
Canadian Society of Addiction Medicine's message to Senators: Support youth and vulnerable populations by passing Bill S-269

October 11, 2024

Dear Senators,

The Canadian Society of Addiction Medicine (CSAM) is calling for the passing of Bill S-269, An Act respecting a national framework on advertising for sports betting, via this open letter to Senators. We applaud the initiation of this proposed legislation and wish to see S-269 continue its journey beyond the Senate to the House of Commons. As a national organization of medical professionals, allied health workers, and scientists dedicated to addressing addiction and its associated health and societal consequences, we are alarmed by the proliferation of sports betting advertising and its potential harms. Policymakers must act now.

According to a 2022 Statistics Canada report, more than 300,000 Canadians were at moderate-to-severe risk of problems related to gambling, with lower-income households and Indigenous people among those most affected. These outcomes can include addiction, financial ruin, and suicide.

Ever since the passage of C-218 and related provincial responses legalizing single sport betting, watching sports has been fraught with moral and health dilemmas. Sports betting advertising has become a prominent feature during broadcasts, including hockey games. This poses particular risks to vulnerable populations such as children, adolescents, and young adults. Many advertisements portray gambling as a harmless, enjoyable activity, potentially normalizing and glamorizing the behavior to youth already susceptible to addiction-related issues.

Indeed, research has consistently demonstrated that exposure to gambling advertising is associated with increased gambling frequency, problem gambling, and a stronger desire to gamble among young individuals. *(A summary of evidence can be found at the conclusion of this letter.)*

Studies have also highlighted the need for policy interventions to minimize the harm caused by gambling advertising on youth, similar to the strategies employed in tobacco. At present, there are insufficient measures in place to protect viewers from the potential harms of sports betting advertising.

It is imperative that action be taken to protect public well-being and promote a safe and healthy viewing environment during sports broadcasts, and we specifically encourage in the creation of a policy framework recommendations related to broadcasters.

CSAM believes measures can be taken to raise awareness of addiction risks, encourage responsible viewing habits, and mitigate the potential harms caused to vulnerable populations. Accordingly, we urge all Senators to support Bill S-269.

For more information, please contact us via the information below. Thank you.

Submitted on behalf of CSAM,

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Summary of Evidence

Gambling advertisements have been shown to have a significant impact on youth, particularly those with gambling problems or at risk of developing such issues. Studies indicate that exposure to gambling advertising is associated with increased gambling frequency, problem gambling, and a stronger desire to gamble among young individuals (Monaghan et al., 2008; Syvertsen et al., 2021; Rossi & Nairn, 2022; Håkansson & Widinghoff, 2019; Parke et al., 2015).

Research suggests that gambling ads often portray gambling as a harmless and fun activity, appealing more to young people than adults, potentially normalizing and glamorizing the behavior (García-Castro et al., 2022; Guerrero-Solé et al., 2017).

The influence of gambling advertising on adolescents seems to reinforce existing gambling behaviors rather than initiating new ones (Monaghan et al., 2008; Friend & Ladd, 2009).

This reinforcement effect can be particularly concerning for youth already struggling with gambling issues. Additionally, the pervasiveness of gambling advertising, especially on platforms like social media, contributes to increased awareness and knowledge about gambling among young individuals. Moreover, the content and extent of gambling advertisements play a crucial role in shaping gambling behaviors and the risk of developing gambling-related problems (Guerrero-Solé et al., 2017).

In conclusion, the evidence suggests that gambling advertisements have a significant impact on youth, influencing their attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of gambling. It is essential for policymakers and regulators to consider these findings when developing strategies to protect individuals from the potential harms associated with exposure to sports betting advertising.