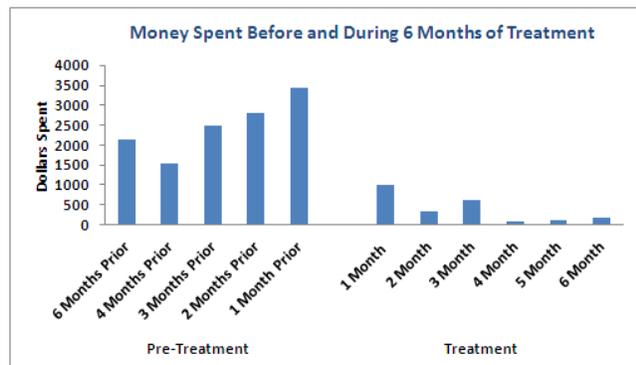


The Impact of Problem Gambling and its Treatment in Ottawa

Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services admitted their first gambling client in June 1996. Although previously rare, shortly after Casino du Lac-Leamy's opening, people began calling Rideauwood and requesting support to deal with their compulsive gambling behaviour and the distress from the negative consequences due to it. In order to address this need, one of Rideauwood's substance use counsellors underwent additional education on how to specifically treat those with gambling issues. Following this training Rideauwood's Problem Gambling Program opened with the aims of treating gambling along a harm reduction to abstinence continuum, with the application of appropriate techniques such as, cognitive restructuring and behavioural change.

Since the initiation of this program, data on the gambling habits before, and during, the treatment of more than 500 gambling clients has been collected. The data collected illustrates both the devastating financial impact gambling can have on an individual's life, as well as the strong influence

that treatment has on reducing their losses. Before entry into the program, men lost, on average, \$3,000 and women lost \$1,300 each month in the six months prior to treatment. After beginning treatment, these losses were quickly reduced by ~75%. Furthermore, the trend observed in this data indicated that clients continued to improve while they were in the program, such that for each additional month a client is in treatment, their gambling behaviour continued to be reduced.



While the majority of people who gamble are able to engage in such activities without perceived problems, studies have shown that 3.9% of Canadians are affected by moderate to severe problem gambling, and that an estimated 10% of Ontarians are "at risk" for problem gambling (CAMH, 2012; Marshall, 2011). Meta-analysis done by the CRP (Community Research Partners) in 2010 on studies which investigated the social impact and costs of casinos in the United States, found that the number of

The number of problem gamblers within 80km of a casino is double that of the general population – National Opinion Research Center, 1999.

problem gamblers within 80km of a casino was double that of the general population (NORC, 1999; Welte et al., 2004; Emerson and Laundergran, 1996; Volberg, 1995). Currently, Rideauwood has only one full time gambling counsellor providing services for more than 100 clients annually, a number which due to lack of funding is already much lower than the number of people in need of services. And the number of people in need of services could as much as double with the opening of a new casino.

The staggering financial costs to individuals and the families of those who engage in excessive gambling are only part of the costs associated with problem gambling. Many societal costs, stemming from job loss, unemployment, bankruptcy, lost productivity through poor physical and mental health, and family breakdown, also have financial costs associated with them. There is also a great mental and emotional toil that is paid by those afflicted by problem gambling. It is important when considering the creation of a new casino to bear these costs in mind, and plan for how best to mitigate the potential damages to both individuals and the community.