



## Casinos do more harm than good, say community health centers

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EMC news - Community health groups and resource centres say the way to stop the side effects of gambling is to eliminate the problem in the first place.

Nine different centres from Ottawa held a press conference on March 25 to talk about their opposition to Ottawa's potential future casino.

Jeff Morrison, board president at the Centretown Community Health Centre, said Ottawa has failed to engage in a dialogue about the issues that come with gambling, unlike Toronto, where discussions have talked about risks.

"We're distracted by things like location," he said. "Location is not a factor. We see these questions as a distraction from what the debate should be."

Morrison said that the nine centres who oppose the proposal all see the negative impacts of gambling on a daily basis.

Problem gambling disproportionately affects certain groups that may already be disadvantaged, including low income individuals, older adults, newcomers to Canada and Aboriginal peoples, a press release issued by the group of centres said.

Each centre's board passed their own individual motion opposing the casino.

While the city is looking at the casino as a potential money maker, Morrison said that the revenue will partially be revenue taken away from other Ottawa entertainment businesses.

"Let's be clear, casino revenues do not come out of thin air," he said, adding that 30 to 40 per cent of casino revenues come from the 3 per cent of the population with gambling problems.

While the group said they are firm in their no casino opinion, if a casino does come in, members strongly urge the city to look at measures to protect citizens.

Morrison said that similar standards have been put in place on items like alcohol, which can't be sold after a certain hour.

Measures could include removing ATMs on site, and forcing a closing time on the casino.

The lack of public consultation on the casino has been troubling, he said. The group of centres is prepared to move forward in facilitating more discussion about the risks of the city putting a casino in.

Some options for gambling in the city are available at the Rideau Carleton Raceway. Morrison said the group isn't opposed to the current operations remaining, as long as no additional capacity is added.

The groups hope that Ottawa Public Health will take a position against the casino, as Toronto Public Health has done.

Toronto's medical officer of health said that introducing a new casino in Toronto would have greater adverse health related impacts than benefits.

"If you can reduce access to gambling in the first place, then the problem isn't there to be solved," Morrison said.

Groups opposing the casino proposal are:

- Centretown Community Health Centre
- Eastern Ottawa Community Resource Centre
- Lowertown Community Resource Centre
- Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre
- Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre
- Rideau-Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre
- Sandy Hill Community Health Centre
- Somerset West Community Health Centre
- South-East Ottawa Community Health Centre