA, Vickers, SM, Fouad, MN, Scarinci, IC & Chu, DI 2020, 'Implementation of virtual focus groups for qualitative data collection in a global pandemic', *The American Journal of Surgery*, vol. 221, no. 5, pp. 918–22.

McCarthy, S, Pitt, H, Arnot, G & Thomas, SL 2026, "“They make it seem harmless”: a qualitative investigation into women’s perceptions about novel gambling promotions and public relations strategies', *BMC Public Health*, vol. 26, no.966, pp. 1-11.

McCarthy, S, Pitt, H, Benjamin, K, Stafford, J, Keric, D, Arnot, G & Thomas, S 2024, 'The role of alcohol consumption in the lives of older Australian women: qualitative insights and an agenda for further research, policy and practice', *BMC Public Health*, vol. 24, no. 1, p. 2715.

McCarthy, S, Pitt, H, Hennessy, M, Njiro, BJ & Thomas, S 2023a, 'Women and the commercial determinants of health', *Health Promotion International*, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 1–5.

McCarthy, S, Thomas, S, Pitt, H, Daube, M & Cassidy, R 2020, 'It's a tradition to go down to the pokies on your 18th birthday'—the normalisation of gambling for young women in Australia', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol. 44, no. 5, pp. 376–81.

McCarthy, S, Thomas, S, Pitt, H, Marko, S, Randle, M, Cowlshaw, S, Kairouz, S & Daube, M 2023b, 'Young women’s engagement with gambling: A critical qualitative inquiry of risk conceptualisations and motivations to gamble', *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, vol. 34, no. 1.

McCarthy, S, Thomas, S, Randle, M, Bestman, A, Pitt, H, Cowlshaw, S & Daube, M 2018, 'Women’s gambling behaviour, product preferences, and perceptions of product harm: Differences by age and gambling risk status', *Harm Reduction Journal*, vol. 15, no. 22, pp. 1–12.

McCarthy, S, Thomas, SL, Bellringer, ME & Cassidy, R 2019, 'Women and gambling-related harm: a narrative literature review and implications for research, policy, and practice', *Harm Reduction Journal*, vol. 16, pp. 1–11.

McCarthy, S, Thomas, SL, Marko, S, Pitt, H, Randle, M & Cowlshaw, S 2022, 'Women's perceptions of strategies to address the normalisation of gambling and gambling-related harm', *Australian New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol. 46, no. 6, pp. 821–8.

Murray, M, Pitt, H, McCarthy, S, Arnot, G, Constandt, B, De Jans, S & Thomas, S 2026, 'A narrative review of qualitative studies exploring the normalisation of gambling for youth and younger adults ', *Health Promotion International*.

Nyemcsok, C, Pitt, H, Kremer, P & Thomas, SL 2022, 'Young men’s perceptions about the risks associated with sports betting: a critical qualitative inquiry', *BMC Public Health*, vol. 22, no. 1, p. 867.

Nyemcsok, C, Pitt, H, Kremer, P & Thomas, SL 2023a, "“Drugs and alcohol get talked about, why not betting?” Young men's qualitative insights about strategies to prevent gambling harm', *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 276–83.

Nyemcsok, C, Pitt, H, Kremer, P & Thomas, SL 2023b, 'Viewing young men's online wagering through a social practice lens: implications for gambling harm prevention strategies', *Critical Public Health*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 241–52.

Nyemcsok, C, Thomas, SL, Bestman, A, Pitt, H, Daube, M & Cassidy, R 2018, 'Young people's recall and perceptions of gambling advertising and intentions to gamble on sport', *Journal of behavioral addictions*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 1068–78.

Nyemcsok, C, Thomas, SL, Pitt, H, Pettigrew, S, Cassidy, R & Daube, M 2021, 'Young people's reflections on the factors contributing to the normalisation of gambling in Australia', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol. 45, no. 2, pp. 165–70.

Pitt, H, McCarthy, S, Keric, D, Arnot, G, Marko, S, Martino, F, Stafford, J & Thomas, S 2023a, 'The symbolic consumption processes associated with 'low-calorie' and 'low-sugar' alcohol products and Australian women', *Health Promotion International*, vol. 38, no. 6, p. daad184.

Pitt, H, McCarthy, S, Thomas, SL, Randle, M, Marko, S, Cowlshaw, S, Kairouz, S & Daube, M 2023b, 'Older adults' perceptions of the risks associated with contemporary gambling environments: Implications for public health policy and practice', *Frontiers in Sociology*, vol. 8, p. 1061872.

Pitt, H, Thomas, SL & Bestman, A 2016, 'Initiation, influence, and impact: adolescents and parents discuss the marketing of gambling products during Australian sporting matches', *BMC Public Health*, vol. 16, pp. 1–12.

Pitt, H, Thomas, SL, Bestman, A, Daube, M & Derevensky, J 2017, 'Factors that influence children's gambling attitudes and consumption intentions: lessons for gambling harm prevention research, policies and advocacy strategies', *Harm Reduction Journal*, vol. 14, pp. 1–12.

Pitt, H, Thomas, SL, Bestman, A, Stoneham, M & Daube, M 2016, "“It's just everywhere!” Children and parents discuss the marketing of sports wagering in Australia', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol. 40, no. 5, pp. 480–6.

Pitt, H, Thomas, SL, Cowlshaw, S, Randle, M & Balandin, S 2022a, "“I always walked out with an empty purse.” Older adults' engagement with electronic gambling machines in Victoria, Australia', *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 533–41.

Pitt, H, Thomas, SL, Melanie, R, Cowlshaw, S, Arnot, G, Kairouz, S & Daube, M 2022b, 'Young people in Australia discuss strategies for preventing the normalisation of gambling and reducing gambling harm', *BMC Public Health*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 1–13.

Plamondon, KM, Bottorff, JL & Cole, DC 2015, 'Analyzing data generated through deliberative dialogue: Bringing knowledge translation into qualitative analysis', *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 25, no. 11, pp. 1529–39.

Rockloff, M, Browne, M, Hing, N, Thorne, H, Russell, A, Greer, N, Tran, K, Brook, K & Sproston, K 2020, *Victorian population gambling and health study 2018–2019*. Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. Melbourne, Australia.

Rockloff, M, Russell, A, Browne, M & Hing, N 2025, *2024 ACT gambling survey*, ACT Gambling and Racing Commission retrieved 08.07.25, Available from: https://www.gamblingandracing.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/2861796/2024-ACT-Gambling-Survey.pdf.

Suomi, A, Kim, J, Biddle, N, Dowling, NA, Hahn, M, Cowlshaw, S, Butterworth, P, Thomas, A, Hodgins, D, Heywood, W, Scott, P & Myers, P 2024, *Victorian Population Gambling and Health Study 2023*, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne.

Suomi, AH, M. Biddle, N. 2024, *Gambling participation in Australia 2024: trends over time, and profiles associated with online gambling*, Canberra, Australia.

Thomas, S, McCarthy, S, Pitt, H, Marko, S, Cowlshaw, S, Randle, M & Daube, M 2023a, "It is always there in your face." Australian young people discuss exposure to gambling activities and promotions', *SSM-Qualitative Research in Health*, vol. 3, p. 100220.

Thomas, S, Pitt, H, Bestman, A, Randle, M, McCarthy, S & Daube, M 2018, *The determinants of gambling normalisation: Causes, consequences and public health responses*, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne, Australia.

Thomas, S, Pitt, H, Randle, M, McCarthy, S, Daube, M, Miller, H, De Moel, C & Bestman, A 2020, *Australian young women's gambling behaviours: A socio-cultural investigation of gambling attitudes, beliefs, and consumption intentions*, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne, Australia.

Thomas, S, van Schalkwyk, MC, Daube, M, Pitt, H, McGee, D & McKee, M 2023b, 'Protecting children and young people from contemporary marketing for gambling', *Health Promotion International*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 1–14.

Thomas, SL, Crawford, G, Daube, M, Pitt, H, Hallett, J, McCarthy, S, Francis, L & Edmunds, M 2023c, 'Time for policies on gambling to benefit health-not the gambling industry', *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, vol. 34, pp. 267–71.

Thomas, SL, Pitt, H, McCarthy, S, Arnot, G & Hennessy, M 2024, 'Methodological and practical guidance for designing and conducting online qualitative surveys in public health', *Health Promotion International*, vol. 39, no. 3, p. daae061.

Thomas, SL, Pitt, H, Randle, M, Cowlshaw, S, Rintoul, A, Kairouz, S & Daube, M 2022, 'Convenient consumption: a critical qualitative inquiry into the gambling practices of younger women in Australia', *Health Promotion International*, vol. 37, no. 6, pp. 1–12.

Thomas, S, Pitt, H, Randle, M, McCarthy, S, Daube, M. 2020, *Australian young women's gambling behaviours: A socio-cultural investigation of gambling attitudes, beliefs, and*

consumption intentions, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne, Australia.

van Schalkwyk, M, Maani, N, McKee, M, Thomas, S, Knai, C & Petticrew, M 2021, "“When the Fun Stops, Stop”: An analysis of the provenance, framing and evidence of a ‘responsible gambling’ campaign", *PloS one*, vol. 16, no. 8, p. e0255145.