

Australian gamblers spend big online - but it's risky

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Australians are spending around \$1 billion annually on illegal offshore gambling sites, yet with few regulations in place they are leaving themselves open to identity fraud, being ripped off or developing gambling problems.

Southern Cross University and the University of Sydney have launched the second phase of a [national online survey](#) looking at interactive forms of [gambling](#) technology. Interactive gambling technologies include using computers, mobile phones, wireless devices and smart televisions to access online gambling sites.

"Gaining a full understanding of the extent, characteristics and patterns of involvement of internet users will assist in guiding the development of policies designed to protect recreational players and those at risk of developing problems," said Professor Alex Blaszczynski from the School of Psychology at the University of Sydney.

"Research shows online gambling can be risky, but that the best way to protect players is to provide a regulated environment that has harm minimisation and responsible gambling features and tools in place," said Dr Sally Gainsbury, lead researcher, from Southern Cross University's Centre for Gambling Education and Research.

The federal government's interim review of the 2001 Interactive Gaming Act, released this week, contained 30 recommendations to strengthen consumer rights and stop harmful online gaming practices. One of the

recommendations was to legalise online poker.

"Legalising online poker is consistent with the Productivity Commission's recommendation and in this context is aimed at allowing access to popular but less risky forms of gambling compared to other types of gambling that allow high frequency play," Professor Blaszczynski said.

"Overall, the recommendations of the Act will go a long way towards harm minimisation and consumer protection."

Internet gambling has changed significantly in the past decade, with more and more [Australians](#) using illegal offshore gambling sites. The constant access of online gambling has critical social implications, particularly given its appeal to younger people, Dr Gainsbury observed.

Overseas sites may not have strong consumer protections or responsible gambling measures, meaning that Australians are vulnerable to being cheated, having their identity or financial details stolen or developing gambling problems.

The internet gambling survey aims to recruit a large, representative sample of Australian gamblers to further the understanding of the impact of internet gambling, including the contribution to gambling problems.

Gambling Research Australia, an initiative of the federal, state and territory governments, has commissioned the survey, which is part of a larger research grant awarded to the Centre for Gambling Education and Research valued at over \$900,000.

The research, which will be completed in 2013, also includes a national prevalence survey, as well as interviews and focus groups.

The [results of the first phase of the research](#), funded by the Menzies Foundation through an Allied Health grant to Dr Gainsbury and released in January this year, found internet gamblers were more involved in multiple types of gambling and had significantly more positive attitudes towards gambling generally.

The survey team is also comprised of the University of Lethbridge's Dr Robert Wood and Professor Dan Lubman from Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, a major Australian telephone and online gambling help provider.

Provided by University of Sydney

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