

# KNOWLEDGE IMPACT

Seeking solutions to problem gambling in a primary care organization focused on health equity

## background

Sometimes the most important issues patients need to talk about are the ones their healthcare providers are not asking them about. Primary healthcare clinicians, from family physicians to other allied healthcare providers, play an important role in starting conversations with patients that encourage them to talk about important issues that they may otherwise be reluctant or hesitant to bring up. Unlike alcohol and substance abuse, primary care clinicians tend to be less aware about gambling as an addiction, and consequently, are less comfortable broaching these important conversations.

The Centre for Urban Health Solutions (C-UHS) partnered with the St. Michael's Academic Family Health Team to gather baseline information on how (and how often) patient-provider discussions around gambling were occurring in appointments, how this information was being captured in the Electronic Medical Record (EMR), and what knowledge clinicians had about problem gambling.

Dr. Flora Matheson, a researcher at the C-UHS, described how:

Problem gambling is a hidden problem, especially for people experiencing poverty and homelessness. St. Michael's Hospital reaches out to the community to care for disadvantaged populations. We wanted to know if physicians and allied health professionals at the hospital's family health team were recording problem gambling in the electronic medical record (EMR), if and how they were diagnosing problem

gambling, and if they were charting problem gambling, where in the EMR this was being recorded.

## *need to know*

- There is low awareness about problem gambling in primary care settings, especially in the case of individuals facing poverty
- Electronic medical records (EMR) capture patient-provider conversations about -- and screening for -- problem gambling
- EMR data, coupled with healthcare provider survey results, are currently being used to determine what opportunities there are to improve awareness (screening and referral) for problem gambling in primary care settings



## project overview

---

### THIS PROJECT CONSISTS OF THREE MAIN COMPONENTS:

- An online survey administered to family physicians and allied healthcare providers within the family health team to: 1) determine how providers document gambling in the EMR; 2) increase knowledge and awareness of problem gambling (PG) by including educational information; and 3) assess whether providing this information improved the primary care provider's understanding of PG as a health issue and changed their view of PG in practice.
- A chart review of patients with recorded instances of gambling to determine which social determinants of health are associated with gambling, so that vulnerable subgroups can be identified and interventions can be tailored accordingly
- Collaborative review of the project findings with the family health team's healthcare provider team in order to determine how to develop a quality improvement strategy within the family health team to enhance screening, identification, and treatment referrals for problem gamblers

*Note: this project is currently still underway at the time of print.*

## project impact

---

To date, the project has been “an opportunity to begin conversations about problem gambling with the family health team” which has proven invaluable as “it's important to educate physicians and allied health professionals about problem gambling since they represent the first point of contact within the primary health care system.” Initial findings have shown that very few patients are asked about problem gambling, and screening tools previously embedded into the EMR have not been used.

## moving forward

---

The Centre for Urban Health solutions will be presenting the findings to the family health team in the fall of 2017. These findings are expected to generate conversations about which quality improvement initiatives can be implemented in the family health team to enhance both awareness and screening of problem gambling, particularly among vulnerable populations. Additionally, the team at C-UHS is currently interviewing clinicians to understand how curriculum is developed for medical students. This knowledge will be used to identify upstream approaches to improving support for problem gambling in primary care settings across Ontario.

## project contributors

---

This project was an exciting partnership between the Centre for Urban Health Solutions (C-UHS), the St. Michael's Academic Family Health Team, and Gambling Research Exchange Ontario. To learn more about C-UHS, visit <http://stmichaelshospitalresearch.ca/research-programs/urban-health-solutions/>. To learn St. Michael's Academic Family Health Team, visit <http://www.stmichaelshospital.com/programs/familypractice/>.

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO) is an independent knowledge translation and exchange (KTE) organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Learn more about GREO by visiting [greo.ca](http://greo.ca) or emailing [info@greo.ca](mailto:info@greo.ca).

### St. Michael's

Inspired Care.  
Inspiring Science.

Centre for Urban  
Health Solutions



GAMBLING RESEARCH  
EXCHANGE ONTARIO  
DRIVING KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION

To receive the full project report, please e-mail Lindsay Kalbfleisch at [lindsay@greo.ca](mailto:lindsay@greo.ca)