

# Touchpoint

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## Gambling: a Public Health Concern

Problem gambling is a substantial public health concern: gambling harm not only affects individual gamblers, it also impacts the physical, emotional, and financial health of spouses, family members, friends, coworkers, and the community at large.

In 2007, approximately 57,000 adults cited gambling problems among family members, and 180,000 Nova Scotians reported knowing someone experiencing gambling harm.\* The following are common ways gambling harm impacts the public health of Nova Scotians:

### Potential impacts of problem gambling...

#### ...on family and friends:

- stress-related physical and mental health issues including anxiety and depression
- inhibited access to adequate nutrition, heating, shelter, transport, etc.
- increased risk of becoming problem gamblers: children with parents who have gambling problems are more likely to become gamblers themselves.
- social isolation and withdrawal
- family breakdown
- domestic violence

#### ...on employers and the general community:

- fraud and other criminal behaviour
- increased absenteeism
- loss or disruption of employment
- strain on the criminal and justice systems
- strain on social programs

**“A public health lens recognizes that there are both costs and benefits associated with gambling.”**

*~ Korn & Shaffer, 1999.*

As you can see, the cost of gambling harm extends beyond an individual person's losses. The public health perspective focuses on communities rather than individuals, and is guided by the prevention of harm, the promotion of healthy choices, and the protection of high-risk populations. In an effort to address this reality, the NSGF has a new strategic priority: *to raise awareness of gambling as a public health issue.*

Stay tuned for more information about a public health approach to gambling in future issues of *Touchpoint*.

### The latest informal NSGF website poll asks

***Which public health impact of problem gambling most concerns you?***

Take the poll at [www.nsgamingfoundation.org](http://www.nsgamingfoundation.org).

Until next time,  
Jen Wheatley



*\*from the Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection's 2007 Adult Prevalence Study  
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