

CAMH

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Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A4

Dear Committee Members,

We are writing about Bill C-290, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sports betting), which is currently before the Committee.

With years of research, treatment, and health promotion experience in problem gambling, CAMH has practical and academic interest in this direction. Research shows that:

- Approximately 3% of Canadians experience moderate to severe gambling problems and between 30% and 40% of gambling revenues come from this 3%.
- Problem gambling is associated with depression, anxiety, and suicide. It affects family relationships, work and academic performance, and can lead to bankruptcy and crime.
- Increases in gambling availability are associated with increases in problem gambling.

If Bill C-290 passes, provincial governments will soon begin offering single-event sports gambling products, resulting in a sharp increase in legal gambling opportunities. We know from the empirical evidence in the field that this will in turn lead to an increase in demand for problem gambling treatment services.

We are particularly worried about males aged 18-45. This population has a higher tendency to wager on sporting events and to engage in risky behaviour more generally. These characteristics make it likely that this bill will lead to increased rates of problem gambling in this demographic.

In our clinical experience, people now patronizing illegal bookmakers would likely continue to do so because of easy access to credit, convenience, and better odds. In our opinion Bill C-290 is likely to enlarge the pool of people who bet on sports and therefore the number of people affected by problem gambling – not reduce illegal sports betting.

Provincial governments are increasingly turning to gambling as a way to raise revenue. Bill C-290 would facilitate gambling expansion, while also opening the door to particularly dangerous forms of gambling. Our clinicians are especially concerned that this bill would open the door to live in-game betting. This type of sports betting is already available in British Columbia. Because of the quick speed of play and the generally false belief that this form of betting requires skill, this live in-game betting can be particularly problematic for many at-risk individuals.

The harms of problem gambling to individuals and the costs to society are enormous. An approach to gambling policy that considers public health impact can mitigate these harms. In the case of Bill C-290, we hope the committee will consider the potential for negative impacts on the health of individuals, families, and communities across Canada.

Sincerely,



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