



Annapolis Valley Health Gambling and Healthy Communities: Position Statement

Annapolis Valley Health (AVH) has a responsibility to be a leader in health and advocate for policy change that can contribute to better health. Through stating our position on gambling and its related societal and health harms, AVH will influence healthy public policy to create a culture that promotes informed and balanced attitudes towards gambling, prevents harm and protects vulnerable individuals and populations. Position statements are based on best current evidence. They will be reviewed and updated every three years.

Gambling is an acknowledged public health issue. In 2008, Nova Scotia released *Best Advice for Preventing Gambling Problems in Nova Scotia* (Province of Nova Scotia, 2008) and encouraged all stakeholders to adopt a public health approach for preventing gambling problems. *Together We Can: A plan to improve the mental health and addictions care for Nova Scotians* (Province of Nova Scotia, 2012) includes gambling as a significant health concern. The Province of Nova Scotia's 2011 *Responsible Gaming Strategy* puts forward the vision of a Nova Scotia that is "committed to promoting a sustainable, socially responsible and accountable approach to gambling." A public health approach appreciates that societal structures influence how frequently we gamble, how much we spend gambling, what products we gamble with and how much gambling-related individual and community harm is considered acceptable.

Impact of gambling on our community

Historically, gambling has had a limited presence in the Annapolis Valley (e.g. bingo's, cards and raffles). Over the past two decades there has been a rapid expansion of commercial gambling, locally and internationally, with the result that "gambling is now a global, corporate industry with tremendous financial and marketing power" (Strang, 2010). Governments have been an active partner in this expansion due to the revenue generating potential of gambling. In Nova Scotia, gambling has become increasingly mainstream with a proliferation of gambling products. This has created a normalization of all gambling products with impacts on individuals, communities and systems. It has, for instance, become common for gambling to support the operational budgets of governments and organizations.

It has become increasingly clear that, for all gambling products, the harms are not evenly distributed across the population. The unemployed, the underemployed, those with lower levels of education and individuals struggling with mental health and addiction have higher levels of gambling harm (Swedish National Institute of Public Health, 2013). Harmful gambling incurs significant costs to individuals, families, businesses and our communities. Gambling harms include addiction, depression, substance use, family breakdown, domestic violence, crime, loss of employment, bankruptcy, social isolation and suicide (Korn, 2000; Newman, 2007; Swedish National Institute of Public Health, 2012). Newer electronic products (e.g. slot machines, video lottery terminals – VLTs) are associated with a very high rate of problem development. One in four individuals who gambles regularly on the VLTs experiences significant financial, social and health impacts (Province of Nova Scotia, 2008). Every person experiencing these harms directly impacts five to ten other people (Province of Nova Scotia, 2012).

A comprehensive approach: Working together to build a solution

Healthy gambling policy is critical to healthy communities work. Healthy and vibrant communities, where safer gambling is the norm, will support economic sustainability and community well being. This will require comprehensive, multi-pronged and multi-governmental strategies and interventions. Effective population-based strategies include controls on product availability, product design, density, industry marketing and promotions and maintaining government system control with arms-length regulation. Creating a culture that understands of the costs and benefits of gambling product and design will be critical.

Annapolis Valley Health's Position on Gambling and Healthy Communities

Policy and Legislation

Healthy gambling policy will improve our environment and change the conditions in which people make decisions about their health.

- AVH will work with municipal and provincial leaders to:
 - advocate to maintain complete government system control of gambling with an 'arms-length' regulatory body
 - advocate for effective surveillance, monitoring, and reporting of gambling harms
 - advocate for accountable and transparent policy on all further gambling expansion (e.g. internet gambling, new product development)
 - advocate for the effective implementation of the Nova Scotia moratorium on video lottery terminals
 - advocate for effective and evidence-based consumer protection measures to reduce gambling harm
- AVH will work with local communities, schools, municipal governments and our own DHA:
 - to establish gambling polices
 - advocate to decrease government, community organizations, business and our own DHA reliance on gambling revenues

Marketing and Sponsorship

Marketing promotes and normalizes gambling and promotes it as fun and risk-free at the expense of those most vulnerable.

- AVH will work with municipal and government leaders to support the restriction of gambling marketing through advertising and promotion, particularly in areas where identified vulnerable populations live, work and play.
- AVH recognizes that gambling can be harmful and the normalization of gambling in our communities contributes to community level harm. AVH will review all fundraising and advertising opportunities to limit the normalization of gambling and minimize associated risks.

Harm Reduction and Treatment

Addressing risk behaviours and vulnerable populations through treatment and harm reduction will have limited benefit unless implemented as part of a comprehensive approach.

- AVH supports governments and communities in advocating for and taking targeted action to reduce gambling related harms and to reduce the stigma associated with problematic gambling.
- AVH supports increased access to screening, brief interventions and early intervention.

Strategic Partnerships

Successful healthy communities' advocacy will be achieved through the formation of effective, collaborative, and sustainable community partnerships. Our work with our partners is guided by our advocacy and partnership frameworks.

- AVH is committed to working with all levels of government, non-government organizations, coalitions and community initiatives to advocate for informed and low-risk gambling policy.
- AVH assists in the creation of supportive environments and works to strengthen the ability of communities to take action on gambling-related harms.
- AVH will pay attention to the social determinants of health and will work to address the unique situations of those most vulnerable to gambling and its related harms.
- AVH will work with community partners to promote a culture of informed and balanced attitudes and policies towards gambling.

Complete references available in *Gambling and Healthy Communities: Position Statement Supporting Document*.