

**Exploration of Cultural Perceptions, Attitudes and Beliefs  
Regarding Gambling and Problem Gambling in the  
Polish Speaking Community  
in the Greater Toronto Area**

**Executive Summary**

**This research project is a collaboration between COSTI Immigrant Services and Polycultural Immigrant and Community Services (PICS).**

**Purpose of the Research**

Given limited research conducted within ethnocultural communities targeted by this project, the purpose of this research was to explore perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs regarding gambling and problem gambling. The research was also designed to explore how problem gambling may be prevented and reduced, and to assess how approaches, materials and techniques to address the issue of problem gambling in this community can be developed. The Polish speaking community is one of seven communities involved and was selected given its size in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

**Participatory Action Research**

In order for the results of this project to be meaningful and useful to the communities involved, a Participatory Action Research approach was used. This means community stakeholders were involved from the onset to the completion of the project.

**Data Collection Methods**

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather data. Focus groups were conducted with service providers and community members as well as conducting individual interviews with service providers who were not able to attend focus groups.

**Data Analysis and Results**

**Qualitative**

- Common recreational and betting activities (confirmed with both types of analysis, qualitative & quantitative) include sport betting, pyramids, lottery, bingo, casino games, horseracing, stock market and cards.
- Most of the focus groups indicated that in many cases community members are unlikely to seek help unless the problem becomes severe or there is a crisis. Shame and stigma in identifying a problem seems to be a barrier in seeking help. Culture and language were also identified as barriers to seeking help. For this reason, there seems to be a preference for Polish language

services. However some participants also indicated a concern for confidentiality in accessing services in their community.

- Service providers indicated that workers are not currently trained to identify problem gambling. It is something that is not visible so people may think it does not exist. There is a low awareness around the issue in the community.
- Focus groups identified a number of community strengths and resources that would be useful in providing public education on problem gambling including advertisements, Polish radio, television and newspapers, and physicians. Groups mentioned that the Catholic Church plays an important role in the community. St. Casmir Church in particular was mentioned as a location where flyers could be distributed. Service providers emphasized that counsellors need problem gambling specific training, and materials developed for public education should be culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- The various focus groups identified different subgroups in the community as being most at risk of developing a problem for different reasons. Seniors were mentioned as being most at risk by a couple of groups given that they have more time on their hands and they have fewer recreational activities available to them. Other groups that were mentioned are single men who immigrated without their families, newer immigrants and the economically disadvantaged.
- There are no services available in the community for problem gamblers.

### **Quantitative**

- The survey results indicated that adult men, male youth and seniors were reported to be at risk.
- Common recreational and betting activities (confirmed with both types of analysis, qualitative & quantitative) include sports betting, pyramids, lottery, bingo, casino games, horseracing, stock market and cards.
- 20% of respondents said that problem gambling is one of the top 10 issues of their community.
- Family physicians and relatives were the preferred source of help for physical or emotional health concerns.
- Most effective method of public education was identified to be local TV (80%), local newspaper (76%), local radio (59%), and religious institutions (41%).

### **Conclusion**

This research project brought together a number of stakeholders and provided an opportunity for the community to begin to address the issue of problem gambling, while also providing a base for future research, prevention and treatment.