

Responsible and Problem Gambling in British Columbia

*A Plan for Public Health and
Gambling in British Columbia
February 2015*



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than a decade, government and the British Columbia Lottery Corporation (BCLC) have progressively implemented initiatives to ensure that gambling is delivered in the most responsible way possible in our province. These initiatives reflect best practices in the gambling industry. BC is seen as a leader among gambling jurisdictions in the quality of its responsible and problem gambling services. There are, however, opportunities to do more to minimize harm at the population level through policy and at the individual level through prevention and treatment programs. This document provides government's plan for promoting responsible gambling and addressing the public health risks associated with problem gambling, including details about existing services and new initiatives.

The action items contained in government's *Plan for Public Health and Gambling* are the product of collaborative work undertaken by a cross-ministry working group with representation from the Ministries of Finance, Health, and Education and BCLC. This working group was established following the release of a report in October 2013 by the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) entitled *Lower the Stakes: A Public Health Approach to Gambling in British Columbia*. The working group was tasked with creating a plan for responsible and problem gambling in British Columbia, taking into consideration the PHO Report recommendations, the findings from 2014 Problem Gambling Prevalence Study, research on online gambling, and other relevant research and policy related to gaming, health, and education.

The PHO Report made 17 recommendations to address problem gambling from a public health perspective. The recommendations focus on prevention, health promotion, protection, and research to minimize harm and prevent problem gambling. The 2014 Problem Gambling Prevalence Study found that there has been a 28 per cent reduction in the problem gambling prevalence rate in British Columbia from 4.6 per cent of the population in 2008 to 3.3 per cent in 2014. Online gambling is a growing part of the gambling industry, and represents a significant area of business growth for BCLC. However, it was not addressed in detail in either the PHO Report or the Prevalence Study. The government and BCLC consider this an area that warrants further research. This will help ensure that responsible gambling initiatives online are evidence-based and meet the same standards as those offered in gaming facilities.

In the area of prevention among youth and young adults, the government's Responsible & Problem Gambling program has standardized, age-appropriate responsible gambling presentation materials for students in grades 6 to 12 and post-secondary students. These materials are designed to meet learning objectives in the current education curriculum for a variety of subject areas. The program has already implemented a number of best practice mitigation strategies for preventing problem gambling. These include practices such as tailoring services to meet the needs of specific age groups and cultural groups and effectively providing awareness and education about youth problem gambling to parents, teachers, healthcare workers, and other allied professionals. However, research on prevention and education suggests that there is a need to frame problem gambling as one of several types of potentially risky behaviours for youth, and approach problem gambling prevention from a resiliency building approach rather than a problem avoidance approach. Changes will be made to the Responsible & Problem Gambling program to incorporate a greater focus on problem solving and critical thinking in order to ensure that programs are as effective as possible for students and are designed around the most up-to-date and relevant research available. In addition, the Ministries of Finance, Health, and Education will work together to increase awareness among educators and allied professionals about the need for youth education to prevent problem gambling and promote related education materials.

The government and BCLC have already implemented initiatives that are aimed at empowering individuals with the information and tools they need to make healthy choices about gambling; however, even further responsible gambling measures will be put in place. BCLC plans to implement new money and time budgeting tools for players in gaming facilities that have an Encore rewards membership, make improvements to staff training, and launch customized responsible gambling messaging for *PlayNow.com* account holders and Encore members. The government already contracts staff in every casino as GameSense Advisors to provide players with information about responsible gambling and support players who may need to access problem gambling services. The government plans to implement a GameSense Advisor presence in Community Gaming Centres.

With respect to treatment for problem gamblers, the Responsible & Problem Gambling program offers free, province-wide counselling and treatment services for problem gamblers and their families. There are no waitlists for these services, and the program is a global leader in the use of Feedback Informed Treatment, which is a recognized best practice that was identified in the PHO Report. The government's treatment program has proven client outcomes that exceed international norms and demonstrate effective value for the money that is invested. In addition, the government recognizes the importance of continuity of care for individuals who face multiple, inter-related problems. For that reason, the Ministries of Finance and Health will work together to explore problem gambling screening and collaborative care planning for clients with co-occurring issues.

The government and BCLC take the risks of gambling seriously and are committed to delivering gambling in the most socially responsible way possible. Going forward, the Ministries of Finance and Health and BCLC will maintain a working group to share and analyze best practice research and provide advice to government on gambling policy. Additionally, the government will create a standardized package of information for municipalities that host or are considering hosting gaming facilities to offer them more information about the public health impacts of gambling and assist them in making decisions about gambling expansion in their communities.

With respect to research, the government and BCLC have committed \$2 million over five years to support the establishment of the Centre for Gambling Research at the University of British Columbia (UBC), and the Centre officially opened on November 12, 2014. UBC has received \$1 million in the first year and will receive \$250,000 in each of the subsequent four years. BCLC and GPEB also plan to undertake research to determine the impacts of reducing higher risk features of Electronic Gaming Machines and undertake research to better understand online gambling participation and problem gambling among online players in British Columbia.

The Ministries of Finance, Health, and Education and BCLC are committed to working collectively to implement the 21 action items outlined in this plan.

INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade, government and the British Columbia Lottery Corporation (BCLC) have progressively implemented initiatives to ensure that gambling is delivered in the most responsible way possible in our province. This is achieved through a wide range of prevention initiatives in schools, communities and gaming facilities, tools and support to help individuals make healthy choices about gambling, and counselling and treatment services for the small number of people who develop problems with gambling. Both government and BCLC are delivering high-quality responsible and problem gambling services and achieving excellent value for the investment that is made. There are, however, always opportunities to review programs and services in order to make improvements, assess and address emerging issues, and implement findings from new research.

In October 2013, the Provincial Health Officer (PHO), Dr. Perry Kendall, issued a report entitled *Lower the Stakes: A Public Health Approach to Gambling in British Columbia* (PHO Report on Gambling). The PHO has a mandate to report to British Columbians and the Minister of Health on the health of the population and recommend actions that improve health and wellness in the province. Dr. Kendall's report provided 17 recommendations to the Ministries of Health, Finance, and Education aimed at addressing problem gambling from a population health perspective. This perspective seeks to balance individual-level education and treatment services for problem gamblers with population-level public health responses, including the creation and implementation of gambling policy that promotes health, minimizes harm, and prevents problem gambling.

Initially in response to the PHO Report, a cross-ministry working group was created in May 2014 with representation from all three ministries and BCLC. The working group was tasked with considering the PHO recommendations as well findings from the 2014 BC Problem Gambling Prevalence Study, other relevant research related to gambling, including online gambling, and government policies related to the delivery of services in the education, health, and gaming sectors. The group provided a unique opportunity to raise awareness across government about the benefits of gambling as well as the associated risks, to share information and best practices, and to build relationships among professionals working in gambling, public health, and education policy.

This document provides government's plan for addressing the public health risks associated with gambling, and reiterates government's commitment to delivering gambling entertainment opportunities in our province in a socially responsible way. BCLC was an integral member of the working group, and provided input and advice on many of the action items contained in this document. Like government, BCLC is committed to ensuring that gambling is conducted responsibly, and has agreed to work closely with government to implement action items that involve the corporation.

GAMBLING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Many British Columbians participate in gambling activities, such as lotteries, horse racing, slot machines, table games, online gambling, and community-based raffles and gaming events. Overall, approximately 73 per cent of the adult population in the province participates in gambling activities at least once in the past year.¹

The Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch (GPEB) is responsible for ensuring that gambling activities in British Columbia are conducted fairly, securely, and responsibly. The regulatory framework for gaming is provided by the provincial *Gaming Control Act and Gaming Control*

¹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2014

Regulation. GPEB regulates all gaming in the province and ensures the integrity of industry companies, people, and equipment. GPEB provides regulatory oversight of BCLC, which is the Crown Corporation responsible for conducting and managing gaming in British Columbia. GPEB also licences all community groups and organizations that conduct community raffles and other gaming events for charitable purposes. Additionally, GPEB is responsible for gambling policy and the Responsible and Problem Gambling Program, which delivers prevention and treatment services to citizens.

Availability of Provincially-Regulated Gambling

BCLC works with contracted service providers and retailers to provide commercial gambling activities offered in the province. The most commonly played games are provincial and national lotteries, such as LottoMax, Lotto 6/49, and Scratch & Win, which are sold through a network of nearly 4,000 lottery retailers in convenience stores, grocery stores, mall kiosks, and bars and pubs. Across the province, there are 17 casinos in operation, including two at horse racetracks. Casinos typically feature gaming tables, poker tables, slot machines, and electronic table games. There are seven bingo halls that host bingo exclusively, and 18 community gaming centres that offer bingo as well as slot machines, Keno, and lottery products. Two major racetracks and two seasonal racetracks are in operation as well as 23 teletheatres, which offer simulcast broadcasts of races run at local, national, and international tracks.

In 2004, BCLC began offering regulated online gambling by launching its website *PlayNow.com*. The website is the only legal, regulated, online gambling site in BC, and is one of only three in Canada. The site now offers national and provincial lottery games, Keno, Bingo, table games, slots, sports betting, and poker. To access games on *PlayNow.com*, players must register on the website, and identity, age, and residency are verified by a third party. Online gaming currently represents approximately two per cent of BCLC's net income, but continues to grow each year. Unique in Canada, BCLC also hosts Manitoba Liquor and Lottery Commission's online gambling customers on the *PlayNow.com* platform.

In addition to commercial gambling offered through BCLC, many non-profit organizations and community groups hold gaming events to raise money for charitable purposes. These types of activities include events such as large province-wide ticket raffles, 50/50 draws at sporting events, and community bingos and poker tournaments. In 2013/14, GPEB issued 10,120 licenses to eligible organizations to conduct licensed charitable gaming events.

Gaming Revenue and Benefits

In 2013/14, commercial gaming in British Columbia, excluding horse racing, generated \$2.8 billion in gross revenue. After prize payouts and expenses, commercial gaming generated \$1.174 billion in net income for the province. The majority of this revenue is used to fund essential provincial government programs and services, such as healthcare, education, justice, and other social services. Additionally, 10 per cent of net income from gaming facilities, such as casinos, is directed to host local governments and is used to fund municipal government services and infrastructure. Local communities also benefit from community gaming grants, which are provided to organizations with a focus on arts and culture, sport, environment, public safety, human and social services, and Parent Advisory Councils (PACs). In 2013/14, the provincial government distributed \$135 million in community gaming grants to approximately 5,000 community organizations.

RESPONSIBLE AND PROBLEM GAMBLING

The significant revenue that is generated from gambling activities and the subsequent benefit this revenue provides to the province must be balanced with the need to protect vulnerable people who face problems with excessive gambling. For the majority of people who participate in gambling, it is an enjoyable form of entertainment; however, for some people it can be

problematic and for a small number of people, gambling can become a serious problem with severe consequences for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Problem Gambling as a Mental Disorder

In 1980, the American Psychological Association established pathological gambling as a diagnosable mental disorder, and it was included in the third addition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) as an impulse control disorder. The DSM offers common language and standard criteria for the classification of mental disorders, and is widely used by mental health and addiction professionals across North America as a key reference for diagnosing patients.

The fifth addition of DSM, released in May 2013, reclassified pathological gambling from an impulse control disorder to a non-substance addictive disorder, which explicitly recognizes problem gambling as a medical issue and solidifies the need for clinical treatment of the disorder in serious cases.

Problem Gambling Prevalence

GPEB commissioned the most recent provincial Problem Gambling Prevalence Study, which measures the prevalence of problem gambling in the adult population. The findings of the study show that moderate to severe problem gambling has declined in British Columbia by 28 percent from 4.6 per cent of the adult population in 2008 to 3.3 per cent in 2014. This means that there are currently about 125,000 British Columbians who face moderate to severe problems with gambling.

Problem gambling prevalence is declining in most gambling jurisdictions. This may be, at least in part, because the industry as a whole has significantly improved its approach to responsible and problem gambling over the last decade. British Columbia is seen as a leader among gambling jurisdictions in the services and programming it delivers.

Other key findings of the 2014 Problem Gambling Prevalence Study include:

- Young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 are at significantly higher risk for problem gambling than other adult age groups;
- Problem gamblers are significantly more likely to have South Asian or Aboriginal, Inuit, or Métis origins than other ethnic origins;
- Low income levels are correlated with problem gambling behaviour;
- Problem gamblers are significantly more likely to experience other mental health issues than the general population; and
- Problem gamblers are significantly more likely to gamble at casinos, in private games, on sporting events, bingo, and online.

Responsible and Problem Gambling Initiatives

The provincial government and BCLC are committed to ensuring that gaming activities and products are offered in a socially responsible way, and both GPEB and BCLC deliver responsible and problem gambling programs.

GPEB's Responsible & Problem Gambling Program provides British Columbians with free information and resources to support informed choices and healthy behaviours with respect to gambling participation as well as high-quality, free treatment services for people who need help to address problem gambling. The program delivers:

- ***The Problem Gambling Help Line*** – operates 24-hours a day, seven days a week to provide British Columbians with free information, crisis-counselling, and referral services in several languages.

- **Staff in Casinos** – the province contracts staff who work in casinos to deliver BCLC's GameSense programming to players and staff. These staff act as 'GameSense Advisors' to help players make healthy decisions about gambling, build an understanding of how gambling works, and offer strategies to keep gambling fun and safe. They also provide support and information to people who may need access to problem gambling services.
- **Counselling Services** – are delivered free of charge to individuals and families seeking help with problem gambling. Access to these services is available through the Problem Gambling Help Line.
- **Public Education** – is delivered in schools, communities, and online through the BC Responsible Gambling website: www.bcreponsiblegambling.ca

BCLC's responsible gambling initiatives are complementary to those provided by GPEB and are focused on customers, where and when they play, providing information and tools necessary for players to make informed decisions. Key initiatives include:

- **GameSense programming** – is the umbrella under which BCLC provides responsible gambling information to players. This information is available online, at all lottery retail outlets, and at interactive GameSense Info Centres in casinos and self-serve interactive kiosks in community gaming centres.
- **GameSense Info Centres** – are in place in all casinos, and self-serve interactive kiosks are in place in community gaming centres. The centres are located on or near the gaming floor and offer a variety of resources and strategies intended to keep gambling fun.
- **Voluntary Self-Exclusion Program** – is available to individuals who want to exclude themselves from gambling activities in order to help them control their gambling behaviour. At the time of enrollment, individuals can choose the time period of their exclusion, ranging from six months to three years, and they can choose the type of gambling activities for their exclusion, including facilities with slot machines, commercial bingo halls, or *PlayNow.com*. They are also ineligible to be paid for any jackpot prize they may win while enrolled in the program. At the time of enrollment, BCLC provides materials to help individuals access resources to support them in addressing their gambling problem.

In addition, GPEB and BCLC partner to deliver Responsible Gambling Awareness Weeks. In 2014, the awareness campaign took place in six communities in all regions of the province. The objective of the campaign is to raise awareness of responsible gambling practices and to connect people to community services and supports. The weeks feature events such as an educational kiosk that travels to community centres, malls, schools, seniors' centres and other locations and workshops and presentations to healthcare workers, community groups, parents, and students. BCLC also hosts the New Horizons Conference in Responsible Gambling that brings together academics, government, industry, and treatment providers to share research, information, and best practices about risk mitigation and service delivery for players.

PROBLEM GAMBLING PREVENTION FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Research has shown that most adult problem gamblers began gambling, on average, at age 10. In BC, the average age to start gambling is 13, and by age 18, 56 per cent of youth have gambled.² Because gambling is quite popular in our society, many teenagers try different gambling activities, including card games, poker, dice, scratch cards, and sports betting.

The 2014 British Columbia Problem Gambling Prevalence Study found that although young adults between 18 and 24 are the least likely age demographic to gamble, those that do are at significantly higher risk for problem gambling than other adults.³ Additionally, gambling service providers are taking advantage of the popularity of computer gaming and adapting internet gambling offerings to make them more appealing to a wider audience, particularly young adults. There is a need to ensure that young people have learning opportunities to understand the nature of gambling and build skills to make healthy choices about gambling participation in youth and as young adults when more gambling options become available to them.

Problem Gambling Education and Prevention Services

The provincial Responsible & Problem Gambling prevention program is based on a harm-reduction approach. The program currently has standardized, age-appropriate, presentation packages for students in grades 6 to 12 and post-secondary students.⁴ These interactive presentations are delivered by prevention specialists, who are contracted to deliver presentations free of charge in schools and communities across British Columbia. The presentation packages are designed to meet prescribed learning outcomes under the current education curriculum in a number of subject areas. Teachers and school administrators invite prevention specialists into classrooms to deliver presentations. There has been varying interest from schools and school districts, but those that have received presentations have provided positive feedback that the program is engaging for students and meets learning objectives.

Prevention specialists also deliver presentations to community organizations and allied professionals, such as school counsellors, social workers, and mental health professionals, which is an identified best practice for preventing problem gambling. In 2013/2014, 21 prevention specialists delivered 3,744 presentations to 128,630 BC residents across the province. Further, prevention materials are designed to meet the needs of specific groups, which is another best practice identified by the PHO Report. For example, the Responsible and Problem Gambling Program delivers culturally relevant gambling awareness programs for Aboriginal, Asian, and South Asian populations and prevention materials are available in numerous languages. Prevention initiatives are also tailored to meet the needs of a range of different age groups from elementary students to older adults.

To raise awareness about the risks associated with gambling among post-secondary students, prevention specialists along with trained student volunteers deliver an engaging program called **Gam_iQ**. Students visit an interactive **Gam_iQ** booth, which is set up in a high traffic area on campus usually for two to three days. At the booth, students can take a short, 5-question quiz using an iPad application that teaches and reinforces responsible gambling messages. Participants receive take-away information and are eligible to receive various student incentives including a gift certificate to the campus bookstore or cafeteria and a different give-away each day.

² DECODE, 2008

³ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2014

⁴ BC Responsible and Problem Gambling Program at <http://www.bcreponsiblegambling.ca/prevention/>

There are, however, opportunities for improvements to the current approach to problem gambling prevention services based on the most up-to-date evidence on prevention and education related to risk-taking behaviour among youth. Prevention research has demonstrated that changes in behaviour and attitudes are not generally based on a single event⁵, and therefore education materials should be integrated more fully into everyday instruction in a variety of subject areas rather than single presentations.

The PHO Report also points out the need to ensure that prevention initiatives are integrated with education around other risky behaviours, such as substance use. Applying an approach whereby problem gambling is framed as one of many types of risky behaviour allows instructors to teach problem gambling issues from the perspective of building resilience in adolescence. Building resilience, as described in the PHO Report, involves developing problem solving-skills, social and emotional competence, autonomy, and a sense of purpose. Students who develop these types of skills show more resilience under stressful situations and resist the use of unhealthy coping mechanisms that can lead to dependence.

ACTIONS:

- *The provincial Responsible & Problem Gambling program will link with the University of Victoria's Centre for Addictions Research and other researchers to work towards linking problem gambling education with broader issues of substance use, including preventing and addressing dependence and fostering positive mental health and social and personal responsibility.*
- *Within available resources, the provincial Responsible & Problem Gambling Program is shifting its prevention services to incorporate a greater focus on problem solving and critical thinking to ensure programs are as effective as possible for students.*

Promotion and Awareness

There is presently a lack of awareness that problem gambling is an issue among youth. In addition to making improvements to current prevention materials, there is a need to increase awareness of problem gambling among teachers, administrators, parents, and the public.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for setting provincial curriculum, which all public schools must follow. Schools and individual teachers are responsible for determining the way in which the curriculum is taught and the resources they use. The education curriculum for Kindergarten to grade 9 (K-9) is currently being renewed, and a draft has been released for public consultation. The Ministry of Education is committed to developing the new curriculum in collaboration with educators, and curriculum development teams have been established to develop the curriculum for each subject area. The draft renewed curriculum focuses on building core competencies, skills, and knowledge while ensuring greater flexibility to meet the needs and interests of students. A review of the curriculum for grades 10 to 12 is currently underway and will have a similar focus.

The draft renewed curriculum for K-9 Physical and Health Education includes broad language for curricular competencies related to risky behaviour, which opens up a range of potential topics that may be taught. The draft renewed curriculum attempts to allow students to develop a general decision making framework tied to their personal identity, values, and goals. The approach that the provincial Responsible & Problem Gambling Program is taking to problem gambling education aligns well with the renewed curriculum because it focuses on building competencies in problem solving, making informed and responsible decisions, and accessing information on available resources and services.

⁵ Dickson, Derevensky & Gupta, 2002

The Ministries of Education, Finance, and Health will work together to increase awareness about problem gambling among youth and seek out a number of opportunities to build awareness of the need for education in this area. This will be done through information to Parent Advisory Councils (PACs), teacher and administrator professional development opportunities, and education resource networks. One resource network available for teachers to find new teaching materials is the Healthy Schools BC website⁶.

Healthy Schools BC, a key initiative of the Province's Healthy Families BC strategy, builds the capacity of the health and education sectors to effectively implement healthy schools initiatives using a Comprehensive School Health approach, and involves a partnership between the Ministries of Health and Education, the Directorate of Agencies for School Health (DASH BC)⁷, health authorities, education partners, and other key stakeholders. The Healthy Schools BC website includes links to learning resources that have been approved by the Healthy Schools BC management committee, and also provides a forum for sharing ideas and experiences among health and education professionals through a monthly newsletter, Healthy Schools stories map, and news updates section.

ACTIONS:

- *The Ministry of Education will share the findings of the PHO Report on Gambling as well as current research related to youth gambling with the Physical and Health Education curriculum development teams and other relevant specialist associations such as school counsellors.*
- *Links to responsible gambling education materials will be added to the new Physical and Health Education curriculum as well as to the Healthy Schools BC website and promoted in the Healthy Schools BC newsletter.*
- *The Ministries of Education, Finance, and Health will work together to increase awareness about the need for problem gambling education and its links with broader issues of risk-taking behaviour and promote related education materials.*

⁶ Healthy Schools BC at www.healthyschoolsbc.ca

⁷ Directorate Agencies for School Health at www.dashbc.ca

PROMOTING HEALTHY CHOICES

Responsible gambling involves accompanying gambling entertainment opportunities with the appropriate education, information, and tools to support players in making healthy choices about the way they spend their time and money. It also involves ensuring that people who may experience problem gambling have information and support to connect them with services that can help them address their problem. GPEB and BCLC already have in place many responsible gambling initiatives to support players. For example, BCLC is seen as a leader among gaming operators around the world in its responsible gambling programming. In 2013/14, BCLC received re-certification at Level 4 of the World Lottery Association Responsible Gambling framework, and was asked to contribute case studies in research and player education to be referenced by other gaming jurisdictions. Level 4 certification is considered a ‘continuous improvement’ category, and is the highest level an organization can achieve. To attain this level, BCLC has been required to provide evidence of program evaluation, gap identification, and commitment of resources to strengthen areas for improvement.

There are, however, opportunities to continue to expand responsible gambling initiatives and supports to players. This is particularly true in the area of new gambling offerings and business growth for BCLC, such as online gambling, and in areas of high-risk gambling offerings such as Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs).

Communication to Players

GameSense Info Centres are in place in every casino and self-serve interactive kiosks are in place in every community gaming centre in the province to provide players with the opportunity to receive the information they need to make informed decisions about how they spend their time and money. The Centres are located on or near the gaming floor, and are thus highly visible in gaming facilities. They are also staffed by GPEB-contracted employees to provide information and support to players.

The Info Centres include interactive, touch-screen resources that are designed to demonstrate to players how games work, explain the difference between chance and skill based games, provide information about the odds of winning, dispel commonly held myths about gambling, and provide tips for responsible play. They include an independently developed slot machine tutorial that animates the workings of an EGM, introduces concepts like “near misses” and demonstrates a random number generator. In addition, many casinos also incorporate a GameSense demonstration slot machine that opens up and allows patrons to see electronic components of the machine.

GameSense Info Centres often host a wide variety of entertaining and engaging educational activities using prizes and giveaways designed to generate awareness and conversation about responsible gambling. Last year, BCLC conducted nearly 60 individual promotional activities at casinos and community gaming centres across the province. New activities are continuously being developed that cover a full range of games and services, tackle gambling myths, and encourage responsible play.

However, because not everyone who plays EGMs in gaming facilities chooses to visit the GameSense Info Centre, BCLC is exploring opportunities to provide EGM players in gaming facilities with point-of-play information. The PHO Report on Gambling recommended adding risk-rating signage on all EGMs. However, research on point-of-sale warnings on other high-risk products, such as tobacco and alcohol, suggests that signage on EGMs is likely to be

ineffective for problem gamblers.⁸ Additionally, it is not possible to distinguish different ratings for different types of EGM games because all EGMs are classified as high-risk gambling offerings. Instead, BCLC will focus on point-of-play messaging that explains the odds of winning. This type of information is intended to help increase informed decision making and correct erroneous beliefs about EGMs.⁹

ACTIONS:

- *BCLC is working with other gambling jurisdictions in Canada on constructive approaches to communicating 'odds' and 'return to player' on Electronic Gaming Machine screens to dispel myths about control and ability to win.*

Tools to Support Player Self-Monitoring

Offering supports, such as money and time pre-commitment tools, provides players with a convenient and easy way to self-manage their play online and in casinos. Financial pre-commitment has been a part of *PlayNow.com* since its launch in 2004. All players are required to self-select a maximum weekly transfer-in limit between \$1 and \$9,999. Within the week, the system will only allow the player to transfer-in up to the total amount selected. Players can decrease their weekly transfer-in limit at any time; however, increasing their limit will only take effect 24-hours from the time the request is submitted. Additionally, people's 'play history' is visible on the screen at all times, so they can view how much money and time they have spent.

These same financial and time management tools have not been available to players in casinos and community gaming centres. With the implementation of BCLC's new Gaming Management System, BCLC will have the capacity to offer such tools to players who are Encore Rewards members. Between 20 and 30 per cent of players hold an Encore Rewards card to earn points when they play slot machines and table games in casinos and to access exclusive promotions and contests.

ACTIONS:

- *Beginning in 2015, BCLC will offer new time and money budgeting tools to its Encore Rewards members. Similarly, enhanced tools have been developed for implementation on *PlayNow.com*.*

In addition to money management tools, current BCLC policy prohibits Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) from the gaming floor and restricts their visibility from the gaming floor in all casinos and community gaming centres. Gaming facilities do not grant credit to patrons, and maximum withdrawal limits on ATMs depend on personal financial institutions.

The PHO Report on Gambling recommended further reducing access to money in gaming facilities. Although the working group fully considered this recommendation, the concern with restricting electronic access to money through ATMs is that it would be contradictory to anti-money laundering strategies in gaming facilities. GPEB, BCLC, and gaming service providers are working to prevent criminal attempts to legitimize illegal proceeds of crime through gaming facilities. A number of steps are being taken to reduce the amount of cash that is brought into facilities and encourage the use of traceable, non-cash alternatives. In order to discourage patrons from arriving at BCLC gaming facilities with large amounts of cash, the opportunity for accessing cash at the facility through ATMs or electronic fund transfers must be made available.

⁸ Stockwell, June 2008; Kim et. al., 2014

⁹ Lucar, Wiebe, & Philander, 2013

Williams, West, & Simpson, 2012

Training for Gaming Facility Staff

BCLC requires all gaming facility staff that interact directly with players to successfully complete BCLC's Appropriate Response Training (ART) program. The initial program was developed by the Responsible Gambling Council (RGC), which is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to problem gambling prevention. Frontline staff complete an online course that provides information about signs of problem gambling and available resources, while management and supervisory staff receive more in-depth classroom training that focuses on how to interact with patrons exhibiting problem gambling behaviours or seeking assistance for a gambling problem. Training must be completed within 90 days of receipt of GPEB registration as a gaming worker, and a refresher course must be taken every three years.

The RGC and the Responsible Gambling Sub-Committee of the Interprovincial Lottery Corporation (ILC) have recently released new standards for casino gaming worker responsible gambling training. RGC's standards are incorporated into their RG Check program, a responsible gambling certification program developed for gaming facilities. All BCLC gaming facilities except one new facility¹⁰ have completed comprehensive RG Check audits and are fully certified. The new facility has been audited, and BCLC is awaiting the final report. ILC's standards have been developed to assist Canadian jurisdictions in developing their gaming worker training programs with the potential for cross-jurisdictional collaboration in developing training materials and delivery mechanisms in the future.

ACTIONS:

- *BCLC has conducted its third review of the Appropriate Response Training program for gaming facility staff, and in 2015, will be incorporating new approaches to problem gambling identification and response as recommended by the Responsible Gambling Council.*

Staff Training Regarding Alcohol and Gambling

Casinos and community gaming centres are adult-only entertainment facilities where there is a general expectation from patrons that alcohol is available. In order to enhance the consumer experience, BCLC and gaming service providers are making efforts to offer a broader range of entertainment options, such as music events and first-class dining, rather than strictly gambling. The availability of alcohol in gaming facilities is consistent with availability in other adult-entertainment facilities. In spring 2014, the provincial government implemented minimum drink pricing based on serving size. This pricing applies to all establishments that serve liquor, and is designed to encourage responsible consumption and public safety.

Similar to all other liquor establishments, staff that serve alcohol at casinos and community gaming centres must have completed the Serving It Right course as required by the province's Liquor Control and Licensing Branch. The course educates licensees, managers, and servers about the legal responsibilities when serving alcohol, signs of intoxication, and effective techniques to prevent problems related to over-service. Servers must refuse service to anyone who is intoxicated and ensure they leave the premise safely. Casinos and community gaming centres have a significantly higher security presence than other adult-oriented entertainment facilities, and for this and other reasons, alcohol consumption is typically lower and there are fewer alcohol-related incidents than what is found in bars, pubs, and nightclubs. For example, Edgewater Casino in Vancouver reported in 2013 that only one in five patrons actually purchased alcohol. However, the consumption of alcohol affects impulse control and risk-taking behaviour that can impact patrons' decisions about game play. For that reason,

¹⁰ Chances Maple Ridge

government and BCLC recognize the need to ensure that all gaming facility staff understand the relationship between alcohol consumption and potentially problematic gambling behaviour.

ACTIONS:

- *In implementing changes to the Appropriate Response Training program, BCLC will incorporate mandatory staff training about the cognitive effects of alcohol and the resulting increase in impulse behaviour. This will help all casino staff recognize signs of intoxication and problematic play so they may notify management staff, security staff, or GameSense Advisors to intervene when required.*

Interaction with Players in Gaming Facilities

When gaming facility staff identify patrons who are exhibiting problem gambling behaviour, they are trained to notify senior management or GameSense Advisors. Management staff and GameSense Advisors approach patrons who may be experiencing distress to offer them support, information, and referrals to problem gambling services and resources. The number of interactions with GameSense Advisors has been increasing by approximately 25 to 30 per cent each year since 2009. In 2013, there were 54,000 interactions between GameSense Advisors and gaming facility patrons.

GameSense Advisors are currently available in all 17 casinos, but are not in place in the 18 community gaming centres. BCLC has undertaken efforts to address this service gap, and in 2013, BCLC piloted the GameSense Education Outreach initiative. This initiative involved 10 contractors who were trained to conduct player-focused educational activities that promoted responsible gambling. They traveled to all community gaming centres across the province, and complete 156 shifts with the goal of increasing visibility and usage of GameSense self-serve centers and resources among players.

ACTIONS:

- *GPEB and BCLC plan to implement a GameSense Advisor presence in community gaming centres.*

Telephone Customer Service Interaction with Players

BCLC engaged a consultant to conduct a review to assess how problem gambling behaviour and call history could be proactively used to offer players responsible gambling support and resources. Customer support agents are frontline employees who deal with a wide spectrum of player interactions, ranging from account services and complaints to questions about products or games. Based on initial results from this review, it has become clear that BCLC could utilize customer support to assist players who may be experiencing a problem with gambling. When individuals call to make a complaint, the caller history is recorded. Sometimes ongoing complaints can be a sign that individuals are displaying problem gambling behaviours. Customer support agents have been trained to offer responsible and problem gambling resources only if callers request them. Customer support staff will now be trained to use call history and verbal cues garnered during live phone calls to identify individuals who may be experiencing issues with their gambling to conduct appropriate supportive engagements, including potential referrals to treatment.

ACTIONS:

- *BCLC is implementing a new Appropriate Response Training course that is specific to customer telephone support. It includes training on how to assess and respond to callers who may be experiencing difficulty with their gambling, details on available resources, procedures for handling third party concerns, and escalation guidelines. The course is mandatory for all customer support staff within 60 days of hire and*

recertification will be required annually. A new element of the ART program is new “red flag behavior” protocols.

The customer support team relies on a catalogue of online reference documents (knowledge articles) to quickly find information relevant to whatever issues a caller raises during a call. New articles containing specific responsible gambling information and links have been written to correspond with new procedures in the Appropriate Response Training course and are being made available for agents to use.

Supporting Online Players

Online gambling is an emerging part of the gambling industry that is complex and developing quickly. It is estimated that British Columbians wager over \$125 million each year on off-shore unregulated sites such as PokerStars, Bodog, PartyPoker, and Bet365.¹¹ GPEB is not able to regulate these offshore sites. BCLC’s *PlayNow.com* website offers players a secure, regulated site to participate in casino, lottery, bingo, and sports betting offerings online. *PlayNow.com* represents a significant area of business growth for BCLC. Since the website was launched in 2004, gross revenue has increased from \$300,000 to \$91 million in 2013, and the number of registered players has increased from 30,000 to over 265,000.

PlayNow.com includes a number of responsible gambling initiatives including mandatory pre-commitment, information on time and purchase history, and easy access to GameSense information and BCLC’s Voluntary Self-Exclusion program. However, BCLC does not presently monitor individual player activity on *PlayNow.com* and cannot identify potentially distressed players the way staff in gaming facilities are able to do through observation.

To explore opportunities for communicating more relevant information to players, BCLC has engaged researchers from the International Gaming Institute of the University of Nevada Las Vegas. They have evaluated BCLC’s ability to identify different sub-groups of players based on factors such as frequency or amount of play and to provide customized responsible gambling messaging.

ACTIONS:

- *BCLC will implement customized responsible gambling messaging to PlayNow.com account holders as well as BCLC Encore members. This initiative will provide individuals who may be displaying signs of problem gambling with messaging about available support and resources.*
- *BCLC will engage an international team of researchers in a longitudinal research project to evaluate the impact of customized messaging on player behaviour.*
- *BCLC has also worked with the Responsible Gambling Council in developing and implementing their new Responsible Gambling Check accreditation program for online gaming. In anticipation of being the first online gambling platform to officially participate in this program, BCLC has initiated a number of changes in its approach to online responsible gambling, including better documentation of processes, policy reviews, and customer support training. The Responsible Gambling Council is auditing PlayNow.com.*
- *GPEB will update its Responsible Gambling Standards to include online gambling on PlayNow.com. These standards must be followed by BCLC and all gaming service providers in British Columbia.*

¹¹ Ipsos Reid. 2013

PROBLEM GAMBLING SUPPORT AND TREATMENT SERVICES

Current Problem Gambling Treatment

GPEB's Responsible & Problem Gambling program offers free, confidential counselling and treatment services to individuals seeking help with gambling addiction as well as couples and family members who may need help. Any British Columbian can access these services regardless of age, language, or location, and ending gambling participation is not a condition to receive treatment services. The program is offered province-wide and counsellors can provide outreach services to remote communities or telephone services when travel is not possible. All services are free of charge, and there are no waitlists.

In addition to individual, couple and, family therapy, an intensive day treatment program called the Discovery Program is available to existing clients. Discovery is a free, multi-day group treatment program that runs between two and five days and builds skills useful in recovery, increasing self-awareness about relationships with gambling, and visions for moving forward, all done in a group setting where experiences and perspectives about gambling issues can be shared. Discovery is offered throughout the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island. Individuals from outside of these areas can access the program, but must make their own travel arrangements. However, in cases of financial need, subsidies may be available to assist with costs.

Brief interventions and motivational enhancement therapy, as recommended in the PHO Report on Gambling, are both used in the existing treatment program. These include psycho-educational workshops offered through the Discovery program, relapse prevention groups and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) groups, as well as individual, couples, and family counselling.

The Responsible & Problem Gambling program is a global leader in the use of Feedback Informed Treatment (FIT) to assess the effectiveness of the problem gambling services offered. In this approach, counsellors regularly check in with clients to make sure that they are getting what they need from services. The use of this tracking method is new to the field of counselling, and British Columbia is a global leader in this recognized best practice. Together, counsellors and clients monitor progress using web-based software called MyOutcomes to track outcomes related to clinical services. Outcomes include engagement rate, effectiveness rate, and client satisfaction. All clients participate in MyOutcomes tracking, and of these, 73.8 per cent have experienced clinically significant improvement in their well-being as a result of counselling. A good completion rate is typically considered to be 65 per cent, and GPEB's program is therefore achieving excellent client outcomes and value for the funding that is invested in this program.¹²¹³

¹² Miller, S., email communication January 27, 2014 (Dr. S. Miller is one of the developers of the FIT approach and has provided the provincial Responsible and Problem Gambling program with interpretation of the MyOutcomes data).

¹³ The provincial Responsible and Problem Gambling clinical programs have also proven to be effective in contributing to client change based on measuring the "corrected effect size." This statistical measure reveals how much RGP treatment actually contributed to client change, versus clients improving due to chance, placebo, or unrelated events. MyOutcomes data on corrected effect size show that the counselling program is above average in comparison to other counselling programs. RGP's current corrected effect size for clients who have completed treatment is achieving clinically significant, effective outcomes. The current corrected effect size is 0.5 (cumulative data since March 2012). The expected industry norm for average counselling effectiveness is a corrected effect size of 0.

Additionally, the Responsible & Problem Gambling Program has currently contracted with an independent research company to conduct a longitudinal outcome study of clients who have completed counselling. Outcome measures will be tracked pre and post treatment, including at 6 months and 1 year after completing counselling.

Treatment and Outreach Services to Assist Aboriginal People

The 2014 Problem Gambling Prevalence Study found that individuals of Aboriginal origins were significantly more likely than other cultural groups to experience problem gambling. Approximately 5.5 per cent of Aboriginal people are classified as moderate or severe problem gamblers compared to approximately 3.3 per cent of the overall adult population in BC.

In 2012, GPEB's Responsible and Problem Gambling Program created a dedicated Aboriginal Services Coordinator position to ensure that problem gambling prevention and treatment services are culturally sensitive and tailored to meet the needs of Aboriginal people. The program also has seven Aboriginal service providers who deliver prevention, outreach, and treatment services to Aboriginal people. Service providers travel to northern and rural communities to build relationships with communities and connect with individuals who may be experiencing problem gambling. Once a face-to-face relationship has been established, the Responsible and Problem Gambling Program offers problem gambling counselling in person and/or by telephone to ensure that people in rural and remote communities are able to access these services.

The Responsible and Problem Gambling Program is partnering with the Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling, a non-profit organization in Washington State that provides services to problem gamblers and their families, to deliver an International Indigenous Conference on Problem Gambling in October 2015. The conference will be designed to raise awareness about healthy lifestyle choices including best practices about prevention, support, and treatment services for those acutely affected by problem gambling. The conference will be targeted for Indigenous community leaders, organizations, and professionals who assist people with problem gambling and will be delivered with a broad health promotion focus.

Linking Problem Gambling Treatment with the Broader Health System

People struggling with gambling dependence often also face other simultaneous dependencies on drugs or alcohol, sex, food, gaming, shopping, or the internet. Lorains, Cowlshaw, and Thomas (2011) undertook a review of peer-reviewed and unpublished research from 1998 to 2010 regarding comorbid disorders in problem gamblers. Their review found that approximately 60 per cent of individuals with a gambling problem are addicted to nicotine, 57.5 per cent are addicted to other substances including drugs and alcohol, and almost 38 per cent suffer from a mood disorder.¹⁴ Substance use can lower a person's inhibitions and judgment to set and maintain gambling limits. The presence of multiple dependencies may result in increased frequency and magnitude of consequences, which can further increase the person's shame and guilt around their behaviours. Similarly, the 2014 Problem Gambling Prevalence Study found that problem gamblers are significantly more likely than non-problem gamblers to experience a mental health issue, such as a mood disorder or an anxiety disorder or have contemplated or attempted suicide. The study also found that problem gamblers are significantly more likely than non-problem gamblers to experience substance use issues and to gamble while using alcohol or drugs.

Currently, mental health and substance use services offered across regional health authorities provides both assessment and screening for problematic gambling by clinicians within their

¹⁴ Lorains, Cowlshaw & Thomas, 2011

broader clinical assessment processes. Upon the results of a clinical assessment where problematic gambling has been identified, clinicians will work with their clients to link to associated gambling resources available through GPEB's Responsible & Problem Gambling Program. Mental health and substance use clinicians will refer clients to these available services at the client's discretion. Clients may choose to access the available services, or continue to receive treatment through their current mental health and substance use clinician.

GPEB and the Ministry of Health recognize the importance of continuity of care for individuals who face inter-related problems. While problematic gambling screening and assessment are currently available in the broader mental health and substance use treatment system, a more formal collaborative approach for persons with concurrent or comorbid issues may require additional efforts and focus. It is thus, the intention of the Ministries of Finance and Health to address the broader discussion of improving continuity of care for clients by further linkages between programs.

ACTIONS:

- *The Ministry of Finance will partner with the Ministry of Health to further explore problematic gambling screening and collaborative care planning for clients with co-occurring issues with the goal of improving the overall continuity of care.*

RESPONSIBLE AND PROBLEM GAMBLING POLICY AND RESEARCH

When decisions are made about gambling expansion or the types of gambling offerings available, consideration is given to impacts on problem gamblers. Both the government and BCLC take risks associated with gambling seriously and are committed to ensuring that gambling in British Columbia is offered in a socially responsible way. There are opportunities, however, to improve the availability of information that is provided to decision makers both at the provincial and community level. This can be done by sharing best practices among provincial and municipal governments and among program areas and by supporting problem gambling research.

Government Gaming Policy

GPEB and BCLC have the mandate to determine how gambling is delivered in the province. BCLC is required to seek Ministerial approval to introduce new types of gambling offerings. For example, the government approved the introduction of *PlayNow.com* as well as new games offered on the website. With approval from host local governments, BCLC has discretion to locate and relocate gaming facilities and determine their size in order to meet market demand.

The cross-ministry working group established to consider the PHO recommendations and other relevant research on gambling has helped build a partnership between public health and gambling policy staff, and has emphasized the value of a public health perspective in decision making on gambling policy. There is a need for ongoing collaboration among stakeholders to share and analyze best practice research related to responsible and problem gambling and to create a deliberate and integrated approach to the safe delivery of gambling in British Columbia.

ACTIONS:

- *The Ministries of Health and Finance, with BCLC, will be responsible for maintaining a working group with stakeholders and the Ministry of Education as required, to continue dialogue regarding policy and legislative decisions that involve the expansion of gambling in the province, issues related to the public health risks of gambling, and alignment of policies and practices. The working group will act as an advisory committee for government decision makers. It will have a mandate to ensure that gambling policy is informed by reliable research and best practices, creating a fulsome understanding of the social and economic implications of gambling.*

Informed Decision Making for Communities

The *Gaming Control Act* requires municipal approval for decisions about relocation or expansion of casinos and community gaming centres. The establishment of a new gaming facility or the expansion of an existing facility is initiated by BCLC.

BCLC's first step is to conduct a market analysis, which involves assessment to determine whether the gaming revenue potential for a particular market area will support a new gaming facility or the expansion of an existing facility. BCLC must ask the host local government for written approval before locating or relocating a facility. The service provider is responsible for submitting to BCLC a preliminary business plan that details how the market potential will be realized. This plan includes a description of the proposed facility, its proposed location, and how it will be marketed and financed.

Under the *Gaming Control Act*, host local governments must ensure an opportunity for public input and must consult with potentially affected neighbouring communities before a decision is made to approve the proposal. This process may be done through a public hearing, but each municipality sets its own process for consultation. Municipal governments may request

information from the service provider and from BCLC, such as revenue, roles and responsibilities, safety and security, and responsible gambling programs. BCLC provides information to potential host local governments on a case-by-case basis at the request of the municipality. There is currently no standard information provided to municipalities to ensure that they receive a fulsome understanding of the benefits and risks involved with expanding gambling in their communities.

Additionally, decisions about the availability of alcohol in gaming facilities are made by the Liquor Control & Licensing Branch in consultation with municipalities. The availability of alcohol at casinos and community gaming centres is restricted to the licenced area. Many casinos and community gaming centres have liquor-primary licences, which permit the availability of alcohol on the gaming floor, while others have food-primary licences, which require that alcohol only be served within the dining area. Because the consumption of alcohol affects impulse control and risk-taking behaviour, it is important that decisions about the availability of alcohol in gaming facilities are made with an understanding of the risks as well as factors that can mitigate those risks. Factors that can diminish patrons' risk of intoxication include the availability of high quality food at affordable prices, less expensive non-alcoholic beverages, the size of the licensed area, hours of service, and maximum serving sizes available.

ACTIONS:

- *The provincial government will develop a standardized package of information outlining the public health risks of gambling. It will be offered to municipalities to assist decision makers in their analysis of gaming expansion and ensure that they have a full understanding of the risks and benefits of expanding gambling in their communities. The package will include information about problem gambling prevalence, availability of alcohol, high-risk games, and revenue generated from problem gamblers.*

Centre for Gambling Research at the University of British Columbia

With respect to new research on problem gambling, the government and BCLC have committed \$2 million over five years to support the establishment of the Centre for Gambling Research at the University of British Columbia (UBC). The Centre officially opened on November 12, 2014. UBC has received \$1 million in the first year and will receive \$250,000 in each of the subsequent four years. UBC is also expected to explore and obtain other funding sources and grants for the Centre. The Centre is being led by Dr. Luke Clark, who is a cognitive neuroscientist and renowned expert on problem gambling and dependence.

The Centre will independently determine the type of research it will undertake, and will operate with complete academic independence from the government, BCLC, and the gambling industry. The Centre, however, plans to establish a cross-disciplinary advisory committee to provide input on research topics and alignment with the needs of policy makers and program developers. The government and BCLC would like to see the Centre fully established and operating before making ongoing funding commitments to research.

ACTIONS:

- *The Government and BCLC will consider long-term funding of the Centre for Gambling Research at UBC in 2017.*

Other Research Supported by BCLC

BCLC funds a wide-range of research on an as-needed basis, and has maintained a robust responsible gambling research program, which has been cited by the World Lottery Association (WLA) as a “best practice” standard. The WLA’s independent panel has requested that BCLC prepare a case study on the research program as a reference for other WLA members.

Research is generally conducted in order to evaluate the effectiveness of current programs, determine player receptivity to new responsible gambling programming concepts, inform opportunities for new responsible gambling initiatives, and to assess player and public awareness of responsible gambling programming. This research may be undertaken internally by BCLC's research department using a proprietary panel of gambling participants, commissioned to independent researchers, or co-sponsored by a third party or by two or more Canadian gaming jurisdictions to address areas of common concern. Examples of research projects that have been undertaken in recent years include:

- A longitudinal study of the VSE program (November 2011) and follow up study currently underway;
- A study on youth and gambling to inform the development of programming around youth gambling at both GPEB and BCLC;
- Market Insights Monitor used to track BCLC key performance indicators, including player awareness of responsible gambling;
- Appropriate Response Training (ART) evaluation;
- A joint initiative with other Canadian gambling jurisdictions on linking self-exclusion programs to treatment; and
- A joint initiative with other Canadian gambling jurisdictions on how to provide essential information to slot players, such as odds of winning and return to player.

Going forward, research on EGMs and on online gambling is a priority for GPEB and BCLC because EGMs are a particularly high-risk gambling offering and online gambling is a relatively new gambling offering.

High-Risk Gambling Offerings

EGMs (slot machines) are available in casinos and community gaming centres throughout British Columbia. The PHO Report on Gambling identifies that there has been a 200 per cent increase in the number of slot machines in the province since 2003. EGMs are known to be higher risk than other gambling activities because of game features such as the speed of play and the illusion of control. While EGMs generate the greatest amount of revenue, they also pose risks to people who are at-risk for problem gambling.

British Columbia is one of only two provinces in Canada that does not allow Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs), which are EGMs outside of gaming facilities such as pubs and bars. In British Columbia, EGMs are only permitted in gaming facilities where trained staff are able to monitor players and potentially identify problem gambling. This also facilitates an effective VSE program because self-excluded players can be restricted from gambling by prohibiting their access to gaming facilities. In jurisdictions where VLTs are available in pubs, bars, and other establishments, it is not possible to restrict people's exposure or access to these high-risk forms of gambling.

Some provinces that offer VLTs are re-examining their policies. For example, after extensive research, the Government of Nova Scotia has reduced the number of VLTs in its province by 1,000 since 2005 and continues to have a moratorium on the addition of any new VLTs.¹⁵ Similarly, New Brunswick has reduced the number of VLT sites in the province by 50 per cent and the number of VLT machines by nearly 25 per cent¹⁶, and Prince Edward Island has reduced the number of VLT sites by 50 per cent and the number of VLTs by 20 per cent.¹⁷

¹⁵ Government of Nova Scotia, 2011

¹⁶ New Brunswick Lotteries and Gaming Corporation, 2012

¹⁷ Government of Prince Edward Island, 2008

In British Columbia when new games are introduced in gaming facilities or online, BCLC uses an assessment tool called GAM-GaRD to generate a risk profile of the game. GAM-GaRD works by examining three types of characteristics of the game:

- *Structural features*, which reinforce play and satisfy gamblers' interest in the game. These include design features of the game such as the speed of play, "near win" opportunities, illusion of control features, jackpot size, and graphic, lighting and sound effects.
- *Situational characteristics*, which persuade or entice people to play the game. These include such features as the availability and accessibility of the game, advertising, and sensory factors.
- *Responsible gambling features*, which mitigate the risks involved with playing the game. These can include such features as the use of pop-up warnings and spending limits.

GAM-GaRD generates a numerical score for each game tested with a maximum possible score of 47.5. A GAM-GaRD score of less than 20 is considered a low-risk game, a score between 20 and 30 is medium-risk, and a score above 30 is high-risk. One of the most significant contributing features to a high-risk score is speed of play. Games like lottery draws and ticket raffles typically have low-risk scores, while all EGMs score as high-risk.

Slot machines are among the most popular games played both in gaming facilities and online. The game design features that make EGMs enjoyable for non-problem gamblers can also be problematic for those who are at risk of problem gambling. Therefore, a balance must be struck between delivering entertainment while also protecting vulnerable individuals. GPEB and BCLC are interested in undertaking research to better understand the impacts of EGM design features on player behaviour both in terms of interest in the games and problematic play.

ACTIONS:

- *In addition to increasing responsible gambling features, GPEB and BCLC will undertake research to determine the impacts of reducing or minimizing higher risk features of Electronic Gaming Machines.*

Research on Online Gambling

The 2014 Problem Gambling Prevalence Study found that problem gamblers are more likely to participate in online gambling than non-problem gamblers. This finding is consistent with much of the literature related to online gambling.¹⁸ However, there is little research to understand whether this is a causal relationship, and some research even suggests that participation in online gambling may be negatively related to problem gambling severity.¹⁹ Philander & MacKay (2014) suggest that this may be because lower-denomination games are more widely available online than in casinos, which means smaller wagers are possible and players are better able to manage the amount of money they spend on gambling. As well, the convenience of being at home may actually help limit the length of gambling sessions since there are many alternative non-gambling activities at home unlike at gaming facilities. Legalized online gambling allows for regulation and improved player security as well as links to responsible and problem gambling information and services.

Both government and BCLC are committed to ensuring that responsible gambling initiatives online are evidential based. In addition to keeping apprised of national and international

¹⁸ Griffiths & Barnes, 2006; McBride & Derevensky, 2009; Wood & Williams, 2011; and Gainsbury, Russell, Wood, Hing & Blaszczynski, 2014

¹⁹ Philander & MacKay, 2014

research on internet gambling, government and BCLC recognize a need for research to better estimate and understand online gambling participation among British Columbians and problem gambling among online players. This research should include *PlayNow.com* and other unregulated online gambling websites that British Columbians use.

ACTION:

- *GPEB and BCLC will undertake research to estimate online gambling prevalence and problem gambling prevalence among online players in British Columbia.*

CONCLUSION

British Columbia is seen as a leader in the delivery and effectiveness of many of its programs and services related to responsible and problem gambling. For example, as described under the Promoting Healthy Choices section, treatment services offered through GPEB's Responsible & Problem Gambling program have proven to have excellent client outcomes that exceed international norms. This program is an example of high-quality service and excellent value for the money that is invested. Additionally, as explained in the section on problem gambling prevention in youth and young adults, the Responsible & Problem Gambling program is currently shifting the focus of its prevention strategies and initiatives to ensure they meet the most up-to-date evidence on prevention and education related to risk-taking behaviour among youth. Similarly, BCLC is seen as a leader among gaming operators in its responsible gambling program, GameSense. As described in the Promoting Healthy Choices section, BCLC has achieved the World Lottery Association's highest responsible gambling certification. All casinos and community gaming centres have been certified through the Responsible Gambling Council's RG Check program, and *PlayNow.com* is expected to be the first online gambling platform to be certified by the Canadian Responsible Gambling Council's RG Check program.

Moving forward, the government and BCLC are committed to ongoing improvements in the areas of problem gambling prevention, responsible gambling support to players, treatment services to problem gamblers, and research. The cross-ministry working group established to consider the PHO Report's recommendations and other relevant research and policy has created a unique opportunity to raise awareness across government about the benefits as well as the negative effects of gambling and to build relationships among professionals working in gambling, public health, and education policy. Moving forward, the Ministries of Finance, Health, and Education are committed to working collectively with BCLC to implement the action items in this plan, and ensure that gambling is offered to British Columbians in a way that is safe and responsible by mitigating harmful impacts to individuals and communities.

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APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Problem Gambling Prevention for Youth and Young Adults

1. The provincial Responsible & Problem Gambling program will link with the University of Victoria's Centre for Addictions Research and other researchers to work towards linking problem gambling education with broader issues of substance use, including preventing and addressing dependence and fostering positive mental health and social and personal responsibility.
2. Within available resources, the provincial Responsible and Problem Gambling Program is shifting its prevention services to incorporate a greater focus on problem solving and critical thinking and prioritizing the need to ensure programs as effective as possible for students.
3. The Ministry of Education will share the findings of the PHO Report on Gambling as well as current research related to youth gambling with the Physical and Health Education curriculum development teams and other relevant specialist associations such as school counsellors.
4. Links to responsible gambling education materials will be added to the new Physical and Health Education curriculum as well as to the Healthy Schools BC website and promoted in the Healthy Schools BC newsletter.
5. The Ministries of Education, Finance, and Health will work together to raise awareness about the need for problem gambling education and its links with broader issues of risk-taking behaviour, and promote related education materials.

Promoting Healthy Choices

6. BCLC is working with other gambling jurisdictions in Canada on constructive approaches to communicating 'odds' and 'return to player' on Electronic Gaming Machine screens to dispel myths about control and ability to win.
7. Beginning in 2015, BCLC will offer new time and money budgeting tools to its Encore Rewards members. Similarly, enhanced tools have been developed for implementation on *PlayNow.com*.
8. BCLC has conducted its third review of the Appropriate Response Training program for gaming facility staff, and in 2015, will be incorporating new approaches to problem gambling identification and response as recommended by the Responsible Gambling Council.
9. BCLC will incorporate mandatory staff training about the cognitive effects of alcohol and the resulting increase in impulse behaviour.
10. GPEB and BCLC plan to implement a GameSense Advisor presence in community gaming centres.
11. BCLC is implementing a new Appropriate Response Training course that is specific to customer telephone support. It includes training on how to assess and respond to callers who may be experiencing difficulty with their gambling, details on available resources, procedures for handling third party concerns, and escalation guidelines.

12. BCLC will implement customized responsible gambling messaging to *PlayNow.com* account holders as well as BCLC Encore members.
13. BCLC will engage an international team of researchers in a longitudinal research project to evaluate the impact of customized messaging on player behaviour.
14. BCLC has worked with the Responsible Gambling Council in developing and implementing their new Responsible Gambling Check accreditation program for online gaming. In anticipation of being the first online gambling platform to officially participate in this program, BCLC has initiated a number of changes in its approach to online responsible gambling, including better documentation of processes, policy reviews, and customer support training. The Responsible Gambling Council is auditing *PlayNow.com*.
15. GPEB will update its Responsible Gambling Standards to include online gambling on *PlayNow.com*. These standards must be followed by BCLC and all gaming service providers in British Columbia.

Problem Gambling Support and Treatment Services

16. The Ministry of Finance will partner with the Ministry of Health to further explore problematic gambling screening and collaborative care planning for clients with co-occurring issues with the goal of improving the overall continuity of care.

Responsible and Problem Gambling Policy and Research

17. The Ministries of Health and Finance, with BCLC, will be responsible for maintaining a working group with stakeholders and the Ministry of Education, to continue a dialogue regarding policy and legislative decisions that involve expansion of gambling, issues related to the public health risks of gambling, and alignment of policies and practices.
18. The provincial government will develop a standardized package of information outlining the public health risks of gambling. It will be offered to municipalities to assist decision makers in their analysis of gaming expansion and ensure that they have a full understanding of the risks and benefits of expanding gambling in their communities. The package will include information about problem gambling prevalence, availability of alcohol, high-risk games, and revenue generated from problem gamblers.
19. Government and BCLC will consider long-term funding of the Centre for Gambling Research at the University of British Columbia in 2017.
20. GPEB and BCLC will undertake research to determine the impacts of reducing or minimizing higher risk features of Electronic Gaming Machines.
21. GPEB and BCLC will undertake research to estimate online gambling prevalence and problem gambling prevalence among online players in British Columbia.