

Gambling in Australia during COVID-19

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Introduction and Aims: The global COVID-19 pandemic and related government restrictions led to changes in the availability of gambling in Australia, with land-based gambling venues temporarily closed and major national and international sporting codes suspended. This study aimed to improve understanding of how gambling participation, alcohol consumption, and health and wellbeing were affected.

Design and Methods: The study involved two phases of data collection (June - August 2020): 1) an online survey of 2,019 people who gambled; and 2) interviews with 10 key experts who worked in gambling research, regulation, policy, and treatment.

Results: Almost 1 in 3 survey participants signed up for a new online betting account during COVID-19, and 1 in 20 started gambling online. Even with limited access to venues, overall, participants gambled more often during COVID-19; the proportion who gambled 4 or more times a week increased from 23% to 32%. Among all gamblers surveyed, 79% were classified as being at risk of, or already experiencing, gambling-related problems. Young men (18-34 years) were the sub-population most likely to sign up for new online accounts, to increase their frequency and monthly spending on gambling (from \$687 to \$1,075), and to be at risk of gambling-related problems.

Discussions and Conclusions: Survey participants and key experts recommended a range of initiatives to minimise gambling-related harm in the community, including a reduction in the availability and marketing of gambling products and the implementation of strong consumer protection measures. Findings will help to inform the development and implementation of policy and practice responses.

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