

A qualitative investigation of Aboriginal  
gambling behaviour, consequences, risk  
factors, and help-seeking in the Northern  
Territory

August 2021





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**Menzies School of Health Research**

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## **PREFACE**

This report presents findings qualitative study that explored Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s gambling behaviour, associated harms, help-seeking for gambling issues, and their views about current legislation on gambling in the Northern Territory (NT). The aim of this study was to generate an evidence base that could be used to inform targeted interventions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing harms from gambling in the NT.

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# Executive Summary

## Background

This report presents findings from a qualitative study conducted between October 2020 and June 2021. The overarching aim of this study was to provide insights into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's gambling behaviour, associated harms, help-seeking for gambling issues, and their views about current legislation on gambling in the Northern Territory (NT), for a selection of regular gamblers on electronic gambling machines, sports and racetrack betting; and people negatively affected by someone else's gambling.

The results of this study will provide an evidence base that the Northern Territory Government, gambling industry, and counselling services can use to better inform policy and interventions that assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing gambling-related harms in the NT.

## Methods

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a targeted selection of respondents from the 2015 and 2018 NT Gambling Prevalence and Wellbeing Surveys. The sample comprised 29 participants, aged 18+ years. The sample included weekly gamblers, non-regular gamblers, and those negatively affected by others' gambling. The interviews included both semi-structured and structured questions. The semi-structured questions explored participants' current and past experiences (in the past 12 months) about:

- gambling behaviour including reasons for gambling, use of venues, and how venues may have affected the way they gamble;
- effects of gambling on individuals and families;
- strategies used for controlling gambling;
- help-seeking for gambling issues, including being approached by and talking with personal contacts (e.g., partners, other family members, friends, work colleagues), formal services (e.g., GPs, counsellors, welfare organisations, financial counsellors), and third parties (e.g., venue staff), about gambling; and
- impact of COVID-19 on gambling among Aboriginal people.

Participants were also asked for their views about:

- who was appropriate and best-placed to intervene or help, and how it would be best to do so;
- what they thought might help so circumstances 'didn't get so bad';
- current legislation on gambling in the NT; and
- strategies and interventions government and other agencies could use to minimise harms from gambling in the NT.

A Framework Analysis approach was used for data analysis. Appropriate ethics approval was obtained, and all participants were provided a \$50 supermarket or store voucher for their time.

## Findings

### *Gambling behaviour*

Of 29 participants who participated in this study, 10 were male, 27 belonged to 35+ years age group and 17 were living in the Darwin-Palmerston region. Nineteen participants reported playing electronic gaming machines (EGMs; colloquially called pokies) as their primary gambling activity. Gambling was described as a recreational activity in the general Australian society. However, it was also reported that, in general, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (respectfully Aboriginal hereon) gamble more than Non-Indigenous people. Although participants described links between luck and gambling, none reported any cultural connotations or superstition relating to gambling, specifically among Aboriginal people. The reported reasons for gambling included (1) getting over boredom, (2) using gambling as an opportunity for socialising and be entertained, (4) replacing other addictions with gambling, (5) winning money and have a better life, and (6) using gambling as a tool for distracting oneself from life challenges.

Participants (gamblers) in this study were identified as either moderate-risk (n=6) or problem-risk gamblers (n=6) based on their Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) scores. Interestingly, all participants who were identified as problem gamblers reported pokies as their primary gambling activity. The majority of other bettors (such as sports and racetrack bettors) were identified as low-risk gamblers. Participants who were identified as non-problem gamblers, reportedly, managed to keep their gambling under control.

The majority of the participants in the affected others group were negatively impacted by someone who primarily gambled on pokies. Further, most of the participants in this group were affected by immediate family member' gambling. The negative impacts from gambling included (1) tension in the family and other relationships, (2) financial trouble, (3) increased stress and anxiety, (4) poor quality of life, (5) mental health challenges, and (6) social isolation.

### *Appropriate approaches: intervening and seeking help*

Overall, not many participants sought help or intended to seek help for their gambling issues. In many such instances, either they had not had issues with their gambling, or they had not acknowledged the issues. However, a few participants who were identified as moderate-risk gamblers and problem gamblers had sought help or intended to seek help for their gambling issues.

The reported barriers to seeking help were (1) not acknowledging issues with gambling, (2) feeling of shame and guilt around gambling, (3) a lack of awareness about the available services, (4) long waiting times to access support, (5) issues with transportation to get to the services, and (6) complicated procedures such as referral requirements.

In some cases, gambling issues were acknowledged but help was not sought because the issues were considered manageable without help. In other instances, accumulated trauma in the family led to gambling problems and other issues, which encouraged participants to seek professional help, especially those who were affected by someone else' gambling.

When asked for potential approaches to minimise harms from gambling, participants emphasised (1) addressing and acknowledging the underlying issues (usually addiction and mental health challenges), (2) using gentle but assertive and proactive communication strategies and open conversations with gamblers, (3) having easily available and culturally appropriate gambling support services, (4) providing a safe, non-judgemental space for those facing issues because of gambling to voice their concerns, (5) involving people with lived experience of gambling (or addictions and mental health challenges) in support services, (6) equipping family and peers with appropriate skills to help gamblers, and (7) increasing awareness and creating relevant culturally- and language appropriate health promotion resources. The majority of the participants identified family followed by friends as the preferred sources over professional services, to seek help for gambling issues.

### ***Potential intervention strategies***

Participants shared some of the self-help strategies they had used to control their gambling. The reported strategies were (1) self-exclusion from venues, (2) setting up limits to spending money and time on gambling, (3) prioritising other expenses over gambling, (4) keeping themselves occupied with activities other than gambling, (5) taking breaks from peers who were involved in gambling, and (5) finding ways to contest challenges (e.g. poor social and emotional wellbeing) they had faced because of their gambling.

Participants were conscious of gambling as a revenue-generating commodity for the government, the gambling industry, and associated businesses. Hence, their role in regulating gambling for public benefit was considered doubtful. However, they were also vocal about the potential strategies the government and relevant industrial agencies could adopt in minimising harms from gambling. The suggestions included a stricter regulation relating to (1) licensing of venues, opening hours of venues, (2) limiting bet size, (3) restricting the availability of pokies at venues, and (4) minimising the incentives provided by betting companies and venues for people to gamble.

Other suggestions included (1) de-glamorising pokies in terms of their make and lights and sounds they emit which positively reinforce people to gamble more, (2) finding ways to regulate overseas online betting companies in Australia, (3) creating health promotion resources such as advertisements and awareness campaigns in local Aboriginal languages (especially for remote Aboriginal people) and in a culturally appropriate manner, (4) re-introducing appropriate dress code for patrons at venues in order for them to spend money on dressing and thus have less available money for gambling, (5) restricting patrons to simultaneously smoke, drink alcohol, and gamble at venues, and (6) implementing mandatory cultural awareness training for venue staff.

Some participants expressed their concerns about online gambling in terms of easy access, a lack of privacy, and developing the risk for further gambling harm, especially among younger people. Hence, advocated for the government to introduce a stronger regulation around online gambling. Participants also described the utility of government's BasicsCard initiative in regulating people's gambling expenditure and thus reducing gambling harms.

In addition to above-mentioned strategies, participants also described for the government and related agencies to introduce strategies to upskill people in terms of providing (1) financial education, (2) basic life skills to cope with stress and anxiety, (3) effective communication,

(5) gambling harm awareness, and (5) health literacy; as means of reducing harms from gambling in the NT. Some participants further mentioned that governments and other agencies should utilise evidence-based practices and adapt successful national and international programs to reduce gambling-related harms in the NT.

### ***Impact of COVID-19 on gambling***

Most participants reported that the temporary closure of gambling venues in the NT because of the COVID-19 pandemic did not impact their gambling behaviour significantly. However, the impact on pokies players was slightly more significant than on participants in other groups. Some participants switched from traditional to online gambling (such as online pokies and lotto) while others cut down on their gambling during the closure.

In some cases, the closure provided participants with opportunities for recreational activities other than gambling and also enabled them to spend more time with their families and peers. In contrast, some participants reported an increased level of alcohol consumption or “fell into alcohol’s lap” during the pandemic. Some participants also expressed concerns about the possibility of having their personal information traced with the mandatory use of NT COVID-19 check-in app or manually signing the registers at venues, after the re-opening of venues. This concern led many participants use online gambling options.

## **Conclusion**

The results suggest that a targeted intervention approach has the potential to minimise harms from gambling in the NT. To be successful, the approach should consider the experiences and understandings of people at risk of gambling harm or experiencing it. The majority of the participants in the study were from urban NT. Although those recruited from regional NT were originally the residents in regional NT, they lived either in urban NT or at least moved between urban and regional NT at the time of this study. Hence, we did not identify differences in opinions varied by region, which is a limitation of this study. To gain further insights into Aboriginal gambling behaviours, further research is needed, especially in remote and very remote Aboriginal communities in the NT.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

### *Australian gambling environment*

An estimated 64% of Australian adults take part in some form of gambling annually with the Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory (NT) having one of the highest reported levels of gambling in Australia (Hing, Russell, Tolchard, & Nower, 2014; Stevens, Gupta & Flack, 2020). Of the Australian adult population that gamble, about 2.5% experience moderate to severe problems caused by problem gambling (Productivity Commission, 2010). Every problem gambler's gambling activity impact about six others around them (such as family and friends) (Goodwin, Browne, Rockloff, & Rose, 2017). This suggests that up to four million Australians experience harms from gambling including decrements to health and social and emotional wellbeing, psychological distress, and financial stress (Langham et al., 2016).

### *NT gambling participation rates*

Between 2015 and 2018, the annual gambling participation rate in the NT for most forms of gambling significantly declined (Stevens, Gupta, & Flack, 2020). However, higher participation rates in keno and casino table games were found in the NT compared with other Australian jurisdictions (Stevens, Gupta, & Flack, 2020). Further, Electronic Gambling Machines (EGMs; colloquially called pokies) continued to be a dangerous form of gambling in the NT, with over 50% of weekly gamblers experiencing problem or moderate risk problem gambling (Stevens, Gupta, & Flack, 2020) in the NT. Furthermore, the frequency of gambling was found to be significantly associated with problem gambling risks, most notably among those who gamble weekly and monthly (Stevens, Gupta, & Flack, 2020).

The prevalence of problem gambling risks significantly increased between 2015 and 2018 in the NT with problem gambling rising from 1,200 to 2,500 people and 3.55% (6,400 people) of NT adults classified as moderate risk or problem gamblers, while about 8% (14,500 people) of adults in the NT indicated that they had experienced at least one negative consequence from someone else's gambling in the year before the survey (Stevens, Gupta, & Flack, 2020). The finding of the 2018 NT Gambling Prevalence and Wellbeing Survey also found that compared to the non-Indigenous population, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (respectfully Aboriginal hereon) experienced greater burdens of harm from gambling (Stevens, Gupta & Flack, 2020).

### *Aboriginal gambling participation in the NT*

Australia is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, with Aboriginal people representing 3.3% of the total Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The cultural diversity and differences are important to acknowledge and understand, to effectively address social issues such as problem gambling and gambling-related harms. There exists limited knowledge about Aboriginal Australians gambling, especially in the context of the NT (Fogarty, Taylor, & Gray, 2018; Stevens & Young, 2009).

Further, evidence appears to be lacking as to what commonalities and differences exist in gambling behaviours among Aboriginal people from urban and regional locations in the NT. Two recently conducted population surveys carried out in the NT identified that Aboriginal

respondents in both urban and regional settings, experienced significantly higher rates of problem gambling and harm from their own or someone else's gambling, compared with the non-Aboriginal population (Stevens, Gupta, & Flack, 2020; Stevens & Young, 2009; 2010).

Gambling is a common activity in many Aboriginal communities like the wider Australian population, but the reasons Aboriginal people gamble can differ with higher unemployment and less money, escape from problems and poverty (Korf, 2019). Aboriginal people gamble on casino games, card games, horse races, sports, and the same activities as the wider Australian population. However, there exists a significant variation in gambling activities among Aboriginal people across NT with card games being one of the most popular gambling activities in remote NT Aboriginal communities, while in urban and regional towns EGMs are more popular (Stevens, Gupta, & Flack, 2020). Card games have been a popular game amongst urban Aboriginal populations but has changed with the increasing accessibility to regulated gambling in these areas. Aboriginal people from remote communities may change their gambling behaviours when they travel to urban regions and increasing their accessibility to other forms of gambling not available in remote regions such as the casinos that are based in Alice Springs and Darwin (Gupta & Stevens, 2021; Stevens & Bail, 2012; Fogarty et al., 2018).

An observational study undertaken by Foote in 1996 over a six-week period at the Darwin casino found that there was an increased patronage of Aboriginal people and particularly women with a preference for pokies. Foote (1996) further noted that with an increase of Aboriginal people at the casino and the availability of new forms of gambling, suggested a transition from unregulated gambling (card games) to regulated gambling (Casino games, pokies, keno).

In 2015, 3.6% of Aboriginal respondents screened using the Problem Gambling Severity Index, were classified as experiencing either problem or moderate risk gambling. This varied from 5.8% and 6.8% in Darwin/Palmerston and Alice Springs respectively, to between 1% and 10% in Katherine, Tennant Creek/Nhulunbuy, and the rest of NT, compared with prevalence between 1.2% and 3.3% for the same regions for the non-Aboriginal population (Stevens, Thoss, & Barnes, 2017).

In 2018, problem/moderate risk gambling prevalence increased for Aboriginal respondents and ranged between 6% and 13% across regions, compared with between 3.3% and 3.9% across regions for the non-Aboriginal population. The significant variation across regions observed for the Aboriginal population is not surprising, given the differential access to different types of gambling products and the different contexts in which Aboriginal people gamble (e.g., card games to pokies) (Stevens, Gupta, & Flack, 2020; Young, Lamb, & Doran, 2011; Young et al, 2007).

There was also significant variation across regions for Aboriginal respondents in whether they experienced harms from someone else's gambling, ranging between 11% and 78% in 2015, and between 5% and 26% in 2018. For non-Aboriginal respondents, rates of harm from someone else's gambling ranged between 6% and 12% in 2015, and 5% and 6% in 2018 (Stevens, Thoss, & Barnes, 2017; Stevens, Gupta, & Flack, 2020). These statistics clearly show that Aboriginal Territorians experience significantly higher rates of problem gambling risk and harm from someone else's gambling, and that problem gambling risk and gambling-related harms vary significantly across regions in the NT. Given this variability, it is necessary to better

understand the differences between Aboriginal gambling and harms from gambling, for different regions across the NT (i.e., covering wide geographic area).

### ***Gambling regulation***

Governments have responsibility for regulating gambling which includes casinos, poker machines, sports and race betting, and lotteries (iclg.com, 2021). However, since the expansion of pokies across pubs and clubs in the NT in the mid-1990s, there has been little published research undertaken into regulated gambling among the Aboriginal populations (Stevens & Young, 2009).

The NT Government gambling policy targets gambling as a discrete harmful activity by only providing education and counselling for people with gambling problems and those impacted by someone else's gambling, to address negative impacts of gambling (Stevens & Young, 2009). However, since the NT gambling policy was released in 2008 and with the continued growth of the gambling industry in the NT (in online gambling for sports and racetrack betting), the government position as a regulator has also grown and become more complex, with targeted approaches to gambling regulation now the modus operandi to minimise gambling-related harms.

The findings from a recent qualitative study conducted in the NT provides insights into the potential of a targeted intervention approach to minimise harms from gambling (Gupta & Stevens, 2021). Furthermore, results from a qualitative study conducted with Tasmanians affected by someone else's gambling (affected others) suggested that prevention and treatment interventions tailored to address the causes and impacts of harms experienced by affected others are likely to address this issue (Acil Allen Consulting, Deakin University, Central Queensland University, & The Social Research Centre, 2017). Overall, studies have suggested that to be successful, interventions need to be receptive to the experiences and understandings of those who are at risk of gambling harm or are experiencing it (Davidson et al., 2018; Gainsbury, Hing, & Suhonen, 2014; Lubman et al., 2015; Thorne, Goodwin, Bryden, & Best, 2016; Stevens, Gupta, & Flack, 2020; Gupta & Stevens, 2021).

### ***Barriers to delivering and accessing services***

For many Aboriginal people gambling is a complex issue which makes it challenging delivering programs. Several barriers exist for Aboriginal people seeking help for gambling issues such as people living in remote NT range from isolation from gambling help services, shame, denial, a lack of Aboriginal specific services, and a reluctance to access mainstream services (Fogarty et al., 2018; Stevens & Bailie, 2012; Stevens & Young, 2009). In many Aboriginal communities, gambling is an activity that is socially accepted, and some Aboriginal people may not consider they have a problem with gambling and, therefore, not see a need to access gambling services.

### ***Current study***

This study addresses the current priority of the Northern Territory Government (NTG) to generate evidence about the gambling behaviours of the Aboriginal populations in the NT. The findings will increase our understanding about Aboriginal gambling behaviour, consequences, and risk and protective factors, with a view to developing culturally sensitive resources to minimise gambling-related harms among Aboriginal communities, from an urban-regional perspective. Using a continuum to plot and describe different groups of gamblers based on

their gambling behaviours (e.g., from healthy to unhealthy, and from no problems to severe problems), is another valuable contribution of this project, to develop public health approaches to address Aboriginal gambling (Breen, Hing, & Gordon, 2010; Korn & Shaffer, 1999). While the focus of the study is on Aboriginal people living in the NT in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek, and Nhulunbuy (i.e., urban and regional locations), the findings are expected to have implications for people from all Aboriginal backgrounds, and thus will bring benefit to the whole community.

## 1.2 Aim of the study

The overarching aim of the study is to explore and investigate gambling behaviour, consequences, and influencing factors (risk and protective factors), help-seeking, and potential interventions, among Aboriginal people in the NT. It is anticipated that the results of this will

1) provide the Northern Territory Government (NTG) and service providers with baseline evidence on gambling behaviour, risks and harms in urban and regional Aboriginal populations.

2) provide information on the needs of Aboriginal people when planning future development of services, practice, and promotional activities that can minimise gambling's negative impacts on Aboriginal populations in NT, and Australia more broadly.

3) contribute to the government and service providers' understanding of the gambling patterns and needs of the Aboriginal clients as well as draw recommendations for improving access to, and cultural appropriateness of the support services available to them in the NT.

## 1.3 Study objectives

- Explore gambling behaviours and experiences.
- Provide insights into help-seeking behaviours for gambling issues, through formal services (e.g., health, community, and specialist gambling support services) and personal contacts (e.g., family, friends, and work colleagues).
- Assess the likelihood of recognition of gambling behaviours and associated harms by others, either in a gambling context (e.g., venues and online gambling), service delivery settings (e.g., health and community services), or in personal contexts (e.g., family, friends, and work colleagues).
- Assess the openness of people experiencing harms to interventions, preferences for types of interventions, and the preferred contexts for offers of help.
- Explore strategies by which people who are open to intervention can be directed to assistance and appropriate sources of information.
- Describe the range of self-help strategies people use to control their gambling.
- Explore opinions on gambling legislation in the NT.
- Explore impact of COVID-19 on gambling among Aboriginal people.

Note: For the convenience of writing, participants were categorised into two groups - gamblers and affected others, and referred to as such, throughout this report.



## 1.4 Structure of the report

This report consists of four chapters.

- Chapter 1 provides a short review of the relevant literature, the aim, and objectives of this study.
- Chapter 2 provides an overview of the study's methodology. The chapter presents information on (i) sample selection; (ii) data collection; (iii) interview analysis; and (iv) ethics.
- Chapter 3 presents findings on
  - participants' gambling behaviour. This section provides information on (i) gambling activities; (ii) reasons for gambling; and (iii) use of venues.
  - the negative impacts participants had experienced from their own (for gamblers) gambling and/or others' gambling.
  - participants' experiences with and opinions about help-seeking for gambling issues.
- Chapter 4, the final chapter, provides a conceptual framework based on the findings of this study. It also includes recommendations for addressing gambling harm among Aboriginal people, and more broadly, general population in the NT. The scope for future research is also discussed.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter presents an overview of the methodology used for this study, with Appendix C presenting information on the interview guides used for data collection.

### 2.1 Sample selection

A purposive sampling method was used to recruit the participants. Participants were selected from the 2015 and 2018 NT Gambling Prevalence and Wellbeing Surveys, as these surveys contained a question asking respondents' if they would be interested in participating in future research', with over 85% of respondents indicating they would. Further recruitment was carried out using a word-to-mouth strategy. The focus of the sample selection was on regular (weekly) and non-regular (monthly) pokies, sports and racetrack gamblers, and people negatively affected by someone else's gambling. An initial list of respondents who met this criterion from the 2015 and 2018 surveys and agreed to be recontacted was generated. From that list, potential participants were contacted and invited to participate in the study. The selection also considered age, gender, Aboriginal status, and region where participants had lived at the time of recruitment.

The company, Roy Morgan Research (RMR) who carried out participant recruitment for the 2015 and 2018 Gambling Prevalence and Wellbeing Surveys (and owned the contact details of respondents) made initial contact with eligible people (n=57). Menzies contacted all 57 people to arrange the interviews. Further contacts (n=10) were made based on a word-to-mouth strategy (i.e., snowball sampling).

Where mobile phone numbers were available, initial contact was made via text messages. Those who did not respond to the text messages were followed-up by phone calls. Calls were made between 9am and 8.30pm weekdays, 10am and 5pm weekends, and were prohibited on public holidays. Text messages were re-sent to those who did not take the calls. Those who still did not respond and where email addresses were available, were sent an email at this stage. Up to five attempts were made to contact people.

Where mobile phone numbers were not available, calls were made on landline numbers. Calls were made between 9am and 8.30pm weekdays, 10am and 5pm weekends, and were prohibited on public holidays. Where email addresses were available, emails were also sent. Up to five attempts were made to contact people. Finally, 29 people agreed to participate in the study. The sample comprised 15 EGM gamblers, four sports and racetrack bettors, and nine who had experienced harms from others' gambling (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1** Participant distribution by the type of primary gambling activity

Category	n
<b>EGM (Pokies) players</b>	16
<b>Other bettors *</b>	4
<b>Affected others</b>	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>

\*sports and racetrack betting, lotto, roulette, cards, table gaming

Of 29 participants, 10 were male, the majority belonged to 35+ age group (n=27), and 17 were living in the Darwin-Palmerston region (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2** Demographic characteristics of the final sample

Target group	Age		Sex		Region			Total
	<35	35+	M	F	Darwin/ Palmersto n	Alice Springs	Other	
<b>Affected others</b>	1	8	1	8	7	2	-	<b>9</b>
<b>EGM (Pokies) players</b>	1	15	8	8	7	2	5	<b>16</b>
<b>Other bettors*</b>	-	4	1	3	3	3	-	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>29</b>

M = male; F = female; \*sports and racetrack betting, lotto, roulette, cards, table gaming

Other = Katherine, Tennant Creek, Nhulunbuy

## 2.2 Data collection

This study draws on a strength-based approach. The study design and interview schedules used for the current study were used for a similar study conducted with Aboriginal people in another Australian jurisdiction and had Aboriginal involvement in their development (Breen, Hing, & Gordon, 2010). However, we were cognizant that the NT Aboriginal population represented a unique setting with associated demographic and cultural implications. Hence, to ensure that the research methods were respectful and acknowledge the cultural distinctiveness of Aboriginal Communities, we adapted the study design and interview schedules to the NT context in consultation with local Aboriginal people.

Local stakeholders who provided input to refining the study design and the interview schedules included Aboriginal gamblers, someone who had been affected by others' gambling (both randomly selected from participants who partook in our previous gambling study) and the Menzies' Social and Emotional Wellbeing Aboriginal Advisory Committee (SEWBAAC). Both the stakeholders deemed the study design, and the content and language of the guide appropriate for use with local Aboriginal people.

We developed interview guides for each of the three categories of participants. There was a set of questions common across the guides, and a further set of questions that was specific to the individual guide (see Appendix A).

The majority of the interviews were conducted over the telephone; however, face-to-face interviews were conducted where requested. All interviews were conducted by Aboriginal researchers who were part of the research team. At the beginning of the interview, the Participant Information Sheet was read out to the participants and a verbal Informed consent was obtained. Each interview lasted for an average 30 minutes. All participants agreed for the interviews to be audio-recorded. All recordings were transcribed by a secure transcription service.

Participants were given a \$50 grocery voucher for their involvement in the study, as a token of appreciation, and compensation for their time. The vouchers could not be used to purchase alcohol, tobacco, and gambling products. Although the final sample was smaller than what was planned, the theoretical principle of saturation was reached (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), where new findings or insights were no longer revealed during the interviews. Therefore, interviewing more people would not have necessarily yielded much new or relevant information.

The interviews included both semi-structured and structured questions. The semi-structured questions explored participants' current and past experiences (in the past 12 months) about:

- gambling behaviour including reasons for gambling, use of venues, and how venues may have affected the way they gamble;
- effects of gambling on individuals and families;
- strategies used for controlling gambling;
- help-seeking for gambling issues, including being approached by and talking with personal contacts (e.g., partners, other family members, friends, work colleagues), formal services (e.g., GPs, counsellors, welfare organisations, financial counsellors), and third parties (e.g., venue staff), about gambling; and
- impact of COVID-19 on gambling among Aboriginal people.

Participants were also asked for their views about:

- who was appropriate and best placed to intervene or help, and how it would be best to do so;
- what they thought might help so circumstances 'didn't get so bad';
- current legislation on gambling in the NT; and
- strategies and interventions government and other agencies could use to minimise harms from gambling in the NT.

At the end of the interviews, gamblers were asked structured questions on the PGSI, to assess their problem gambling risk. Participants were also given the opportunity to discuss anything they wanted about the topic that was not covered during the interviews.

## **2.3 Analysis**

A Framework Analysis method was used to explore the interview data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). We considered this approach because it allowed the inclusion of both pre-existing theoretical constructs (a deductive approach) and emergent data-driven themes (an inductive approach)

to inform the development of the analytic framework. This approach also suited the objectives of the study, in that we had identified areas from the literature we wished to explore (Breen, Hing, & Gordon, 2010, Gupta & Stevens, 2021) but also wanted to discover the unexpected, and identify themes in the data (Parkinson, Eatough, Holmes, Stapley, & Midgley, 2016; Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013).

To ensure the reflections on interview data captured the voices of the participants correctly and in a culturally appropriate and respectful manner, data coding was checked by two Aboriginal members of the research team who also conducted the interviews. This was also a part of member-checking exercise to help improve the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of the results.

NVivo 12 software was used to organise and manage the data. Participants are quoted throughout the results sections of the report (chapters 3). Sex (male and female), age group (18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, and 65+), and region (Darwin/Palmerston (D/P), Alice Springs (AS), and other (Katherine, Tennant Creek, Nhulunbuy)), are noted for each quote. References to the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) scores are also made for gamblers (Wynne & Ferris, 2001).

## **2.4 Ethics**

Ethics approval to conduct this study was sought from the Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee (CA-20-3747) and the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Northern Territory Department of Health and Menzies School of Health Research (2020-3728).

## Chapter 3: Findings

This chapter presents information on

- participants' gambling behaviour. This section provides information on (i) gambling activities; (ii) reasons for gambling; and (iii) use of venues.
- the negative impacts participants had experienced from their own (for gamblers) gambling and/or others' gambling.
- participants' experiences with and opinions about help-seeking for gambling issues.

### 3.1 Gambling behaviour

This section provides an overview of participants' (gamblers) gambling behaviour, including type and frequency of gambling activities, reasons for gambling, money spent on gambling, gambling impact, and preferred location for gambling. We separated gamblers into two categories based on their main gambling activity: pokies players and other bettors. The perspectives of those who were affected by someone else's gambling are also included in this section. Based on the PGSI, most participants belonged either to the problem gambling (n=6) or the moderate-risk category (n=6). This was followed by participants classified as experiencing no risk (n=4) for problem gambling. One participant did not answer the PGSI survey. All problem gamblers belonged to the pokies group (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Frequency of PGSI scores among pokies and other bettors

Gambling risk	Gambling category		
	Pokies	Other Bettors	Total
Non-problem gambling	4	0	4
Low-risk	0	2	2
Moderate-risk	5	1	6
Problem gambling	6	0	6

#### 3.1.1 Gambling activities

##### *Other Bettors' perspectives*

Participants in the other bettors' group were involved in multiple gambling activities such as Lotto and Keno, sports betting. Some of them had also played pokies, but it was not their primary gambling activity. The frequency of their gambling activity varied from several times and days a week through weekly and once or twice a month. The money they had spent on gambling ranged between \$15 and \$80 a week; however, some had spent more money on gambling, for example, \$400 on the Melbourne Cup. Nearly all participants in this group did offline gambling, such as at clubs and outdoor events.

*"Oh, like I have a dabble every now and then... I don't go yeah, every week or every day.... I'll very rarely put on a lotto ticket.... or even go down to the casino or the club or whatever... Sometimes I'll put on a Keno ticket when I feel like it.... Once or*

*twice a month.... probably about 100 [dollar per month] .... Oh yeah, mainly yeah whatever club I go to, I go for lunch, I'll spend half an hour on the pokies and that's it. "(F,45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

*"Well, I play lotto every week. Numerous times, days. Numerous schedules. Keno a lot... And from time to time, I'll have a punt on the horses.... [Pokies] very rarely.... Maybe if I'm out with my nan or something, I'll put some – so rare. And keno would be every time I go have a lunch or something at a venue that has keno on.... So, that's \$60 a week. ...on lotto....And maybe \$20 a week on the keno." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*"I play the pokies if I go to a casino or a pub, licensed premises but that's like, once a year.... I probably buy the lotto, Keno every now and then... [nothing else] because I don't know how to play anything else and I don't know how to bet.... probably \$15 with lotto... if I was to buy a Keno ticket or.... if I'm getting a lotto ticket, I would get that if it's near a shopping centre where I'm doing my shopping... I don't go out of my way to get a ticket...I don't do anything online. I'm not that needy.... [I got my tickets at] newsagent. "(F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)*

*"Only Melbourne Cup, that's the only one mate... I think it only comes once a year ... On the Melbourne Cup, probably about \$400.00... [Lotto tickets] not very often, just when my wife says, "have another go at that." So, I'd probably say once a month maybe." (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

A few participants had played online Keno and Lotto on their mobile phones.

*" But I also have [Keno] on my phone, which is dangerous... if there's a big [win on Lotto], I'll do one on my phone and then I'll go to the newsagents." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

### **Pokies Players' perspective**

Participants in the pokies group provided detailed insights into their gambling behaviour. The frequency of their gambling ranged from a couple of times a week (once or twice to four or five times a week) to once or twice a fortnight to once or twice a month. Similarly, the money they spent on pokies varied, from as little as \$20 a week to hundreds of dollars on each occasion. The losses and wins, the amount of spare money they had, and their mood and mental wellbeing on a particular day primarily influenced the frequency and money spent on gambling. A few participants have had big wins, some had smaller wins, and others had incurred more losses than wins.

*"...it could be anywhere between twice to maybe four or five times a week, depending on the loss or win.... [how much I spent] That could be hundreds. It would be at least hundreds." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

*"I like to play Pokies... Probably once or twice every couple of months...[I spend] Probably about \$50 or 100 bucks each time... Normally [in] my local pub." (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 0, AS)*

*"Maybe we go on a Friday... But not every day. Only just sometime when we feel like doing it." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 10, D/P)*

*"When I was doing it [pokies] because I had psychosis. I've been treated for that for a while now, so I'm down to just like \$20... I probably won't even go to gambling after this because this is more like good sign, you know what I mean." (M, 25-34 yrs, PGSI 9, Other)*

*"Yeah, well my grandson's – he'll be 20 this year, so when my daughter was pregnant for him, I had a big \$20,000 win just before he was born, so that helped buy some stuff.... and then about 10 years ago I had another \$13,000 win... and again just a 30c bet sort of thing and the balloons came up, so I keep thinking I've got to go back again, I'm due for another big win sort of thing... Yeah, I've had two big wins on the pokies, the 20,000 and the 13 and yeah, and I keep thinking it must be that time again." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 5, Other)*

*"I've probably had more wins than I've had losses. I've had a few big wins... I won 10 grand is the most I've won.... I've won that three times. I've had a couple of smaller ones, about 5000 or 6000" (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 0, AS)*

*"[In] Casinos, I'd say I've hit even, 50/50 [wins and losses]. Because sometimes, I have really big wins, and then sometimes, I'd have – Likewise, I've just been paid and nearly lost all my wages because I had this gambling addiction, actually, when a casino started up in Perth." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

The high availability of pokies machines in the NT was reported as one of the drivers of high gambling:

*"Mainly pokies. Especially up here in the NT, it's like Victoria, it's pokies everywhere. In Perth, we don't have that problem... I found I got back in the old bad habits up here. So I lived in Melbourne for 16 years, and I've been back to Perth for 16 now, but then I come up here last year, and I found I'm getting back in the old bad habits that I was falling into in Victoria... Every payday. Sometimes I've got good control like I will only take \$20 with me or something, but other times, you just get a suspicious cycle trying to win your losses.... I use to work in the industry. In Melbourne, I use to manage hotels and pubs and things like that, and once all the pokies come into it well everywhere, they were just right there in front of you all the time" (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 4, AS)*

While playing pokies was the primary gambling activity reported by participants in this group, some of them regularly participated in other types of gambling activities, primarily Lotto and Keno.

*"My gambling activities I put down Thursday Powerball in, maybe once a month. When my sister comes in from Bathurst Island, we might go out and have dinner and might put Keno on while we're eating dinner. And she always says, "Let's go and play the pokies." So, that might happen, maybe twice a month, play the pokies." (F, 55-64 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*



The following participant mentioned that they had bet on horses as a group. They had created an account, took turns on betting, and deposited the money won from betting into the account.

*"...four of us are in a horse syndicate where we take it in turns, once a month, to spend \$40 which goes into an account for a Christmas party."(M, 65+ yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

Most participants had preferred to play pokies at the local pubs and clubs, preferably those located at a convenient distance to home (or work). Some of them had gambled at the casinos, while others had switched to online gambling.

*"Mostly the clubs, yeah, because they're more closer." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*"It [club] is in the northern suburbs, so I just stay this side." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 5, Other)*

*"So before, I used to always play at the pub or go to the casino. But I haven't played in a pub for a long time since I had online gambling. Yeah. I like pokies. Which is good because it's easy enough to get your key card, but it's pretty easy to do online because your card is attached to the account. But I used to spend a lot of money on gambling." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

Apart from gambling, venues (especially the casinos) had provided participants with other opportunities such as dining, swimming in the pools, smoking in the smoking areas, chat with other people, and so on.

*"I mean casino's got that little coffee bar and stuff like that so now and again we'll just go and sit and have a coffee in between or whatever." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 5, Other)*

*"I'll go there for dinner with some – because they also have the \$15 all-you-can-eat nights. So they have that at the casino. Or just going for drinks and meeting people there, or sometimes, you – There's people in town for conferences and whatnot, "Let's meet at the casino – " I notice –Actually, that's one thing I notice, that I have a lot of aboriginal - "Well, meet me at the casino. " Everyone wants to meet there....and then, I didn't realize at the back of the casino, there's this other outdoor pool bar..." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

*"I smoke. I don't drink. I use to have a long bad habit with drinking, and I got out of it a long time ago. But yeah, smoking...I'd make sure of I got money before I go. I try and limit myself now as to how much I take with me. So once it's gone, it's gone." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 4, AS)*

Participants were aware of the ATM facilities at the venues. However, in some cases, it negatively impacted their gambling, as described by the below participant:

*“Because I use to get in a bad habit, I’d take my card with me, use the ATM, withdraw, you get all the money out and lose all my money. This was on payday, you know.” (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 4, AS)*

One participant mentioned that using the available services at the venue depended on whether they had won or lost on gambling. If they had lost, they would leave, but stayed longer and used services in case of a win.

*“No, I’d pretty much just quickly slide into the side door, have a press, and if I didn’t win obviously straight back out, but if I did win I’d be sticking around for a bit longer.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

### **Affected others’ perspectives**

Nearly all affected others reported pokies to be the main gambling activity the person was gambling on who negatively affected them. However, many expressed that most gamblers were involved in multiple gambling activities, including offline and online betting, roulette, cards, and gaming tables as well.

*“He [ex-partner] used to go and have big nights at the casino. Pop into the pokies on nights out. Even if he was just gone to, say, Nightcliff Sports Club with mates for some beers, he would end up spending – There would always be an extra \$50 to \$100 gone through the pokies. Also, TAB, games and things.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*“It involved the use of gaming facilities... and there were card games, gambling, bets, that kind of thing.” (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)*

### **3.1.2 Impact of gambling**

#### **Other bettors’ perspectives**

Some participants described how gambling had impacted them as a child. In some cases, gambling had caused significant tension in the families, while others had not experienced substantial impacts.

*“Probably, yes, I think it did cause a lot of trouble, but that was between Mum and Dad...” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

*“No [it did not cause any problem]. Like I said, it wasn’t a big thing.” (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

Regular gambling had caused financial troubles, anxiety and stress, and tension and conflicts within the family and other relationships.

*“Oh, course it’s obvious mate – you’re losing money. People get pretty upset when they lose money as well, so there’s always going to be some drama.” (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

*“Oh well, I suppose I have seen how it does impact on people who don’t have any money, and they’re always borrowing, and they seem to think that they need to gamble just to get the money back, but it doesn’t work that way.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

*“[It could lead to other problem] Very easily. I had a girlfriend who was very heavily – and I’ve got a cousin – who are very heavily addicted to gambling to the pokies. Both of them would get paid and, by midnight that night, have no money. And be asking me for money... And be asking me to buy them x, y, food, cigarettes, whatever. And they’d have the rest of the fortnight with no money. It does. It stresses me out... Because I’ve got to lend them something. I never get it back. It leaves me short. It affects me a lot. It can lead to a lot of problems. Because then they get evicted. They have to start selling their possessions. It’s a terrible downward spiral.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

Most of the participants had kept their gambling under control, and thus no significant negative impacts of their own gambling on themselves or others around them were reported. The primary adverse effect that surfaced in the conversations was the false hope for winning money and regret of losing money which affected social and emotional wellbeing in many instances.

*“Negative impacts? Well, I never win. That’s a negative impact... I probably – I would never gamble to the point I was short of money. I’ve got those boundaries, which is good. But I know plenty of people who don’t.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*“I suppose when people don’t have a win, they want more and come back for more. I think they have hopes and dreams, we all do, and I think some people, that their hope is to have a quick win and then they can retire and buy whatever they want, I suppose.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)*

*“Well, me personally, I only ever go if I’ve got the money and if I can afford it and I think like I said last time if I do it I make sure that I’ve done my shopping and...rent paid, all the bills are done so there really hasn’t been a negative impact other than just, I suppose, lose money.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

*” No, I’m not regular [gambler]. The only thing I’d probably say is that I don’t like losing. It makes me a bit depressed for a bit; I think, “Oh, crikey!” That’s about it.” (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

One participant provided insights into how their gambling negatively impacted someone around them:

*” A friend of mine who never knew about online lotto has since seen me with it, downloaded it. And he actually said to me recently, “I think I’ve become addicted to this. I can’t stop buying lotto tickets.” It has, by me showing somebody else about it, they’ve now got on to it and are spending more on the lotto than they previously had... But you have to be straight down the line. It’s not just affecting you; it’s affecting everyone around you. Because when you run out of money, you’re*

*bludging off every other bloody person. Straight down the line.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

### ***Pokies players’ perspective***

Gambling had affected relationships between gamblers and their children, partners, and parents. Gambling had affected finances in many instances and caused feuds and addictive behaviours in some cases.

*“In the Darwin, they more mainly people - like Indigenous people getting worse with this pokies now. Yeah, even they come in in the community. I think I see that.... What they do, they spend their money on the game. And with kids - kids too - kids, they there outside, waiting for their parents.” (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 4, D/P)*

*“... [a] night out with family, we tried and said, “Oh, this isn't bad” because we'd won. From then on, yeah, it can be really bad sometimes, I could lose my whole pay. Then I was so sick, like I just felt so horrible because I didn't have money to pay my rent, buy food and lucky I live with one of my siblings and they covered me but that's a strain on them too see, and oh my god, I just felt so sick to the guts, mate. Yeah. It scared me for a while, yeah.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*“when they lose the money, they get angry and bit confused and frustrated. And they take it out on people, like families. They swear at them and they say, “you the one that make me lose all the money.” But it's not their problem; it's the person who gambling.” (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 7, D/P)*

Participants agreed that gambling could lead to other problems and impact others in their immediate social environment if gamblers were not able to control it. They shared similar thoughts about how gambling could affect a person’s life as described by participants in other groups. They mentioned gambling addiction as a root problem where all negative impacts stemmed from and their associations with mental health and wellbeing.

*“It can destroy your life, all your hard work. I've known people who've been extremely successful in their career and gotten themselves a house, car, you know, everything idealistic, but then gambling has completely taken all of it away from them. In my own story, it was more the, yeah, financial strain that cause a lot, but then that caused depression on top of it, which caused anxiety on top of it, which caused them anger sometimes, because it takes a while to connect your emotions to the actions... I guess it could even lead to homelessness.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

*“It's an addiction just like anything else. I use to drink a lot like that and gambling, you drink more and you lose more so than you drink more to try and forget it, and drugs as well, it's all an illness I suppose.” (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 4, AS)*

*“I've seen, in some communities, kids weren't getting fed because parents have lost the money on gambling, including on your phone. Or you don't eat as*

*healthy. So you might eat pies and junk food, whereas you could have did a big shopping, and you're scrambling." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

*"They get impatient with me. "Oh, you know you had the money, your rent in there, that food money, you spent that" and they just growl at me and carried on like that. I mean, I understood - I saw where they were coming from, they just told me what I already knew but that it's hard to explain, the addiction, you have to go on, yeah. I've got to do it. Even though you know it's wrong, you're still doing it. They get impatient and frustrated with me and don't talk to me for a while, so it can push family away, it can..." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

Some participants were exposed to gambling within their families as kids. They shared their childhood experiences of how their family members gambled and how it impacted them later in life.

*"I think it was the other way around. It was more like, our dad's gambling impacted on us rather than mine...I think it was more our dad's – was his impact on the family, rather – yeah. So it was more from that point of view." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

*"...my mum was a big pokie - but I didn't really know about it. Like horseracing, yes, because my nanna, she was a big - every Saturday was her TAB day. So I know about the horses. My dad, he punts. But probably with the pokie machines, not until I was old enough to go into the clubs, probably - maybe when I was in my twenties. Maybe late twenties. My mum, she's a big pokie player, and all my aunties." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

*"I seen my parents played. I seen, yeah, many of them. My grandma." (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 7, D/P)*

*"I just - my family - cousin used to take me out....Because I didn't know about the gambling. I didn't know how to do - play poker. But when she was playing, I used to sit next to her and [learnt to play]." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 10, D/P)*

Some participants who were exposed to gambling as kids had not necessarily taken up gambling as adults:

*"...there's previous things that were family-influenced. I didn't necessarily get involved, but I think if your parent's doing it, something triggers you to do it. ... Yeah, I've always been exposed... because my dad was heavily into horse racing, so I began. And then, every Saturday, we'd catch the train and sit outside with the TAB. So we're waiting there, he'd come out with the cash, "Here's some money." And then, "Oh, this is – " So we didn't mind waiting a couple of hours outside the TAB, because we knew we were going to get the money. But then, I could see my brother and myself went in different ways, whereas it became a means of my dad to solve things, "Here's money, money." But as a result, then, my father's passed on, my brother doesn't know how to do things...He got divorced, didn't know how*

*to get his daughter back, didn't know how to pay an electric bill, a lot of things...." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

Some participants had not gambled until they were introduced/exposed to it by their partners:

*"Well, in my house, they played bingo, but the pokies I didn't get introduced to until one of my partners was big into it, and I wasn't really into it, but I'd always get dragged along. Then eventually, I just started sitting down and playing... I learned from my ex, pretty much. An ex-partner." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

One participant reflected on the potential impact of winning money via gambling on relationships:

*"They say if you win every day, you got friends everywhere. Just like how you drinking alcohol. But when you got nothing, it's - no one's there." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 10, D/P)*

### ***Affected others' perspectives***

Most of the participants were affected directly by their immediate family members' gambling. Family members included parents, partners, and in-laws. Only one participant indicated a non-direct impact by an extended family member.

*"... not directly impacted but definitely I've seen how family react and carry on when they've lost a lot of money, especially if there's alcohol and drugs involved as well because they've gambled it..." (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

*"Yeah, I was impacted by my parent's gambling." (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*"[What was your relationship to them?] My daughter's father. My ex-partner" (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

In some cases, people were affected by multiple gamblers. For instance, one of the participants expressed a complex gambling impact risen from different relationships:

*"It would have been more than one person. That was either as a partner, a de facto partner relationship and as a consumer of the service of a child in custody." (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)*

When we asked participants about how others' gambling affected them, they described various forms of impact. Among them, the financial and welfare implications were often mentioned.

*"I have missed child support payments, even though he [ex-partner] is working and has been working throughout because apparently, he has started doing online gambling now and he didn't need to leave the house" (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*"The welfare that I would normally receive, I wasn't able to access. Often the money that would come into the householder the financial accounts weren't what they*

*should be because the money or the asset was being used elsewhere [gambling]"*  
(F, 45-54 yrs, AS)

Gambling also affected participants' relationships, for example, with their families and partners, and subsequently impacted their social life.

*"There was no real quality of social life or contact."* (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)

*"... it just created a situation where there was arguing because money's been taken out of the joint account for the purposes of gambling.... So then it just creates friction amongst me and my husband, and then our kids as well are impacted because they're wondering why we're arguing."* (F, 35-44 yrs, AS)

In addition, one participant described how one's social reputation is affected because of others' gambling, as reflected in the below participant quote:

*"It did actually destroy reputation"* (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)

Participants discussed how the quality of their life and the time spent with the family were negatively influenced by gambling. The impacts ranged from postponed studies, compromised nutrition and physical health, and missed family time, events and dinners because of gambling.

*"... I spent my childhood sitting in sports clubs waiting for my dad to get off Pokies..."*  
(F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

*"... If ever we went out for dinner or something like that, Mum would go missing in action. We would find her playing the pokies. Also, when I was younger, as well, often we would be waiting in the car for her... But also often meant that she was late to almost everything. Or wouldn't rock up to things. So, any events - and while she may not have said that she was gambling, we knew that she was."* (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

*"Everything that we did, there would be gambling involved. Like, he'd [ex-partner] want to go to a club where there were pokies or go to the casino. I'd wake up in the middle of the night, and he'd be gone, and he'd gone to play the pokies at a local club."* (F, 45-54 yrs, D/P)

Participants also reported judgemental attitude towards gamblers as a consequence of irresponsible and wasteful gambling:

*"...it made me think negatively about them [gamblers] in a sense like for someone that works so hard and most of these mob that I know, they're fairly good with money up until they hit the machines or go to the TAB and it's like well you've just saved all this money, instead of investing it into a high-risk environment.... they could have taken their family somewhere on a trip or put that away for retirement or something, but you're seeing them just blow their money for the sake of blowing their money. Whilst they're gambling that money, they're also drinking and carrying on as well."* (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)

One participant highlighted the need for gambling awareness from an early age since children are inadvertently and indirectly exposed to gambling and related harms. The exposure is not just through the family but through online gambling and online gaming as well.

*“... online gambling is so accessible these days...all you need is a phone. And there’s no proof that kids are over the age of what is legally required to be a gambling age...the online games that are created for kids...the farm games where you’ve got to collect a certain amount of tokens or a certain amount of jewels to get a new skin, kids become very addicted...I have had experience of my kids using my bank details to put into the – buy online, so they can get to a higher level in a game. So gambling is not just targeted at adults, it’s targeted at the kids as well, and they don’t understand that that’s gambling.” (F, 35-44 yrs, AS)*

### **3.2 Why Aboriginal people gamble?**

#### ***Other bettors’ perspectives***

When we asked participants about their motivations and reasons for gambling and wins-losses rate, they unanimously reported that it was the desire to win more money that motivated them to gamble. In many instances, there were small wins but relatively more losses (monetary).

*“...I only downloaded it because someone in [Jabiru] won \$1.3 million... I lose far more than I win... Far more... the biggest win I’ve had from a lotto is \$40... The keno I won \$70 once. But no way I win more than I lose. No. Absolutely not.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*“To win money, mate. What else do you do?” (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

*“I haven’t really had any [negative impact] because I don’t live for it, it’s not an obsession or compulsion but I don’t have the money to gamble - I have the money to have a bit of a go at lotto. If I don’t have the money, I don’t do it. If there’s a big win, a big jackpot, I’ll have a go, but I don’t just do it just for the sake of doing it to waste money... The negative is that one, you don’t have the money and two, you can’t guarantee the win and the majority of my experiences are I don’t win so I don’t get into it like others.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)*

Gambling helped some participants to get over the boredom and provided opportunities for socialising.

*“Oh no, it was just to be social, bored, just need to get out of the house, do something so yeah, that type of thing. [Interact] with people.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*



Most of the participants were exposed to gambling as kids. Card games were usually played as part of family activities for money. Betting on horses and playing pokies at casinos by family members (parents, grandparents) were commonplace. Some participants were also exposed to gambling at schools, especially the older ones.

*"I mean, I know Mum – we were always taught to play cards but [I suppose, yeah, a] family activity to go down to the pokies after having a meal, that was it..." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

*"Well, we used to play cards at home. So, when we do play cards, we do play for money at home.... Not all the time. But if it's family we'll play for money. So, grew up with that.... My nan is a big horse [bettor]... Every weekend we'd see her with her radio having a bet. And she was a casino – always at the pokies at the casino. I think that's why I don't do pokies. Because I've seen her at the casino." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*"Crikey, when I was a kid, mate. I mean, we used to – Melbourne Cup when I was bloody ten-year-old, or even less than that. I think it was yeah, about ten-year-old. At school we used to run the sweeps and all that sort of thing. The teachers run the sweeps back in those days." (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

### ***Pokies players' perspective***

As participants in other groups described, this group also mentioned no cultural connotations of gambling for Aboriginal people. Gambling was defined as a conduit for socialisation in many cases. Nonetheless, gambling was described as a universal activity in Australia and not exclusively related to Aboriginal people.

*"You see all the children, they grown up around the card ring with their mothers, and now, when they come into town, it's not so much gambling cards in town now, it's the pokie machines." (F, 55-64 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*"I think Australians are, naturally, gamblers and it's just an interest for them." (M, 65+ yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

Gambling was also described as a replacement for other forms of addiction:

*"No, it's got nothing to do with culture.... that's the thing that made me think, like addiction, any kind of addiction, whether you move from one to another, you give up one, then you move to something - I noticed my aunty was like that. She smokes a lot of marijuana, and a heavy drinker. Then when she stopped doing that, now she plays the pokie machines. She never, ever played the pokie machines before that." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

Peers and other relationships were also described as influences in developing gambling and other addictive behaviours:

*"I guess it's when company as well so friends will come and "oh come on, what are we doing?", "nothing", "oh well come on, let's go casino" so we'd do it that way*

*where say fortnightly pay weeks or whatever we'd go and stuff like that..." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 5, Other)*

*"[How did you start gambling, or did you learn it from anyone?]. My mum taught me everything. Like after she ran away from my dad. He just come up here like when she went to gaol and stuff. Yeah, just he was real for him, you know like yeah about how he was. They got drunk some times." (M, 25-34 yrs, PGSI 9, Other)*

*"[How did you start gambling, or did you learn it from anyone?]. - I don't know, I just get to know that game. I didn't know - they told me, "no, you can come and play. You see it - you see, I will play in that." I said, "oh yeah, I keep watching them. Oh, that's how you do it." So I got carried away with that too." (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 7, D/P)*

*"I didn't learn pokies through my mum, I learnt to play cards.... I'd have to make all the sandwiches or cups of teas and bikkies and stuff, and that was a fortnightly – well almost a weekly thing because the way it worked like someone would have a game of cards one week, but they'd have it over a two-week - so Mum's games would be two-week.... The way I got into pokies was came up here to Darwin and the first time I'd been to the casino or anything and once I'd left my husband, mixed with my friends and "come on, let's go to the casino or whatever... The first casino was here, but now, since I've been here [in Darwin] and when I go anywhere now, I'll go the casino or whatever." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 5, Other)*

*"...opportunistic friends come in, we end up at the casino, then I end up gambling. Or I've got other friends who like their slot machines, and then I could get influenced. Like, another mate likes horse racing, and I might put a bid on. But I don't usually do it, it's only because he's there, I might - "Oh, okay. " After a few drinks, you might get influenced. " (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

Gambling was described as a maladaptive coping strategy for escaping from boredom, loneliness, and stress. It also provided the illusionary feeling of being social and having pleasure but involved the risk of developing an addiction.

*"Because I had kids at the time, and I was a single mum, and because I don't have any support, when they went to childcare pretty much that was – because I couldn't have a life just outside being a mother. It was pretty much my only escape for an hour or two I could get for the day because I didn't have enough of a window to do anything else socially, or opportunity to do anything else socially. Pretty much I found comfort in poker machines, yeah." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

*"Yeah, mostly out of boredom. Yeah, sometimes I - because I don't take drugs, marijuana or anything like that, I'm not into recreational drugs, I don't really drink, I've got to have some sort of pleasure in my life, so gambling's one of them.... But yeah, somewhere to go. Sometimes, yeah, like I said, sometimes it's boredom, sometimes I try and go and win to pay my bills. But yeah, it's very easy to get trapped." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*“Well, just walked into a club one day and was bored, and saw a Pokies machine and thought, well, I'll go and put \$10 in and see what happens. And it was fun.” (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 0, AS)*

*“I didn't really realise until that time that I actually was addicted, was when I had this - you get this feeling, it's like a rush. Then you go - and I would just go in and play the pokie machines.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

*“I gambled because part of it was a stress relief, to a degree, but then if I won it was excellent but then if I lost it set my depression, anxiety, to another level. Most of the time it was an escape, hopefully for good, but yeah... Well, yeah, because I didn't have any social circle or anything. They [gambling activities] were my only friend.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

Mental health challenges such as depression were also reported as the reasons for gambling:

*“Just depression and probably depressed or something. I've had psychosis but it draws you away from it, you know, like gambling and all that, drinking, smoking and that.” (M, 25-34 yrs, PGSI 9, Other)*

For some participants, gambling was a leisure activity, and some of them started doing it out of interest:

*“It was kind of a social thing too, because when I used to go home for holidays, that would be me and my aunty's thing. She would wait for me to come home and then when I got home to the Gold Coast, me and her, we'd go out and have dinner, then we'd play the pokies. So that was our kind of thing. And my dad, me and my dad do.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

*“Just for an interest, I suppose, just mainly – it's an activity, I suppose, but it's not high up there on my list of priorities, that's for sure.” (M, 65+ yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*“Well, maybe a bit of fun as well. There's a fun element to it, you get together with people, and it's sort of like –Sports has got a fun element to it, and it's like a form of sport that's got that – and a bit of competition like sports got, like who's going to win.” (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

Participants also explained how the needs and desire for a better life and winning more money had encouraged taking up gambling, in some cases.

*“I suppose it's always that thing of winning, winning money.... “ (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

*“I'm just trying to get a better life or something. I want the new iPhone and I can't get it, I want PlayStation.... I wouldn't mind a new car – Yeah, just, I'm trying to get ahead with life, or improving your financial situation because things are bad, you're always held back by your finances... Well, I'm getting older now, so start thinking*

*about retirement, "Wouldn't it be good with a bit of extra money, and then I could retire more comfortably?" (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

*"Because they [Aboriginal people] need money... We want to win money for do shopping." Or things like that." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 10, D/P)*

Some participants described the differences in types of gambling activities between different Aboriginal groups. Card games were more prevalent in rural and remote communities, while other forms of gambling, such as pokies, were more prevalent in urban Aboriginal people.

*"You see all the children, they grown up around the card ring with their mothers, and now, when they come into town, it's not so much gambling cards in town now, it's the pokie machines." (F, 55-64 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*"And some remote communities I used to go to, people would play card games with all these people sitting in a group, only to find out it was doing that. But I think it differs between groups because I find how some of them from up here in the top-end or remote communities that have been – It's been different when I'm in Redfern or Sydney. So there's a different context to and types of gambling between Aboriginal people." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

Participants shared their thoughts about how the lack of general education, financial education, basic life skills and coping skills might contribute to gambling among Aboriginal people.

*"Because there's no financial education, proper financial education in school, I reckon. Also there's no life skills when it comes to managing issues. Gambling is an escape for everyone who goes to it, right? So they're either escaping, could be trying to get money..... If they're too mild to get themselves a job or to learn how to study, you just go for the quickest thing to get money, you know? ... I reckon it all literally comes down to just not enough education on finance and just education on how to deal with emotions or certain things that pop up in life where instead of using that as an escape route, there's other options." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

*"It comes back to education. They get so much money from the government and they try and double it. You know what I mean? They try and put all their money back into the Pokies machine, hoping to get big wins. And I've seen a few of my friends where they put money and if they lose, they just keep putting money in until they win something, or they lose it all." (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 0, AS)*

### **Affected others' perspectives**

When participants were asked why Aboriginal people gamble, most of them described gambling as a form of a maladaptive coping strategy to escape, distract, be taken away from reality, go numb, and get rid of the boredom.

*"I think it's a distraction; it's a distraction from culture and family. Similar to how people drink to go numb or to forget things... a coping mechanism like they think they have control of money, but then they lose all that money, they're also losing that control. So same with alcohol, if they want to have that control of the alcohol,*

*but then by the end of the night they've drunk, and they've lost that control, so it's that numbingness, I think too, going blank, forgetting your worries, that distraction from life." (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

*"I honestly think that it's a pattern recognition process. There's a real calm in gambling, and it takes away from the outside - outside world. So for someone like my mum, who has, I think, quite a few - has had quite a few life challenges - that space and time to be able to gamble has always been almost a reprieve from those thoughts and that life and those things." (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

The other possible reason for Aboriginal gambling derives from a social aspect. It was described as a form of gathering, a social pursuit, though when money and machines are involved, it creates a different space. Playing card games, yarning and communicating is part of Aboriginal culture, especially in regional/remote communities. However, because of the mainstream impact of society, other forms of gambling are taken up (such as playing pokies), and, especially when money is involved, gambling often creates a disharmonious space within the Aboriginal societies.

*"...the card games and things like that like if money wasn't involved, but there is that concept of yarning, communicating that... that social gathering, which our mob used to do, especially the old nannas and ladies, they would sit around in a circle, share stories of the day, play games amongst themselves. But then that whole concept of gambling is just putting a stake or a risk factor in it..." (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

*"I've got other family members who play cards, and that's a very cultural thing.... Everyone gets out and plays cards. You always get pulled in to play cards. But when it comes to pokies, I think it's a really different thing.... I think that that's the case with - it is a remote thing with the cards. Everyone - even us, as kids, were taught how to play cards. And that's just a cultural thing. That was just a thing that we did. But pokies - there's no engagement. It's non-engaging. It's isolating as well. And it distracts from any responsible. So, I think it's a really different thing." (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*"I think it's a normal way of life; it is a normal social pursuit. It's something that they can do, that they believe that they can afford to do. It would be associated with the culture of the species or the Aboriginal group and how they gamble or why they gamble. But it may also be because they're affected by mainstream society, and that's all that there is left to do." (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)*

While for some people, it was an entertaining and gripping leisure activity, gambling often turned into an addiction, as expressed by one of the participants:

*"I think the biggest drawcard is that people genuinely believe that they can increase their money. And secondly, it is exciting when you do win, or when they win.... It can be addictive. If someone's had a big...windfall before, they think that they're going to be able to have another big windfall if they just keep - I'll just have one more go, I'll just have one more go, I'll just put another \$20 through the machine..." (F, 35-44 yrs, AS)*

Unsurprisingly, gambling was also considered an opportunity to make more money, with many believing it was an easy and quick way to increase their capital:

*“It’s generally a lack of other opportunity to come by money. So, you’ve got people on welfare who don’t have a lot of other opportunities. So, I believe there’s a hook there, believing it’s an easy way to get money and it’s also a way to pass the time.”*  
(F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

We also asked people about superstition related to gambling in Aboriginal societies. None had responded in the affirmative to that question; some participants mentioned that luck might play a role.

*“It’s definitely not cultural. It’s not superstitious.”* (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

*“There’s a point of no return, really, when they need to do something to quit something, and luck is part of that.”* (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)

### **3.3 Appropriate approaches: intervening and seeking help**

We asked participants to describe their experiences and views on seeking help for gambling issues. The discussion revolved around whether they had sought help for themselves or others, appropriate approaches to intervene in someone’s gambling-related issues, and barriers to and facilitators of help-seeking.

#### ***Other bettors’ perspectives***

None of the other bettors group participants had been in a situation or at least thought they had any gambling issue that required help. It was also reflected in the conversations around their gambling behaviour.

*“No, mate. I honestly don’t think I need to, to be honest.”* (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)

*“I’ve never thought I’ve needed help.”* (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)

Also, none was approached by anyone because of their gambling issues. In fact, they had received text messages and emails about the betting opportunities and events from betting companies.

*“There’s plenty of ads and things that come through and emails...”* (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)

*“Oh yeah, I get the thing through the email or something, Sportsbet.... I think it’s Sportsbet... I don’t know what they’re about, I just see a thing there just saying, I don’t know what it is – “racing is happening this weekend” or some bloody thing. I just delete it.”* (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)

*"Because I've got an account there so I could, as I said if you do it, if you do, like if you gamble, you put a bet on like the Melbourne Cup, you go through online, and then they get your email address and they've got every other damn thing to annoy you with. That's another thing too, another thing that sort of annoys me is that they keep your phone numbers there, and they send you these damn – I did every now and again, what do you call, like a text.....it says if you want to opt out, press whatever it is. Which I do every time, and it just – nah it goes dead. So, I'm stuck with these damn things, going to annoy me forever. But anyway." (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

Gentle but assertive communication with gamblers in a silent and safe space by the venue staff was described as a potential strategy approach with regular and/or problem gamblers for their gambling issues. Acknowledging gamblers' challenges and underlying issues with problem gambling; however, should be the first step in the process.

*"Firstly, you have to know it's a problem, don't you? ... The sticker – you don't talk to it. ... Then the venue people know who's there every day. They might be able to just have that conversation. "You've been here five times this week.... I think it's just a general conversation around, "I've observed you. Do you want to talk about anything?" You don't need to get to the personal side of it. But observe what people are doing and then you can point out to people what they've been observing." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*"I think to be approached would be the venue owners because if you're sitting, pressing on a machine for hours on end, I would imagine - I would like to think that a venue owner would walk up and say like if you're drinking alcohol, "Okay, that's enough now. You need to move on." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)*

*I think there's a lot of other underlying problems there. I do see a lot of old folks anyway, they get down there and they can't help them, they pour their pensions into the damn thing. So, I'd say the venues themselves should have a damn responsibility." (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

*"Oh, you might have to pull them off the machine, you might say, "hey hold up on the machine for a bit," sort of thing. You're still in the pokies, sort of say, "hey, want to have a little chat?" So, take them in a room and have a bit of a chat." (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

Participants were aware of the available resources such as stickers and flyers to seek help for gambling issues. However, those resources were not considered very helpful in many cases. Seeking professional help was considered more appropriate, especially where problem gambling was involved. Family support was well-regarded, especially in recognising the issue and early warning signs; however, it was also recognised that family members were not well-equipped to handle the situation in many instances.

Friends and community support groups were also considered appropriate for gamblers to reach out for help; however, the role of work colleagues was not well-regarded unless someone had a good rapport with their colleagues.

*“I have tried to support my friends through their stuff. But I’m not equipped enough for it..... God. You wouldn’t tell your work colleagues, would you?” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*“That’s a hard one... I know I did have a brother who was constantly asking me for money and then he’d go and gamble it. We told him, “you need help” but he never took it up anyway so that’s a bit hard...” (F,45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

*“It would be the Aboriginal Health Practitioners. ... But it needs to be somewhere private and confidential. Those kinds of things.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*“I suppose support groups within the community with elders perhaps - probably community members that are significant in people’s communities that could encourage small groups I suppose.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)*

When we asked participants how bad things would need to be for them or someone to say something to the gamblers about their gambling issues, they expressed that interventions were necessary when gambling would impact family, relationships, finances, employment, and mental health.

*“...I think when you know you’ve got no money left and you have to ask somebody else for money, then there is a problem.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)*

*“If they’re [gamblers] coming around every damn payday or whatever, and they put heaps of cash in. I mean, they can see if you’re putting heaps of cash in. Just the occasional every now and again, that’s no drama – but when they keep pouring that money in those slot machines mate, my God.” (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

*“It is an addiction. Once you get to that stage... You need to acknowledge you’ve got it, accept it, and somehow kind of remove yourself.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*“I think when their [gamblers] families are affected, I think when their lives are affected, when that is all they think about.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)*

Participants expressed that gambling companies do not target Aboriginal people specifically. They target everyone more broadly, though, in general, Aboriginal people gamble more than Non-Aboriginal people.

*“Not really. I mean I haven’t seen [that gambling companies specifically encourage Aboriginal people to gamble]..I do know that a lot of Aboriginal people go along to gamble because they think it’s a quick way to earn money or get more money but yeah, I haven’t seen anything specifically targeted...” (F,45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

*“They’re [gambling companies] not discriminatory in the money they take.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*



*"I think they've [gambling companies] got a business to sell and I think they have the right to advertise and display what they have. I think it's up to the individual like anything in life like alcohol and drugs. I think it's a choice and I don't think it's about gambling products itself. It looks pretty and we all have a dream, but I think it's up to the individuals, not the companies." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)*

*"I think they just want anybody, mate. So, there's no – I don't see there being a real target...I have noticed there with Aboriginal people, have got a tendency – well, a lot of have too much damn spare time on their hands, you see. I think that's half their trouble, too much spare time. So, what do they do – they go to the bloody casino, and they get drunk and then they, oh Jesus you know, they've got no money left, the kids are running wild." (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

*"The only thing I notice, though, the clubs and pubs are encouraging older people to come to establishments and the cheap meals and stuff like that. Of course, there's always – I suppose there's always that, encouraging [us to come in] save on your meal and then you've got money [to spend on the] pokies." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

### **Pokies players' perspective**

While a few participants had sought professional support for their gambling issues, others expressed their intention of seeking help for their gambling issues. Among the latter cohort, some had preferred seeking help from family and peers instead of professional service. A preference for family and friends was comfort and safety though one participant expressed the same experience with the professional support.

*"Well, I never thought about it actually, even though there was - like I said, there's information out there, I never really thought about it. I turned, well, through me going through that bad place but also I found if I was that desperate, I'd be sitting down with my mates who were in the same position as me and we'd talk about it..." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*" [I wanted to get help because of] family, financial, like I said I had a pretty bad problem for a while. It's just a vicious circle it becomes." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 4, AS)*

*"Yes [I wanted to get help]. I was actually just looking up last week for the gamblers anonymous or something like that.... Probably because I've lost big money... I never put a lot in to win it, but it was big money. So I was thinking, maybe I need to -because when I win it, it's like, you try and think, well, I could build it up, make it more. Then you end up with nothing, and it's like, hmm, maybe I need to go and seek help, and to try and not play at all.." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

*"The only reason I felt comfortable going back towards that service [counselling] was because the counsellor made me feel extremely comfortable." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

One participant described that they had never thought about asking for professional help; since gambling was common in the family and among friends, they were always around for support when required. Moreover, they had never seen family members and friends seeking help for gambling issues and thus had never considered taking professional help.

*“No, I never [asked for help]. I just put up with it, just thinking, “Oh, it’s my bad luck week, ” or something. Or there was always ways around it. You can go to your friends, “Can you get me dinner tonight, ” or your family, or something. There’s always somewhere to go, where you could get some sort of support... nd maybe, too, because my dad gambled all his life, and I never saw him do it. So that was probably not seeing him – He’s just gambling, and then you just haven’t seen him seek help, so you don’t think about it yourself. You just sometimes see it as part of life, something people do...” (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

Participants who had reached out for help described challenges associated with it. The challenges were 1) a lack of awareness about the available services, 2) waiting time to get support, 3) issues with transportation to get to the services, 4) complicated procedures, and 5) referral requirements. In many cases, participants acquiesced in these challenges and never sought any help.

*“The thing is, with these services [health services]; yes, they’re there, but it’s a mission to actually get there when you need it.... if you don’t have a car, you’ve got to catch a bus, and if you got kids – you get turned off getting the help if you’re already struggling with daily life. I think if someone could come to your house there and then, that I reckon would do wonders, but the fact that a lot of people – in my situation, if I was told I was getting an appointment and then I had to be here at this time on this day, by then I’m over it. I don’t want to get your help. I’m trying to deal with a one year old and a few month year old, and I got no car, and you want me to get to you? Good luck. It’s just easier for me to keep gambling. A lot of people want the help, but it’s just the services are sometimes just a hell of a lot just to even get into.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

*“Or they always need a referral from a doctor, and it’s like, people don’t want to be telling everyone their business. I’m calling you directly because I’m desperate and I need to talk to someone now or I’m going to do something stupid. That’s a lot of the time when I make the phone call. But most of the time you may be calling some business and it’s like, “Can I take your name, your number,” or, “Have you got a referral?” It’s just, you hang up before they ever finish because you need that direct help there and then. And when people reach out that is when they’re desperate, and they desperately want help. So like I said, if it doesn’t come through there and then, they’re going to be turned off and probably won’t look for help again.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

Some participants highlighted that even though their GPs were good, they never felt confident and comfortable talking about their gambling issues with their GPs.

*"I did have a real deadly doctor. I liked him but, yeah, funny as I was comfortable talking to him about absolutely everything else but no, I wouldn't talk to him about gambling." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

Services that involved people with lived or living experience of gambling issues were considered crucial in help-seeking:

*"I've found you're more likely to talk to someone who has experience like you knew experience because you feel they know what you're talking about, you know? Someone who even though they mean well, they may come up and try and talk to you and you think "Oh, what do you bloody know? Piss off. " So but if you're sitting down with someone who's, look, just as downhearted as you, in the dumps as you, then you're more likely to talk to them than someone who wants to help you." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*"I find personally when I talk with friends and that, talking it out with people. Not only telling people about your problem but you're also I see it as thinking aloud. And sometimes when you talk aloud, you come up with possible solutions yourself. It's just like "Oh wow, yeah, I've got to try that", it's that sort of thing for me. Yeah. So talking, like the Alcohol Anonymous, it's talking it out, does help sometime... So I think they should keep that kind of service open because when you hear other people go through problems, you also give a person possible solutions to their problems, their habits. So that really, really helps just talking out loud, like in a casual sort of environment, you know." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

Hitting the rock bottom was a necessary force to reach out for help, as the following participants summarised:

*"Yeah [I got help]. That was Uniting Care in Cairns. Even though I wanted it, like I said, until I was forced into a corner and actually was just confronted about it, I wouldn't have actually, I think, gone until I was absolutely, yeah, like I said, homeless. It's because I wanted it, I guess I didn't know how to do it, and then you're embarrassed. Like I said, I reached out once but then I was told, we're going to get your number and we'll call back and all this shit; so then I gave up. So that turned me off. I actually did reach out for help before I got that counselling, but I was turned off from the way in which it was handled, and so then until I was forced in the corner, I went to this counselling. But even now, I still don't want to gamble. I hate the bloody shit, I hate all of it. I'm not an alcoholic, but I don't even want to drink, but I've realised that I actually have an addictive personality, so it's also being aware of that. A lot of people don't realise they have addictive personalities, so it's learning to be – yeah.... I would have preferred to just be able to call and just talk to someone at that very moment I made that phone call." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

*"it's that the person, whether they're Aboriginal or not, needs to get in that bad place, experience it and go from there." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

Some gamblers had gotten over their gambling issues either by themselves or with family and friends' support.

*"[I did it by myself and was talking with some other friends]. Sometime family can help them. The people that don't gamble." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 10, D/P)*

The following participant expressed that people on their healing journey face various challenges. One of the challenges the below participant faced was their family demanding money and convincing them to gamble.

*"Sometimes because the thing is sometimes you may want to stop but you've got family, "Humbug, humbug, humbug"[for money] and I've seen it a lot. So like they've got the - you see those films where they've got the devil one side on their shoulder and the angel on the other side, so you [are] trying to tell them "No, don't, don't, you've got to look after this and that", trying to talk reason to them but sometimes you've got the other mob on the other side, saying, "Oh come on, come out. " (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

A safe space with peers where gamblers could acknowledge and share their problems and underlying issues was considered a critical element of approaching gamblers and their healing journey. Above that, a step-by-step approach and timing were mentioned.

*"I said, never approach a gambler when they're gambling. Timing is of the essence with something like this. Like, you don't want to - trust me, when they're playing, if you think - they'll think you're bringing them bad luck and say, "Piss off. " Most of them can get abusive." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*"Slowly. Just try and talk to them and bring it up in conversation and see if you can get them to talk about it. Just try and tell them, "look, if you need help, we're here", "if you need someone to talk to, I'm here for you". Same with anything in life, "if you need help, I'm here". " (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 0, AS)*

*"Unless you had something like AA, or gamblers anonymous, or something like that, where you could just go along, and you'd probably see all your mates there. But something like that where you have to acknowledge you've got a problem, and once they acknowledge that then you go the next step." (M, 65+ yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*"I guess she [counsellor] helped me to understand that a lot of the reason people gamble is what she called an iceberg effect. Gambling's at the top, but there's all this trauma and all these things that haven't been diagnosed or touched on underneath the iceberg. That's how she explained it to me. It's also relating your emotions to actions, and a lot of it was just being consciously aware of what's setting you off. What makes you react like that? Because there was always an emotional reaction to why I went and gambled." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

Most participants have never seen staff approach a gambler at the venue because of their gambling behaviour. The following participant was approached, but because of their intoxication.

*"[I was approached] Only because I was intoxicated once. I had a little too much to drink. Getting a little bit too happy and, yeah, they asked me to leave.... It was fair enough. I was pretty drunk..." (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 0, AS)*

*"No, I've never, ever seen anyone anywhere approached by any staff, and being told to even stop because, you know, I've seen you sitting here for six hours now and you've been – whatever. Never, ever, ever have I even heard of that or seen it happen to anyone." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

### **Affected others' perspectives**

Many participants had never sought help, neither for themselves nor for anyone else who were affected by gambling. While some tried or advised the gamblers to seek help, they finally chose to separate themselves from them because of the co-occurrence of excessive gambling with substance use or no improvement in gambling behaviour.

*"I just separated myself from the relationship. He [ex-partner] had a whole lot of other mixed issues too, with drinking and drink driving and everything. He was forced to get help, but more for the drinking side of things, which obviously exacerbated the gambling side." (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*"I suggested that he [ex-partner] should see someone about the amount of time he spent gambling and how much money he spent, but he said it wasn't a problem. And I chose to leave." (F, 45-54 yrs, D/P)*

Some participants described that they had not asked for help and stressed that a proactive communication strategy could help gamblers ask for help and potentially change their gambling behaviour.

*"...for them [gamblers], I like "well you mob spend too much money", just let them know, it's like "you mob are spending way too much money, you should be saving it somewhere. Better invest it somewhere that's – has a more positive... and beneficial." (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

*"Hey, I noticed that you've [gambler] never got any money after the weekend; where did you spend all your money?" Or "I noticed you're always at the TAB", or, "I noticed you're always checking your phone. You've never got any money for smoko; I can't keep lending you money. Do you want us to try and get you help?" (F, 35-44 yrs, AS)*

The main reason for not asking for help was a denial of having a gambling issue. In cases where the issue was acknowledged, it was considered manageable. However, it did affect gamblers and their families in some way, regardless of the intensity of the problem.

*"It hasn't impacted on me in the case that my family go without food, or rent doesn't get paid, or the mortgage doesn't get paid. But it still creates friction and arguments because I have to be the one that says, "Stop, stop using our money." (F, 35-44 yrs, AS)*

*"I suppose because you just manage as family, you just do it." (F, 65+ yrs, D/P)*

The following participant explicitly described that they had sought both family and professional support because of the family's accumulated trauma that led to gambling problems and other issues.

*"Just because many of us in my family have experienced quite extensive trauma. We've all been seeing counsellors. I've been - I've had a clinical psychologist since I was 17 years old, and I still see a clinical psych every second week. But we also had family help as well." (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

We asked participants about who they thought was appropriate for gamblers to approach about gambling issues. The responses included family members, health professionals (such as counsellors, health practitioners), social workers, mediators, service providers and financial advisors, and venue owners.

*"...as an Aboriginal person, that's what we do. It's part of life that you ask family for help and how family always helps. But that's usually in the support and the scaffolding of when things are going pear-shaped." (F, 65+ yrs, D/P)*

*"Possibly a social worker. A health practitioner, someone who specialises in addiction or gambling problems. A financial advisor. Maybe a mediator, someone who can provide some amount of arbitration between their assets." (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)*

*"I guess, if the people are only comfortable going to a couple of venues, they can approach the venue owners directly and put a limit on themselves or something. Or else, they can go to [a service provider] or talk to health workers. On the back of the casino doors and everything, and the pokies toilet doors, there is always numbers to call as well." (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

We also provided them with a list of potential sources of support to elicit responses around help-seeking for gambling issues. The list included partners and family, friends, work colleagues, service providers, and anyone else. There was an agreement in responses about the role of the family to seek assistance for gambling problems. Whilst we also received relatively consistent answers about friends and services, responses about work colleagues varied, with many participants deemed the latter inappropriate.

*"Yes, family and friends. They're the ones who probably notice it more, seeing from the outside that there's something wrong, and they're supportive...I don't talk to people I work with about that sort of stuff." (F, 45-54 yrs, D/P)*

*"I think that's up to the person, whether or not they're getting along with friends and work colleagues....And maybe it would just be a matter of the person, maybe their work colleague, giving reference to their workplace counselling service for being a staff member or offering them support." (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)*

One participant stressed the importance of identifying the core reason for the problem and seek help accordingly.

*“I think it depends on the core situation of the individual, like why are they gambling? Why are they gambling, and what’s the reasons behind that distraction to life? Whether it’s family problems, domestic violence or children, work. Are they doing it as a substitute for something else they could be trying to give up, smoking and drinking, so they turn to something else to distract themselves instead? Or they might do it because they drink a lot, so they also want to gamble because they’re drinking and smoking and doing drugs, so they have that need to gamble...if that person’s gambling as a distraction from family, well then there’s obviously a family issue that is husband and wife arguing and carrying on while the kids aren’t participating in house duties and are playing up at school or vice versa....if it’s family-related, they need to talk to counsellors, seek that core” (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

Participants provided interesting insights into the barriers to help-seeking for gambling issues. Shame, stigma, and pride were the frequently expressed barriers.

*“Pride might be a good one, again with that whole idea of that stigma within the community, within the family that you’re supposed to be the provider... If you’re the only person working within that household, that’s a lot of responsibility, and then that creates that cycle too....Once you start breaking it down, you can see why a lot of mob don’t like talking or reaching out within a family group about gambling or even drugs and alcohol too because there’s that stigma of you’re supposed to be the breadwinner, you’re bringing the money in, it’s your responsibility to look after us, and you just spent all that money.” (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

*“Shame. And being just embarrassed that that’s what they spend money on. They’ll suggest you go back to country and get away from it. But that’s not always a good idea.” (F, 45-54 yrs, D/P)*

*“...if you’re comparing circumstances of losing if they’re having so many problems, whether they talk about it around helplessness or stigma associated with being stereotyped or labelled. Probably don’t feel much like a person, and they are in need of help; more like someone to study.” (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)*

Some participants described that not seeing gambling as an issue because it is a normalised behaviour within a particular social group or provides escapism could also present barriers to seeking help for gambling.

*“...if you’re gambling with your friends and your family, it’s very hard to pull up because it’s become normalised behaviour in a lot of areas, particularly around Pokies for urban people and more so cards and things, cards on tarps out in communities. And, so, it’s being done in big groups. So, family and friends aren’t necessarily going to pull people up...” (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)*

*“It’s about - yeah, it’s mental framing of what it is. I know that, for Mum, we’ve a couple of conversations about it, and it is a relaxation space for her. So the*

*gambling isn't the thing... I don't think it's ever been framed inside Mum's head as an issue." (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*"The fact that they don't think they have a problem, the fact that they think it's okay to go to the casino." (F, 35-44 yrs, AS)*

Unlike the issues with family and domestic violence, drug and alcohol use, and even getting help to pay the bills, people knew where to seek assistance; there was uncertainty around the available support and services in a gambling context.

*"...when we're talking about that help for the person who needs, like the drug addict or the gambler, the one who's inflicting the trauma on the rest of the family, for them to receive the support when it comes to drugs or alcohol or even domestic violence, it's very apparent in the community where to go and who to ask for assistance and help, to get maybe some support if you want to try and give it up, or change your way. When it comes to gambling, it's not apparent who do you go to. Who do you ask? You don't want to go and ask your doctor, they're for medical purposes. You don't want to go and ask [a relationship support provider] that's about your personal stuff. You don't want to ask, you know, who do you ask?" (F, 65+ yrs, D/P)*

In cases where people were aware of the available resources, enrolling on service was sometimes time-consuming and complex. Such complexity often disconnected people from seeking help, as reflected in the below participant quote.

*"You've got to actually reach out, get triage, do an intake, make an appointment. Sometimes when people decide to reach out on any sort of problem, they want that immediate help, and then if they're given too long having to wait for it, then they move on from it or talk themselves out of it, or the moment passes it. So, I think for a lot of services in general, that time it takes to get an appointment and have any meaningful conversation is a real barrier." (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

We asked participants about how to best approach a person (gambler) for their gambling issues. The prompts included "who was best placed to help", "what to say to the person", "where and when to intervene". The topic also involved discussion around how to encourage people to get help, make the conversation more comfortable and how bad they thought things go before they intervene.

Participants emphasised that the approach would depend on the person they deal with, their relationship with that person, and the situation. They further stressed that there would not be a "one-size-fits-all" approach in this context. Some people were comfortable in seeking assistance from family or peers, while others preferred professional support:

*"It depends on your relationships, I guess, with individuals and how comfortable you feel about reaching out to organisations like Lifeline, like the gambling hotline. Whether you want to talk to someone familiar or you want to talk to a complete stranger.... It's all connected, gambling, alcohol...mental health, drugs, domestic violence." (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*



*"I've tried to speak to Mum about it before, in the past...But she's just told me to get fucked. So definitely not me [laugh] as a family member. I think that if a GP was to have a discussion with her, it might be a different story. I think it's going to be different for everyone, but I know that, as someone affected, as well, I don't think that I can come in with an objective perspective around gambling....And I think, for someone with my mum's temperament, which is a little bit - she's quite sensitive and wild, so in that - it needs to come from an authority figure.... I think it depends on the person and the temperament of the person... I think it's person dependent"* (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

*"...the level of comfortability I think comes down to your relationship with that person. When it's inside of your family, there's not a lot you can do to feel comfortable.... But if you don't handle that conversation correctly, you can have a really big fracture in your family. It is uncomfortable depending on your role. For a stranger - like, I'm the sort of person, if I was in a bar and saw a stranger on the Pokies ploughing through their money or whatever, I would probably feel more comfortable having that conversation with them than I would a family member."* (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

Participants discussed the circular associations between gambling, substance use, and mental health. Hence, a multi-layered approach with the potential to promote behaviour change was emphasised. It was also acknowledged that behaviour change takes time and includes several attempts to happen.

*"This comes into behaviour change...So we're speaking about multi-tiered approaches. It means planting seeds, making sure that people are aware that there are services available and then making sure that people within their support network are aware of those services available as well so that they can have the conversation...It's about promoting those services....So to make it not normal, you have to do things like make sure that everyone in the abyss knows it's not normal. And that comes from TV ads and putting it out on, you know, walls in clinics and in social spaces next to the pokie machine. That's one aspect of it. And then having people have the discussion, conversation about it is the next. It opens - after those seeds are planted, it opens the opportunity to have those discussions... it needs to be multi-tiered if it's - if you're talking about behavioural change, then it's an absolute requirement."* (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

*"It all boils down to that core value of mental health and how you're coping within yourself for that time and period."* (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)

*"Because as we know, giving up or making massive change in your lifestyle, it just doesn't happen overnight, and it usually would never happen at the first attempt. It would take many attempts for someone to truly make that change for life."* (F, 65+ yrs, D/P)

The stigma around gambling was expressed as a barrier to help-seeking. It obstructs open and comfortable conversations between the parties (gamblers and people related to gamblers such as family members, friends, colleagues). Participants reported that both parties were

often not sure how to start a conversation about gambling issues. Thus, appropriate strategies are needed to create a safe space and bring gambling into the normal conversations.

*“So just bring gambling into the normal conversation with a person who, for example, you see that has got a gambling problem or an issue. Because people are not comfortable or they don’t know how to bring that stuff into the normal conversation, and hence they can’t really help.” (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)*

*“It comes down to that stigma as well, like “oh, if I’m gambling all my money, I must be a loser, or I must be a real dickhead. I’ve got a wife and kids or a husband and kids to look after or a carer for my grandmother or mother like shit, I’m just wasting all my time, money on bullshit, really in a sense”. (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

*“...making people feel comfortable about talking about gambling?... I don't know. I think it's a really hard thing to make anyone feel comfortable about something that may have hurt them or caused trauma or they may feel shame about.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

Communication and other strategies play a significant role in approaching and supporting gamblers. It might include (1) highlighting how gambling impacts the affected person instead of telling the gamblers what to do; (2) asking how gamblers feel; (3) acknowledging how they are affected and how they might be feeling disappointed; (4) ensuring them that the necessary support (non-monetary) will be provided; (5) constantly changing and developing new strategies to reduce gambling and related harms; and (6) showing them the positives of not gambling.

*“I just found - when I talk to him [father] now about it and reflect on things, and still it comes up as a problem now and then, I use statements about how it impacts on me ...So, I've stopped trying to do the whole, like, telling him what to do, but I say, "well when you do this, it impacts on me this way, or makes me want to pull away and not spend time with you" or whatever. So, I just make it about the impact on me rather than framing it as me telling him what to do.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*“Seeing how they’re feeling. Asking if they’re okay, if their families are okay, why they might be spending all the time in the club. Maybe not asking straight out, “Why do you gamble all the time?” Maybe seeing if they’re happy and if other things might be making them spend time away from family and playing on the pokies” (F, 45-54 yrs, D/P)*

*“I’ve just learned to change my strategy in dealing with it. I made it quite clear I do not lend money anymore. I do not give money over because I know where the money goes. But she [daughter] has then changed her strategy. She’ll use her cash to gamble, and then next minute, the electricity’s disconnected, and she knows that I won’t let the electricity sit off because of the grandkids. So, then I’d say the next minute, well then I change the strategy, okay, well I took all the kids home with me for a whole fortnight until she got her next pay when she can get her electricity on. But she [daughter] had to stay at her house with no electricity on, and I had the kids...so you’re constantly having to change your strategies and your*

*movement or your way of thinking or dealing and supporting because they are very smart at manipulating and getting what they want.” (F, 65+ yrs, D/P)*

*“Acknowledging how they are affected. Acknowledging how they might be feeling disappointed because there’s no money left, or the financial accounts aren’t looking too good for the next six months or whatever. And acknowledging all of that first and being able to work their concerns. That would help them begin to try and approach the issue objectively.” (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)*

*“The peer groups [might be best placed to approach gamblers]. Just organising things that don’t involve being at gambling would be really helpful. Family events that haven’t got gambling. Just fun and enjoying life and socialising that doesn’t include that, because people still need to feel connected and part of a community.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

How efficient an approach will be, primarily starts with the gambler’s self-reflection on whether they acknowledge their gambling issues.

*“Well, I think, as well, the parameters - what does destructive gambling use look like? Do you do any of these things? If people were able to read that and see that they’re doing things that might impact others around them negatively, then that - I mean, it takes self-reflection, but I think that’s a first step.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*“They have to acknowledge they’ve got a problem first. Then they’ve got to look at well, what are their strategies in solving those issues, so they were removing those issues from their families, their life so that it’s not going to impact.” (F, 65+ yrs, D/P)*

*“I find it quite tricky just because of that difference in the reality of it all. Trying to get through to someone, sometimes, when they are in denial it is a problem.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

Discussions around self-regulation strategies also emerged during the conversation. Some gamblers had used such strategies to control their gambling, for example, leaving their credit card with their partner. As the following participant expressed, it works sometimes, but it might put additional stress on the affected person since they have to cope with the gambler’s frustration if they change their mind.

*“...my ex did that to me loads of times. He said, “You take my card. Don’t give it back to me. Don’t you give it back to me.” But then, two hours later and six drinks later, it would be like, “Give me my card now....But then, you can also end up bearing the brunt of their anger about it too once they have changed their mind and they are in a different headspace.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

Aboriginal cultures being collectivistic, a unified, collectivistic approach might work better when approaching the gamblers about their gambling issues.

*“I know with my dad, it was his sisters that ended up approaching him, but they did it all together. I guess it helps to have the numbers and have that support because it's easy to brush off what one person says, but a whole - all his sisters sort of had a unified approach.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

Many participants described gamblers should be encouraged to take some sort of breaks (such as a tea break or a food break, hang out with people, etc.) between their gambling sessions. This might distract them from gambling and break the positive sensory reinforcement provided by the lights and sounds emitted by the pokie machines for endless gambling.

*“Maybe they could put people in the clubs that go around and just say hi to people when they're playing, and just to see and maybe try and distract them for a little bit. If they've been sitting there for a long time, maybe talk to them, see if they want to go hang out or do something else. I don't know. If you're playing, you don't want to stop playing.” (F, 45-54 yrs, D/P)*

*“Seeing the queens flick on the screen...The smells, the lights, the sounds, it becomes a sensory overload too like “oh it's so cool in here like my machine's going off”. (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

We asked participants how bad things needed to get before saying something to gamblers about their gambling issues. There was a consensus in participants' responses to this question. They expressed that when gambling starts to impact family members and others related to gamblers, gamblers' health, and basic needs, it is an indicator to intervene.

*“I think when it starts - when the impacts have that ripple effect. So, by him losing money and him not being able to afford rent, then someone in the family having to chip in or take him in even has been the case. So, when it starts affecting others, when it starts affecting health or the ability to afford basic needs, and also when it - yeah, I guess this comes under affecting others. Like, missing family things because you're stuck at the Pokies and losing track of time, or not going home and sleeping because you're sitting at the casino and that sort of thing.” (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

### **3.4 Potential intervention strategies**

Participants were asked about the potential intervention strategies that the Northern Territory Government (NTG) and the gambling industry could develop and implement to minimise gambling harms among Aboriginal people. While some participants described clear ideas appropriately allocated to each party, some found it challenging to differentiate their authorities in harm minimisation, so they shared their thoughts in a more general way. Thus, this chapter presents all ideas emerging from participants' data relating to harm minimisation without stating that it falls under the government's or the gambling industry's responsibility. Participants also shared some self-help strategies that help them keep gambling under control.

#### ***Other bettors' perspectives***

Participants described various self-help strategies such as self-exclusion from venues, setting up spending limits, and prioritising other expenses in daily budgeting that they had used, and other gamblers could use to regulate their gambling.

*“...no, just not go. I would always make sure that – I would say to people “if you want to go there” or just refuse to go to a venue that has gambling or not even – yeah, I guess go to places to have dinner or whatever with your friends or your colleagues but not go anywhere near the gambling area.” (F,45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

*“I won’t go over – I won’t spend more than I – I won’t leave myself without money. Certainly won’t... but I do also...make sure all my bills are paid. All my food is bought. All of that. And then so I know whatever money is left in my bank is – not necessarily for gambling, but it’s disposable money.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*“I think a budget on what to spend and prioritising things in your life, I think - that’s all I can think of.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)*

*“... nana had a TAB account. And we’d go and put \$50 in for her or whatever. So, she could do her gambling. She’s 90 years of age. It changed so that only she could put her money into her TAB account. That worked well for us. Because she’s in [a rural town]. She is an invalid but she like her betting. That kept her mind active. That bit, I think.... was useful for us and her. Because....other people putting money into somebody else’s TAB account.... I don’t think that helped anyone.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

Participants were asked about the changes to the NT gambling legislation made in 2018 when online wagering providers were prohibited from offering any credit, voucher, reward, or benefit as an incentive to open an account. The majority of them were not well-informed of the changes. However, they responded in the affirmative that such changes were required and potentially beneficial to the community in minimising gambling harms.

*“I didn’t know about that... [changes to the legislation] but otherwise [unregulated gambling] that will just put people more and more into trouble.... “(F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*“I wasn’t aware of anyway, that back in 2018 that the government changed the rules...I mean that’s just a con-job that – that’s playing on people’s weaknesses. Well, this way [new regulations] they’re not going to get themselves indebted, are they. That’s basically it. They’re not going to be imposed to go the damn sites.” (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

Participants were also asked about the responsible gambling messaging that betting companies were required to use for their patrons, for example, in their advertisements and at venues. Many described that gamblers and others often did not take notice of such messaging and thus have no impact on peoples’ gambling behaviours.

*"I've noticed them, but I don't think anyone's really taken much notice of them."  
(F,45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

*"Oh, mate honestly, look people don't read that. Mate, if it's going to get in the road – it's just like an alcoholic, let's face it. They could have heaps of advertising and anything saying that you shouldn't drink too much, you shouldn't do this, and you shouldn't do that. Like you shouldn't smoke, and all this sort of thing. If you're going to smoke, like me I smoke – I take no notice of these things written on the pack, and see these horrible-looking tobacco ads, you have someone's eyeball there and the rest of the skin looks all dead around it. But I take no notice of that. It's the same thing with gamblers mate.... you see they run these ads of the problems that come with gambling, and that sort of thing. That I suppose does help, a bit I suppose, because the rest of the family are there watching as well, I suppose it makes the gambler – I imagine it would, would make them feel sort of embarrassed, and the rest of the family's watching the same thing. So, I suppose that can be helpful." (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

*"Here's all your odds, here's all of this, but "Gamble responsibly" .... So, it's not, "You have to do this." "This is your choice but do it responsibly." I like that... You're responsible for it." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

One participant raised concern about the messaging they had received from overseas betting companies offering them betting opportunities from the comfort of their homes and asked for a stricter regulation around it.

*"That's interesting because a lot of emails that they send out offers credit and it's usually overseas sites and all that stuff so it's obviously not regulated that well, I still see them pop up in my email, emails and text messages so I think I answered a couple of questions on some online things and then all of a sudden they're even messaging me so – yeah... I think they should make it stricter." (F,45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

Participants shared their thoughts about how the government and relevant agencies could minimise gambling harms among Aboriginal people. The suggestions included stricter licensing, limiting opening hours of venues, continuing the BasicsCard initiative, enforcing a dress regulation at gambling venues, and cutting down the number of licences.

*"Restrict the number of licences on the venues that do this, that provide gambling."  
(F,45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

*"I do like the BasicsCard idea. I also like that venues have set opening times. I know they do that in some of the remote areas with alcohol so why couldn't they do that for venues as well, especially heavily populated Indigenous communities? It's hard on other communities where non-Indigenous people or any person I suppose it's not fair if they would like to have lunch and gamble but anyway. So, I like the idea of the BasicsCard, monitoring of their money if they're using welfare and perhaps using - if the children don't go to school, the parents don't get their money*

*so just spending money in establishments like that, you're not going to get your money." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)*

*"I think, I really do believe that everybody that's unemployed, if we're talking about the unemployed people – they should all get Basic Card with a very small amount of cash. That way they can get their little bottle of beer or something, and maybe a packet of smokes or whatever, and then the rest of it'll go on food.... Like I said that Basics Card is a damn good idea. But that's to go across the board – it shouldn't be just the Aboriginal people, but across the board, that Basic Card's a really good one... Otherwise, it does get discriminatory – it does." (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

*"I'm looking at from the Alice Springs area, district – the dress regulation. They used to have a certain dress regulation. Nowadays, a lot of these venues, they don't care if someone comes in there with a pair of thongs on. That was something, if they enforced dress regulation, and I mean having that neat clothes, not dirty-filthy clothes, and have proper footwear and things like that. So that would slow up a lot of it. And basically, people will then have to spend some of their money on buying decent clothes, which is less money for gambling. That's one way around – like I said that's one thing. But the venues don't anymore, they don't care." (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

*"Well that's a hard one, really. I mean, you can't stop Aboriginal people going in there and making adult choices to do this because then you're in trouble for just being – what do you call it? Stereotyping and basically excluding people based on race so you can't do that. There's nothing, really apart from... [cutting] down the number of licences, make sure that there's stricter things in there and that the clubs I suppose, well if they think that just by putting stickers up and all that stuff and it's not 'til the patron actually goes to the club and complains that they say, "Well this is what you can do, this is the advice we can give you." So, they think they're doing the best they can anyway." (F,45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

They also referred to the potential complexities around implementing the above-mentioned ideas because of the agencies' (betting companies and venues) and the government's interest in generating revenues from gambling.

*"I don't think they can really do anything to tell you the truth because it's their business, that's the whole point in gambling, to make money like in any business. I don't think there's much they could do, or I don't think there's much they want to do. They advertise and say - when you watch the footy and gamble on the footy and then at the end, they say, "Gamble responsibly." That's just a figure of speech now. They keep repeating that and they don't even know what it means. To me, it's a no-win situation." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)*

*"But let's face it mate, the government itself loves this gambling thing – because all the money that goes out, comes back in again, at taverns." (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

While various factors influence gambling behaviour, the following participant emphasised the gambler's and affected others' responsibility and choice. Thus, whatever intervention strategies are implemented, the person's responsibility needs to be addressed and improved. Without that, the intervention cannot be successful.

*"Funnily enough, it's something we've all grown up with. You've seen it and a lot of people don't recognise that there's a problem. They don't have money, but they have family to support them for the rest of the fortnight or whatever. So, short of shutting every venue down, there's not a lot. I don't think the government has to be responsible for everything Aboriginal people do.... It's a choice thing." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*"Again, short of shutting all the venues – there's not a great deal. Do you put a limit on how much you spend on the machines? I don't – I just think it makes it – I think it's a choice – it really is a choice. And if you choose to do that, that's your choice. I know it makes it humbug for everybody else, but then it's the family's responsibility to say no." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

One participant highlighted how online gambling further complicates the existing problem and needs stricter regulation to minimise related harms.

*"But the online side of things, I don't know mate, I honestly – if anything becomes a real problem for a certain individual, maybe they could probably do something like have their phones, something on it so they couldn't access or something, on their phones." (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

Among other possible strategies, some participants recommended educating Aboriginal people about money management skills to regulate their gambling and thus minimise gambling harms:

*"But the trouble is though, there's a lot of money there... There's a lot of cash, especially in our region here – there's money, and a lot of Aboriginal people don't understand how to manage money... [money is] just a bit of paper, and then they'll say "oh the men from government – the men from government give me money... So, it's people putting bad ideas in their heads to start with. And the money management skills – even the young ones, even the kids, mate they're not going to school. It's a sad state of affairs." (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

### **Pokies players' perspectives**

Participants in the pokies group listed similar strategies to control their gambling as described by participants in other groups:

1. Acknowledging the underlying issues
2. Sending positive reminders to themselves that they could overcome the challenges associated with their gambling
3. Keeping themselves occupied with stuff other than gambling
4. Setting up limits on the money spent on gambling
5. Taking breaks from peers who had persistent gambling issues



6. Self-excluding themselves from venues
7. Adopting strategies that have been successful in overcoming other addictions such as smoking and alcohol use.

*“It’s just a conscious thing, and one, you have to accept it to yourself first that, yes, I have a problem, I have an addiction, and it’s saying that first and foremost to yourself... I guess it’s been just trying to be conscious about it every day....But then it’s mentally talking myself through, no, you don’t need to go to the pokies... it’s talking myself through my options and just recognising and reminding myself that I don’t need that, I don’t want that, and looking back at how far I’ve come since not doing it every week... And reminding myself of the positives out of it if I’m not going every week.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

*“...this trick I learned with a spacing thing. And actually, they used to have this good thing on TV, it was an ad about drinking alcohol and spacing it. And then, I started picking that – about, have one beer, then your next one, have a water. And so, you’re rehydrating. So every second one was a beer and every second one was water, so you’re rehydrating. And then, I started to do that a little bit with my gambling, just didn’t – Maybe I’ll gamble – do a lotto ticket this week, then I’ll give next week a miss. Or sometimes, what I’ll do is just keep myself occupied with things as well, too...So some of it, I’d start going to the gym and having other activities and stuff like that. So looking for new activities and have something that would occupy my mind as well, too. So I think that was it, and not being around – trying to have breaks from people who had the problem as well, too. So I’m trying to hang out with different people, so I wasn’t always being influenced by..” (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

*“I don’t know if they do it up here but down in Perth the casino you can ask to be blacklisted. If you had a gambling problem. I don’t know if they do it in venues up here or not.” (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 4, AS)*

We asked participants about their opinions on the changes made to the NTG gambling legislation in 2013, where the note acceptors were installed into EGMs in clubs and pubs, allowing gamblers to load up to \$1,000 in any denomination of the note. While most participants agreed that the coins-only machines (the older system) would cause less harm to gamblers, others did not see much value in the older system.

*“People would be too tired to put them [coins]. They should limit it to \$100 a go. That makes it a little bit more safe. Because most people that play, don’t have \$1,000 to load that much. Most people are \$20, \$30, they go up to \$100.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

*“... I’d say the old dollar coins is what they should stick to, because they’ve got not only notes now, but when you go to take out your money now, you don’t actually get the money. You get a piece of paper with a barcode with the stated amount leftover. So it’s very dangerous when you don’t actually have money you’re holding in your hand because, again, you’re not conscious of that, from your wallet to your hand to the machine, right? At least if you’ve got coins, yeah, I’ve got \$10 coins, yeah, and*

*you put it in. But when it's notes, it's that freely passed through, it's those little steps that either will make you conscious or disconnected from the actual thing that's happening. So if you've got coins, you're actually hearing it and feeling the money, which makes it a bit more in the moment, but when you have notes, you're just slipping through like crazy. Yeah. I reckon coins definitely would be a way better option, if they want to keep gambling machines around.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

*“Yeah, I've been in some of those places, too. And I didn't think it really made a difference, because it just made that – Yeah, it was annoying getting \$50 and then getting it all in \$1 coins. But it didn't actually stop anything because I thought, “Well, I'm not putting \$50 cash in. But all I have to do is put the money in, and I can get it as coins. ” And so, it didn't really – It just changed the way I did it, it didn't actually stop or prevent it. It was just looking at a different way to do it, and – But it's just annoying, that was all [I was just finding]. But maybe it slowed down the spending, but – I don't know. I couldn't see that it really had much of an impact” (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

Some participants referred to the Western Australian system of regulating pokies and how the NTG could adapt it to reduce gambling harms in the NT.

*“To me, it should be like WA [Western Australia]. I lived in WA where they didn't have pokie machines in pubs. They only have it in the casino.... To me, that was amazing. I thought, because of the impact that pokies can have in general, it was really nice to see a state where it wasn't in every damn pub, they're just in the casinos. So unless you went to Perth, a casino, you couldn't get on the pokies.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

Participants described potential strategies that the NTG and other relevant agencies could employ to regulate gambling and associated harms in the NT. Some explained that improving people's mental health should be the government's first priority in reducing gambling and related harm in the NT and, more broadly, Australia.

*“Man, the mental health would just be improved so much in this country if gambling was out, you know, alcohol's up there, gambling's just as bad as alcohol. It's not worse because it's a silent killer. At least alcohol, people are there going mad and you can see it happen, the damage happen, but gambling, that person could look so well put together, but underneath they're shattered because they're about to probably lose their house, but you wouldn't even know because of how much of a stigma it has around it. I think just talking about it in general, yeah.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

Reducing bet sizes and regulating opening hours of venues was described as an important part of gambling legislation:

*„They [the government] just need to blow all the bloody things up. ...To me, the bloody things just need to disappear altogether. People's mental health is going.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

*"I suppose, like reduce the size of bets [could reduce the negative impact]...Because even like on online pokies, they don't go past \$100....[and] they can put \$1,000 in a machine at a time." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

*"I reckon definitely reducing hours, because it's ridiculous. These things are open until 4 in the morning. I think maybe if you've got your little nightclub and casino, obviously do that within the club hours, but things like pubs and that definitely should, because it's destroying families." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

In contrast, one participant expressed that reducing opening hours might not be enough to keep gamblers away from gambling:

*"...the government could try that [reducing opening hours] but it's not going to stop people from gambling. People just go there the next morning... They will go. Yeah, regardless of what the hours, gambling hours are. Yeah. But I think what they do now is sufficient because most people that I know will go up to like nine, 10 o'clock and then they go home. Yeah, so on the rare occasions that I've stayed back past 10, I've noticed there's hardly anyone there, so a majority of people leave before the venue closes. But you do still have people there gambling when they close. It depends on the night, I suppose." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

Participants were conscious of gambling as a revenue-generating commodity for the government, the gambling industry, and associated businesses. Hence, their role in regulating gambling for public benefit was considered doubtful. However, people should also take personal responsibility for responsible gambling.

*"I mean, that's a bit harsh, I feel, because I feel with the gambling venues, right, for the mob who own it, it's hard because they're trying to run a business, you know what I mean?... It's business and it's - yeah, so do you stop a business because it's not going the way you want it to?" (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*"you can't hold the business accountable for people gambling. It's the individual that will be held accountable for their own gambling." (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*"Well, there's, probably, lots of things they could do, but they're not going to do it because that's their livelihood." (M, 65+ yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

Offering incentives to gamblers by venues (such as free alcohol and transportation to venues in regional/remote areas) and the gambling industry (such as free credits to open a gambling account) to continue gambling should be regulated to prevent people from gambling excessively

*"The last couple of times I was in Brisbane, what they did is, you'd walk in and I said, "Oh, can I have a beer?" And they said, "Oh, don't worry about it, " and then, I started – And then, by the third free beer, I'm thinking what's all this free beers?" And later on, I found out that's what they do to make – so that they're encouraging*

*it.... free alcohol. And I didn't pick it up. But it was in Brisbane, and so they just said, "Oh, don't worry about it, " and I thought, "Oh, very generous pub. " But then, by the third one, I was starting to think, "Three beers?" I was – "Well, what's – " I started thinking, "Well, what's this?" And then, later on, I found out that's what they do to intoxicate you to spend there. And so, you'll win, but then, you'll put it straight back in." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

*"So, if people are drinking and gambling, it doesn't help.... and having the ATMs there don't help either. Because those ATMs also got a high fee on them." (F. 55-64 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

*"I just see more that they're interested in taking your money. A lot of industries and casinos and all that, you're going in and spending money, and – Because also, the other thing is, once you make it up a bit, you start getting invited – Well, a lot of – The cards that you get at the casinos is – And that was another thing, because yeah, that auntie was getting addictive, because the next minute – Because she was going every day and putting money in, and the next minute, she's into the Diamond Club...And we could go in the Diamond Lounge with auntie, and then she could get three free drinks. And then, I joined and got the cards myself, as well, and then you win prizes on top of that as well." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

Flyers and posters at venues might make people realise that gambling could cause significant issues. To make them more effective, they should be created in local languages and not just English.

*"the poster that - up in the - sorry - board or somewhere - glass door or window - that's a good sign to tell people not to gamble. Sometime you can see it in the door in the toilet..... they should have both Creole and English..." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 10, D/P)*

*"Sometimes, I think some forms of advertising [could help in minimising gambling harms], because sometimes – I saw that Congress– just up – when I was in Alice Springs. So they had, "Always wash your hands, " and then, the message was over and over on TV....Because they're the things that reach a lot of remote communities, is just, people are sitting around and – So I always thought, advertising. And I've even learned some things like that, a couple of things off the – yeah with the spacing alcohol and I learned that through an ad on TV and started practicing it based off an ad on TV." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

Education and health promotion programs about responsible gambling could be the most critical elements of the overall gambling harm minimisation program, as below participant described:

*"It could be something like going to schools, some forms of education. And so, those kids are hitting that puberty into your adult life and then getting into the – think about getting a car and whatnot. And sometimes, they don't – You get taught a certain amount of things at school, but sometimes, you don't get taught about gambling and the impacts of gambling.... Yeah they don't talk at it - you might have*

*sexual health education and nutrition and sports and stuff.... Or they might talk about drugs, sometimes, some schools. But then, they don't have any talk about gambling or anything, and it's such a major problem" (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

*"They could give more education on it. A lot of it comes down to education, knowing your limits. To me, my gambling is my gambling. Like, I've got to know when to walk away. I don't have someone to tap me on the shoulder and say, "you've had enough; let's go". (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 0, AS)*

Most participants welcomed the BasicsCard program and thought it was an excellent initiative to reduce gambling and other addiction-related harms.

*"For Aboriginal people – well, where I live, they subsidise their money. They get half in cash and half in a - what do they call it? A green card, and you can only buy food and drinks and stuff with that. You can't buy alcohol or cigarettes or tobacco or anything like that with it. It's only for food. That's one way they could combat it." (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 0, AS)*

*"I know a lot of people don't agree with it, but to a certain extent I do because it means that the vulnerable, like the children – because women are big gamblers too – at least they can get something to eat, and whatever, because sometimes they really do struggle because a lot of the money just goes straight to gambling." (M, 65+ yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

Participants described the effects of the lights and sounds emitted from pokie machines, the messages displayed on the machines' screens, and why it needed to be regulated.

*"Yeah, the jackpot, always get you one more. It's weird like it's bad when it's going up and down too. I think what puts you off when you go there and someone else wins it the machine that you won it off, you know what I mean." (M, 25-34 yrs, PGSI 9, Other)*

*"Yeah, I think that it [lightning, melodies, messages] plays, maybe, on your mind unconsciously. You're not aware, but it's going on, and then and you're bought in with lights and things. And then, you basically see it at every casino around the world. And Las Vegas is a big, flashing thing." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

*"...there's actually a whole scientific research behind how to make these gambling machines... they actually have specialised people come in, because there's certain things within the brain, right, and so it gets triggered. And they actually get scientists to come in and make certain tones in the damn machines. There are all those jingles you hear? They're done for a reason, to get you going, or to get you hyped up. You'll notice when, say, free spins are going to come. Not free spins, but the symbol for free spins, [impersonating sound], and so you wait until that third one, and you're amped up 'til the third one, yes, I'm going to get free spins – but then nothing. Shit. Then you hit again. So they actually have a scientific base behind them. Everything to do with the music, to do with the lighting, to do with the fact that they don't put the actual time. You'll notice all the rooms are completely dark, no*

*windows, it's all for a reason. It's a mental thing. They actually have people legitimately who specialise in this type of thing, and that's who they hire to make these machines. That's what was the interesting part, is you realise, shit, there's actual a whole scientific thing behind this. It's just all to get people's psyche, into their psyche, and make them addicted." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

Finding other ways of revenue and limiting the number of pokies could be another way to minimise harms from gambling:

*"if they [the government] could find other ways to get revenue, apart from that, maybe that would help but, my goodness, it's not an easy task... I don't know how you're going to do it, but I think they really should look at limiting poker machines; that's a huge impost." (F. 55-64 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

### **Affected others' perspectives**

The majority of the participants in this group strongly advocated for the need for gambling-related education, awareness, and culturally sensitive programs instead of the existing "gamble responsibly" campaigns and available resources such as leaflets and flyers. In addition, reflecting on the roots of problem gambling and its co-occurrence with substance use and compromised social and emotional wellbeing, the need for incorporating mental health literacy into the programs and services was emphasised.

*"What type of interventions would assist? Culturally competent interventions that are compatible with the culture's origins, the language, dialect; their practices, beliefs, traditions in respect of customs and lore, and how that is interpreted. And what practices are credible and preserve life. Interventions that work from the bottom up would be hoped for." (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)*

*"Yeah, because there's definitely only just posters and basic information and leaflets. You go down like the last pub that I went to at the casino...you just walk in, and there's a little tray of leaflets there and a few posters on the wall. Yeah, that's highlighting to people that are in there, but at the same time, it's not always in a registered outlet." (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

*"I think caring for people's mental health, in general, a lot more. Needing that escape and finding it such a thrill and so interesting, there has got to be other issues going on too. Like, my ex used to say he felt so good when he was gambling. He didn't feel bad about it until the next day." (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*"A lot of them have that anti – not anti, it's not antigambling, it's just that gambling responsibly campaign, so they still have that campaign, but again it's just leaflets and an A5 piece of paper within the pokie room or Keno room." (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

Drawing on education, one participant emphasised that the bar staff are usually not trained to approach someone with gambling issues. Especially in the NT, these people need to be culturally aware, and flyers and posters must be translated into relevant Aboriginal languages. Thus, the programs need to address this concern.

*"I think that if there were sort of gambling counsellors that maybe even just did rotations through some of the hotspots in particularly Darwin and Katherine, and Alice Springs casino as well, and those people would be Aboriginal Liaison Officers. So, being recognisably Aboriginal themselves, as in being from that particular community or that town and be in a position to have that conversation...And then that person could do plug-in - like, a referral sort of thing after that conversation. I think something like that may work." (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*"I certainly appreciate the posters on the toilet doors and things like that because when people are having a quiet moment, they can take that in. A couple of factors around that is you're in the NT, you need to make sure the language around that is correct or is translated, particularly at the casino where people are coming in from communities and may not be able to read the messaging" (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*"I just don't think it should be left up to people behind the bar. We get a lot of backpackers outside of COVID. Normally, you've got a lot of backpackers working behind the bar, you've got a lot of young people, you've got people who are not trained in how to approach people around something that is so sensitive, and you've certainly got a lot of people working behind bars in the NT that are not culturally aware. So, I don't think that it should be up to the venue to have that conversation. It's a specialised role." (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

Approaching Aboriginal gamblers at venues in the NT needs to apply a culturally sensitive approach to avoid stepping into any racism-related direction. Cultural awareness education for venues staff has the potential to assist with this issue.

*"I've actually worked in a venue myself where we were told that anybody who had sat on a machine for a ridiculous amount of time or we became aware that they were losing a lot of money, we were encouraged to go and approach them and say, "would you like a break? How about we go and get a cup of tea?" Pull them away in some way. My concern around doing that with Aboriginal people is that there is already a subculture of racism in venues in the Territory, and I think that it could be seen in such a negative light and become quite a different issue." (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

The conversation with participants also included reflections on how important it was to invest in education about gambling and implement various programs to address gambling issues. Evaluating the available programs and services is essential to assess their feasibility and adequacy in relevant population groups. This is especially true in the NT context because of the diversity in Aboriginal population groups.

*"...they need a huge injection of funds and resources to be able to cope with something of the magnitude of gambling... As we know, some people succeed in these programs, other people do not. Something works for some people, and something doesn't work for someone else. So, it's a matter of having, I think, lots of different programs and lots of different resources and having lots of different opportunities for the people to be able to access consistently....So, these people need to have the opportunity to be able to go back into the programs. If it takes ten*

*times that they're accepted in, and ten times they end up walking out, but the 11th time might be the time that they actually succeed in getting away from that gambling lifestyle. So, we've got to keep having a revolving door and having lots of reviews to see what is working for our clients in that community. Because lots of different communities are all very different as well."* (F, 65+ yrs, D/P)

*"Education, like being educated about it a bit more like a lot of people don't understand gambling behaviours like even myself, there hasn't been really anything launched on it other than just advertising. You go to the casino or to one of the pubs with pokies or Keno, you only see the little A4 or A3 posters that give you that support numbers and things like that."* (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)

Training the venue staff on using proactive but assertive communication strategies with patrons might assist gamblers with regulating their gambling and thus related harms:

*"I think people having that conversation there and there too like the mob behind the bars with the RSG interacting with their clients more often and having those conversations like "hey, how often do you do this?" but do it in a friendly manner like "how often do you come down here?". Old Nanna says, "oh I come down here every second day and put 30 or 40 bucks in". Then there's maybe "hey, Nanna, that doesn't sound very good. Your social aspect's, stepping out's really, really good". But then again that might upset her like "what? You're saying I can't come down here and" (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

Developing and exercising health promotion strategies such as those used successfully in smoking cessation or other addictions might be another tool for gambling harm minimisation.

*"...outreach to community - or sometimes smoking cessation programs they've had - but I haven't really seen the workers that go out and talk to people about gambling...I've noticed that particularly government doesn't seem to have anything like that there. They might have a smoking cessation or health promotion sometimes but doesn't have a gambling focus."* (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

*"We've done really well in terms of smoking reduction... if I'm thinking bigger picture than just gambling here, as well as the other addictions, it's a space where you go; perhaps maybe we need to support addiction a little bit more in Australia. And some of the background effectors of addiction."* (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

Participants strongly recommended that governments and other relevant agencies should introduce firm legislation around gambling. It should include regulating the trading hours of venues, number of venues, number of pokie machines at venues, venues where pokie machines can be established, gambling advertisements, and timing of gambling advertisements on TV.

*"Make them [gambling opportunities] less available. So, that places have less pokies, so there's not as much opportunity to play. Some of these clubs have got so many*



*machines. You have to make the same rules for everybody...make clubs close earlier"*  
(F, 45-54 yrs, D/P)

*"...regulating the venues, a bit more.... I don't know if it would work or not, but possibly if the venue asked people when they came in, "Have you got a limit? Would you like us to -" The venue could probably be a bit more upfront with that sort of thing. Rather than just letting people keep emptying their bank accounts once they have had a few drinks"*  
(F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

*"...make it harder for establishments to have poker machines..."* (F, 35-44 yrs, AS)

*"Well, over in WA, pokie machines are not allowed in any sporting clubs or any clubs. They're only in the casino and a registered gambling place. So, to me, the fact that here in the Territory, they can go down to the local tavern, and you've got the pokies there. You go into the sporting clubs; you've got the pokies there. I think if they minimised it so that it's not so freely available at every club and pub in Darwin or in the Territory, and only available at the casino like in other states. Other states have exactly that."* (F, 65+ yrs, D/P)

Regulating the venues could include legislation around how to use the venues for smoking, drinking, and gambling.

*"I don't have the statistics, but I'm assuming there was a big impact when smoking was not allowed in Pokies areas. I think that's probably been helpful, and I wonder if disallowing drinking in that area might work as well. So, you've got to pick: you're either smoking or drinking or gambling; you can't be doing all of them at once."* (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

*"So, if governments were able to regulate localities of this the same way that we've regulated localities of drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes - you know, you want to speak about minimising harm? That's how we do it."* (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

Introducing regulations around gambling conditions such as setting up smaller limits on spending in one go and a day, requesting registration or membership or filling in surveys could minimise gambling harm, as the following participants expressed.

*"Don't make it as easy to play. Maybe you have to register or something. Or you've got to be a member. And then maybe you can only go there for a certain - like the Banned Drinkers Register, where you can make people say, "You've been here for 10 hours, you can't come for another day...Maybe make some rules to control how much time people spend, but that's only in the clubs. You go to one place, and then they say, "No, you can't come in", you go to another place."* (F, 45-54 yrs, D/P)

*"I think that there should be limits set, but I also think that the limits set should be - there should be a difference between gambling that's actually financed and gambling that is funded so people can actually go along and play a game without actually losing money....there should be a limit on how much they spend that way."*  
(F, 45-54 yrs, AS)

*“Look, I think across the board rather than just for Aboriginal people, but I would like to see government legislate to have some cut-off points with the actual Pokies machines. With my son's PlayStation, it's programmed to turn off after an hour. I think if there was some way if they could tell if the same person has been sitting at the machine for a long period of time, then reset and don't let that person sit there for too long. Or if someone gets up to a couple of hundred dollars has gone through, there should be a message on the screen that says, 'have a spell. Sit this one out for half an hour' or something. Give people time to get out of the loop because I think it's quite hypnotising.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*“I don't know, maybe a questionnaire that comes up on a pokie machine that you have to take before you proceed with your gambling. I mean, some people sit there for hours.” (F, 35-44 yrs, AS)*

*“I think they are not as responsible as what they could be. They could actually be asking – offering people the chance to set limits at the start of the day.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

The suggestions also included providing different entertaining options within the venue, throwing gambling out of the social environment, and creating a family-friendly space at venues.

*“It's the demographic like when you're sick of listening to music and standing on the dance floor you want somewhere quiet to sit down, and everyone seems to go to the game room because it's quiet, and they purposely have done that in the pubs and clubs, the gaming room is a lot more quiet” (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

*“Get them the fuck out of social environments...when it comes an RSL and then investing a crapload of money into the pokies right next door - I think that there's a real issue with it. I don't mind the idea of a casino. I don't mind the idea of purposefully going to gamble. But when you start to bring it into people's day to day function space - it's like having pokies at a supermarket or something. That sort of stuff's insane.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*“There's no real family friendly places to –you know what I mean? You can't go and have a meal and take the kids, and like it used to be. Everywhere you go, like you go to the football club, St Mary's, and all that, it's just bingo – that's where they have bingo. That's pokie machines, it's just like, “Seriously?” They're the ones that shit me the most” (F, 35-44 yrs, DP)*

*“They could offer some facilities away from the – I am just thinking about when I was at Casuarina Club the other week. That was good in the fact that there was another area, and everyone was welcome to go and sit there, even if they weren't having meals or weren't drinking a whole lot or weren't gambling anymore. There was still somewhere they were welcome to sit, so they didn't have to be sitting gambling the whole time to be enjoying the comfort of the venue.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

Thoughts around the role of gambling-related advertisements in harm minimisation also surfaced in the conversations.

*“I think advertisement like better advertisement of the effects of gambling and actually break it down.... put the gambling ads back up and highlight like “hey, gambling affects family, gambling affects your relationships, it affects the children, it affects your financial stability”. There’s your car gone, there’s the family gone...”*  
(M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)

The following participant expressed that governments and other agencies should employ evidence-based practices to reduce addiction-related harms since excessive gambling is another form of addiction.

*“I think that governments need to take heed from the evidence base that’s occurring around the reasons and rationale behind some of these addiction practices. And gambling fits into that.”* (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)

Some participants described the critical need for specialised gambling support services exclusively catering to Aboriginal people:

*“It’s education and as I said, providing opp – there is nothing in the community, and I’m an educated Indigenous woman, and there are no programs that even I’m aware of where these clients can go to. Well, it’s not promoted. It’s not educated out into the community if there is.... So, whether there is programs, we need to know about it, and if there’s no programs well, we need to create the programs.”*  
(F, 65+ yrs, D/P)

*“Like, there’s specialist areas that have been set up to deal with alcohol and drug problems, but there is nothing set up for gambling, and gambling has been a massive, massive issue that affects the Indigenous community whether you are remote or whether you are an urban Indigenous. It affects you, your families around you. It’s amazing that the government hasn’t put money into providing programs and resources to be able to support and educate. Education is the key to everything and maybe to just get some education out into our Indigenous community.”* (F, 65+ yrs, D/P)

### **3.5 Impact of COVID-19 on gambling**

When COVID-19 started in Australia (and the NT), pubs, clubs, and land-based gambling venues were closed, and sporting activities were ceased. We asked participants about how their gambling behaviour had changed during this period. The conversations happened around whether 1) there had been any change in the amount of money they spent on gambling, 2) switched to online gambling, and 3) replaced gambling with other activities.

#### ***Other bettors’ perspectives***

Most participants in this group reported that the temporary closure of gambling venues in the NT because of the COVID-19 pandemic had not impacted their gambling behaviours. Some participants switched from traditional to online gambling (such as online Lotto, Keno, and pokies, etc.), but overall, there was no significant change in their gambling activities.

*“No because there was no other way to do it, so I just didn't bother. I didn't think about it and it didn't worry me at all... we weren't allowed out anyway.... You only could go out to go and get your shopping and I did...” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 2, D/P)*

*“So that didn't change me at all, no.” (M, 55-64 yrs, PGSI not available, AS)*

*“If things were shut, then I didn't bother buying a lotto ticket or didn't go for a Friday afternoon drink with the workmates and put on a Keno because you couldn't but I didn't think anything else to do or didn't find different ways or anything.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 1, D/P)*

*“I did it more online.... Downloaded apps.... [A bit more on Lotto] .... Well only apps.... I did it [pokies online], but I don't put money in them.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

### **Pokies players' perspectives**

COVID-19 impacted participants in the pokies group slightly more significantly than participants in other groups. While some switched to online gambling, others slowed down their gambling. The latter mostly applied to those who were not regular gamblers. A few participants were content with the shutting of venues as it helped them control their gambling, save money, and spend more time with family.

*“I actually liked the fact that we couldn't go because it just helped me. Because sometimes I can't control myself, so it did it for me.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

*“Just waited for it to open and just went in....I slowed down on my gambling so it doesn't really affect me anymore....but with someone's who addicted, yeah, that could be a problem. But you know what anyone who plays the pokie machines, right, they can go online and gamble.... I didn't online gamble but if someone with the COVID-19, like you said, because they closed down all the venues and everything with the pandemic and so I know of people who've gone to online gambling.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*“If they were shut, did that change my gambling? No. You just be reasonable. You just accept it. It sucks but yeah you've just got to wait. It's like holding a piss or something. I don't know like. You kind of see yourself with something else.” (M, 25-34 yrs, PGSI 9, Other)*

*“That was good too. Everything was closed....the pub and no one didn't go and gamble. And I used to all keep my money in the good way too. Before, I used to gamble, but today I still have my money.” (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 7, D/P)*

*“I suppose it [my gambling] did [change], in one sense. We'd go down, every week, to the casino and have lunch and spend our \$20 on Keno and get your free \$20 on your pokies, so we stopped about February, I think. So, we don't spend the \$20 a week that we used to, but apart from that, I think, whatever you lose in the hurdy*

*gurdy you make up in the merry-go-round. I think that the online gambling has, certainly skyrocketed since that time.” (M, 65+ yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*“That’s [COVID-19 restrictions] probably when I started online.... It’s not like I’ve been doing it for years, it’s only just kind of started, that online.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

*“I know people started playing cards again at home. Normally the old people – they sit around playing cards.” (F. 55-64 yrs, PGSI 3, D/P)*

Some participants gambled online more, especially during the initial period of the pandemic when the venues were shut. They gambled online on pokies, lotto, sometimes using the online betting applications.

*“But now, I’ve transferred it [Lotto] to the phone, so I now am not paying commission fees, but it was just easy, I can just get my thing. So I did do, actually, that. I went onto my phone and started doing things on the phone...” (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 8, D/P)*

*“I did online pokies but they have all different things on the app. So I suppose they have roulette and all those other things.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

*“I’ve got TAB, as I say, and you look at the options, on there, what you can bet on, it’s just about two flies crawling up a wall, almost. People just have so many options that the temptation would be there, there’s no doubt about that.” (M, 65+ yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

Further, some participants switched to online betting with overseas betting companies during this period. However, the uncertainty around losing money and the personal information associated with providing bank card details to open accounts with those companies restricted others to use such gambling services.

*“[Did you switch money to more online gambling?] Yeah, I reckon it would have been that time, because I haven’t been playing online for years. Only because I thought, oh, I don’t know, that’s a bit scary with your cards attached to the account, and you don’t know if it’s Australian. Because a lot of people I know, they play the overseas ones. I do it with the Australian online, so I do it with that.” (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

One participant drew attention to the potential risk of addiction to online pokies which held them to gamble online:

*“Not me but I mean like a lot of people went to online gambling.... That’s one thing I haven’t done, and I don’t want to get hooked into it.” (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 4, AS)*

While many participants were involved in some form of online gambling, the aversion to phones and computers held some participants from gambling online.

*"I've never been one, I can't stand the phones and computers. I've never turned onto wanting to do any of that." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

On the other hand, it was expressed that gamblers would find a way to gamble regardless of the shutdown of venues and whether they were not "tech savvy".

*"Oh, if you're a gambler you'll find a way to gamble, whether it's online or not. If you weren't tech savvy and you needed to gamble online then I'm sure people become tech savvy. And Apps make it so easy, today, for all kinds of different activities." (M, 65+ yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

One participant described how their life changed positively during the pandemic. Although it was not a direct result of the lockdown but having been able to secure employment and indulging in sports had consumed most of their time instead of spending that time on gambling as was done previously.

*"I just joined the sports club, started getting into sport and got myself a job and that. It's not like I never wanted work, but because I'd just become a single mum, trying to raise two babies on my own, I was limited for quite a while on what I could do and how I could do it. So gambling was my only escape, and it wasn't until these kids are pretty much around walking age that I could, and other external things weren't happening, was I finally able to actually focus on getting a job and getting out there. Yeah. There's more than just the gambling in that people have to take in the fact of there's a lot of external things that drive people to gamble. Yeah. And self esteem, and there's so much more into it than just putting money into it." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 11, AS)*

In some cases, the restrictions associated with the pandemic provided opportunities for recreational activities other than gambling.

*"Yeah [I did] more fishing. There's a lot more fishing." (M, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 4, AS)*

*"Sometime people they like going fishing and hunting. Yes. That's the only thing they can do. Yeah. It was a good thing for people to go out and do these. You know, taking kid... they forget about gambling, you know, playing cards." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 10, D/P)*

*"I [did]crochet... I sit at home and I make blankets for my grandkids. I'm doing one for my great-grannie right now. I've got five weeks before it comes." (F, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 16, D/P)*

In contrast, some participants reported an increased level of alcohol consumption or "fell into alcohol's lap" during the pandemic, as described by the below participant:

*“What was my alternative? We just go back to because there was a lot of during there working, we just went back to working. Just have a drink. If you don't gamble, you just have a drink. Throw it into drinking. I don't know it's like fall in alcohol's lap.” (M, 25-34 yrs, PGSI 9, Other)*

Some participants missed the social aspect of gambling at venues during the lockdown period. However, keeping in contact with peers by other means, such as over the phone, helped them overcome this challenge.

*“For me, yeah, no, I prefer to go to the venue because it's an outing, as opposed to staying home and gambling on the phone or whatever. I prefer to go out. If I really wanted to go out and have a bit of a press, then I'd prefer to go to a venue.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*“No, not really [I did not switch or spend more money on online gambling]....that's [gambling] entertainment for me, you know, you go there and spend an hour there and then you go, kind of thing.” (M, 65+ yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

*“[I] stayed home and watched TV. Or thank god for the mobile phone, just get on the phone and ring someone up and have a yarn.” (F, 45-54 yrs, PGSI 0, D/P)*

After the lockdown restrictions were eased, venues, following the health authorities advice, required people to use the NT COVID-19 safety check-in service at the venues. This provision had raised concerns around privacy issues for some participants, and thus they preferred to not go to the venues.

*“...you go into the pub and you got to sign your name. And your phone number. And that's what stopped me now. I thought, nah, this is no good, signing your name and your number, and this - yeah, the other people comes in - maybe your family or whoever that knows you, look at your name. Ah, he's here. It's his number here. I got to get this number too, as well. So I can call him. That's why I stopped. That's the only thing now - that's why I stopped going to the pub. And every pub.” (M, 35-44 yrs, PGSI 7, D/P)*

### ***Affected others' perspectives***

Most participants in this group had not experienced significant changes in others' gambling behaviour.

*“...because we live in the Northern Territory, we weren't really affected by – we had very minimal effects from COVID-19 restrictions. There was no lockdown period for – I think there was two weeks at Eastertime, and a lot of Aboriginal people were all sent back to community; there was free transport offered. But personally, it didn't necessarily affect me or my husband because he was – he continued working, and the only thing that you could gamble on was horse-racing; horse-racing didn't stop... it hasn't really changed his gambling activities.” (F, 35-44 yrs, AS)*

*“Look, for me personally, it's only really my dad that gambles regularly, and the impact was that he didn't gamble because he didn't go anywhere, and he doesn't have a credit rating to have an online betting platform, which is good. So, he didn't go anywhere. That did stop him from doing it.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

Some participants had experienced positive impacts of COVID-19 on gambling:

*“...much more home time. Much more family time.... You got told off if you were out – if you were out for a walk and stuff – you were just – because, in Darwin, we didn't get shut down so much. It was only a couple of weeks. But still, it was much quieter on the streets. You'd go to work, and people wouldn't be around. So, there'd be no people under the water tower, no people sitting in the square. Everyone was home with family. And not everyone's got flash phones, so you can't do stuff...It was good...They were always around, and not so much alcohol, and there was more food...I loved it.” (F, 45-54 yrs, D/P)*

*“I think a lot of people got distracted – not distracted, but they weren't distracted with the gambling habits so gave people the opportunity to see the core problems and I think that's been a big issue with COVID, especially around mental health like making people see “oh that's why I was depressed, because I spent all my time over here when I should have been here with the family working out our problems, discussing those conversations”. In a lot of cases, it hasn't happened like that as well; they've now – spending more time in that situation that's causing them to gamble, that they're choosing to gamble, so they're in that situation where all the fighting and all the drinking and all the drugtaking's taking place...” (M, 25-34 yrs, D/P)*

Some participants described that gamblers switched to online gambling during the pandemic:

*“...actually, it opened up another avenue that some people did not know about, and now they know about, and they're using which the online gambling with the casinos over in Las Vegas and that. So, they're putting in more money. They've been putting in more money...A lot of family members I know didn't know about it until other family members found out about it because there was a new thing, and now quite a lot of them are doing it.” (F, 65+ yrs, D/P)*

*“My daughter's father, yes, took up online gambling. Playing some blackjack online, and things like that which didn't have to close down...he has openly admitted that – We have missed child support. He has gone out of his way to make sure that it didn't get deducted from his pay. I don't know what sort of stunts he pulled to do that, but he is on an automatic deduction anyway because he had got himself in a pickle doing online casino games and things.... he has just found a different way to do it when he couldn't leave the house.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*“that's how online got worse because they got bored....and then they got given all this money, because the government created all these stimulus packages, and so everyone had all this money and couldn't go anywhere so that's where every day you went online and that's where the majority of it went.” (F, 35-44 yrs, DP)*



*“And for people that are gamblers, it may have aggravated their problems a bit. Because the community online was bigger and normalised.” (F, 45-54 yrs, AS)*

Participants also highlighted the potential differences that remote and urban communities might have experienced due to the COVID-19-related restrictions.

*“However, the communities that I work with, it had a bit of an alternate affect because there was more money in community, more people in community because the repatriation from Darwin, and therefore, that unregistered sort of gambling did increase. Because, also, people were locked in their designated areas and unable to move through country like they normally would. So, that sort of - a bit more bored, bit more cashed up than usual, so I do actually believe that there was an increase in community and a decrease in urban settings is my opinion.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

Participants in the affected others group did not share many examples wherein gamblers had significantly replaced their gambling with other recreational activities. Mostly, it was a twist in their behaviours, like finding other avenues, places, and methods to gamble.

*“...what I understand, the drinking was more at home, and the gambling also became more at home as well.” (F, 35-44 yrs, D/P)*

*“Instead of be drinking and pokies in the pub, it'd be drinking and cards at home and in back yards.” (F, 65+ yrs, D/P)*

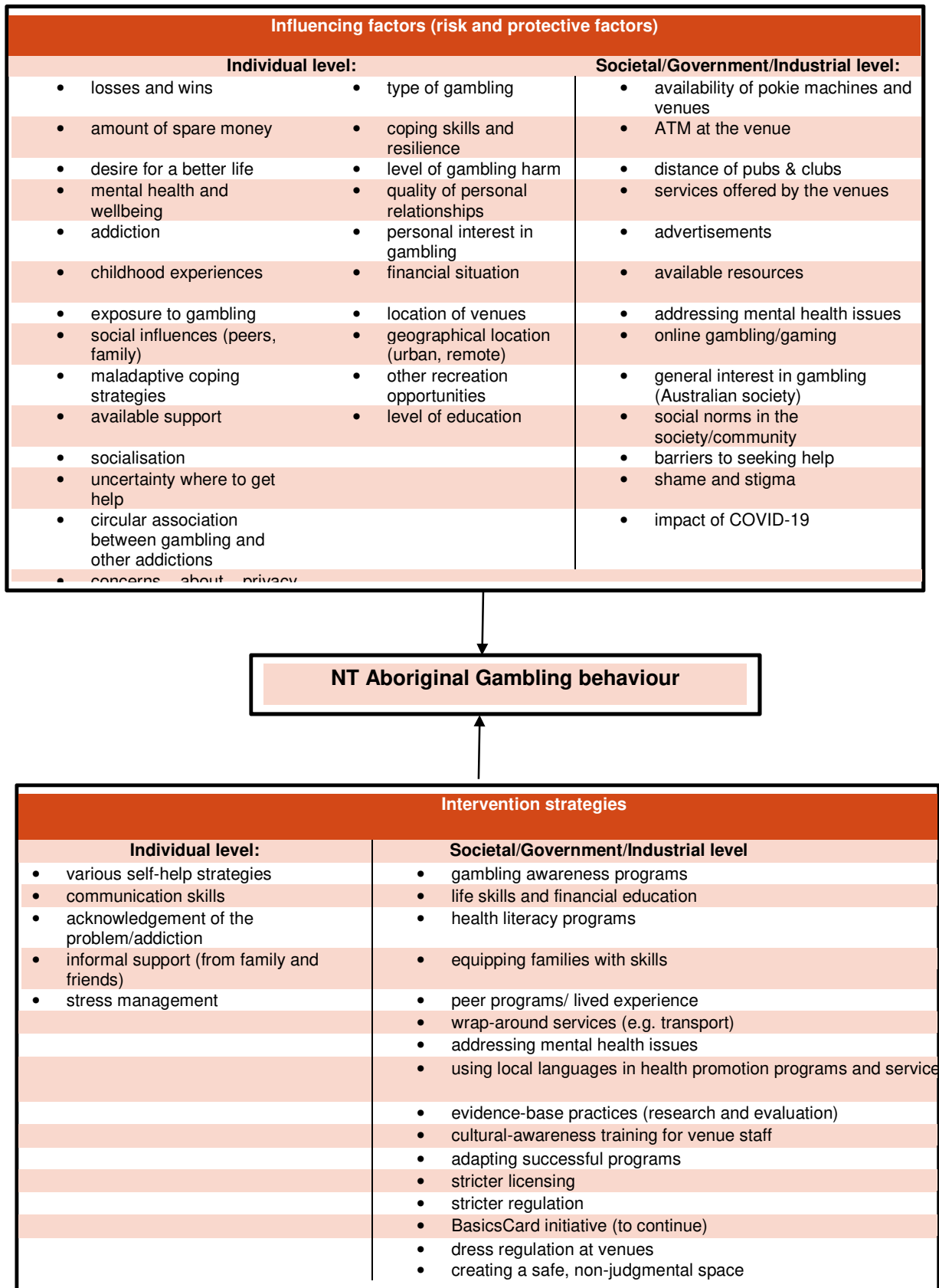
## **Chapter 4: Conclusions and recommendations**

This chapter provides a conceptual framework based on the findings of this study. It also includes recommendations for addressing harm from gambling from a public health perspective and scope for future research.

### **4.1 Main findings**

Based on participants' perspectives and the interviewers' observations, Figure 1 (the conceptual framework) provides insights into factors that influence gambling behaviours of Aboriginal people and potential intervention strategies, at individual, community, government, and industrial level. Viewing the framework from a public health perspective, we consider it as a useful tool when developing health promotion resources and strategies to minimise gambling-related harms among Aboriginal people, and more broadly, general population, in the NT.

Fig.1 A conceptual framework for developing health promotion strategies for reducing gambling-related harms



## 4.2 Recommendations

Key findings from the research that could be used to underpin approaches to intervention are:

Participants' perspectives/interviewers' observations	Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Opportunities for recreational activities other than gambling</b></li> </ul> <p>Boredom and isolation were described as facilitators of gambling.</p>	<p>Providing alternative modes of entertainment and encouraging people to engage in activities that involve the support of others, may help people to limit their gambling.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Self-awareness of gambling behaviour</b></li> </ul> <p>A lack of self-awareness of gambling behaviour was one of the drivers of gambling harms.</p>	<p>Strategies aimed at improving awareness of gambling behaviour such as keeping track of losses and venues issuing regular statements on gambling expenditure to their patrons may facilitate the self-identification of gambling issues.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Resistant to seeking help</b></li> </ul> <p>Some gamblers who were aware of their gambling issues appeared to be resistant to seeking help.</p>	<p>Initiatives that portray positive outcomes from gambling interventions may encourage them to seek help. For example, creating advertisements featuring gamblers from relevant communities who had previously benefitted from gambling interventions. Also, involving people with lived experience of gambling (or addictions and mental health challenges) in support services might encourage people to seek help for their issues.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Western Australian Model</b></li> </ul> <p>Some participants mentioned the Western Australian model (in Perth) where pokies are not located in pubs &amp; clubs.</p>	<p>Remove from or limit the number of pokies at Pubs/Clubs and only being available in the casinos.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Promote Services</b></li> </ul> <p>Many participants were aware of the available resources and services to avail for alcohol and drugs support but were not</p>	<p>Create a campaign and raise awareness about gambling support services.</p>

<p>aware of support services for gambling-related issues.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gambling Phone Service</b></li> </ul> <p>Participants mentioned that the gambling hotline is only a referral service and would have preferred a direct counselling service to deal with issues at the time of calling.</p>	<p>Offer a gambling phone support service rather than it being a referral to gambling services.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gambling support workers placed in venues</b></li> </ul> <p>Participants, especially in affected others group, mentioned that people experiencing gambling problems are likely to be identifiable by venue staff and other gamblers at gambling venues.</p>	<p>Employ gambling support workers at venues to check on people and offer support.</p> <p>Interventions that provide information to venue staff and other gamblers about identifying and approaching people with gambling harms and offering help may be useful in addressing and minimising the impacts of problem gambling.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A multi-layered approach to behaviour change</b></li> </ul> <p>Many participants discussed the associations between gambling, substance use, and mental health.</p>	<p>Develop and implement a multi-layered approach to behaviour change that includes gambling education and support incorporated into other Alcohol and Other Drugs and Mental health services than those just delivered in silos.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Resources for Families</b></li> </ul> <p>Many participants deemed personal contacts appropriate to approach for help and them to offer help to gamblers.</p>	<p>Develop resources for families with tips and tricks to support family members to deal with gambling issues. For example, interventions that guide close others about raising gambling in general conversation may encourage gamblers to seek help. Further, equipping family and peers with appropriate life skills such as money management, cope with stress and anxiety, education, might enable them to help gamblers with their issues. Also, interventions that provide information about formal services may facilitate close others to refer gamblers to the services for help.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Incentives for gambling</b></li> </ul> <p>Incentives to gamble (such as free alcohol and transportation to venues) are offered by venues. Free credits are also offered by betting companies to open online gambling accounts.</p>	<p>Regulate free incentives to prevent people from gambling excessively. Regulate online gambling as it is especially easily accessible by children and younger people and might put them into gambling addiction at a later stage.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gambling services in remote areas and approaches for services delivered to Aboriginal people</b></li> </ul> <p>For many people living in remote regions, there are no gambling services available.</p>	<p>Establish gambling support services in such areas. Since the majority population in these areas are Aboriginal, there is a strong need for developing services in local Aboriginal languages and culturally appropriate manner.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gambling-related stigma, self-help strategies, and messaging</b></li> </ul> <p>Some participants mentioned there is a negative stigma talking and obstructs people talking about problems, both within families and services. Further, self-help strategies helped gamblers to limit their gambling in some cases, especially, where they were not comfortable talking about their gambling issues.</p>	<p>Appropriate strategies are needed to create a safe space and bring gambling into normal conversations.</p> <p>Self-help strategies helped gamblers to limit their gambling in some cases. Therefore, interventions that provide information on such strategies are likely to be successful, especially where shame and embarrassment are associated with gambling.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Preventive interventions targeted at some groups</b></li> </ul> <p>In general, low- and moderate-risk gamblers were more receptive of the negative impacts and harm from own gambling than high-risk gamblers.</p>	<p>Preventive interventions targeted at these groups may have a significant impact in addressing and minimising gambling harm in the community.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Timed Gambling &amp; Breaks</b></li> </ul> <p>Many participants mentioned gamblers should be encouraged to take some sort of breaks in between gambling sessions to distract their mind from gambling.</p>	<p>Strategies might introduce timed gambling at venues or people being encouraged to take breaks.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>How could governments and other relevant agencies help in minimising gambling and related harms?</b></li> </ul>	<p>Restrict licencing of venues</p> <p>Reduce the hours of gambling at venues like hours reduced for purchasing alcohol in some communities.</p> <p>Introduce modalities such as the BasicsCard at venues so that patrons' spending on gambling can be monitored.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Revert to coins/limit gambling to \$100 a session</b></li> </ul> <p>Some participants described how going back to the older legislation where only coins could be inserted into the pokies would be a good barrier to limit gambling and would like it returned.</p>	<p>Return to coins only at venues and reduce the loading up of pokies to \$1,000 down to \$100 in one go.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Research and evaluation</b></li> </ul>	<p>Adopt successful national and international evidence-based practices in the NT context. Periodically evaluate existing gambling support programs and services and adjust them to the ongoing requirement of communities</p>

### 4.3 Future research

There are a vast range of cultural and linguistically diverse differences in urban, regional, and remote Aboriginal populations across the NT, and many challenges delivering programs to these populations. The diversity and differences among Aboriginal people across the NT are often not reflected in many health promotion and harm reduction gambling support and services (Fogarty et al., 2018). Furthermore, recognising Aboriginal people in the NT as a homogenous population is problematic as it does not consider the cultural and linguistic diversity, and potentially stigmatising ethnic and racial groups. The location that Aboriginal people live in the NT also adds to the diverse differences of the broader population. Aboriginal people in urban centres tend to have higher levels of education and a great access to employment (Fogarty et al., 2017).

Most of the participants in this study were from urban localities in the NT. Although many participants recruited from regional NT in this study were originally residents in regional NT, but they now lived either in urban localities or at least moved between urban and regional localities at the time of this study, and generally had higher levels of education and better access to employment opportunities. This may have affected the study's ability to detect differences by region, which is a limitation of this study. To gain further insights into Aboriginal

gambling behaviours, further research is needed, especially in remote and very remote Aboriginal communities in the NT.



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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

### **A qualitative investigation of Aboriginal gambling behaviour, consequences, risk factors, and help-seeking in the Northern Territory**

#### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

This Is for You to Keep

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##### **What is the study about?**

This project will investigate gambling behaviour, consequences, help-seeking, and potential interventions, among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Aboriginal) in the Northern Territory (NT). Participants will comprise both gamblers and those affected by someone else's gambling.

##### **Who is undertaking the study?**

This study is being conducted by the Menzies School of Health Research. The research team will include:

- Dr Himanshu Gupta
- Dr Matt Stevens
- Mr David Aanundsen
- Mr Jahdai Vigona

The study has been funded by the Northern Territory Government's Community Benefit Fund. It has been approved by the Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee (CA-20-3747) and the Menzies and NT Department of Health Human Research Ethics Committee (2020-3728).

##### **What am I being invited to do?**

You will be asked questions related to gambling. There is no right or wrong answer to any of the questions, so please feel free to express your views. This conversation will take about 30 minutes, unless you have more to say. The interview will be conducted by telephone. If you agree, the interview will be audio-taped, as it will help us not miss any information you provide during the interview and will also help us to analyse the information.

##### **What are the risks?**

There are no significant risks associated with your participation. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview you can stop. If you would like to talk further with someone about your or someone else's gambling or other issue, you may contact Amity Community Services on 1800 858 858 - 24 Hr Toll Free helpline, and Lifeline on 13 1114. If you wish, we can direct you to Aboriginal controlled health organisations - Danila Dilba Health Service (Darwin), Wurli-Wurlinjang Health Service (Katherine), Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation (Tennant Creek), and Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation (Nhulunbuy).

**What are the potential benefits of participating?**

This study will give you an opportunity to voice your opinions and experiences related to gambling. The information will help government, industry, and service providers to develop policy and programs to minimise gambling-related harm among Aboriginal people in the NT, and potentially the whole community.

**What will happen to my information?**

All information collected in the interview will be kept on password-protected computers and will only be available to the research team for analyses. Your name and other personal details will not be made public and nothing written in any reports will link you personally to this interview.

**How to get in touch?**

- Dr Himanshu Gupta: himanshu.gupta@menzies.edu.au or 08 8946 8597
- Mr David Aanudsen: david.aanudsen@menzies.edu.au

**You can say no at any time.**

**You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to.**

**You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.**

## Appendix B: Consent Form

### A qualitative investigation of Aboriginal gambling behaviour, consequences, risk factors, and help-seeking in the Northern Territory

#### CONSENT FORM

You can say NO

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It is important before you agree to participating in this study that you read and understand the information sheet.

You don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to.  
You can withdraw from the study at any time.  
Everything you say will be confidential.

**I agree to participate in this study and understand the purposes and procedures of the study (including audio-recording of the interview) and any risks relating to my participation in the study.**

#### Declaration by Participant

<b>I agree:</b>	Please circle	
• I have read the Participant Information Sheet, or someone has read it to me in a language that I understand.	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
• I understand the purposes, procedures and risks associated with my participation in the survey.	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
• I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
• To participate in this survey as described and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time during my participation in the survey and that there will be no negative consequences if I withdraw.	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>

Name:		
Signature:		Date:
Witness Name:		
Witness Signature:		Date:

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If you have questions about the project, please contact Dr Himanshu Gupta on 8946 8597 or [himanshu.gupta@menzies.edu.au](mailto:himanshu.gupta@menzies.edu.au). If you have any concerns or complaints about the project, you may contact the Secretary of the Human Research Ethics Committee of NT Department of Health and Menzies School of Health Research: Phone 08 8946 8600 or email [ethics@menzies.edu.au](mailto:ethics@menzies.edu.au)

## Appendix C: Interview Schedule

### Instructions:

- Brief participants about the nature and purpose of the study (read out the PIS)
- Give them the opportunity to ask any questions
- Obtain the verbal consent and record on the CF
- Begin the interview

### 1) Gambling behaviour

- Who gambles? (*Ask those affected by others' gambling*)
- What games do people play? (*Ask specifically for card games and commercial gambling*)
- Where and how often do they play?
- How long do they play each time?
- How much do they spend each time?
- Why do they gamble?

### 2) Risk factors

- In general, why do you think Aboriginal people gamble?
- How do you think gambling products and services encourage people to gamble?  
*Prompt – gambling products: ask about cards, lotto, pokies, sports, and race betting, etc.*  
*Prompt – services: ask about in-venue availability of alcohol, provisions for smoking, availability of ATMs; and online betting, etc.*
- How do you think these differ in urban and remote areas and with the type of gambling?

### 3) What might help people to gamble responsibly?

- What do you think might help people to control their gambling or not gamble?
- How do you think these differ in urban and regional areas and with the type of gambling?

### 4) Consequences of gambling

- Could you describe some of the effects of gambling on individuals and families in the Aboriginal community?  
*Prompt – social, financial, health effects*  
*Prompt – effects on the recreation and leisure activities – gamblers not spending time with the family, not using free time for other activities such as sports, social events, etc.*

### 5) Potential Interventions

- What do you think prevents Aboriginal people to ask for help for gambling-related issues?
- What do you think might help them to ask for help for gambling-related issues?
- What could communities do to reduce negative impacts and encourage responsible gambling among Aboriginal people?
- What could the gambling industry do to reduce negative impacts and encourage responsible gambling among Aboriginal people?
- What do you think the government might do to reduce negative impacts and encourage responsible gambling among Aboriginal people?
- What do you think community services, welfare, and health agencies might do to reduce negative impacts and encourage responsible gambling among Aboriginal people?



**6) Impact of COVID-19 on gambling among Aboriginal people**

- In your opinion, how has COVID-19 affected gambling among Aboriginal people?  
*Prompt – ask for reasons for a change in gambling behaviour, type, amount, spending, frequency, etc.*  
*Prompt – probe for other recreation and leisure activities people are aware that people might have taken up because of COVID-19.*  
*Prompt – ask for social, financial, health effects.*

**Ask at the end of the interview** - What do you think governments could do to minimise harms from gambling?

**PGSI (to be asked to gamblers)**

We will also ask a handful of questions we asked in the previous phone interviews. (For face-to-face interviews, offer to ask them the PGSI questions or fill it in and put it in an envelope (confidential)).

Now I'd like you to think about all your gambling in the past 12 months...

INTERVIEWER NOTE: PLEASE READ OUT "thinking about the last 12 months" READ OUT BEFORE EVERY STATEMENT

DO NOT FLIP – KEEP GRID IN ORDER

	Never	Some times	Most of the time	Almost always
PGSI1 - Thinking about the past 12 months, how often have you bet more than you could really afford to lose? Would you say: (1)	0	1	2	3
PGSI2 - Thinking about the past 12 months, how often have you needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement? (2)	0	1	2	3
PGSI3 - Thinking about the past 12 months, how often have you gone back another day to try to win back the money you lost? (3)	0	1	2	3
PGSI4 - Thinking about the past 12 months, how often have you borrowed money or sold anything to get money to gamble? (4)	0	1	2	3
PGSI5 - Thinking about the past 12 months, how often have you felt that you might have a problem with gambling? (5)	0	1	2	3
PGSI6 - Thinking about the past 12 months, how often have people criticized your betting or told you that you had a gambling problem, regardless of whether or not you thought it was true? (6)	0	1	2	3
PGSI7 - Thinking about the past 12 months, how often have you felt guilty about the way you gamble, or what happens when you gamble? (7)	0	1	2	3
PGSI8 - Thinking about the past 12 months, how often has gambling caused you any health problems, including stress or anxiety? (8)	0	1	2	3
PGSI9 - Thinking about the past 12 months, how often has your gambling caused any financial problems for you or your household? (9)	0	1	2	3

CPGI\_SCORE = PGSI1 + PGSI2 + PGSI3 + PGSI4 + PGSI5 + PGSI6 + PGSI7 + PGSI8 + PGSI9