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Charles Darwin University

## Investigating gambling behaviours in non-English speaking populations in the NT A Scoping study

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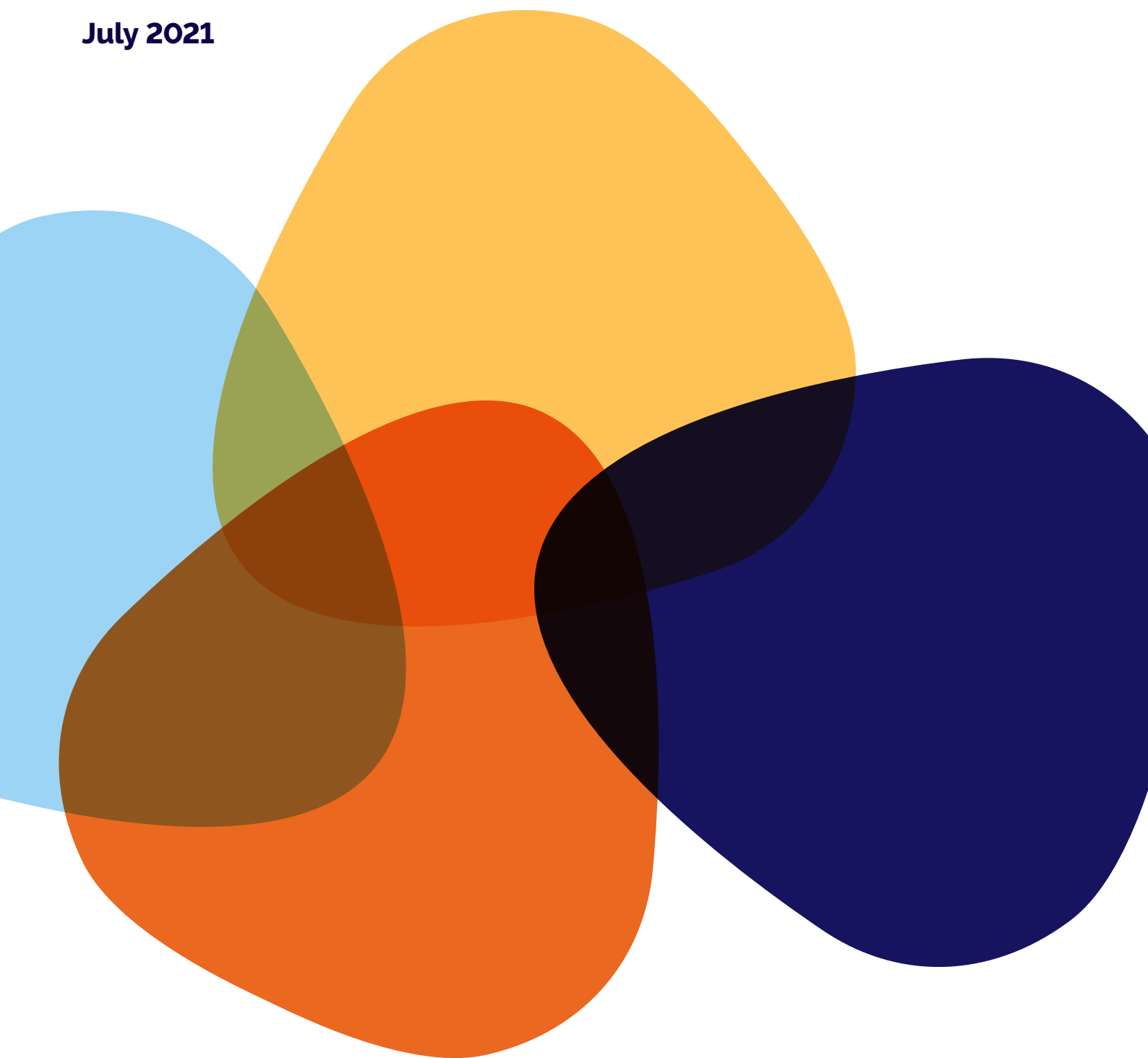
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# Investigating gambling behaviours in non-English speaking populations in the NT: A Scoping study

Final report to the Department of Justice

July 2021



Dr Kate Golebiowska, Dr Himanshu Gupta  
and Dr Matthew Stevens



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**July 2021**

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# Executive summary

Funded by the Northern Territory Department of Justice (Community Benefit Fund), this scoping study investigated the nature, the extent and the outcomes of gambling-related problems in Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) communities in the Northern Territory (NT). It identifies strategies recommended by the NESB community leaders and counselling organisations to prevent harms from problem gambling in the future. The empirical data collection occurred in two phases in 2020-2021 in Darwin and Alice Springs. In the first phase scoping phone interviews were conducted with the NESB community leaders and representatives of the counselling organisations. They enabled the research team to identify those NESB communities where gambling-related problems are present and to fine-tune the questions that were asked in the second phase. That phase of the interviews occurred in person in Darwin (with 2 exceptions where Zoom was used) and by phone in Alice Springs. These interviews were longer and in-depth. Questions that were used in both phases of the research are available in the Appendix.

## Most harmful forms of gambling, development and impacts of gambling-related problems

- At the time of the interviews, gambling-related problems were affecting several communities originating from Southern and Eastern Europe; North-East Asia, South-East Asia and Southern and Central Asia.
- Counselling service organisations reported anecdotal knowledge about gambling being undertaken by members of some new and growing communities in Darwin, in particular from Southern and Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Community leaders representing the specific countries mentioned by the counselling service representatives did not report problems with gambling in their communities. This may result from the communities from these regions having more than one cultural association or reflect the fact that not all immigrants belong to a cultural community association.
- The most harmful form of gambling, which holds across all NESB communities where gambling-related problems were identified, is playing the electronic gambling machines, commonly known as 'pokies'.
- Other addictive and harmful gambling activities that NESB community members engage in include card games, betting on horses and other sports, playing lotteries and buying 'scratchies'.
- NESB community leaders believe that the second generation (mostly younger people) engage in harmful online gambling, including on sports, but the former have a low understanding of how this works.
- In some NESB communities the elderly people suffer gambling-related harms. It is thought that this results from a lack of culturally-appropriate, attractive, alternative activities they could engage in during the day.
- Though low numbers of people in the NESB communities experience problems with their gambling, these nevertheless affect individuals of all ages regardless of their labour force status, education level, civil status, length of residence (for immigrants), women and men.
- Experiencing problems with gambling may lead to an individual become less involved in events organised by their cultural community in comparison to other members.



- Gambling-related problems in NESB communities are triggered by loneliness and boredom; a lack of other attractive entertainment options; high levels of work and life-related stress; in response to the loss of high social and economic status enjoyed in the home country which cannot be replicated in the NT; and through acculturation to the Australian (Western) lifestyle where gambling is available combined with a lack of social controls that would be present in the country of origin. The notion of 'luck' is reportedly an important motivation in some new and growing immigrant communities from South-East Asia but not too important in some North-East Asian community groups where gambling-related problems exist but are thought to be largely controlled.
- Gambling is believed to morph into a gambling problem when an individual does not know when to stop and becomes addicted. Players have a 'budget' for gambling; its amount depends on personal circumstances and may range from \$100.00 for a retiree, up to \$500.00 for a parent with a large family in receipt of Centrelink support, to several hundred dollars for an employed person (per outing).
- Gamblers with problems may either have a high 'budget', a family who will rescue them in crisis, or they may sometimes borrow from others to continue gambling. Gambling debts are believed to not be always re-paid. Individuals experiencing issues with their gambling may use gambling as a 'financial strategy' to fund purchases or raise funds to pay bills.
- Gambling-related problems negatively affect the concerned NESB community members, their families and friends, and, where gambling debts are not paid back, also members of their wider communities. Within families and in couples, financial stress and arguments in relationships occur. Unattached, single gamblers with problems may forgo substantial sums of money, which in turn may affect their ability to retain significant personal properties such as a car.

## Barriers to help seeking and preferred forms of help

- Personal shame and social stigma associated with gambling-related problems delay help-seeking behaviours.
- Gamblers with problems from NESB communities have a strong preference for informal help and advice over formal counselling. Those who help informally must have the trust of the gambler and may include family members, very close friends, religious leaders and rarely, community leaders.
- Counselling service organisations in Darwin and Alice Springs have recently worked with very low numbers of NESB clients seeking help for problem gambling and from their point of view it is impossible to ascertain which NESB communities may be over-represented as clients. One reason thought to be behind the low use of formal counselling is that mental health services (such as to address gambling-related problems) may not be part of the health care systems in the countries of origin, or the concept of using them may be unfamiliar to some cultural groups.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Amity Community Services and Melaleuca Australia aimed at sharing knowledge and educating each other is a smart way forward also for other stakeholders interested in reaching out in culturally sensitive ways to NESB community groups and advising of the support they have available to gamblers with problems.

## Reasons for not gambling amongst NESB community members

Some NESB communities from North-West and Southern and Eastern Europe; North Africa and the Middle East; Sub-Saharan Africa; North-East Asia; South-East Asia; Southern and Central Asia and Oceania and Antarctica are reportedly not engaging in gambling thanks to one or more of these factors:

- Faith (in Islam gambling is forbidden, in Christianity it is often perceived as a sin).
- Working hard, focusing on providing for the family (also sending remittances to extended family overseas) and ensuring that the settlement in the NT goes well.
- Not having sufficient time and money left to gamble.
- Perception that gambling is a waste of money.
- Perception that gambling is part of the Western lifestyle that the communities in question do not acculturate to.

## Opportunities for the Northern Territory Government to prevent future harms from gambling in NESB communities

- The study participants see the Northern Territory Government as the key stakeholder able to help them minimise gambling-related harms in the NESB communities. It is thought that the Government can do so by funding new initiatives and educating the NESB community leaders. An important observation resulting from conversation with the Community Benefit Fund on a draft of this report is that the Northern Territory Government agencies are ineligible to apply for the Territory funding and considering the current financial constraints it would be difficult to fund these activities from other sources. The Government encourages cultural associations and counselling organisations with a vested interest in addressing gambling-related problems in NESB communities to apply to the Community Benefit Fund Gambling Amelioration program. It is also acknowledged that adding more specific information about activities that are fundable (by using examples) can improve the awareness amongst these stakeholders. The specific responses put forward by the participants to better address the current gambling-related problems in NESB are:
- Information in leaflets, brochures and posters about responsible gambling and help-seeking should be translated into community languages to improve accessibility of information to NESB groups. This will help make the information culturally-sensitive. Information provided in English is considered confronting by some NESB communities and it is not being noticed.
- A training workshop for the NESB community leaders to educate them about the available services for gambling-related problems could be organised and attended by representatives of the counselling services to enable a two-way interaction to exchange information and discuss cultural sensitivities around providing counselling for gambling-related problems. The NESB community leaders suggested that the Northern Territory Government (NTG) could organise it. With the constraints noted above, the counselling organisations might explore an opportunity to apply for funding under the Community Benefit Fund Gambling Amelioration program to host such a workshop.
- To meet the needs of the NESB community leaders the Northern Territory Government could maintain a comprehensive website with information about all available services for gambling-related problems.

- Social media, the youtube.com channel, TV, Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) programs in community languages and NESB community websites should be leveraged to place advertisements and short videos discussing responsible gambling and the availability of help for gamblers with problems. Many NESB community leaders are interested in being featured in such advertisements and videos and address their communities in the native tongues.
- Developing the advertisements and short videos can be enabled by utilising the Community Benefit Fund Gambling Amelioration program. Information about the suitability of this program for these purposes should be better communicated to community leaders. Some thought that the current scope of the grants program in the NT would need to be extended to cover them.
- Free translating services, which are available to counselling organisations, work well and should be maintained.
- Screening questionnaires should be translated from English to community languages and made available to counsellors for use.

In light of the continued but still relatively new migration to the NT from South-East Asia, Southern and Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, future research should focus on understanding attitudes towards gambling and gambling behaviours in communities originating from these regions.

This study has two limitations related to its approved research design and focus. First, the presented information is second-hand data and not direct accounts of NESB community members with gambling problems. Secondly, testing the suggestions made by the interviewees for effectiveness and costing them fall outside the scope of the study. It nevertheless remains the first account of the motivations for gambling, gambling behaviours and help-seeking behaviours of NESB gamblers with problems in the NT and as such it fills an important knowledge gap.

# 1. Background to the project

No systematic studies have been conducted in the Northern Territory (NT) to date to establish which communities from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB) may be at risk of problem gambling and what strategies could minimize the harms and improve their well-being. This report addresses this urgent gap. It presents and discusses the results of a scoping study funded by the Northern Territory Department of Justice (Community Benefit Fund, CBF) and conducted by a joint Northern Institute and Menzies School of Health Research research team in 2020-2021.

The study generates evidence and offers recommendations to the Northern Territory Government (NTG) about the gambling behaviours of the NESB populations (excluding Indigenous) in the NT, it identifies the country regions for NESB groups in the NT, which may be at higher risk of problem gambling and consequential gambling-related harms. To present and discuss the empirical results, the report uses the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2019) *Standard Australian Classification of Countries, 2016*.

The data was collected in Darwin and Alice Springs, which are the two urban centres in the NT with the highest numbers of NESB residents. The three key reasons that make this research timely and urgent are the results of the 2015 and 2018 Northern Territory (NT) Gambling Prevalence and Wellbeing Surveys indicating increased risk of problem gambling, the recent sustained increases in NESB populations in the NT, and the projected faster annual average growth rates of the non-Indigenous vs. the Indigenous Territory population.

Figure 1 below illustrates that problem gambling risk is significantly higher for people living in homes where English is not the language spoken compared with English speakers, particularly in the moderate and low risk categories. In 2018 gambling Territorians living in non-English speaking households were 2.6 times more likely to be classified as an at-risk gambler compared with English speaking households, with 37% of people in non-English speaking households being at-risk, compared with 14% in English speaking households. Eleven percent of gamblers living in non-English speaking households were classified as experiencing moderate risk problem gambling, compared with less than 4% for English speaking households, while 25% of gamblers living in non-English speaking households were classified as experiencing low risk problem gambling, compared with 10% for English speaking households. Similar trends were present in 2015, though the absolute and relative magnitude of these differences were larger in 2018.

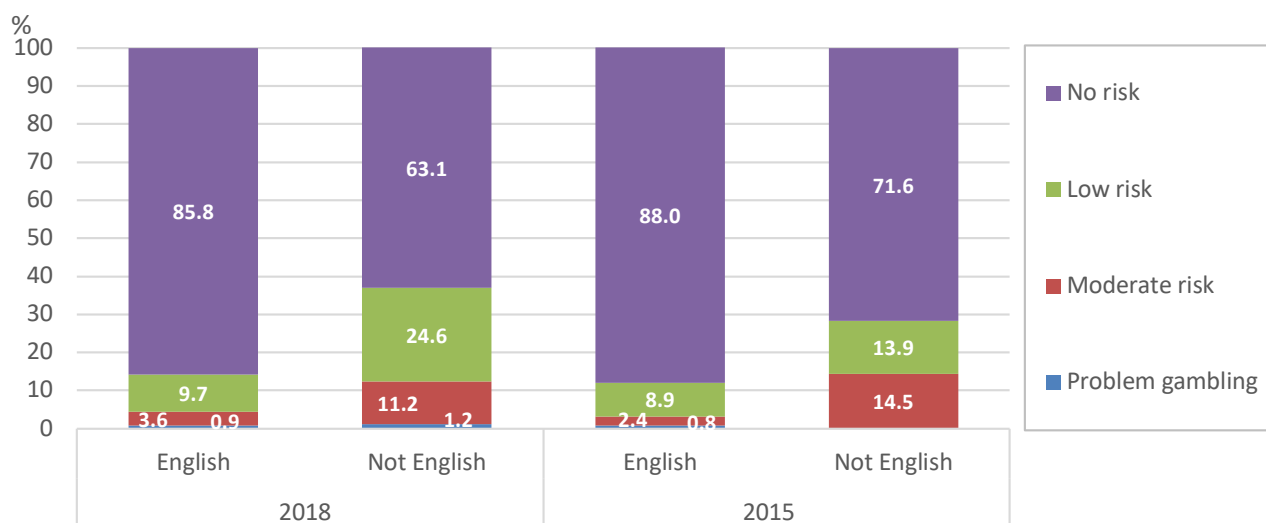


Figure 1: Language spoken at home by problem gambling risk, 2015 & 2018, NT adult population. NOTE: Excludes Indigenous respondents.

Sources: 2015 and 2018 NT Gambling Prevalence and Wellbeing Surveys. Menzies School of Health Research 2019, 2017.

NESB communities in the NT have been recently growing. Analysis of the ABS Census (2006; 2016b) data reveals that the number of 2016 Census respondents in the NT aged 20 to 89 who were not Indigenous, did not speak an Indigenous language at home and did not speak 'English only' grew by over 100% from the numbers recorded at the 2006 Census: from 12,000 (2006 Census) to 26,000 (2016 Census). If the 100% growth was repeated in 2026 from the base of 26,000, there would be over 50,000 Territorians from the NESB communities and some of them would be at risk of problem gambling. The growth in the NESB populations in the NT is likely to continue, though possibly slow down temporarily because of the current international (and sometimes internal) border closures due to COVID-19. But with the growth, the population of at-risk gamblers will also increase. For example, the 2016 Census recorded 3,464 individuals aged 15 to 24 in the NT, who were non-Indigenous, did not speak an Indigenous language at home and did not speak 'English only' (ABS 2016a). This group of people, which comprises large shares of speakers of Asian and Southern European languages, will soon be entering adulthood and some of them might become gamblers.

The 2016 Census enables appreciating phenomenal proportional increases in some new migrant communities, that is those, which had low numbers at the 2001 and 2006 Censuses. For example, the Indian community in the NT grew by more than 580% between 2001 and 2016: from 523 to 3,595. Between 2011 and 2016 Nepal and Taiwan recorded the highest proportional growth although from low bases. The Nepalese community grew from 350 to 1,126 (222%) and the Taiwanese community increased from 233 to 629 (169%). Notable growth was also recorded by the Chinese community, which grew from 865 (2011) to 1,196 (2016), or by 38%. The 2016 Census identified the Philippines as the largest source country for overseas-born Territorians, the first time an Asian country has topped this list. The Filipino community in the NT grew from 1,745 (2001) to 5,912 (2016), or more than three-fold. Communities from Africa almost doubled in size during 2006 to 2016. At the same time, a small decrease of -0.3% was recorded for the Australian-born Territory population (Shalley et al. 2019:12). In Greater Darwin, 25.5% of the population was overseas-born at the 2016 Census (ABS 2021).

The currently available population projections for the NT until 2046 (NT Department of Treasury and Finance, 2019:7) show that the non-Indigenous average annual population growth rates are about to or have started exceeding the rates of the Indigenous annual average population growth. This trend is projected to be maintained into the future. The non-Indigenous component of the NT population is going to drive the population change. This change entails the cultural norms around gambling. This is not merely 'a future population change scenario', it has already eventuated, for example in Alice Springs. Recent and substantial growth in diverse immigrant-born communities between 2001 and 2011 has resulted in the immigrant-born groups coming to represent, remarkably, 20% of the town population, which is the same as the Indigenous population (Yuhun et al. 2012).

## 2. Study aims, design, data collection and analysis

### 2.1 Aims and objectives, design and geographic scope

This project aims to address the urgent knowledge gap about the gambling risks in the NESB communities in the NT using Darwin and Alice Springs as the data collection sites. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. Generate and interpret baseline knowledge on problem gambling and help-seeking behaviour of the NESB communities in the NT.
2. Share findings and recommendations with the Community Benefit Fund and the participant organisations.
3. Share the study results with the academic community to advance scholarly knowledge.

### 2.2 Methodological approach

To meet the above objectives, the research team designed the data collection in Darwin and Alice Springs in two phases. It occurred in 2020-2021. The first phase involved phone interviews, which were scoping in nature and short (up to 20 minutes). They enabled the research team to fine-tune the questions that were asked in the second phase. In this phase, the interviews were in-depth and took around 1 hour each. In the second phase interviews in Darwin were conducted face-to-face (except 2 interviews that were completed using Zoom) while in Alice Springs they were conducted over the phone. The interviews included community organisations and incorporated cultural associations as well as counselling services.

The questions asked in the first and second phase of the interviews can be found in the Appendix. In the first phase, questions were asked of community leaders to ascertain the community's perceptions of gambling, whether they see it as an issue within their community, and if they would be interested in participating in the second phase of the interviews to help the research team further understand gambling behaviours and harms, and potential barriers to help-seeking. For counselling services, the line of inquiry was different and was about understanding what culturally appropriate services they can offer, and if they collect data on the origins of their clients, and if any NESB groups are over-represented. In the second phase, we followed up with those cultural associations and counselling services that wished to continue participating in the research. We arranged semi-structured interviews with key informants in these organisations to explore the extent of gambling in their communities, barriers and enablers of seeking help for gambling-related harms and asked how the NT Government and NGOs can better support the NESB communities to access gambling help services, and how to ensure they are culturally appropriate. Grocery vouchers valued at \$20.00 were given or mailed to participants in this phase as a way of acknowledging their input and time into this of research. All but one person accepted them.

## 2.3 Identifying organisations to be invited to the study

This study commenced with a comprehensive scan of the cultural associations and clubs in Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs in order to identify suitable organisations to participate to this study. We used the following resources:

1. A list of 'Incorporated Association Compliance & Registration Status' (an Excel file) obtained on request from the NT Department of Justice.
2. A list of the multicultural community organisations in the NT dated 3 February 2020 which we accessed from [nt.gov.au/community/multicultural-communities/contact-a-multicultural-service-or-community-group](http://nt.gov.au/community/multicultural-communities/contact-a-multicultural-service-or-community-group).
3. A list of student associations available from the CDU website (not dated) [www.cdu.edu.au/student-central/student-groups/join-cdu-student-group](http://www.cdu.edu.au/student-central/student-groups/join-cdu-student-group).

After removing duplications, removing organisations based and serving areas other than Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs and a small number of organisations, which due to incomplete data could not be convincingly assigned to neither location, we created a list of 146 organisations. It included cultural associations and counselling services. We treated this as our starting point. As soon as the first phase of the interviews started, it became obvious that many contact details were out-of-date, email addresses for some groups no longer existed, and some communities which are numerically large did not seem to have an incorporated association. With this knowledge, we tapped into professional and social contacts and resources to fill as many of these gaps as possible and identify current community leaders and other knowledgeable community representatives to invite to this study. As such, the participants in this study were recruited using a combination of purposive and network sampling, which is a well-accepted and practiced approach in qualitative studies (Neuman 2011).

The final number of interviews conducted in the first exploratory phase included 43 in Darwin and 12 in Alice Springs (55 in total). This phase did not have a minimum set number of participating community associations and counselling organisations. Rather, we were interested in speaking with as many of them as possible to well understand the prevalence of gambling across the diverse groups and the forms of gambling perceived to be the most popular and harmful. Based on these interviews, the research team identified participants from the cultural associations and counselling organisations (16 in Darwin, 4 in Alice Springs) who were invited to the second phase of the interviews. The interest in participating in this second phase was gauged in phase one. In sum, 75 interviews were conducted for this study.

For the purposes of this project, the research team has obtained ethics clearance from three human research ethics committees: the Charles Darwin University Human Research Ethics Committee (CDU HREC), the Menzies School of Health Research Human Research Ethics Committee (Menzies HREC) and Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee (CAHREC).

## 2.4 Analysis of qualitative data

Qualitative research enables establishing the meaning of a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants (Creswell & Creswell 2018), in this case NESB community leaders and representatives of counselling organisations. We recorded the interviews and transcribed them using the NVivo transcription software. First, we read and re-read the interview transcripts to gain a general understanding of what the participants were talking about, if there were any points of convergence and divergence between the NESB community leaders and representatives of counselling organisations, geographical variations as well any aspects of gambling behaviours that the interviewees did not have a comprehensive understanding of.

We adopted the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke 2006). We broke the transcripts into smaller parts and started identifying themes, concepts and perspectives discussed by the interviewees. The process of refining and presenting the final themes and perspectives as well as the interpretation offered in this report benefited from analytical work and our continued reflection on the interview materials on hand. These processes started in the first part of 2020 (first milestone report) and continued in late 2020 (second analytical report) as more interviews were completed. The thematic analysis approach enabled us to interpret the meaning and mutual relationships in the information shared by the participants, systematise it and present conclusions.

## **2.5 Limitations of the study**

This study was designed to collect information from representatives of counselling organisations and leaders of community and cultural associations. As such, it is important to acknowledge that the information presented here does not come directly from NESB gamblers with problems, which is a limitation. Testing for effectiveness the recommendations made by the participants how the Northern Territory Government as the key stakeholder may help minimise the gambling-related harm in the NESB and costing these recommendations fall outside the scope of this current project. This is also a limitation.



# 3. Results

This section presents results obtained in the first and second phase of the interviews in Darwin and Alice Springs. NESB community associations may have the name 'Darwin' or the 'Northern Territory' in the official name. Their NESB members will usually live in Darwin and Palmerston so the results presented here should be seen as relevant to Palmerston-based members of the NESB communities also.

## 3.1 Finding out about gambling-related problems

Community leaders from Southern and Eastern Europe and South-East Asia interviewed in the second phase of the interviews in Darwin explained that they learn about a problem that an individual or a family in their community is experiencing, when the situation turns extreme, for example, when a gambler has no means to pay off a gambling debt, when children are affected, or when there is a risk that a house may be lost. They then reason with the gambler, but until then the habit is kept private because it is socially shameful. Community leaders may also learn about a problem in private conversations with other community members but for this to be disclosed, the other party needs to be very close to them (have trust). The stigma is not only socially damaging for the individual in question but also for their family if they have one.

## 3.2 Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of NESB community members who experience gambling problems

Representatives from counselling organisations were asked to describe the demographic profiles of their clients who sought help for gambling-related issues, to which similar responses were received. In Alice Springs which has a significant Indigenous population, service providers had not seen many people from other NESB groups that sought help for gambling-related issues. Nonetheless, most of the clients were male, above 40 years of age, had at least a high school degree, were at least employed part-time, and had a family. The clients were of Southern and Central Asian and Sub-Saharan African origins. Because of the tiny numbers, it was difficult to ascertain which NESB groups had experienced more gambling issues than others. In Darwin, one interviewed counsellor who has worked recently with a male client originating from the Southern and Central Asia region explained that he was fully employed as a tradesperson. An older woman from the Southern and Eastern European region sought help from another counselling service.

Representatives of cultural organisations in Alice Springs commented that more older men gamble than younger men and women in general. If women were gambling, they would often play the 'pokie' machines. Some middle-class people were believed to gamble as a way of increasing their income. It was also noted that gambling behaviours depend on personal circumstances such as the amount of time left after work, whether one does or does not have a family, whether they work or not. This sentiment is reflected in Darwin; with more interviews conducted there it is possible to characterise the NESB gamblers with problems in greater detail. The community leaders who identified the problem in their communities, however small (for example one individual, or a small group of people), observed that it affects both males and females. Both married and single men experience problem gambling. Problem gambling affects all age groups: young people, middle and older age groups; the latter will often include retirees. It was noted by representatives of some Southern and Eastern European as well as South-East Asian community groups that the elderly gamblers experiencing problem may be lonely women (e.g. widowed), while in some North-East Asian communities elderly women may regularly attend the casino with their female friends but they are not considered to be experiencing problems with their gambling.

NESB community members who experience problem gambling include those who work full-time, part-time, are retirees and are on Centrelink benefits. Some retirees may need to maintain part-time employment, sometimes in the form of 'cash in hand' (tradesmen), in order to sustain their gambling addiction. Gambling is affecting people regardless of their level of education with those more educated and/or commanding higher salaries gambling for higher stakes. People who are working for others and business owners can also experience problems with their gambling.

It should be noted that young people, often second generation born in Australia, or growing up here since a very young age, are thought to be engaging in online gambling. Online gambling is the least understood form of gambling by most community leaders and by at least one counselling organisation. No community leader could share any hard data on the online betting and they admitted they did not know enough about how this was technically done. But they believed it was negatively affecting the young people involved with it. Some thought that this form of gambling was 'invisible', happening behind the bedrooms' closed doors and where the 'spend' could be easier because betting would be done with a credit card rather than by cash in hand.

### 3.3 Popular gambling activities

Playing electronic gambling machines or 'pokies' as they are commonly known, at the Darwin and Alice Springs casinos as well as at the hotels (pubs) and clubs is the most popular of the gambling activities that NESB community members engage in. In Darwin they appear to be the most addictive and causing the greatest harm amongst all forms of gambling. They are particularly popular and harmful for women, regardless whether they are employed, unemployed, or retired. Community leaders in Darwin noted that one of the attractions of the 'pokie' machines is the 'low entry point', or affordability. Unlike for example table games, where at least \$100.00 may be needed to start, 'pokies' can be played with little money. One or two dollars or even cent coins are enough to play and get the excitement and the 'adrenaline rush'. Another comment that was made about 'pokies' is that they are designed to addict. The noise, the flashing colours and the 'congratulations' announcements that accompany each 'win', no matter how small, are designed to keep people playing.

Playing card games for money also occurs at the casinos but equally at private houses in Darwin and Alice Springs. The events at home are social occasions where people will meet to eat and drink, moving to playing card games next. In some communities of the South-East Asian origin these gatherings at home that involve betting enable re-creating the gatherings for family and friends (with small bets) that would normally occur in the country of origin, and this is a way of keeping the culture alive. In some Southern and Central Asian communities, family time can involve playing card games but not betting.

Another motivation for gambling at home mentioned by one of the South-East Asian community leaders in Darwin is that these people do not want to be seen gambling, out in the public, particularly that many have professional jobs and connections. This suggests that the choice to engage in gambling at home is deeper than a social occasion. At the casinos table games are available but they seem to be not as popular among the NESB patrons as the 'pokies' due to a more formal dress code that needs to be observed and a 'higher entry' point.

Gambling-related harm arises from betting on horses on the racetrack; this is often by the more educated NESB community members. Betting on horses and other sports appears to be a men's domain occupied by the mature age and younger generations alike. Other popular forms of gambling, where bets may be smaller but the activities nevertheless systematic include buying lotto tickets and/or 'scratchies'. The latter are often a women's domain.

### 3.4 Motivations for NESB community members to gamble

Many community leaders in Darwin and Alice Springs interviewed in the second phase of the project identified loneliness and boredom as important reasons for the NESB community members to develop problem gambling. An important distinction needs to be made between Darwin and Alice Springs. In Darwin this motivation largely applies to the elderly members of settled communities, often women. This age group is socially lonely and bored due to a death of a spouse or partner and/or children moving away. Spending time gambling at a venue (which all community leaders believed were perceived as nice and welcoming) is a way of escaping home and moving, temporarily, to a perceived much nicer environment, air-conditioned, where they feel valued, respected and important. These women, and sometimes men, typically gamble alone. In Alice Springs, boredom is paired with a lack of wider opportunities for social interaction for NESB community members of working age. Going gambling to the casino after work, where there is not much else to do in a small town, fills this void. In addition, gambling offers the newly arrived immigrants an opportunity to interact with their own as well as the broader Australian community.

An observation about a lack of entertainment options beyond the casino in Darwin was made by a representative of one of the CDU international student associations representing a country from Southern and Central Asian region. Students will go there in mixed-gender groups for lack of other fun activities in the evenings (for example shopping centres close early, pubs are not a suitable cultural choice), sometimes on long weekends but typically monthly. The group will typically enjoy a meal together but disperse to gamble individually. This is perceived as form of acculturation to the Western lifestyle, where gambling is an accepted form of entertainment. Gambling may be illegal in the country of origin or available only to tourists. It is also a behaviour that occurs when individuals are freed of the social and cultural controls that would normally be present in their country of origin. This interview did not suggest that international students are experiencing problem gambling, but rather, they are exploring Australian culture and treat gambling as a group pastime. A community leader representing one of the growing communities from Southern and Central Asia in Darwin who spoke about both the settled community members and international students from this country noted that the absence of a range of entertainment options after dark is one of the reasons why international students are motivated to attend the casino. The newly found social and cultural freedom and wanting to fit in with the Australian lifestyle that permits gambling is also at play for newly settled immigrants for one of the growing South-East Asian communities in Darwin.

In Darwin, working age members of the settled NESB groups also attend gambling venues in groups, but these outings are perceived more as a social occasion to spend time with colleagues and friends. No Darwin community leader who noted that they patron the casino said that this arises out of a lack of other entertainment options. The latter appears to be a motivation for some international students and some elderly NESB women who are bored during the day.

In Darwin, where housewives, or even family groups from the NESB communities engage in gambling as a group at a venue, the community leaders believe that such outings serve primarily social reasons. Gambling is an 'add-on' activity for entertainment. This is the case for some Southern and Eastern European and North-East Asian communities. Group social outings of elderly community members to a gambling venue are a way of bonding and filling otherwise dull time during the day. The casino in Darwin is reported to be incentivising visits by offering free drinks, free tokens for an initial game, or a free return bus trip home. These incentives were mentioned by some community leaders in Darwin in the context of the gambling by the elderly both in groups and individually. Peer pressure or encouragement to join a group (usually from work) that is going out to a gambling venue is another reason why especially new arrivals from some South-East Asian groups take gambling up.

Cultural notions of luck and cultural practices of gambling that members of the NESB communities bring to Darwin from their home countries or observe growing up in Darwin as the second generation play a role in sustaining gambling behaviours but they should not be seen as always leading to problem gambling. These notions and behaviours are conventionally believed to characterise some North-East Asian communities,

but this cannot be fully supported by the interviews conducted for this study. While some representatives of the counselling services interviewed in Alice Springs noted that gambling and money characterise one of the North-East Asian cultures and their counterparts in Darwin noted that Asians believe in the notion of luck and gamble a lot, the insights offered by the North-East Asian community leaders reveal a more nuanced picture. Only one of the interviewed North-East Asian community leaders in Darwin mentioned the word 'luck' and they considered this notion to be a weak driver of gambling. The other North-East Asian community leaders in Darwin opined that while gambling is part of lifestyle and engrained in their cultures, only around 1% of their respective community groups could be experiencing problems with their gambling. While many members of some North-East Asian communities in Darwin gamble systematically, overall, the community leaders think that most regular gamblers control their behaviours well. Those North-East Asian community leaders in Darwin who spoke about gambling-related problems in their communities thought that those individuals were not in absolutely pity circumstances thanks to either being rescued by their families or commanding incomes that enable sustained gambling.

It is very important to note that cultural notions of luck as drivers of gambling behaviours, including contributing to experiencing gambling problems, were noted by some community leaders representing recent and growing (some rapidly) new immigrant communities from South-East Asia in Darwin. Counselling organisations in Darwin are aware of these communities but have no knowledge about the factors that might now or in the future drive harmful gambling behaviours. In addition to the notion of luck, there are co-existing circumstances such as a new peer pressure for the employed people, easy access to gambling venues that may not exist in the countries of origin or be only available to tourists, gambling being illegal in the country of origin, wanting to fit in with the new Australian lifestyle, and for some, a lack of traditional social and cultural control that is left behind when a person immigrates to Darwin.

Stressful circumstances in personal lives such as a loss of social and economic position upon migration to Darwin may encourage gambling and problem gambling. One of the North-East Asian community leaders in Darwin commented that some members of their community found themselves unable to recoup the high status they enjoyed in their home country, previously enabled by well-paid managerial positions in industries that do not exist in Darwin. This has pushed them to gamble as a way of dealing with the frustrations they experience as a result of being locked in low-skill, menial positions. This was echoed by a community leader representing one of the Southern and Central Asian countries. They did not specifically single out the de-skilling and a loss of status but commented in broader terms that some in their community use gambling as an escape from the high demands of daily life and grind. While the high stress at work did not seem to be specifically mentioned by interviewed community leaders in Alice Springs, some of them commented that gambling was an enjoyable past time and offered the NESB community members an opportunity to relax.

The main reason for the NESB community members to developing problem gambling was not knowing when the right time was to stop. As one of the interviewed community leaders in Alice Springs noted, it can be enough to enjoy a few big wins, which, coupled with boredom and a pleasant past time, can put a person on a path of continued gambling. This is echoed by the interviewed community leaders in Darwin who noted that the addicted community members who attend gambling venues such as the casino may regularly stay there long hours. Others observed that gamblers experiencing problem gambling think of themselves as smarter and more skilled than other gamblers, which leads them to believing that next time, they will enjoy a big win. Some high risk gamblers believe that the 'pokie' machines owe them money, which motivates them to chase previous losses, which is a known risk factor for problem gambling. Unemployment, carrying debts (usually younger generation), being on Centrelink support, or looking for quick financial gains to manage expenses: both essential such as home bills, and optional, such as shopping or social outings, are also among reasons that push people to carry out high risk gambling leading to gambling-related problems. Debts may include lifestyle related ones e.g. a mortgage, or a gambling debt that needs to be repaid. Sometimes, when a pay check is spent on gambling before bills are paid, people may turn to more gambling in the hope to raise the needed funds. Heavy gambling can be therefore seen also as a financial strategy.

Representatives of some counselling services in Alice Springs and Darwin noted that members of NESB communities may seek their help primarily to address other life stressors such as the drug use and gambling may be identified as a co-existing factor. However, the number of such clients is very small.

The interviewed community leaders in Darwin who identified gambling-related problems in their communities thought that most gamblers who are working, retired, or in receipt of Centrelink payments have a 'budget' for gambling. They do not know exactly what the amounts are but believe that it can be up to several hundred dollars for those who are working (each time they go out), and much less for the retirees, up to \$100.00. If gambling consists in regularly buying 'scratchies' from a newsagency, it is usually a matter of a few dollars but more than one 'scratchie' is purchased. As one of the community leaders of calculated, a family with 5 children could have around \$400.00 to \$500.00 left per fortnight from their Centrelink payments and a portion of this sometimes goes to gambling.

### 3.5 Impacts of gambling-related problems

Negative impacts of gambling-related problems are wide-spread and affect the individual concerned, their family if they have one, and others in their community, especially if gambling debts remain unpaid. One indication that gambling is a problem for an individual may be their gambling frequency. Not all interviewed NESB community leaders knew how frequently gamblers with problems would visit the gambling venues: some could not answer this question, while others provided their best estimate. This is the case because problem gambling is generally perceived as a shameful activity that only in rare and emergency circumstances would be shared with a community leader. Gamblers at high risk of problem gambling are thought to attend the gambling venues more frequently than low and no risk gamblers. For example, in some NESB communities in Darwin the lonely and bored gamblers, who are often the elderly, may attend the casino in Darwin 4 times a week and their stays may extend well into the night. Gamblers with problems from a North-East Asian community group who are of working age and single may attend a venue alone, and as soon as they receive their pay check. In another North-East Asian community, a pay check is not immediately spent on gambling; rather the bills are serviced first, and whatever is left is spent on gambling. This shows that nuances exist in behaviours of gamblers in the communities originating from the same region.

NESB community leaders in Darwin and Alice Springs commented that high risk gamblers who play the 'pokie' machines will continue until they have absolutely no money left. This is echoed by financial counsellors in Darwin who added that in their role they have access to bank statements of clients and multiple withdrawals can be seen on the day when they gamble, indicating chasing losses is occurring. For those employed, this is often on their payday. In extreme cases, a fortnight's worth of salary can be spent in one evening.

Newly arrived immigrants who socialise with the settled compatriot community will go and gamble with these community members and they will all attend the same venue. What seems to facilitate this is employment in the same industry. In extreme circumstances, high risk gamblers may need to gamble every day at a venue. Lotto and 'scratchies' are regular, weekly activities; occasionally when a lot can be won at the lotto, some community members will try their luck more than once a week. In general, it appears that weekly gambling activities are common, regardless of the type of gambling. Probably not all gamblers who engage in such activities on a weekly basis experience problems; rather, many will have a budget and will stop once the money is all spent. People of working age and those who are parents will usually have less free time during the week to go to a gambling venue than the elderly community members who are retired or unemployed. One interviewed community representative of a growing South-East Asian group in Darwin observed that one of the effects of problem gambling can be less involvement in community-wide activities in comparison to other members.

The circular associations of gambling with finances and social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) were noted by all community leaders in Darwin and Alice Springs and were supported by interviews with counselling services in both locations. The harms were predominantly monetary; however, gambling had also caused stress, frustration, domestic violence, and strained relationships. In most cases, the male partner in the relationship succumbed to addictive gambling behaviours and subsequently created issues within the family and sometimes between community members. If he was also a parent, his behaviour would cause financial arguments with the wife, render the family unable to pay essential bills, create the need to either gamble more to pay these bills, or to borrow money from community members, or Australian friends, colleagues or neighbours. In some communities, both parents in a family can be heavy gamblers and this negatively affects the family budget as well as relationships in the family. Gamblers experiencing harm from their gambling would also cause problems in their married relationships even if there were no children. For unmarried or single people who gamble, large sums of money may be lost, which in turn may affect their ability to keep their assets such as a home or a car.

Culturally sanctioned strategies around borrowing money to fund a gambling habit or repay gambling debts are examples of fine-level differences between community groups originating from the same region. For example, in one community originating from the Southern and Central Asian region borrowing from its members is not practised at all because it would be looked down upon and generate unfavourable gossips. But in some North-East and South-East Asian communities borrowing to gamble from community members and family, as well as others (for example Australian friends, colleagues or neighbours) is practiced, but it was noted in one interview that a gambler would usually not reveal the real reason for borrowing money out of shame. Gamblers from one Southern and Eastern European community were reported to be borrowing money to gamble from their community members in Darwin, whereas members from another community from the same region were reported to not be borrowing from their compatriots. Both Asian and European community leaders noted that the gambling debts were not always paid back. This could and did in some instances, lead to rifts in the community groups.

The elderly may face a dilemma whether and how much to spend on gambling versus the need to save funds for health emergencies. At least in one Southern and Eastern European community in Darwin, some elderly people who are already impoverished continue to lose money on gambling regularly and they are believed to have no savings for a health emergency. They tend to avoid private health care providers because they are unable to afford them – all the money left after paying bills goes to gambling. They will buy cheap food for themselves so that they have funds available for gambling. In other words, the addiction comes before their personal health and well-being. It is believed that offering culturally-appropriate, cheap or free activities that will represent an attractive alternative to gambling, may help reduce the incidence of problem gambling in the elderly. While this comment was made by only one community leader (who did not share any specific ideas what they could be), similar alternatives could be considered by other community groups where gambling by the elderly is harmful.

Problem gambling leads to developing a sense of personal shame and guilt. The activity also carries a social stigma. The interviewed representatives of community associations and counselling services considered shame, guilt and stigma to be negative impacts. Problem gambling is believed to be a very private matter for the individuals concerned, which can explain why even the community leaders learn about its impacts in crisis situations and why gamblers with problems may take a long time to seek help. The habit is not discussed publicly as this would result in losing face, being judged as a person with a mental health problem and often lead to community gossip. Families are typically protective of other family members with gambling problems to avoid staining the family's reputation and to avoid rumours in the community. However, despite these efforts, it is sometimes possible for the word to get out and the family may be the last to learn about the community gossip.

### 3.6 Barriers to seeking help

Key barriers for gamblers with problems not wanting to nor seeking help in Darwin and Alice Springs include:

1. Not acknowledging a gambling problem. The gravity of the addiction is such that people are unable to 'get this out of their system'.
2. Self-perception that their gambling is not bad enough to seek help.
3. They believe that they can deal with their problems themselves.
4. They are not aware of the existing support and services.

The interviewed community leaders and representatives of counselling services agree that gamblers with problems will only seek help when they acknowledge that they have a problem. One of the interviewed community leaders in Alice Springs noted that gamblers may be aware of high expectations that people around them have of them and avoid the stigma. This contributes to the gambler take a long time to admit that their gambling is a problem, or to say 'yes' to help. Another interviewee in Alice Springs representing a service provider noted that the sense of shame that needs to be overcome in order to seek help is particularly affecting men. In many cultures there is an expectation that men should handle their problems themselves and this line of thinking is relevant in the context of seeking help.

Gamblers with problems seek help only in situations when they do not have any other choice, or when they have already lost their freedom (e.g. they are jailed) or for other reasons that are very important to them, such as keeping their family together, or staying in the relationship. Those who seek help in Darwin do not approach Amity Community Services, at least in the first instance. In general, informal, community-based help is preferred as the first or the only form of help.

In those North-East Asian communities in Darwin whose leaders are aware of gamblers with problems, the affected individuals receive usually informal advice from family members or friends who care about them. This shows that it is not the gambler who takes the steps to address their behaviour. Rather, the advice comes from the environment around them. This can be in the form of a reminder that, for example, their children are going to attend university and the gambler should restrain themselves and save funds for their education. This advice usually works to some degree; the gambler will control themselves for a while but will eventually return to their previous habits. If a suggestion was made by a family member or a friend that they seek formal help, this would cause offence. This is culturally accepted knowledge and such suggestions are not made.

None of the interviewed community leaders representing a North-East Asian community in Darwin were aware of a gambler that would ever seek formal help if they were experiencing problems, for example by going to the Amity Community Services. Their view was that members who gamble regularly have a sense of responsibility towards their families. At the time of the interviews they did not believe there was anyone who was unable to control their gambling. They thought that there was 'an advanced gambling culture' in their groups – people know their boundaries and the gambling budget is part of their overall budget. One of the North-East Asian community leaders explained that unwritten social rules regarding gambling exist. One should never go above their set limit, whatever this limit for gambling is, because if they do, and they cannot afford to pay for necessities (including for children's needs), the community will isolate them and will not help out.

In another North-East Asian community in Darwin, if one does go above 'the limit', which is rare, they will not seek financial help from their friends or family. They will find other ways of paying off their debts so that their families, especially children, do not suffer. In other words, while gambling is a part of life in some such North-East Asian groups, it is not the absolute priority. Family and looking after the needs of the closest ones is.

Responses to gambling-related problems in other Asian communities in Darwin are diverse. For example, if a gambler with problems from one South-East Asian community was seeking help, they would likely engage in self-help (which was not further described) but would avoid formal counselling services, religious leaders, work colleagues and family. This is because experiencing gambling-related problems is considered taboo. If they were to discuss the matter with a friend, they would need to trust them, and they still may not tell them the full story. By comparison, a gambler with problems from another South-East Asian community, or from one of the Southern and Central Asian communities, would likely receive a suggestion from a family member or another significant other to seek help. A Southern and Central Asian community member would prefer a third-party support such as a counsellor rather than a community member, including the community leader. This is because gambling-related problems are considered shameful and there is no appetite for community knowledge about a personal matter. In rare instances where a friend would be approached for support, like in the South-East Asian community mentioned above, the relationship would need to be close.

A Southern and Central Asian community member would not approach a religious leader to seek help, but it would be culturally appropriate to seek their guidance to achieve a state of mental peace, e.g. by meditation, in order to be ready to start addressing the core issue. By contrast, a South-East Asian gambler with problems would seek help from a religious leader (depending on faith, they could be a Buddhist monk or a catholic priest), or a community leader. Their choice of help is driven by trust, like the trust that members of the other Asian groups would have in a close friend. Unlike gamblers with problems originating from the Southern and Central Asian region, South-East Asian gamblers with problems would not, in the majority, be seeking formal help.

In Alice Springs, gamblers with problems receive help through the community networks, for example in one of the South-East Asian groups. This can include family, or other families in the community, friends and community leaders. This reflects the collective nature of the culture where it is accepted and expected to be looking out for others. It is also important to note that the recourse to formal help appears to have greater acceptance in the NESB communities in Alice Springs in comparison to Darwin, even though the number of gamblers with problems who have sought such help is low. Gamblers Anonymous Australia is the counselling service that is reportedly being used.

The European community leaders were only interviewed in Darwin. In one of the Southern and Eastern European communities the unsung heroes supporting the community members in dealing with various issues including gambling-related problems are the Canossian Sisters (a Catholic religious institute whose members are involved in charity works). This is preferred over approaching the community leader. In the two other Southern and Eastern European communities, strategies to seek help for are different. In one of them, gambling-related problems, which are reported to be very rare, would be resolved within the family. If this accidentally became community knowledge, which the family would avoid at all costs, it can be expected that the community would come to their aid financially asking, or not, for the money to be repaid. This would depend on how close the families would be. Seeking help from formal counselling providers would be the absolute last resort because it is considered culturally stigmatic and it could become community knowledge. The interviewed community leader emphasised that the community has settled in Darwin with the aim of bettering themselves and providing a sound base for their children to be educated and grow. In the other community for the reasons of shame and stigma, a gambler with problems would not confide and seek help from their family, rather, they would be interested in obtaining help privately or completely anonymously. The private help could be sought from a community leader, or an ex-gambler who has addressed their own problem successfully. A religious leader would not be approached in Darwin, but interestingly, travelling interstate to receive help from a religious leader does sometimes occur. This confirms the utmost importance of anonymity, regardless whether it is informal or formal help that is being procured.



There is no evidence from the in-depth interviews conducted with community leaders in Darwin that their settled community members are unaware of the available formal counselling services. In Alice Springs one of the interviewed service providers noted that new immigrants in particular may not be aware of the available support services or reluctant to use them because of the lack of awareness and understanding of the Western concepts of counselling and treatment. This observation is echoed by a leader of one of the CDU international student associations representing a Southern and Central Asian student group. They explained that mental health services are not part of the health system in the home country and hence the idea of accessing them is culturally foreign. Seeking formal help for gambling issues is also a taboo, not discussed and not practiced at home. That being said, new international students receive comprehensive information during the Orientation week (the O-week) about the confidential counselling services that the University offers for free. Despite their cultural 'foreignness', being an international student does present challenges and student leaders may direct fellow students to confidential counselling services at CDU to resolve issues other than gambling. The interviewed student leader thought that if needed in the future, students from their community would carry this attitude of willingness to seek help to address gambling-related problems and would consider approaching a formal counselling service like the Amity Community Services. Many are in the process of negotiating what cultural elements from home they observe and in what aspects of the Australian life they are interested in acculturating. Accessing counselling services at the University illustrates acculturation. Accessing formal help to address gambling-related problems would be another example of this.

### 3.7 Views of the counselling services in Darwin

Two counsellors from Amity Community Services in Darwin confirmed what the community leaders conveyed in their interviews: gamblers with problems from the NESB backgrounds do not seek help from their organisation. In recent times, neither of the counsellors worked with any clients from a NESB background. Multicultural clients approach Amity to resolve other problems, such as their abuse of alcohol and other drugs (AOD) and sometimes gambling-related problems are co-factors, but they are not the main motivation for help-seeking.

Amity Community Services reported actively pursuing connections to other community-based organisations with a view to promote the knowledge about their services and to educate their own counsellors in a two-way process. As of late 2020, they had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Melaleuca Australia with a view to collaborate closely in the future. Collaboration was planned to start in 2021. Amity staff are interested in:

- obtaining introductions to community leaders to explain what support the organisation offers to gamblers experiencing problems;
- understanding which are the most used NESB languages, with a view to develop brochures in these languages;
- obtaining training from staff at the Melaleuca Australia how to provide culturally sensitive support to gamblers from NESB backgrounds;
- eventually helping gamblers at risk of problems from these communities.

By the time of the interview, the organisation has also given a presentation about their program for gamblers to the Salvation Army. Other organisations that could support Amity's efforts to better inform the community about their services include the Banyan House and COTA NT. Amity believe that education for the community is key and it is the driver behind reaching out to other community-based organisations and for having signed the MoU.

The same sentiment was expressed by some representatives of the counselling services in Alice Springs. Given the cultural and linguistic diversity there, they expressed the necessity for developing resources to help them with using culturally appropriate language and tools when working with their clients. The MoU which the Amity Community Services has signed in Darwin might be considered as a model for the counselling services in Alice Springs and for other organisations in Darwin and Palmerston.

Counsellors from other counselling services in Darwin shared anecdotal knowledge and personal observations made at the gambling venues (when they were outside of their work duties) that reveals that individuals from the new and rapidly growing communities originating from Southern and Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (including women) attend them. This is important because Amity interviewees also mentioned these groups in the context of potential future needs coupled with no current knowledge about them.

### **3.8 Measures to prevent harms from gambling**

Interview participants were asked what the Northern Territory Government and other agencies could do to minimise harms from gambling in the NESB communities. The discussions primarily focused on seeking opinions on preventative measures rather than on post-harm interventions.

Counselling service providers in Darwin and Alice Springs explained that they use or would use interpreters for their clients if the English language was an issue. The availability of this service should continue. Where needed, clients from NESB backgrounds were referred to addiction counselling or financial counselling as well. In Alice Springs it was observed in some cases that cultural obligations meant that male counsellors were preferred for male clients and vice-versa. Service providers in both locations discussed the importance of having information leaflets in a language that clients from NESB backgrounds can understand. Except one counselling service in Darwin, where their leaflets can be printed in a language other than English, all other interviewed service providers commented that leaflets and brochures are available in the English language only. They agreed that being able to offer brochures, leaflets and posters in the relevant languages would be most useful and would make a difference. One interviewee in Darwin suggested that it would be further valuable to have the screening questionnaire translated into foreign languages. Pictorial representations of responsible gambling and gambling harm-related information on leaflets was a suggestion made by a service provider in Alice Springs. They thought that for NESB clients who do not read English language well, a visual representation may help.

Creating awareness about and promoting responsible gambling and available support and services on social media platforms was another suggestion offered by many interviewees from the counselling services and community associations. The main reason is their ubiquitous use and popularity. The proposed solutions are:

- Use Facebook, Instagram and other social media to promote responsible gambling and explain where one can obtain help in native languages, or in English but with subtitles. For some communities, advertisements and posters around gambling in the English language are confronting and they are not getting noticed.
- Use youtube.com to record short movies to target the young audiences.
- Use Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) foreign language channels to place advertisements in the relevant languages. Some communities follow news from their home country on SBS. Leveraging the free availability of the services in community languages makes sense.
- Feature local community leaders and other member of the respective communities in TV and social media advertisements to put a familiar face(s) and use the native language in messages to address gambling-related shame, embarrassment and to promote help-seeking among NESB gamblers with problems. This measure could assist also the 'affected others'.

- Place advertisements about services to seek help for gambling-related problems in native languages on social media channels used by the NESB groups. The same products can be used on the NESB community websites in Darwin.
- Short movies addressing responsible gambling and the availability of help for gamblers with problems recorded by the community leaders in their native languages would help in getting the message across in culturally-appropriate ways.
- Leverage the existing cultural community websites to provide information that can be accessed privately.

To put the above comments in a context, it is noted that 2 North-East Asian community leaders did not have an opinion on what new measures could help prevent gambling, and the community leaders representing 2 Southern and Eastern European groups in Darwin were not convinced that translated information placed on social media and the TV would be effective (partially due to poor digital skills in the elderly to access it and for privacy reasons). However, another community leader representing one of North East Asian groups shared the view that using social media and TV were great ideas that would make people notice the messages.

Other proposed solutions included:

- The Northern Territory Government/Community Benefit Fund to fund and organise a workshop to educate community leaders about the services currently available for gambling-related problems for both the gamblers and the affected others.
- Establish and maintain a comprehensive, up-to-date Northern Territory Government website listing all counselling services, which community associations could then provide a link to on their community websites.
- Establish a local, confidential helpline for the NESB communities, where counsellors would be qualified to help with gambling-related problems and other issues in native languages. The focus on local is *key* because national helplines are not perceived as understanding the uniqueness of the Darwin/NT economy (e.g. limited economic opportunities when jobs are lost). While these national helpline counsellors may have empathy, they will often lack the understanding of the local conditions.
- Extend information about services available to address gambling-related problems to the general community. In some NESB groups the adult Australian-born children are best placed to encourage a parent to seek help.

Suggestions were also made to use community or institution-wide events such as the Harmony Day celebrations or events for students at CDU (for example the O-week) to slip in the packs a leaflet about the available support services for gambling-related problems. It was acknowledged that no one would read them immediately and out in the public, but people could do so in their private time and space.

The project participants in Alice Springs acknowledged efforts, that the Northern Territory Government put into addressing gambling harms among NESB communities. However, they also highlighted that because the Government gets money out of gambling, it was 'tricky' for the Government to do much in terms of regulation.

It needs to be noted that there is scope for the Northern Territory Government to improve communication with community leaders and possibly counselling organisations around activities that can be currently funded under the Community Benefit Fund Gambling Amelioration program. For example, some of them thought that new funding would need to be made available for the purposes of recording the short videos. However, there already exists a funding program for such purposes. One way to address this could be by adding specific examples of fundable activities. Similarly, clarity around funding the education workshop for community leaders mentioned above would be beneficial. Some community leaders thought that the NT Government could fund it, however, conversations with the Community Benefit Fund point to the Community Benefit Fund Gambling Amelioration program as a suitable funding stream for which community-based organisations are able to apply.

### 3.9 No problem gambling and protective factors

This project enabled the identification of NESB groups where no gambling-related problems were reported, or where rare incidents occurred in the past and were deemed non-problematic for the community at large. This section provides an overview of results obtained in the first phase of the interviews in Darwin, where the highest number of NESB community leaders was reached.

Leaders of the long-time established NESB groups in Darwin from North-West and Southern and Eastern Europe (which are numerically small) did not report any gambling-related problems within their communities. Leaders of the faith-based associations (Hindu, Islamic) and Africa-wide associations, where members represent various ethnic origins, did not report any gambling-related problems, either. Community leaders representing groups that are of Islamic faith did not report community-wide problems, though some were aware of past incidents involving individual members of their communities. They commented that gambling was a forbidden activity in Islam. Community leaders representing the Sub-Saharan African region did not report gambling-related problems in their communities citing religious reasons (in Islam gambling is forbidden and in Christianity sometimes perceived as a sin) and added that gambling was not part of the African cultures and that is looked down upon. That being said, some of them recalled single incidents from the past, where a community member experienced gambling-related problems. Other NESB groups in Darwin where gambling was not reported as causing community-wide problems originate from North Africa and the Middle East; North-East Asia; South-East Asia; Southern and Central Asia; and Oceania and Antarctica. The above suggests that the Sub-Saharan African and some Southern and Central Asian community members who were anecdotally reported gambling are either engaging in this activity for entertainment only, or the community leaders may not have a fully accurate knowledge. If the latter is the case, this would not be a sign of a lack of understanding of their own community; rather that some communities from these regions have more than one association each. Not all recently arrived immigrants may belong to an association also.

In addition to the religious reasons and community attitudes despising gambling, other reasons for not gambling or doing so in a controlled way that were brought up in interviews included:

- A sense of responsibility manifested through hard work, ensuring there is sufficient money to provide for the family including for children's education (sometimes also though remittances sent to the home country for education of children in the extended family there);
- Working hard and having no time to gamble;
- Focusing on settling well in Darwin to buy a car, buy and own a house;
- Perception that gambling is a waste of money;
- Not having sufficient funds to gamble (affordability);

- Not being part of community lifestyle and gambling being perceived as part of the Western culture;
- Community members look after their senior members well. As a result, seniors do not have a need to pass time elsewhere, for example at the Darwin casino.

Some NESB community leaders from North-East Asia and Southern and Eastern Europe who reported no gambling-related problems within their cultural communities noted that if there was an issue, then the affected people would usually not be discussing it for fear of social shame and being seen as weak (i.e. stigma).

## 4. Discussion

This scoping study explored the extent and impacts of gambling-related problems in NESB communities in the Northern Territory using Darwin and Alice Springs as data collection sites. It also explored strategies that NESB community leaders and representatives of counselling organisations see as useful mechanisms to reduce gambling-related harms in their communities in the future.

By far the most harmful form of gambling is playing the ‘pokie’ machines. This holds across all NESB groups where gambling-related problems affect the community. It holds for all age groups, both genders, labour force status, the level of education and the marital status. Playing card games for money at gambling venues and privately, betting on horses and other sports, playing lotteries and buying ‘scratchies’ were also often seen as addictive and harmful. While it was not conclusively explained that card games are the domain of one gender, horses and sports betting appear to be the domain of men. Lotteries and ‘scratchies’ seem to be preferred by women, in addition to playing the ‘pokie’ machines. There appears to be little known about the preferences for different forms of online gambling (excepting sports betting, which is usually done online) and their impacts on young people but the overall sense is that younger members of the NESB communities (and more often second generation migrants) engage in it more heavily. Other than online gambling and the senior community members who are lonely and experiencing gambling-related problems, in the working age populations it appears that the number of individuals who experience significant gambling problems is low (e.g. one or two people, sometimes around 10). These are estimates because some cultural/country of origin groups have more than one association. In this scoping study it was not possible to engage with each and every association.

### 4.1 Factors facilitating the development of gambling-related problems

While there are many factors that trigger gambling behaviours that are considered problematic, loneliness and boredom were identified as very important ones for the elderly people with minimal social contacts and the working age populations (in Alice Springs) for whom gambling is seen as an exciting pastime in a town with minimal entertainment options. In this context, a suggestion made by one of the Southern and Eastern European community leaders in Darwin to offer a greater number of culturally-appropriate, cheap or free activities to senior members makes sense as a way of reducing the incidence of their gambling-related problems. Future research should develop a repository of such ideas to share with all NESB community groups across the Territory.

Gambling being a popular form of entertainment in the evenings was also noted by one of the CDU international student associations, however, not in the context of gambling-related problems. It appears that for some international students as well as some newly immigrants, gambling represents a form of acculturation as they are in the process of negotiating home and the Australian cultures. They may engage in gambling also because of the lack of social and cultural controls from the countries of origin that would prohibit or not endorse it. For some of the recently settled migrants this is coupled with peer pressure, having an income and the settled immigrant status and for them it sometimes leads to developing gambling problems.

The cultural notions of ‘luck’ did not feature much in the interviews with the North-East Asian community leaders, in fact, ‘luck’ was mentioned once and was perceived as a weak driver of developing gambling-related problems. It appears that while gambling is undeniably part of some North-East Asian cultures, both low, no risk or high risk, gamblers usually will have ‘a budget’ and manage their expenses so that no one is in dire circumstances requiring immediate intervention. Given that providing for the family is an absolute economic and social priority, either families step in to assist a gambler experiencing problems, or their incomes are so high that gambling is budgeted for. Counselling services are well aware of the

gambling practices by gamblers from these communities, but they have not been approached by a single gambler with problems. However, the notion of 'luck' is one of the motivations contributing to developing gambling problems in some new and growing immigrant communities from South-East Asia.

Gambling-related problems also appear to be underpinned by high levels of stress at work; in some communities they may be a response to the loss of high social and economic status upon migration to Darwin. Gambling turns into problem gambling when the person does not know when it is time to stop, leading to addiction. This is often associated with unemployment, trying to raise funds to service lifestyle debts (for example a car or a mortgage, or other bills), optional spending (for example shopping or social outings), or 'simply', trying to recoup what the 'pokie' machines are believed to owe the gambler. It was noted that heavy 'pokie' machine players gamble until there have absolutely no money left in their pockets.

This study engaged with representatives of NESB community groups where gambling-related problems are not a community-wide issue or are believed to be non-existent. Reasons that were cited for this include faith (in Islam gambling is forbidden, in Christianity perceived as a sin); working hard, focusing on providing for the family (including through remittances) and ensuring that the settlement goes well; not having sufficient time and money left to gamble and a perception that gambling is a waste of money and part of the Western lifestyle that the communities in question do not acculturate to.

## 4.2 Impacts of gambling-related problems

In some cases, heavy gambling becomes a financial strategy and may involve borrowing money to sustain the gambling habit. It was widely agreed that the amounts of money that fuel high risk gambling depend on one's personal circumstances. They can be high for single high-income earners, several hundred dollars per night for the working age generation, and much less for retirees, up to one hundred dollars. What may be particularly harmful is gambling by people who receive Centrelink support. Families with children who are on Centrelink payments may have up to \$500.00 available per fortnight after the bills are paid and a portion of this may go to gambling. Future research might consider ways in which the gambling-related harm in the non-English speaking welfare recipients could be reduced by using culturally-appropriate strategies. This is important because in family settings there might be a risk of creating a pattern of disadvantage that could continue in the second generation.

The impact of gambling-related problems on NESB communities are wide-spread and affect the individuals concerned, their families, friends and the wider communities. Gamblers with problems may engage in gambling around 4 times per week, daily, or once per week. There is no rule that family or personal bills are paid first, and the remainder of the money is spent on gambling. Even within the same region of origin, for example Asia, some individuals will pay the bills first, but others will take their pay check and gamble on the same day before paying off their regular bills. Gamblers experiencing problems may not be as socially active in the community activities as non-gamblers. Arguments about money that occur at home cause stress, frustration and strain personal relationships. Single gamblers with problems suffer too when they forgo large sums of money and risk the ability to keep their personal assets, such as a car. The impact on families and friends other than what is discussed above was not elaborated on by the interviewees. However, the support and advice that they render out of their own will, or are asked for help by gamblers with problems, suggests that they as well may suffer from the effects of stress that their gambling relative or a close friend is experiencing. The community-wide impacts include rifts when gambling debts are unpaid, or when gossiping about an individual or their family takes place.

Another impact observed in the context of gambling-related problems by the elderly are the extreme saving strategies that they resort to. To ensure they have gambling funds they will buy cheap (e.g. low-quality food) and avoid contact with the private health system because they are unable to afford it. This is important because for the senior members of any community access to specialist care through the private health system is often sooner than the public health system and may be critical to longer-term good health.

### 4.3 Barriers to seeking help and preferred forms of help

Personal shame and social stigma, which are developed as a result of gambling-related problems were identified in the interviews as barriers to seeking help. They have the effect of delaying acknowledgement that one has a problem, leading gamblers with problems to falsely believing that they can deal with the addiction themselves, and, as discussed above, damaging relationships in the family and in the wider community.

Most NESB gamblers with problems strongly prefer informal community-based help, rather than assistance rendered by counselling services. Those who are approached for and offer informal support may include family members, very close friends, religious leaders and rarely community leaders. What drives any of these choices or acceptance of help is trust that the problem will remain confidential. The counselling organisations report seeing such low numbers of NESB clients that it is impossible to determine which communities may be over-represented from their point of view.

### 4.4. Role of the Northern Territory Government in minimising future gambling-related harms in NESB communities

First, given the role of community members in supporting gamblers experiencing problems, it is important for the Northern Territory Government to support initiatives that help NESB groups to access information they can use in their informal roles. Second, equally important is to implement strategies that can help the community groups, including new immigrant groups learn about formal counselling services and what they offer (e.g. professional, confidential support). This is important as mental health services may not be part of the health systems abroad from where they came from and the concept of using them may be 'foreign' to some cultural groups. However, at the same time, adjusting to life in Australia by negotiating the varied aspects of the home and Australian cultures may not be easy and gambling may become a damaging coping strategy. Culturally-sensitive messaging about the role of counselling services including for gambling should be prioritised.

Strategies that services could use to better meet the needs of NESB clients with gambling problems, such as access to free translating services are working well and should continue to be offered. One priority that is currently not addressed is the need to have leaflets, brochures and posters with information about responsible gambling and help-seeking translated into various NESB community languages. This observation from counselling services is supported by observations from NESB community leaders who shared that such information provided only in the English languages may be perceived as confronting, and such messages are simply not being noticed. However, a poster in a community language posted on a wall at a gambling venue would attract attention.

Community leaders are also keen to attend a training workshop, if offered by the Northern Territory Government, where they would like to be educated about the currently available services. This information will arm them with knowledge that they will be able to use when needed. Available and interested service providers operating in the counselling for gambling should also be invited to this workshop. This will create an opportunity for a two-way interaction, where the community leaders will learn what information is available as well as advise the counselling organisations and the Northern Territory Government (as the most likely funder of any initiatives) how information about support for gamblers with problems could be most appropriately conveyed.

Other recommendations made by community leaders include setting up a Darwin/Northern Territory multilingual help line to assist NESB communities access help for various mental help issues including for gambling-related problems. Many also spoke of a need for a comprehensive website with information about all available services for gambling-related problems gamblers that would be maintained by the Northern Territory Government.



Other measures on which most community leaders agreed included using social media, advertisements on TV, including on Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) in community languages, youtube.com and community websites to place advertisements and short videos talking about responsible gambling and the availability of help. Many community leaders are happy to be featured in short videos and address their communities in their native tongue, which would represent an important and collective contribution to improving the awareness and help-seeking behaviours of NESB communities. There is enthusiasm to be involved in such initiatives. Extending the range of the current grants program in the NT to enable recording such videos was proposed as one way in which this could happen. As noted already, the Community Benefit Fund Gambling Amelioration program is suitable for these purposes, which means that the Northern Territory Government should provide better information about its scope to the community-based organisations. Having said this, in practice, if a few applications for this purpose were made, the Northern Territory Government would need to be engaged closely (beyond simply disbursing the grants) to ensure that these videos carry a consistent message and the featured community leaders receive media training. The above means that although a funding mechanism exists and all it takes is initiative, there is a need to remain engaged with the stakeholders and attuned to their needs, including to provide information.

## 5. Conclusions

Despite recent, substantial increases in NESB populations in the Northern Territory, until now no systematic investigation has been undertaken about their gambling behaviours and gambling-related problems. This study fills this gap. It provides a baseline understanding of these as well as presents strategies recommended by the NESB community leaders and representatives of the counselling organisations that could minimize the harms and improve the well-being of the affected individuals, their families and the wider community. The participants in this study see the Northern Territory Government as the key stakeholder able to help them minimise gambling-related harms in the NESB communities through funding initiatives such as videos in native tongues, or through education for NESB community leaders. This research points to the need for the Northern Territory Government to improve the awareness and understanding of the funding guidelines among the community-based organisations as well as being an engaged partner rather than merely a provider of funds.

Overall, this study presents a complex picture. Some cultural groups originating from North-East Asia gamble as part of their lifestyle, but the habit appears to be under control and small numbers of people in these communities are believed to be experiencing gambling-related problems. There are however, gamblers with problems from some recently settled and growing immigrant groups from South-East Asia, who are driven by the notion of 'luck' and the desire to practice the Australian lifestyle where gambling is openly available. Some young temporary migrants such as international students are in the process of negotiating cultures and gambling is one of the freedoms that is unavailable in some countries of origin. Coupled with limited other entertainment options some of them will try their hand at gambling but not at the levels that would be considered harmful. There are other immigrant groups from North-East Asia, where according to their community leaders in Darwin gambling is not a pastime and not a way of life.

With the continued migration to the NT from South-East and Southern and Central Asian regions as well as from the Sub-Saharan Africa, it is advisable to focus future research efforts on understanding the attitudes towards gambling in the immigrant groups from these regions and their gambling behaviours, including any potential gambling-related problems. The counselling organisations do not have this knowledge, they rely on anecdotal information and observations made at gambling venues. What is important is to engage with both the long-term and recently settled communities as well as the temporary migrants such as international students, because the economic and social structures, as well as goals, may differ between these groups. In other words, focusing on a cultural group as an entity without distinguishing between different age groups, length of residence and legal status in Australia, might not provide an accurate picture. Replicating efforts such as the MoU between the Amity Community Services and Melaleuca Australia aimed at sharing knowledge and educating each other is a smart way forward for other stakeholders operating in the counselling space for gambling-related problems and other mental health services.

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# Appendix. Interview questions asked in the first and second phase of interviews

## First phase. Exploratory/scoping questions for leaders of cultural and religious associations and groups

1. Does gambling hold a place within your culture to give it special status or meaning?
2. Do you think gambling causes problems within your community/association members?
3. Would your association be interested in further participating in this study?

## First phase. Exploratory/scoping questions for counselling service providers

1. Does your organisation see people for gambling-related problems?
2. Do you collect demographic information including main language spoken at home or country of birth from your clients?
3. Are you aware of any NESB groups within your client base that may experience more gambling problems than others?
4. Do you have specific approaches or protocols for NESB clients?
5. Would your organisation be interested in further participating in this study?

## Second phase. Questions for leaders of cultural and religious associations and groups

### Impacts from gambling on community

1. Could you please describe how gambling affects your community?
2. Thinking about your community as a whole, what type of gambling is causing most problems?
3. Why this type (types) of gambling is (are) causing your community the most problems?

### Cultural motivations for gambling and individual gambling behaviour patterns

1. Can you please describe whether gambling holds a cultural significance in your community?
2. If yes, please describe how does it affect gambling behaviours in your community?
3. Can you please describe the main gambling activities that people do in your community?
  - *ask about type of activities,*
  - *where do they play (gambling locations)? [casino, clubs, pubs, private]*
  - *how often do they play?*
  - *how much money is spent?*
4. What do you think motivates people in your community to gamble?

5. Are there any differences that you are aware of by gender [i.e. do men and women gamble similarly] and occupation (working vs. not working) in your community? Ask about:

- *motivations*
- *types of gambling*
- *gambling causing most harm to these groups*

### Seeking help

1. Do members in your community seek help for gambling-related issues?
2. If yes, who or where do they seek help from? Probe for:
  - *partner, other family members*
  - *friends*
  - *work colleagues*
  - *community leaders*
  - *religious leaders*
  - *formal services (e.g., GPs, health services, counsellors, welfare services, financial counsellors, etc.)*
  - *self-help strategies*
  - *other, please explain.*
3. If no, what do you think are the barriers preventing them from seeking help for gambling-related issues?
4. What do you think could encourage your community members to seek help sooner?
5. What specific services do you think the Northern Territory Government (NTG) should provide to prevent harm from gambling in your community? In providing the response please think about:
  - *gamblers*
  - *the affected others*Ask about creating awareness (advertisements in print and social media, on TV, internet, posters, leaflets, etc.)
6. Other than the Northern Territory Government (NTG), who else do you think could provide information and support for people with gambling issues and their families in your community?

### Second phase. Questions for counselling service organisations

1. Who are the main NESB clientele who seek help for gambling-related issues? Ask about:
  - *main language spoken at home*
  - *country of birth or cultural ancestry*
  - *gender*
  - *age group*
  - *employment status (working vs. not working)*
  - *highest level of formal qualifications*
  - *family composition situation (only basic information, single, married, divorced, children; see ABS Census <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2901.0Chapter4502016>).*

2. What motivates NESB clients to seek help for their gambling-related issues?
3. What are the main kinds of gambling-related issues NESB clients seek help for? (e.g. financial, family violence, legacy debt)
4. Are there any NESB groups within your client base that experience more gambling problems than others? In your response, please consider:
  - *the number of people gambling*
  - *frequency of gambling*
  - *high amounts of \$ lost*
  - *other characteristics*
5. Do you have specific approaches or protocols you follow for NESB clients?
6. Do you provide other specific services to NESB clients for gambling-related issues? For example, language brochures, pamphlets.
7. Can you please describe barriers you think might prevent the NESB groups to seek help for gambling-related issues?
8. What do you think could encourage NESB groups to seek help sooner? How much do you think stigma is an issue?
9. Do you have ideas how the NESB communities could be better assisted in accessing gambling help services by the:
  - *Northern Territory Government*
  - *NGOs*
10. Do you have ideas how:
  - *Northern Territory Government*
  - *NGOs*could support the delivery of culturally appropriate services?







