



MEDIA RELEASE

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Raising the stakes: how Australians are gambling during COVID-19

Australian gamblers are betting more often during COVID-19 despite limited access to gambling venues, according to research released today by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS).

The Australian Gambling Research Centre's *Gambling in Australia during COVID-19* surveyed more than 2,000 people who gamble from across Australia over June-July. Findings revealed that one in three participants signed up for new betting accounts during COVID-19, and the number who gambled more than four times a week increased from 23% to 32%.

Young men aged 18-34 were the cohort that saw the biggest spike in frequency and monthly gambling spend, increasing from a median of \$687 to \$1,075. They were also most likely to sign up for new online gambling accounts, making up 79% of new account holders.

Lead researcher on the study, Dr Rebecca Jenkinson, said the findings around young men were a concern.

“In every other age group of men, we saw a drop or no significant change in the amount they spent – but young men went in the opposite direction, spending far more than pre-COVID and more regularly,” said Dr Jenkinson.

“Increased gambling among young men was often reported to be associated with being socially isolated, bored, or as a means of social connection with friends.”

“On top of this, the easy, 24-hour accessibility of online gambling means young people have been able to bet at any time, any place,” she said.

“The numbers all tell a story – we have seen many land-based venues temporarily close, but horse and greyhound racing continued and sports like the AFL and NRL resumed with condensed seasons, providing opportunities to gamble online on these products at any time,” said Dr Jenkinson.

Among all gamblers surveyed, 79% were classified as being at risk of, or already experiencing, gambling-related harm. Among young people aged 18-34 years, this number jumped to 90%.

In addition, around half of all survey participants reported their physical or mental health had been negatively affected during COVID-19.

This study follows previous AIFS research that revealed young people were most likely to have lost their jobs leading to financial strain during the COVID-19 crisis.

“It’s really concerning to see such a surge in gambling among young people, particularly when the opposite is true for every other age group – at least in terms of spending,” said Dr Jenkinson.

When asked what participants would like to see change about gambling in Australia, the main response was to see a reduction in gambling promotion and advertising – particularly related to sports advertising.

“Key experts consulted on the study suggested that the restrictions and closures of gambling venues during COVID-19 have given us a unique opportunity to ‘take stock’ of gambling in Australia, and really understand what’s going on.



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“A review of promotion and advertising of gambling, strengthening codes of conducts around gambling, restrictions on pokies venues and casinos, and the implementation of ‘self-exclusion programs’ were all seen as potentially positive steps to reduce gambling-related harm in Australia,” said Dr Jenkinson.

Key experts noted that the temporary closure of venues had immediate benefits for some people who gamble, including more money for essentials and increased savings.

Read the full report, *Gambling in Australia during COVID-19*, here: <https://aifs.gov.au/agrc/publications/gambling-australia-during-covid-19>.

If you would like to talk to someone for support with your or someone else’s gambling issues, please contact the following 24/7 support services for help.

Gambling Helpline 1800 858 858
Gambling Help Online <https://www.gamblinghelponline.org.au>

Other key survey findings:

- Overall, median expenditure on gambling activity decreased from \$500 in the 30 days before COVID-19 to \$460 during COVID-19, but this decrease was not statistically significant.
- On average, before COVID-19, 62% of participants’ gambling was conducted online; during COVID-19, this increased to 78%.
- Three-quarters (77%) had at least one active online betting account at the time of survey (mean 3.3, median 2 accounts) and 30% signed up for a new account during COVID-19.
- With limited opportunities for land-based gambling during COVID-19, there was a statistically significant decrease in the average proportion of participants’ gambling conducted at a pokies venue, club or pub (from 23% to 8%).
- In both time periods, the main products that people gambled on were horse racing (before 57%, during 57%), sports (before 46%, during 45%), lotto (before 41%, during 38%) and greyhound racing (before 35%, during 37%). Around one-third of participants also used or played online electronic games before (32%) or during COVID-19 (36%).
- Among all participants, males were significantly more likely than females to be classified as being at any risk of gambling-related problems (84% compared to 67%), and young people aged 18–34 years were more likely to be at risk (90%), compared to those aged 35–54 years (71%) and 55 years and over (63%).
- The study involved an online survey of N=2,019 people who gamble from across Australia (conducted 10 June – 31 July) and interviews with N=10 key experts who work in gambling research, regulation, policy and treatment (conducted 15 July – 13 August)

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AIFS conducts original research to increase understanding of Australian families and the issues that affect them. See aifs.gov.au for more.