

SPRinG: Supporting People Recovering from Problem Gambling



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OUR VISION

A Canada in which everyone has an opportunity to thrive.

THE CHALLENGE

The prevalence of problem gambling (PG) among people experiencing homelessness is up to 46 percent, nine times higher than the general population. PG is associated with other serious health concerns, such as substance use, mental illness, trauma, chronic illness and disability, as well as poor social support. However, PG prevention and treatment services are often inaccessible to the people who need them, when they need them. Service deserts, long wait lists, limited operating hours, lack of integrated services, and stigma prevent people from seeking and getting help. Health inequities deepen when barriers to care mount. Without tailored, accessible supports for people experiencing homelessness, PG harms push housing and health further out of reach.

OUR SOLUTION

A mobile health app to reduce gambling harms and improve recovery.

Mobile health apps can improve access and adherence to care, and have the potential to address core challenges in current PG services. We are co-designing and developing an innovative and inclusive app to help people reduce the harms associated with PG. App features will include:

- **Guided harm-reduction content** that provides support when people feel an urge to gamble.
- **An urge and gambling log** that helps identify the triggers and high-risk situations that lead to gambling.
- **Key insights** to identify gambling patterns over time and strategies to reduce harms.
- **Connections to crisis lines that can help 24/7.**

Our aim is to have a product ready for wide dissemination via The App Store by Apple and Google Play.

HOW

Working with community partners, we co-designed a low-barrier, evidence-based harm reduction app for people experiencing problem gambling. With the SPRinG app, we are poised to tackle one of the core but hidden health equity challenges people experiencing poverty and homelessness face. When we reduce barriers to problem gambling care, we provide pathways to better housing and health outcomes.

First, we will introduce the app to clients in existing problem gambling programs to encourage uptake, assess integration into practice, and provide independent self-management post-treatment. Next we will continue to employ a community-based participatory research approach to design an implementation strategy that will maximize reach and adoption of the app. Evaluation findings will inform improvements to the app and the implementation plan.

HOW WE'LL MEASURE IMPACT

To ensure the app is evidence-based, client-centered and usable, we are combining quantitative and qualitative research to understand how people use the app to manage gambling urges and behaviours. We are engaging in iterative app development and user testing. We will then evaluate the implementation pilot across our network partners that work with the population, such as Good Shepherd Ministries (GSM), the Jean Tweed Centre (JTC), COSTI Immigrant Services and Gamblers Anonymous (GA). We aim to recruit 20 clients from each of the partner organizations on a rolling basis for four-week evaluations over the course of one year. Data will inform strategies for integrating the app into practice and scaling the solution.

WHY THIS MATTERS

We heard from community service agencies that a harm reduction app would support people experiencing problem gambling in an Ontario-wide service desert. Services for problem gambling are scarce and underfunded, and most service agencies can only operate 9 to 5, leaving gaps in service delivery when people are most vulnerable (e.g., evenings, weekends). The app will not only improve the users' ability to manage their gambling urges and behaviour and reduce gambling-related harms, but will also be a tool for when regular services are not available. Ultimately, the app will empower and support users experiencing the triple burden of problem gambling, poverty and homelessness.

COST \$1 MILLION over 2 years