



Government addicted to gambling: Study

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By Marlo Cameron

Gaming could be a virtue for money-hungry governments, but it's turning into an addiction with dangerous consequences, says an advocacy group.

A report by the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada also suggests that gambling profits should be put toward deficit and debt elimination and the government needs to research the effects of gambling when considering new locations.

"We recommend that governments, not just Ontario, but provincial governments across Canada would take the money they get in terms of gambling profits -- in Ontario that's \$2 billion this year -- they would take that money and use it strictly to pay down debt," said Derek Miedema, researcher with the institute.

This report comes on the heels of an OLG announcement Monday of plans to expand gaming in Ontario.

Miedema said like human gambling addicts, governments hide the damage, protect their monopoly and can't quit.

He calculates current spending habits cost the average Canadian adult \$534 on top of taxes.

EXPAND RESEARCH

Miedema's report also urges governments to better research the effects of gambling when expanding.

"It has all sorts of consequences, not just for the gambler themselves, but for families and co-workers," he said.

Miedema said that the number of gambling addicts is fairly small, but each addict affects five to 10 people.

"And that blows it up into the real scope of the problem being quite huge, actually."

Miedema does acknowledge that some profits go toward funding for government services, but argues that the government could afford to do more.

In Ontario, 6.6% of the almost \$2 billion revenue from 2010 went toward charities and non-profits, with only 2.2% being used to fund gambling addiction research and treatment.

"From a financial perspective, if the City of Ottawa is able to have a stable profit-sharing agreement with the OLG, then there would be a financial benefit," he said.

"But the real cost, and where the lack of research lies, is where they would receive more money than what they're paying out to deal with the negative outcomes."

1912 – 130 rue Albert Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 5G4

T 613.565.3832 f 613.565.3803 1.866.373.4632

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