

# Help on demand: a self-help app for gambling problems

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<b>Registration date</b> 25/10/2024	<b>Overall study status</b> Ongoing	<input type="checkbox"/> Protocol
<b>Last Edited</b> 22/10/2024	<b>Condition category</b> Mental and Behavioural Disorders	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan
		<input type="checkbox"/> Results
		<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data
		<input type="checkbox"/> Record updated in last year

## Plain English summary of protocol

### Background and study aims

This research study aims to test the effectiveness of a self-help smartphone app for gambling problems. The content of the app has been studied in other formats (e.g., paper-and-pencil workbook), but never as an app. To test how effective the app is at reducing gambling problems, this study will follow up with participants after 8 weeks of using the app, and also at 3, 6, and 12 months.

### Who can participate?

Canadian adults with ongoing gambling problems can participate if they own a smartphone and have access to the internet

### What does the study involve?

Eligible participants will complete a baseline assessment, use the app for 8 weeks, and complete a series of follow-up assessments at 8 weeks, 3, 6, and 12 months.

### What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Participants will be compensated after each follow-up survey is completed. Compensation will be provided via email with an electronic gift card valued at CAD \$20. Additionally, this study will help the researchers learn more about how to best help individuals with gambling problems. This is an opportunity for participants to influence the development of new technology-based gambling treatments. Participants may feel uncomfortable at times when asked questions of a personal nature, particularly about gambling behaviour and mental health. They may also experience boredom or fatigue when answering some of the questions.

### Where is the study run from?

The University of Calgary

### When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

July 2023 to May 2026

### Who is funding the study?

The Alberta Gambling Research Institute (AGRI)

Who is the main contact?  
Brad Brazeau (brad.brazeau@ucalgary.ca)

## Contact information

### Type(s)

Public, Scientific

### Contact name

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Principal investigator

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## Additional identifiers

### Clinical Trials Information System (CTIS)

Nil known

### ClinicalTrials.gov (NCT)

Nil known

### Protocol serial number

Nil known

# Study information

## Scientific Title

Help on demand: pilot testing of a personalized gambling self-help smartphone app

## Study objectives

1. Gamblers in the PA group will demonstrate greater subjective user engagement and objective user engagement compared to those in the SA group.
2. Subjective user engagement will be equally predictive of objective user engagement regardless of treatment group.
3. Objective user engagement will be equally predictive of gambling outcomes (i.e., expenditures, problem severity) regardless of treatment group.
4. Gamblers in the PA group will demonstrate greater reductions in expenditures and problem severity compared to those in the SA group. However, both groups will demonstrate meaningful reductions in those gambling outcomes.

## Ethics approval required

Ethics approval required

## Ethics approval(s)

approved 29/08/2024, University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) (Research Services Office, 2500 University Dr NW, Calgary, Alberta, T2N1N4, Canada; +1 403-220-4283; cfreb@ucalgary.ca), ref: REB24-0639

## Study design

Single-centre two-arm interventional pilot randomized controlled trial

## Primary study design

Interventional

## Study type(s)

Treatment

## Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Gambling disorder

## Interventions

This study will employ two treatment conditions: SA (static app) and PA (personalized app). Both groups will have access to the self-help app for 8 weeks.

Participants in the SA group (static app) will be provided access to a default version of the self-help app that does not permit any personalization. App content will be derived from extensive work in our lab developing effective paperback and website-based workbooks for gambling problems. Content is based on cognitive-behavioural and motivational enhancement principles and organized into four modules: self-assessment, goal selection, goal attainment, and goal

maintenance. Activities for the SA group are presented in buffet style upon enrolment without any recommended order or suggestion based on assessment data. All activities are repeatable. Daily check-ins will be prompted at the same time for all SA participants.

Participants in the PA group (personalized app) are provided access to a customizable version of the same self-help app. Upon opening the app for the first time, PA group members will be prompted to select a treatment goal (abstinence, moderation, maintenance) and given feedback based on their gambling problem severity as to whether their chosen goal is reasonable. They will also be prompted to customize the timing and frequency of daily check-in prompts. Activities will become available one at a time based on recommended order (in contrast to the buffet style of the PA group). Participants in the PA group will also receive a progress report at the end of treatment which compiles their responses within activities into a personal narrative.

Participants will be randomized in a 1:1 ratio to each of the two intervention groups (SA; PA), stratified by sex (male, female, other), gambling problem severity (low-moderate, high), and past treatment (yes, no), using the software MINIM (<https://www-users.york.ac.uk/~mb55/guide/minim.htm>).

## **Intervention Type**

Behavioural

## **Primary outcome(s)**

1. Objective user engagement is measured using the following usage data from the app: a) total time spent in the app; b) completion status of activities; and c) total number of app logins, after treatment completion at 8 weeks
2. Subjective user engagement is measured using the Mobile App Rating Scale - User Version (uMARS) at treatment completion at 8 weeks

## **Key secondary outcome(s)**

The following secondary outcome measures are assessed at baseline, 8 weeks, and 3, 6, and 12 months:

1. Past month gambling expenditures measured using retrospective self-report
2. Gambling problem severity measured using the the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) Diagnostic Screen for DSM-5 Gambling Disorder (NODS-GD)
3. General psychological distress measured using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K-10)
4. Anxiety symptoms measured using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7)
5. Depression symptoms measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)
6. Alcohol use measured using the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test - Consumption questions (AUDIT-C)
7. Cannabis use measured using the Cannabis Use Disorders Identification Test (CUDIT)

## **Completion date**

31/05/2026

## **Eligibility**

### **Key inclusion criteria**

1. 18 years of age or older at the point of enrolment
2. Currently residing in Canada
3. Not currently receiving professional treatment for gambling problems
4. Gambled at least once in the past month

5. Currently has at least a moderate gambling problem (as determined by eligibility screening questionnaire)

**Participant type(s)**

Other

**Healthy volunteers allowed**

No

**Age group**

Adult

**Lower age limit**

18 years

**Sex**

All

**Key exclusion criteria**

1. Does not own an Apple or Android smartphone (and therefore cannot download the app)
2. Does not have access to the internet

**Date of first enrolment**

16/09/2024

**Date of final enrolment**

30/04/2025

## **Locations**

**Countries of recruitment**

Canada

**Study participating centre**

**University of Calgary**  
2500 University Dr NW  
Calgary, Alberta  
Canada  
T2N1N4

## **Sponsor information**

**Organisation**

University of Calgary

ROR

<https://ror.org/03yjb2x39>

## Funder(s)

### Funder type

Research organisation

### Funder Name

Alberta Gambling Research Institute, University of Calgary

### Alternative Name(s)

Alberta Gambling Research Institute, Alberta Gambling Research Institute, UCalgary, Alberta Gambling Research Institute - Research at UCalgary, AGRI

### Funding Body Type

Government organisation

### Funding Body Subtype

Research institutes and centers

### Location

Canada

## Results and Publications

### Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study will be available upon request from Brad Brazeau ([brad.brazeau@ucalgary.ca](mailto:brad.brazeau@ucalgary.ca)). All anonymized data will be available upon request after the study has been completed and results have been published, but identifying information will not be released. Data will be available to request for as long as the data is retained, but the timeframe for retention of anonymized data is currently unspecified. The data generated from this study will be the property of the Addictive Behaviours Laboratory. If other researchers wish to request the anonymized data for secondary analyses, they will be asked to provide a one-page summary of the rationale, analytic plan, and significance of the secondary data analyses. This summary will be evaluated by the investigators on the research team. If approved, researchers who wish to conduct secondary analyses will be asked to acknowledge the research team who collected the data as well as the funding source in any resulting publications or presentations.

### IPD sharing plan summary

Available on request