



Addicts fund nearly half of gambling revenue

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Gambling has long been a valuable source of government revenue, used to pay for health care and education.

Research out of the University of Lethbridge shows that between 40 to 50 per cent of revenue generated is made on the backs of addicts.

A new study suggests nearly half of Alberta's gambling revenue comes from gambling addicts and researchers say that's "problematic."

Alberta gets 4.2 per cent of its budget from gambling, which is more than any other province. Gambling revenue is used to pay for things like health care and education.

"No matter how you cut it, 50 per cent, when only two to three per cent of the population is problem gamblers and they're accounting for half of all your revenue, that's ethically problematic," says U of L researcher Dr. Robert Williams.

Alberta gets 4.2 per cent of its budget from gambling, which is more than any other province.

B.C. gets about 3 per cent of its budget from gambling revenue while Ontario receives just 2 per cent.

"We now have more money coming in from gambling than from natural gas royalties," said opposition critic Dr. David Swann.

"This is unacceptable for most Albertans to be living off the backs of the most vulnerable people."

The province says it's not ignoring the issue.

The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission is said to be reviewing the University of Williams' study.

"The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission is going to be reviewing that study as well as the many studies they receive, obviously it's a concern for us as it is for Albertans," said Finance Minister Doug Horner.

"We're always concerned when people have issues with gaming habits. We do put a lot of resources into that as a gaming piece."

The AGLC has rolled out support for addicts at 18 casinos in the province.

"We provide the information about what the signs are so that individuals can make that decision for themselves, whether they've got something to be concerned about," said Anne Mohl with the AGLC.

"The most important thing is for people to be as educated and self-aware as they can be about their own gambling experience. They're the ones who know how much time and money they have."

Critics wonder if the lure of an easy jackpot is overriding the government's concerns about the social costs at hand.

"The first thing any government needs to accept is that if a quarter to half of your revenue comes from the problem gamblers, that you're going to take a revenue hit if you're going to do anything to effectively reduce the prevalence of problem gambling," Williams said.

"In lean economic times, that's a hard sell to governments... it's especially problematic for government whose job is to serve the people rather than exploit the people."

Swann says the province's financial problems will likely the need to help gambling addicts.

"This government is addicted to these kinds of unhealthy incomes," he said.

"This is all about managing their budgetary problems."

Alberta has more casinos and VLTs than any other province in the country.

Read more: <http://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/study-suggests-nearly-half-of-alberta-s-gambling-revenue-comes-from-addicts-1.1279867#ixzz2THg4f3yI>