![Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction — Evidence. Engagement. Impact.]

Developing Canada's First National Low-risk Gambling Guidelines

The Challenge

On average, 79% of Canadian adults participate in some form of gambling in a given year (Canadian Partnership for Responsible Gambling, 2015). Gambling is a legal behaviour that poses potential risks to Canadians. Problem gambling has been recognized as a significant public health issue. Yet people are not aware of the risks of problem gambling and there is a lack of evidence-informed guidelines to provide individuals who gamble with recommendations about how to gamble in a manner that poses minimal risk to themselves and those around them. There is an important need for guidelines to help individuals who gamble make well-informed, responsible decisions about their gambling that would reduce gambling-related harms for themselves and those around them.

> The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) was created by Parliament to provide national leadership to address substance use in Canada. A trusted counsel, we provide national guidance to decision makers by harnessing the power of research, curating knowledge and bringing together diverse perspectives.

The Response

CCSA is leading the development of the world's first **Low-risk Gambling Guidelines** (LRGGs) by the year 2020. Funded by Mise sur toi, these evidence-informed guidelines will help Canadians make informed, responsible decisions about their gambling behaviour in general and in specific situations or circumstances that are particularly risky, such as in the context of alcohol use and consumption of other substances. LRGGs will also assist those who implement responsible gambling programs or promote public health to provide consistent, evidence-informed advice and messaging across all jurisdictions about how to gamble in a low-risk manner.

Who Will These New Gambling Guidelines Help?

The LRGGs are intended to assist a wide variety of audiences, including:

- Anyone who gambles or who has friends or family who gamble;
- Policy makers, gambling regulators and operators tasked with promoting responsible gambling;
- Those developing training materials and capacity-building programs for healthcare providers and allied professionals on how to identify risky gambling behaviour; and
- Those within public health who are developing awareness campaigns to inform the public about low-risk gambling in general and specific risky situations or circumstances (such as gambling while drinking or using other substances).

The Approach

At the beginning of the project in the spring of 2016, two expert groups were formed to oversee the leadership and development of the LRGGs:

1. The **National Low-risk Gambling Advisory Committee** (NLRG–AC) is composed of representatives from prevention, treatment, public health, regulation and others groups involved in promoting responsible gambling. The NLRG-AC has endorsed the need for evidence-informed LRGGs and is responsible for providing input into the development and promotion of the LRGGs.

2. The **Low-risk Gambling Guidelines Scientific Working Group** (LRGG–SWG) is composed of scientists and subject-matter experts in gambling or substance use. This group is leading the development of LRGGs using existing population datasets from multiple countries to assess the association between gambling patterns (i.e., frequency, expenditure and duration) and the likelihood of experiencing gambling-related harms. The research plan is presented in Figure 1.

The LRGG–SWG began its work by **determining which gambling-related harms could be targeted in the LRGGs**. Based on the best available evidence, it was decided to adopt the Victoria Taxonomy of Gambling Harms. This taxonomy classifies gambling harms in seven categories: financial, relationships, emotional, work or school, health, legal, and cultural (Browne et al., 2016).

The LRGG-SWG then identified and **developed an inventory of strong datasets** from Canada and around the world that assess the relationship between gambling patterns and harms. These datasets were then evaluated for their suitability to conduct the risk curves[1] of gambling related harms to identify low-risk gambling thresholds. The custodians of the datasets were invited to participate in the project (Table 2).

Risk curves are currently being conducted on eight datasets from eight different countries, including Canada, the United States, Iceland, France, Sweden, Finland, Australia, and New Zealand. These analyses will form the basis upon which the LRGG-SWG will suggest thresholds, which will ultimately become the LRGGs.

Further, the LRGG-SWG is leading and funding the Québec portion of a **national online gambling survey** (April 2018 to June 2019) that will help increase our current understanding of limit-setting behaviours of people who gamble as well as other questions relevant to the development of the LRGGs.

The LRGG-SWG also identified the need for **two comprehensive literature reviews** to be conducted to inform the development of the LRGGs.

1. **The influence of substance use on gambling behaviours: how use of substances might affect the ability of someone who gambles to set limits.** The first literature review will focus on how the use of alcohol and other substances might affect the ability of someone who gambles to set limits or gamble responsibly in general. Results of this review will permit the LRGG-SWG to understand how the use of alcohol and other substances should be taken into account when developing and promoting the LRGGs.

2. **The gambling risks across different sub-populations.** This meta-analysis will focus on the gambling risks across different sub-populations (e.g., elderly, adolescents, minorities and different genders). Given that each group possesses unique characteristics that confer different vulnerability to the harms of gambling, identifying those who are at higher risk and the level of risk will also be taken into account when developing and ultimately promoting the LRGGs.

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[1] A risk curve can determine the upper limits that when crossed increase the risk of developing gambling-related harms. In other words, at which point does gambling too much, too often or for too long substantially increase the risk of the onset of gambling-related harm?

With consultations with the NLRG–AC on the results obtained, the **draft LRGGs are estimated to be derived in the fall of 2018** and **validated in the fall of 2019.**

The **final LRGGs will be released in a technical report** for addiction professionals, policy makers, regulators, communication experts and gambling providers in **March 2020**. The aim is that these guidelines will be widely used in communication products that educate the general public about low-risk gambling in general and in specific, hazardous situations such as in the context of alcohol or substance use.

Join Us

Throughout the course of the project, the project team will be reaching out to those interested in the national LRGGs with updates on progress and opportunities to be involved. You can sign up to our mailing list by emailing gambling@ccsa.ca.

Table 1. Groups overseeing the establishment of the Low-risk Gambling Guidelines

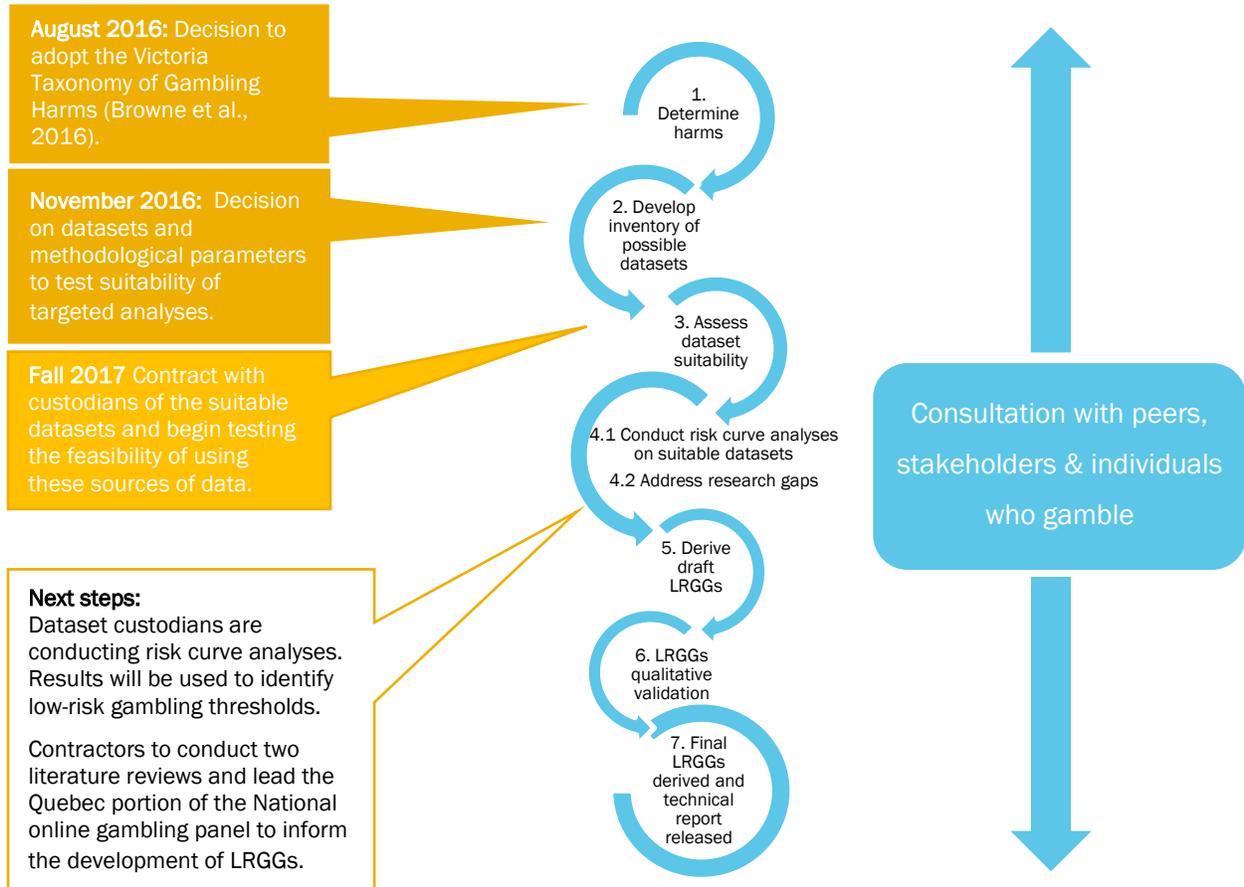|	National Low-risk Gambling Advisory Committee (NLRG–AC)	Low-risk Gambling Guidelines Scientific Working Group (LRGG–SWG)
Co-chairs	Louise Nadeau, University of Montreal Rita Notarandrea, CCSA	David Hodgins, University of Calgary Catherine Paradis, CCSA Matthew Young, CCSA
Purpose	To provide advice over the course of the project, and assist in the dissemination, promotion, uptake and use of LRGGs by key networks and stakeholders.	To provide expert advice and conduct research to support the development of the LRGGs. The group operates as an independent expert working group that will consult with the NLRG–AC, as required.
Membership	Representatives from organizations and sectors addressing gambling-related issues, such as prevention, treatment, public health and finance, as well as the gambling industry and regulators.	Researchers with subject-matter expertise in gambling and addiction.

Table 2. National and International Datasets Suitable to Inform the Development of the Low-risk Gambling Guidelines

Dataset	Country
The New Zealand National Gambling Study	New Zealand
Gambling and Problem Gambling among Icelanders	Iceland
Swedish Longitudinal Gambling Study (Swelogs)	Sweden
Massachusetts Gambling Impact Cohort (MAGIC)	USA
Enquête sur les habitudes de jeu des étudiants universitaires (ENHJEU-Québec)	Canada
Victorian Gambling Study	Australia
Enquête nationale sur les jeux d'argent et de hasard (Enjeu)	France
The Finnish gambling survey	Finland

Figure 1: The Low-risk Gambling Guidelines Progress to-Date

August 2016: Decision to adopt the Victoria Taxonomy of Gambling Harms (Browne et al., 2016).

November 2016: Decision on datasets and methodological parameters to test suitability of targeted analyses.

Fall 2017 Contract with custodians of the suitable datasets and begin testing the feasibility of using these sources of data.

Next steps:
Dataset custodians are conducting risk curve analyses. Results will be used to identify low-risk gambling thresholds.

Contractors to conduct two literature reviews and lead the Quebec portion of the National online gambling panel to inform the development of LRGGs.

1. Determine harms

2. Develop inventory of possible datasets

3. Assess dataset suitability

4.1 Conduct risk curve analyses on suitable datasets
4.2 Address research gaps

5. Derive draft LRGGs

6. LRGGs qualitative validation

7. Final LRGGs derived and technical report released

Consultation with peers, stakeholders & individuals who gamble

References

Browne, M., Langham, E., Rawat, V., Greer, N., Li, E., Rose, J., Rockloff, M. … Best, T. (2016). *Assessing gambling-related harm in Victoria: a public health perspective*. Melbourne, Australia: Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. Retrieved Jan. 23, 2017, from www.responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/28465/Browne_assessing_gambling-related_harm_in_Vic_Apr_2016-REPLACEMENT2.pdf.

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