



CANADIAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

SOCIÉTÉ
CANADIENNE
DE PSYCHOLOGIE

**Opening Remarks to the
Standing Senate Committee on Transportation and Communications
By
Dr. Steve Joordens, Ph.D**

June 5, 2024

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee for inviting the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) to appear today. My name is Dr. Steve Joordens, I am a professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto where my primary research interests are in conscious and unconscious influences, memory and the effective use of technology for education.

It is an honour and privilege to be testifying before you today on behalf of the Canadian Psychological Association. Comprised of more than 7,000 members and affiliates, the CPA is Canada's largest association for psychology and represents psychologists in public and private practice, private industry, academia, and research, as well as students.

With respect to supporting mental health, Bishop Desmond Tutu said, "At some point we need to stop pulling people out of the river and some of us need to go upriver to find out why people are falling in". His analogy highlights the need to focus on prevention when addressing mental health because treatment approaches are simply overwhelmed, and we'd rather fewer people were struggling in the first place.

Marketing gambling amounts to pushing people who would otherwise be OK into Tutu's river. It is the opposite of prevention. If we are going to allow gambling, we must ban any marketing of gambling as we do other products like cigarettes and cannabis. Our society should not push anyone, especially our children, to engage in a potentially addictive behavior.

The marketing we are seeing now represents one of the strongest of pushes imaginable. Gambling companies are weaponizing psychology to convince anyone watching to just bet. They are normalizing and glorifying gambling in complete cooperation with sport and media companies in a way that has indeed convinced over 19 Million Canadians to bet, a stunning penetration rate of over 65 percent.

Gambling is especially addictive because of the random nature of wins. When wins come randomly, then as losses mount, the gambler becomes increasingly convinced that a win is just around the corner... we call this *the gambler's fallacy*. Gambling houses just need you to bet enough to experience a win or two, then you can become hooked...chasing wins as debts accumulate beyond your ability to pay. This is why gambling companies offer up to \$200 in free bets for first time gamblers, more than enough for them to experience a few wins, more than enough to seed the addiction.

Estimates of problem gambling range from 2% to 5%; note that these numbers are based on self-report and are thus underestimates as most addicts deny any problem until they hit bottom. The recidivism rate is over 90% ... once addicted it's almost impossible to stop. What's more, it is estimated that each addicted person indirectly impacts 5 to 10 others, typically family members. Marriages are ending, families are falling apart, and people with this addiction are committing suicide, many because they were pushed into a river they would not otherwise have come near.

Of course, children; any child old enough to be interested in watching or playing sports, are in the crosshairs of these marketing efforts. Children are the future gamblers and now it is almost

impossible to involve one's children in sport without also indoctrinating them into gambling. Gambling ads are in our arenas, at our sports fields, even on player's uniforms. It has become inescapable unless one avoids sport altogether.

When the marketing of a substance or activity is banned it sends a strong and clear signal that that substance or activity is potentially addictive and should only be engaged with in a knowing and cautious manner. Including gambling with cannabis and cigarettes provides a consistent approach to how Canada deals with potentially addictive substances and activities. It respects civil liberties and the right to choose while warning of the dangers. Most critically, it stops the push.

In summary, allowing any form of marketing of gambling runs completely against our members' attempts to prevent and address mental health issues. It pushes all Canadians to consider betting, with an especially strong impact on our children and our marginalized communities. There is no need to market gambling, would be gamblers can easily find legal gambling on their phone apps, apps which can be policed. The Canadian government must not allow companies to push our population into addiction and, with all due respect, I ask all of you to help us help Canadians. As a country we can do better. We should and must ban the marketing of gambling.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening. I would be pleased to address any questions you may have.