



Centre for Addiction and Mental Health  
Centre de toxicomanie et de santé mentale

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# **CAMH Submission to the Toronto City Council Executive Committee**

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EX 24.1

*A PAHO/WHO Collaborating  
Centre*

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Thank you for this opportunity to address Toronto City Council's Executive Committee.

Many individuals in Ontario gamble, and most do so without causing harm to themselves or others, but about 3% of Ontarians have a gambling problem. In Toronto, there are about 11,000 people with severe gambling problems and over 100,000 more with moderate problems. These people experience a range of harms including mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicide, as well as crime, dysfunctional relationships, and financial difficulties. These harms affect not only the people with gambling problems but also their families and communities.

Increases in gambling availability are associated with increases in problem gambling. Evidence from around the world suggests that following the opening of a casino, the number of people seeking problem gambling treatment rises. There is consensus in the field on this issue. Communities in close proximity to a casino tend to be most affected.

People who gamble are at increased risk of depression and suicide. A significantly higher proportion of problem gamblers report having thoughts of committing suicide in their lifetime compared to non-problem gamblers. The Canadian Safety Council, an independent advocacy group, believes that more than 200 problem gamblers alone take their lives each year in Canada.

International evidence suggests that following the opening of a casino in a community, the number of bankruptcies rises. Bankruptcies have an impact that goes beyond the economic – they can tear families and communities apart.

As mentioned above, 3% of Ontarians have a gambling problem. It's estimated that between 30% and 40% of Ontario's gambling revenues come from this 3% of the population with gambling problems. Based on this research it's reasonable to expect that a third of casino revenues going to the city would be coming from people struggling with gambling problems.

A new casino venue could lead to relapse for people in Toronto who had a gambling problem in the past and are currently in recovery. Gambling alters the brain's reward system and this is a fairly permanent change, so relapse is quite common.

In conclusion, there's considerable evidence that building a casino in Toronto would likely have a negative health impact on some individuals, particularly those living close to it. If the Executive Committee chooses to authorize the City Manager to conduct public consultations and seek input from Torontonians on the matter of establishing a casino in Toronto, we urge the Committee and City Council to ensure that consideration of potential health impacts is a central part of the consultation process.

For further information, please contact:

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