

Briefing Note

To: Ron Dupuis, Chair, Board of Health
From: Dr. Penny Sutcliffe, Medical Officer of Health/CEO
Date: February 14, 2013
Re: The Health Impacts of Gambling Expansion in Greater Sudbury

☐ For Information

☐ For Discussion

☒ For a Decision

Issue: Pursuant to the 2012 Ontario Lottery and Gaming (OLG) report, *Modernizing Lottery and Gaming in Ontario: Strategic Business Review*, a new casino is anticipated to be established in Greater Sudbury. The CGS Council is expected to consider how such a casino could optimally benefit area residents. This briefing note summarizes key public health perspectives on the expansion of gambling locally.

Recommended Action:

That the Sudbury & District Board of Health forward the *Health Impacts of Gambling Expansion in Greater Sudbury* report to City of Greater Sudbury Council and request that Council factor into their deliberations and decision-making the anticipated health impacts of casino expansion and gambling.

Specifically that:

1. One of the main negative impacts of gambling introduction is an increase in the number of problem gamblers.
2. Problem gambling has adverse health impacts on individuals, families and communities.
3. The impacts of problem gambling are not evenly distributed in the community, and affect some groups disproportionately including males, youth, older adults, Aboriginal peoples, and individuals and families with low incomes.
4. The increased availability and accessibility of gambling in Greater Sudbury will likely result in an increase in the prevalence of problem gambling.
5. Communities with greater proximity to casinos are likely to experience greater impacts.
6. Much remains unknown about how to successfully treat problem gambling and emphasis should be placed on preventing exposure to gambling and mitigating harm.
7. Broader community health impacts are both negative and positive. These include impacts related to employment, income, motor vehicle traffic, injuries, air pollution, crime and local economic development. The available evidence recently assessed by Toronto Public Health indicates that the introduction of a new casino is likely to have greater adverse health-related impacts than beneficial impacts.

Although a health-based approach would refrain from increasing local gambling opportunities altogether, there are important mitigation measures that can be taken to reduce risk. In the context of gambling expansion, regulating the location (e.g. consideration of vulnerable populations) and operation (e.g. operating hours, number of electronic gaming machines and speed, alcohol and ATM accessibility,

bet and loss ceilings, etc.) should be strongly considered to minimize the harms of problem gambling, particularly among vulnerable or high-risk populations.

Background:

- This Sudbury & District Health Unit position is based on the work of Toronto Public Health in collaboration with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. The TPH-CAMH report, *The Health Impacts of Gambling Expansion in Toronto: Technical Report, November 2012* (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2012/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-51873.pdf>) was prepared in response to the *Modernizing Lottery and Gaming in Ontario: Strategic Business Review* report of the OLG (http://www.olg.ca/assets/documents/media/strategic_business_review2012.pdf), approved in March 2012 by the Ontario Ministry of Finance. TPH further conducted a health impact assessment in January 2013, *Community Health Impacts of a Casino in Toronto* (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-55661.pdf>).
- One of the main negative impacts of gambling is an increase in the number of problem gamblers. **Problem gambling** is defined as gambling behaviour which includes continuous or periodic loss of control over gambling; preoccupation with gambling and money with which to gamble; irrational thinking; and continuation of activity despite adverse consequences (http://www.cpha.ca/uploads/resolutions/2000-1pp_e.pdf). Problem gambling is estimated to affect 1.2% to 3.4% of Ontarians. It is associated with negative impacts on physical and mental health, addiction and substance use, depression and suicide. Other impacts include alcohol-related traffic fatalities, financial difficulties, and family breakdown (1-17). Ontario research from 2003 concluded that moderate risk and problem gamblers while comprising 4.8% of the population, generated 36% of gambling profits (18).
- Certain **population groups** are disproportionately affected by problem gambling: youth, older adults, Aboriginal people and individuals with low-income (19-20). There is also growing concern that adolescents represent a high risk group for gambling and gambling-related problems (21). A casino has the potential to worsen existing social inequalities in that the introduction of gambling has a differential impact on different socioeconomic levels (19).
- **Risk mitigation** measures that have been proposed include careful decision making regarding the location and operation of a casino. Operational recommendations proposed by TPH include the following:
 1. Limiting hours of casino operation: no 24-hour access to venues, closed at least 6 hours per day;
 2. Restricting the number of electronic gaming machines (EGMs) and slowing down; machine speed of play and features that promote false beliefs of the odds of winning;
 3. Eliminating casino loyalty programs;
 4. Prohibiting ATMs on the gambling floor;
 5. Prohibiting casino credit and holding accounts;
 6. Reducing maximum bet size;
 7. Mandating a daily loss maximum;
 8. Implementing strong casino self-exclusion programs, including a mandatory player card system;
 9. Issuing monthly individual patron statements which include full membership medians and averages to compare against personal record of loss, frequency and duration of play; and
 10. Designating areas for alcohol purchase and not providing alcohol service on casino floors to reduce impaired judgment.

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