

# research snapshot

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## Mental health clinicians' responses to problem gambling

### What this research is about

Mental health difficulties commonly occur in people with problem gambling. Nicotine, alcohol, mood, and anxiety disorders are the most common. Problem gambling is common among people seeking treatment for mental health disorders. Mental health disorders can also lead to problem gambling.

Most people who experience problem gambling do not seek help, and only a few receive treatment. As such, mental health clinicians can play an important role in screening and treating problem gambling. Mental health clinicians may also help to reduce the stigma of problem gambling. Unfortunately, mental health centers rarely screen for problem gambling.

The researchers examined how mental health clinicians currently screen and manage problem gambling in Australia. They also explored clinicians' attitudes about training, screening, and treating problem gambling.

### What the researcher did

The researchers recruited 281 mental health clinicians from Victoria, Australia. The clinicians were recruited from a broad range of adult mental health services. The mental health services were selected to be representative of what is available in Australia. The clinicians were not associated with centers that treat substance use disorders or problem gambling.

The clinicians were asked to complete a survey either in-person during team meetings or online. The researchers worked with the mental health centers and managers to promote the survey. The researchers attended meetings to brief the clinicians about the survey. They also worked closely with the managers

### What you need to know

Problem gambling commonly co-occurs with mental health difficulties. Mental health clinicians may play an important role in the screening and treatment of problem gambling. This research examined the knowledge and attitudes of mental health clinicians towards problem gambling. A total of 281 mental health clinicians from Victoria, Australia took part in the study. Most clinicians reported that their caseload included someone with problem gambling. The clinicians had good knowledge about the relationship between problem gambling and mental health. But, they had limited knowledge of screening tools for problem gambling. Most (77%) clinicians reported screening for problem gambling, but only a few did so often. Only 12.5% of clinicians reported having received training in problem gambling. Clinicians who had training had more positive attitudes and confidence in screening for problem gambling. The results suggest that mental health clinicians may benefit from more training in problem gambling.

to track survey completion and to increase the number of responses.

The survey asked the clinicians about their demographics. They were also asked about their knowledge and attitudes about problem gambling, including screening and treatment. From a list of mental health conditions, the clinicians stated which conditions most commonly co-occur with problem gambling. The survey also asked the clinicians what they do when a client presents with problem gambling.

### What the researcher found

The majority of clinicians (72.6%) were women, about 40 years of age, and had 12.1 years of practice. Most of the clinicians (70%) were nurses and worked in public or private mental health services for adults.

The clinicians reported that 11.01% of their caseload included patients with problem gambling. Most clinicians (82.6%) had at least one patient experiencing problem gambling. Only 12.5% reported having had training in problem gambling, with psychologists (41.2%) reporting the highest rate.

Most clinicians had a good understanding of the relationship between problem gambling and mental health. The majority reported not being aware of screening tools for problem gambling. But, 75% agreed that screening for problem gambling would be useful for their practice. Overall, the clinicians indicated their willingness to address problem gambling with their patients. One in five clinicians did not consider problem gambling as a mental disorder.

The majority (76.9%) reported screening for problem gambling, but only 16.0% did so often or almost always. Most clinicians reported being comfortable asking their patients about problem gambling. Regarding actions, most clinicians who screened for problem gambling (69.0%) referred their patients to an external treatment provider. The most common referrals were to gambling helplines and face to face counselling. Most (77.5%) clinicians reported they provided treatment for gambling problems. Clinicians who had training had more positive attitudes and confidence in screening for problem gambling.

### How you can use this research

This research can be used by managers of mental health treatment centers to train clinicians about problem gambling. Funding agencies can use this research to help integrate treatment for mental health and gambling services. Mental health clinicians can use this research to reflect on their own knowledge of problem gambling.

### About the researchers

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### About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

Learn more about GREO by visiting [greo.ca](http://greo.ca) or emailing [info@greo.ca](mailto:info@greo.ca).

