

# First Nations and Aboriginal Gambling: A Critical Review

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# First Nations groups are involved in gambling as consumers and operators

- ▶ Approx. 3.8% of population identifies as Aboriginal
- ▶ Gambling is highly accessible
- ▶ 17 First Nation casinos in Canada (2010)



# Need for Aboriginal research that is culturally and methodologically appropriate

## Aims:

- ▶ Critically evaluate the existing evidence
- ▶ Identify limitations and research gaps
- ▶ Commissioned by Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre
- ▶ Conducted by Centre for Gambling Education & Research, Southern Cross University

# The research questions investigated are:

- ▶ Prevalence of problem and pathological gambling?
- ▶ Associated social and environmental factors?
- ▶ Impact on children and adolescents?
- ▶ Effectiveness of treatment interventions?
- ▶ Methodological issues limiting research?

# International rates of Aboriginal problem gambling compared to the general population:

- ▶ New Zealand – Maori & Pacific Islanders 4 x greater
- ▶ US – Native people 3 x greater
- ▶ Australia – Aboriginal population 6 x greater

# Prevalence of problem gambling in Canadian First Nations & Aboriginal groups

- ▶ Various studies conducted with disparate methodology
  - ▶ Prevalence rates up to 45% reported
  - ▶ Prevalence rate estimated at 10 – 20%
- 4 times higher than general population

# Recommendations for prevalence studies

- ▶ Research be shared widely and conducted jointly
- ▶ Based on comprehensive framework
- ▶ Use of common methodology to enable comparisons

# Social factors associated with Aboriginal problem gambling

- ▶ Stress
  - Gamble to escape stressors and troubles
  - Cope with difficult emotions and existences
  - Attempt to win quick money to relieve stressful situations
  
- ▶ Grief
  - Gambling to dissociate from childhood trauma

# Living situations

- ▶ Reservations often provide gambling opportunities
  - Some benefits through increased revenues
  - Associated harms
- ▶ Urban communities have unique risk
  - Dissociation from Aboriginal community
  - High levels of racism may lead to gambling as a coping mechanism

# Environmental factors associated with Aboriginal problem gambling

- ▶ Gambling is related to culture and spirituality
  - Commercial gambling replacing traditional gambling
- ▶ Marketing promotes gambling as making positive social contribution
  - Legitimises gambling
  - Pressure to engage in gambling

# Recommendations for research to examine social and environmental factors

- ▶ Examine social factors that act as protective and preventative factors to guide interventions
- ▶ Screen for and treat sources of stress
- ▶ Examine reservation and urban communities separately
- ▶ Consider benefits and harms of gambling in communities and appropriate engagement
- ▶ Advertising guidelines needed

# Impact of gambling on Aboriginal children and adolescents

- ▶ Gambling funds contribute to community facilities
- ▶ Parental problem gambling has significant negative impact on children
- ▶ High rates of gambling and problem gambling amongst adolescents

# Recommendations for research to examine impact of gambling on youth

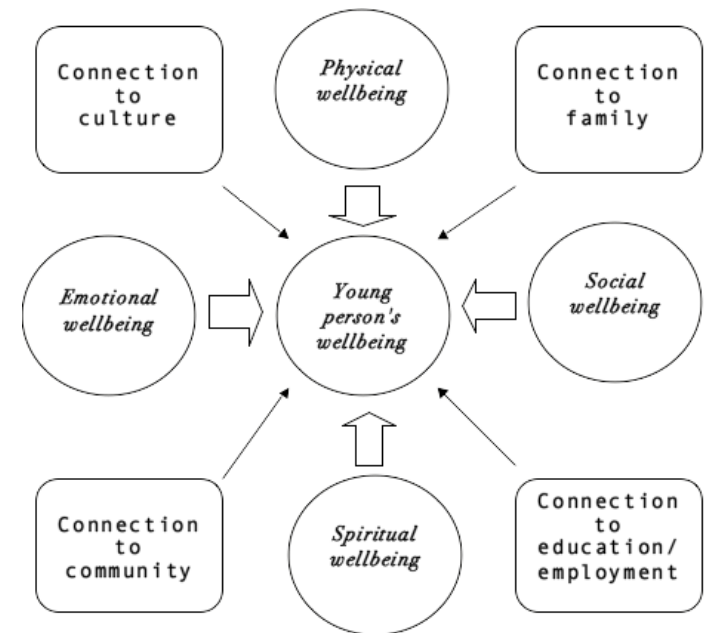
- ▶ Identify protective factors to guide prevention programs
- ▶ Evaluate levels of gambling and problem gambling amongst adolescents
- ▶ School-based educational programs
- ▶ Youth gambling screening and treatment programs

# Effectiveness of treatment interventions for Aboriginal gambling

- ▶ Help-seeking is very low – shame, stigma, confidentiality concerns
- ▶ Mainstream services do not meet specific needs
- ▶ Culturally-specific services needed

# Lessons from addiction programs

- ▶ Treat gambling problems within context of the community
- ▶ McKennitt's holistic approach
  - Physical
  - Mental
  - Emotional
  - Spiritual



*Graphic from Youth Action and Policy Association NSW*

# Recommendations for research to improve treatment effectiveness

- ▶ Understand help-seeking behaviour – motivators and barriers
- ▶ Understand important culturally-specific elements of treatment
- ▶ Improve existing programs and implement specific programs

# Methodological limitations of Aboriginal gambling research

- ▶ Heterogeneity of communities
- ▶ Disparate methodologies
- Results not comparable
  
- ▶ Screens and surveys not validated on Aboriginal populations
- ▶ Prevalence surveys may not be representative
- ▶ Non-aboriginal researchers

# Recommendations for future research

- ▶ Thorough, appropriate recruitment
- ▶ Involve Aboriginal researchers
- ▶ Validate screens and methods
- ▶ Build ongoing capacity

# Conclusions

- ▶ Active involvement of Aboriginal community in research
- ▶ Address broad social and environmental issues
- ▶ Multi-faceted, community approach to problem gambling
- ▶ Appropriate prevention and treatment programs
- ▶ Ongoing research from strategic framework

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