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VLT cards that track gambling habits abandoned in Nova Scotia

My-Play System became mandatory on all Nova Scotia VLTs in April 2012

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The Nova Scotia government is abandoning a program designed to help non-problem gamblers from becoming addicted to video lottery terminals.

The [My-Play System was first introduced by the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation](#) in 2010 to prevent non-problem gamblers from becoming addicted to video lottery terminals. It became [mandatory on all Nova Scotia VLTs in April 2012](#).

Nova Scotia's Provincial Lotteries and Casino Corporation spokesperson Stacy O'Rourke says the total cost of the My Play System was \$19.5 million, \$13.1 million of which was on capital costs. The remainder was spent on developing and operating the system.

The program, developed by Cape Breton-based Techlink Entertainment, gives players information about their current and past VLT activity, allowing them to set a spending limit, to stop play immediately and also to set a time limit.

"The evidence it's not working is 99.9 per cent of players are actually not using the features," said Andrew Younger, minister responsible for Part I of the Gaming Control Act.

He says people used multiple cards, which defeated the purpose.

"It would be morally wrong to do this, to increase revenue and that's not at all what this decision is about," said Younger.

The government says the My-Play System was responsible for a \$47.5-million drop in VLT revenue between 2012 and 2014.

It says fewer people were gambling once they were required to use the card, but still deems the system a failure.

It's a move anti-VLT activist Terry Fulmer predicted two years ago.

"They reaped four or five years of spin from this thing, 'Oh see how we're concerned. We're being asked to speak at international conferences about gaming. We're going to export this technology.' And when it affects the bottom line they dump it," he said.

The gaming corporation will move to a “voluntary model” on Friday and will start to disable the system Sept. 8.

PCs point to poor planning

The Opposition says the failure is due to poor planning.

"Turning to problem gamblers to balance the budget is not competent fiscal management," said Chris d'Entremont, the Progressive Conservative's gaming control critic.

He says the program shouldn't be scrapped without replacing it with an alternative solution, calling the decision "immoral."

The Liberals say VLT revenue is down across North America and now many jurisdictions are using the cards to provide loyalty rewards for gamblers.

"We don't want to be handing out Air Miles or something for playing VLTs and that seems to be where the card system is going," said Younger.

Leo Glavine, Nova Scotia's Department of Health and Wellness Minister, said there is a need to have support and services for people affected by problem gambling.

"We continue to offer gambling support services throughout the province for all Nova Scotians, and I would encourage anyone affected by problem gambling to please call the Problem Gambling Help Line at 1-888-347-8888 or seek assistance through their local health provider," he said.

A [2011 study surveyed 500 regular VLT players about their gambling attitudes and behaviours](#) and found that a card-based system that tracks and informs users about their gambling habits could reduce problem gambling.

Other countries like Norway have made similar cards mandatory, as well as putting limits on daily gambling amounts.

Problem gambling has dropped in Norway, but it is unclear whether it was from the card or removal of bill acceptors — places to insert bills.