

To: Mayor Chow and Councillors,
Toronto City Council

March 23, 2025

Subject: Ex21.15, FIFA 2026 Games

We at Ban Ads for Gambling are very worried about the news that FIFA is now contracting with gambling companies so that they will be advertising gambling before and during the games in 2026. We believe this issue should be discussed during consideration of Ex21.15.

We wrote to Mayor Chow's office about this issue and part of the reply is:

"We are, however, aware that FIFA is close to a deal for an international sponsorship in the gambling/gaming space. Should this sponsorship be finalized, it is likely that Toronto, along with other host cities, will be obligated to execute that sponsorship agreement on behalf of FIFA. This obligation arises from the legal agreements that City Council authorized City officials to enter into prior to Mayor Chow's election."

The FIFA contract apparently states:

Section 1.2 – Competition and ownership of Rights

"Fifa exclusively and solely owns and controls on a world-wide basis all Media Rights, Marketing Rights, Intellectual Property Rights and all other commercial or other rights opportunities, including any title and interest in, and in relation to, the Competition, including any Competition-related events, whether existing or created in the future".

As we at Ban Ads for Gambling have argued, the impact of the pervasive gambling advertisements that now drench sports are devastating to individuals, particularly young people, and of course they demean the whole idea of the nature of sport.

- Both the Toronto Board of Health and the Toronto District School Board have declared their opposition to gambling advertisements, and have agreed the same rules which apply to tobacco and cannabis should apply to gambling: advertising should be prohibited.

Our recent brief on the issues follows this letter.

Our recommendations to City Council are:

1. Prohibit advertisements for gambling in all aspects of the 2026 FIFA games in Canada, including in venues, on sweaters, on broadcasts; and prohibit all broadcasters in any way involved with the 2026 FIFA games from promoting sports betting.
2. Develop and show a significant number of anti-gambling ads.
3. Request the provincial government to prohibit the sports betting companies within their jurisdictions from accepting bets upon all aspects of the 2026 FIFA games in Canada.

The arrangements for the 2026 FIFA games have turned into a nightmare. The cost of the games to the three levels of government is extraordinarily high; the gambling is very offensive and damaging to Toronto residents; and now the city is talking about scalping tickets.

At a minimum, Council should adopt the three recommendations set out above.

John Sewell and Bruce Kidd
For BanAdsforGambling.ca

**

FIFA 2026 games and gambling

March 6, 2025

From www.BanAdsforGambling.ca,

Respectfully submitted,

Bruce Kidd (bruce.kidd@utoronto.ca); John Sewell (John@johnsewell.ca)

We wish to ensure that during the FIFA games in 2026, gambling advertisements are not involved in the games - that they are prohibited.

We write to share concerns about threats to the future of sport in Canada created by the dramatic growth of gambling and the tsunami of ads for gambling that has followed the legalization of sports betting by Parliament in 2021.

We write as sportspersons deeply committed to the ideals of safe, healthy, fair, inclusive and educational sports. We are Olympians, parents and grandparents of Olympians, coaches and physical educators, sports scholars and journalists.

In our submissions to Parliament, the Ontario Alcohol and Gaming Commission, boards of health, municipal councils, school boards and other public bodiesⁱ—we have stressed the way that the proliferation of ads for sports betting, the advent of smart phones, and the deliberate manipulation of smart phone technologies by the betting companies, intensifies the mental health crisis. We have advocated that advertisements for gambling be banned, in the same way and for the same health reasons that Parliament previously banned ads for tobacco. We have urged that all broadcasters refrain from promoting sports betting and develop and show a significant number of anti-gambling ads.

Gambling has been classified as a non-substance-related addictive disorder by the American Psychiatric Association.ⁱⁱ

Mental Health Research Canada reported in June 2024 that the risk of problem gambling in Canada is 7% among adults, 15% among youth 18 to 34.ⁱⁱⁱ That's more than a million Canadians. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health reports that for every person addicted to gambling, another 6-8 are negatively affected. The Canadian Pediatric Society has noted that underage gambling is common in Canada and can start in children as young as 9 or 10 years old.^{iv} Worryingly, such prevalence estimates are based upon self-report, so that the actual numbers may well be higher.^v

Gambling is particularly rampant among young men. Coaches and athletic directors report that athletes are gambling away their tuition, meal and rent money.^{vi} The Canadian Safety Council considers gambling addiction a community safety and crime prevention issue.^{vii} The Council has stated that addiction to gambling is linked to a range of serious personal and social harms such as depression and suicide, bankruptcy, family breakup, domestic abuse, assault, fraud, theft, and even homelessness. These effects can be devastating to the individual as well as their friends, family, workplace, and community.

It's a worldwide problem too. The respected British medical journal, *The Lancet*, calls gambling 'an expanding public health threat', and concludes that 'governments have paid too little attention to gambling harms and have not done enough to prevent or mitigate them.' It documents how the gambling industry has manipulated digital platforms to make them even more addictive. It calls for 'stronger policy and regulatory controls focused on harm prevention and the protection of public health; prohibitions or restrictions on access, promotion, marketing, and sponsorship; the provision of affordable, universal support and treatment for gambling harms; and international coordination.'^{viii}

International research demonstrates that advertising increases both the volume and the intensity of sports betting.^{ix} In response, a growing number of countries (e.g. Spain, Italy, Denmark) have banned or severely restricted the ads. The relationship between advertising and increased gambling is clearly evident in Canada. The 7% of Canadians estimated by Mental Health

Research Canada to present a high risk of problem gambling is more than four times the 1.6% that Stats Can found in 2018 when there was no advertising.

Betting poisons the culture of sports

The message from the gambling industry and its influencers in the media is that ‘you can’t enjoy sports without betting on sports’. The cascade of ads, the uncritical encouragement of betting by seemingly objective sportscasters, and the regulators’ and industry’s messages to ‘bet responsibly’ all normalize betting as an integral part of sports. There is a complete absence of critical commentary or health warnings similar to those employed in the anti-smoking campaigns of former years that played such a significant role in the reduction of tobacco consumption. As opportunities for healthy sport and physical activity are increasingly privatized under the banner of ‘pay for play’, there are fewer positive messages about the importance of inexpensive and accessible public sports.

Because it can all be done on a phone or tablet, and increasingly it invites ‘prop’ bets (i.e. bets on micro events during a game, such as whether a batter swings at the next pitch in baseball or who will score the first goal in hockey or whether a referee will call a penalty in the first half of a soccer game), betting disembodies sports as an interactive, culturally rich form of physical activity. Although the precise determinations are still to be shown, we are convinced that the betting culture discourages active participation in sports, and prevents communities coming together to provide and strengthen opportunity.

The focus on jackpots and payouts furthers the instrumental culture of ‘winning is everything’. Betting accentuates the ‘win at all costs’ mentality that stands in complete contradiction to the ideal of intrinsically rewarding, educationally rich (learning about oneself and others), ‘sport for sport’s sake’, and the values of respect for one’s opponent/co-player and their cultures.

As is increasingly documented, betting invites abuse towards athletes who fail to realize bettors’ targets.^x

The proliferation of ‘prop bets’, promoted to sensationalize betting, undermines the integrity of games, because they provide incentives to athletes and officials to manipulate play in the interest of those bets.^{xi}

Because of the tremendous monies involved, betting encourages some athletes, coaches and officials to manipulate the competitions for illegal personal gain.^{xii} Despite the best efforts of the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sports, the Canadian Olympic Committee and other sports organizations, there is little understanding of the pressures athletes, coaches and officials experience to manipulate the competitions for gamblers’ payoffs.

With the legalization of sports betting, Canada has left the regulation of the gambling industry to the provinces and territories. But if the case of Ontario – among provinces, the leading promoter of sports gambling - is any guide, regulators have been completely captured by the industry.

The Ontario regulator, the Ontario Alcohol and Gaming Commission (AGCO), does little to police the ads and other practices that encourage problem gambling and addiction. Although its regulations stipulate that ads cannot employ influencers who ‘would likely be expected to appeal to minors’, actors with extensive youth film credits and thus appeal to youth, such as Jamie Foxx and Jon Levitz, are used regularly. In response to a complaint by the Campaign to Ban Ads for Gambling, the AGCO refused to take action, rationalizing that ‘the potential appeal of celebrities is dynamic and varies by individual.’

Instead of the ‘public health approach’ recommended by international health experts, the AGCO acquiesces in the gambling industry’s ‘responsible gambling’ approach that acknowledges the

harms from gambling in small type at the bottom of ads while placing the entire responsibility for that harm upon the individual bettor.

Neither the AGCO nor the Ontario Ministry of Health funds public service ads depicting the risks and harms of gambling as was done during the height of the anti-tobacco campaigns.

For all these reasons, we urge Vancouver FIFA 2026 Host Committee to adopt the following recommendations:

1. Prohibit advertisements for gambling in all aspects of the 2026 FIFA games in Canada, including in venues, on sweaters, on broadcasts; and prohibit all broadcasters in any way involved with the 2026 FIFA games from promoting sports betting.
2. Develop and show a significant number of anti-gambling ads.
3. Request provincial governments to prohibit the sports betting companies within their jurisdictions from accepting bets upon all aspects of the 2026 FIFA games in Canada.

ⁱ See for example, Bruce Kidd, ‘Presentation to the Standing Senate Committee on Transportation and Communication on Bill S-269, An Act respecting a national framework on advertising for sports betting,’ Senate of Canada, June 5, 2024; and Steve Joordens, ‘Sports Gambling and the Weaponization of Psychology’; www.banadsforgambling.ca under the ‘Resources’ tab.

ⁱⁱ Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

ⁱⁱⁱ Mental Health Research Canada, ‘Findings of Poll 20’, June 2024, [Results of MHRC Poll 20 — Mental Health Research Canada](https://www.mhrc.ca/en/2024/06/20/poll-20-mental-health-research-canada).

^{iv} *Canadian Pediatric Society*. [Teen gambling | https:// Caring for kids \(cps.ca\)](https://www.cps.ca/teen-gambling)

^v Steinhoff, et. Al, ‘When Substance Use Is Underreported: Comparing Self-Reports and Hair Toxicology in an Urban Cohort of Young Adults’, *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Volume 62, Issue 7, July 2023, Pages 791-804, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S089085672300045X>.

^{vi} Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Submission to the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications: Bill S-269, An Act respecting a national framework on advertising for sports betting; June 5, 2024, [camh-submission-to-tscm-june-2024-pdf.pdf](https://www.camh.ca/en/2024/06/05/camh-submission-to-tscm-june-2024-pdf).

^{vii} <https://canadasafetycouncil.org/gambling-addiction>

^{viii} *The Lancet Public Health Commission on gambling*, October 24, 2024; [The Lancet Public Health Commission on gambling](https://www.thelancet.com/public-health/commission-on-gambling).

^{ix} Samantha Thomas et. al., ‘Protecting children and young people from contemporary marketing on gambling’, *Health Promotion International*, 2023, **38**, 1–14; [Protecting children and young people from contemporary marketing for gambling | Health Promotion International | Oxford Academic](#)

^x E.g ‘Hatred hurled at Raptors stars shows ugly influence sports betting can have on fandom’, CBC [Hatred hurled at Raptors stars shows ugly influence sports betting can have on fandom | CBC News](#), April 11, 2023; James L. Edwards III. ‘The dark side of sports betting and its impact upon NBA players: Death threats, racism and Venmo requests’, *Athletic*, Feb. 12, 2025; and Callum Jones, ‘A target on their back’: college athletes face wave of abuse amid gambling boom’; 2 October 2024; https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/02/college-athletes-abuse-online-gambling-betting?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other.

^{xi} See, for example, Tim Dewhurst, ‘Is it responsible for sports betting firms to target thrill seekers?’, *Globe and Mail*, February 24, 2024; [Opinion: Is it responsible for sports betting firms to target thrill seekers? - The Globe and Mail](#). Sports entrepreneurs have argued that betting keeps games interesting long after their outcomes have been determined without explaining the dynamics behind those ‘prop’ bets on the field of play.

^{xii} John Chidley-Hill, Canadian Press, ‘Former Raptor Jontay Porter likely to get prison term: legal expert’, [Former Raptors centre Jontay Porter likely to get prison term: law expert | CBC Sports](#), December 17, 2024.