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Opportunistic recruitment for gambling self-help

Submission date
09/04/2026

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
10/04/2026

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
10/04/2026

Condition category
Mental and Behavioural Disorders

[ ] Prospectively registered
[ ] Protocol
[ ] Statistical analysis plan
[ ] Results
[ ] Individual participant data
[X] 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 offered to individuals who report high risk gambling in a survey of gambling correlates. The content of the app has been studied previously in other formats (e.g., paper-and-pencil workbook), and a RCT is underway with a social media-recruited sample (https://www.isrctn.com/ISRCTN10990330). Two versions of the same app were developed for that study (a static version and a personalized version); the effectiveness of each will be compared in the present study via follow-ups at 6 and 12 months.

Who can participate?
This study uses a novel recruitment process, targeting adults who are already participating in an online study of gambling and who report gambling more than recommended in Canada's lower risk gambling guidelines (https://gamblingguidelines.ca).

What does the study involve?
Eligible respondents will be invited to access an app to help reduce gambling problems. Characteristics of those reporting interest in the app versus those who do not show interest will be compared.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Benefits and risks not provided at time of registration

Where is the study run from?
Alberta Gambling Research Institute, University of Calgary, Canada.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
February 2025 to April 2026.

Who is funding the study?
Alberta Gambling Research Institute, University of Calgary, Canada.

Who is the main contact?
Prof David C. Hodgins, dhodgins@ucalgary.ca

Contact information

Type(s)
Principal investigator, Scientific, Public

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Study information

Scientific Title
Gambling help on demand: ANP2 recruitment

Acronym
HOD-ANP2

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.

5. The demographic and clinical characteristics of people who indicate an interest in the app versus those who do not will be compared. Interest rates will also be compared between those who randomly received feedback that their gambling reports exceeded the lower risk guidelines and those who did not receive feedback.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 03/03/2025, University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) (2500 University Dr NW, Calgary, T2N1N4, Canada; +1 403-220-4283; CFREB@ucalgary.ca), ref: REB25-0027

Primary study design
Interventional

Allocation
Randomized controlled trial

Masking
Blinded (masking used)

Control
Active

Assignment
Parallel

Purpose
Health services research, Treatment

Study type(s)

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
High Risk Gambling

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 16 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 SA 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 recruited from participants in a national online panel sample of individuals who gamble at least monthly (N= 12,000). Of individuals who exceed one or more of the lower risk gambling guidelines, 3670 will be asked, at the end of the survey, whether they are interested in accessing an app to help reduce gambling problems. Half of these individuals will have received (randomly) feedback that their gambling reports exceed the lower risk guidelines. Participants who agree and provide consent (including an email address) will be randomized in a 1:1 ratio to each of the two intervention groups (SA; PA). It is expected that about 800 will consent.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
1. subjective engagement measured using TWEETS instrument at 16 weeks

2. Objective Engagement measured using usage data from the app: a) time spent on intervention activities, and b) completion status of activities, after treatment completion ; at 16 weeks

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. past month gambling expenditure measured using self-report at 4,6, and 12 months

2. Past month gambling frequency measured using self-report at 4, 6, and 12 months

3. Gambling problem severity measured using the DSM-5 Gambling Disorder (NODS-GD) at 4, 6, and 12 months

4. General distress measured using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) at 4, 6, and 12 months

Completion date
30/04/2026

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Participants in ANP-2 online panel. Inclusion in ANP-2 was 18 years of age or older at the point of enrolment and currently residing in Canada
2. Exceed one or more lower risk gambling guidelines
3. Accepted invitation to participate, and provide active email contact.

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group
Mixed

Lower age limit
18 Years

Upper age limit
100 Years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
818

Key exclusion criteria
Does not own an Apple or Android smartphone (and therefore cannot download the app)

Date of first enrolment
01/02/2025

Date of final enrolment
30/03/2025

Locations

Countries of recruitment
Canada

Study participating centre
University of Calgary
Canada

Sponsor information

Organisation
Alberta Gambling Research Institute

ROR
https://ror.org/030ykd126

Funder(s)

Funder type

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
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

IPD sharing plan summary
Available on request