



## Topic Overview

### Citizen Panels and Stakeholder Dialogue Strengthening Collaboration to Optimize Efforts Addressing Gambling-related Harm in Ontario

The McMaster Health Forum convened two citizen panels on the subject of strengthening collaboration to optimize efforts addressing gambling-related harm in Ontario convened on 26 January and 2 February 2018, followed by a stakeholder dialogue on the same subject convened on 27 February 2018 that was informed by the insights captured at the panels. The panels and dialogue were organized with the support of the Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO).

The panels were also supported by the Government of Ontario (through a Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Health System Research Fund grant entitled Harnessing Evidence and Values for Health System Excellence).

The panels brought together a total of 23 citizens from across Ontario, and the dialogue brought together 21 participants – 4 policymakers, 3 service provider, 6 researchers, and 8 stakeholders – from across Canada to examine the problem, elements of a potentially comprehensive approach for addressing it and key implementation considerations.

### Insights from citizens about the problem

Participants across the two panels identified six challenges related to addressing gambling-related harms in Ontario: 1) the normalization of gambling and the stigma associated with seeking help for gambling problems inhibits access to supports and services; 2) insufficient restrictions on gambling advertisements and ‘give-aways’ result in skewed messaging that downplays the potential risks associated with gambling; 3) conflict of interest within industry and government, stemming from the conflicting goals of revenue generation and delivery of services, makes addressing gambling-related harms difficult; 4) increasingly blurred lines between gambling and online gaming undermine existing restrictions and prevention; 5) limited availability and accessibility of gambling supports and services, including promotion and prevention services, mean many people who need help aren’t getting it; and 6) lack of availability and sharing of data results in limitations in its use to inform the development of programs and services.



**A total of 23 citizens from across the province gather during McMaster Health Forum citizen panels on 26 January 2018 (Hamilton) and 2 February 2018 (Ottawa).**

*Photos include participants and McMaster Health Forum staff.*

## **Insights from citizens about the elements**

Panellists generally supported all three elements of a potentially comprehensive approach to strengthening collaboration to optimize efforts addressing gambling-related harms in Ontario: 1) get the right services to those who need them and bring a public-health perspective to bear; 2) align how funds set aside from gaming revenue are used to better support evidence-informed policies and practices; and 3) establish governance structures that clarify leadership, strengthen collaboration, and promote cross-sectoral partnerships. In discussing element 1, panellists stressed the need to strengthen public-health approaches, as well as health-promotion and disease-prevention services, to combat stigma and support individuals to access the right services at the right time. Panellists emphasized increasing the financial accountability of the gaming industry to support prevention, education, treatment and research (element 2), and they called for the adjustment of governance processes to include insights from individuals with lived experiences (element 3).



A total of 21 participants drawn from government and from health, professional and research organizations gather during a McMaster Health Forum stakeholder dialogue on 27 February 2018.

*Photos include participants and McMaster Health Forum staff.*

## Stakeholders' deliberation about the problem

Dialogue participants generally agreed that the six features of the problem outlined in the evidence brief provide a helpful framing. However, many called for a lens that takes an individualized approach to understanding the problem, and also one that is amenable to the consideration of culturally specific knowledge, such as insights from Indigenous communities.

Participants identified five features of the problem that warranted more attention: 1) the normalization of gambling and the stigma associated with gambling problems means individuals who need help often become isolated; 2) a revenue-generation perspective remains dominant in the province and a public-health perspective is lacking; 3) current understandings of gambling and gambling-related harms are being challenged by new technologies; 4) data are not collected in a coordinated way and not shared among industry, regulators, government, and researchers; and 5) conflict of interest within industry and government dampens any political will to act.

## Stakeholders' deliberation about an approach

In deliberating about how to optimize efforts to address gambling-related harms in Ontario, most dialogue participants expressed support for components from each of the three elements of the potentially comprehensive approach that was presented in the evidence brief: 1) get the right services to those who need them and bring a public-health perspective to bear; 2) align how funds set aside from gaming revenue are used to better support evidence-informed policies and practices; and 3) establish governance structures that clarify leadership, strengthen collaboration, and promote cross-sectoral partnerships.

Overall, all participants agreed there is a need to collaboratively develop a cross-sectoral provincial strategy to address gambling-related harms that considers components from each of the three elements. Participants emphasized that the strategy needs to: 1) identify and prioritize the harms that should be addressed; 2) expand the focus of existing supports and services to include the full continuum of gambling-related harms and prioritize public-health approaches including harm-reduction initiatives; 3) clarify the roles of each agency and organization involved;

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## Stakeholders' deliberation about an approach... cont'd.

and 4) develop more robust approaches to collecting, sharing and analyzing data that will provide the appropriate platform for making evidence-informed decisions. In addition, participants called for the development of a separate self-directed Indigenous strategy, developed by Indigenous communities, that addresses historical legacies and reflects Indigenous ways of knowing, strengths and governance.

## Stakeholders' deliberation about next steps

While recognizing that moving forward with the development of a strategy would require collaborative efforts across stakeholders, dialogue participants highlighted five key next steps that they could focus on in the short term: 1) establish a common framing of the issue that facilitates collaboration across all key stakeholders with a stake in reducing gambling-related harms in Ontario; 2) raise the profile of problem gambling as a priority issue in Ontario by taking advantage of existing opportunities to share insights from the stakeholder dialogue at forthcoming conferences and meetings; 3) determine an appropriate setting to continue deliberations about next steps towards establishing a provincial strategy with key players, including government representatives, industry stakeholders, researchers and citizens; 4) identify the organizations that will be responsible for taking the lead on coordinating the collaborative development of a provincial strategy; and 5) establish a platform to share existing data across relevant organizations (and advocate for a better provincial privacy framework to enable this sharing).

## Panels and dialogue deliverables

To learn more about this topic, consult our complete [set of products](#), which include: the citizen brief that was presented to citizens before the panels, the evidence brief that was presented to dialogue participants before the dialogue, the summary of the panel, the summary of the dialogue, and the video interviews with dialogue participants.

Products addressing other topics are also available on our website [www.mcmasterforum.org](http://www.mcmasterforum.org).

Click on 'Find evidence>Products' in the menu.