



CENTRE FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF
BEST PRACTICES

INSIGHT

A Framework for VLT Safeguards in Canadian Hospitality Settings

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Executive Summary

In the past two decades, there has been a considerable increase in our understanding of responsible gambling (RG) policies, strategies, and safeguards for players in different gambling settings. The preponderance of the 'best practices' research and analysis, however, has been focused on gambling venues such as casinos and, more recently, online gambling. RG programs and player supports in hospitality establishments such as bars, lounges and restaurants have received less attention. This report is intended to be one contribution towards closing that gap.

Key Policy Considerations

From Segregation to Integration

For many years VLT policies and programs have been emerging from a time when professional opinion and 'responsible gambling' programs were largely based on keeping VLT gambling out of sight, less attractive. Sites were often expected to create walls to segregate VLT play. But, as later discussion will elaborate, however well meant, this strategy tends to exacerbate rather than mitigate gambling problems. It makes VLT play less attractive to those who do not have gambling problems. It fits many of the self-destructive inclinations of high-risk players - anonymity, isolation, dissociation and, as a result, stigma.

The policies and programs proposed in this updated model of RG for hospitality sites are based on the view that VLT play ought to be better integrated into sites rather than segregated. This model is also based on the view that players in VLT sites should be assured of robust player protections.

Since RG programs in hospitality settings can't reasonably mirror the full range of safeguards in casinos, it is important to make optimal use of the RG programs that do fit with these types of gambling settings, i.e. player communications, machine-based safeguards, and staff training.

Reinforcing the Social Aspects of Hospitality Gambling

It is clear from this Insight project and the literature that a distinguishing feature of hospitality gambling is the local socialization element. This is not unlike the tradition of the British "local", the bar close to home where friends and neighbours gather. There is some research evidence that they can also play a role in strengthen local social ties. Staff in these settings often develop friendly, familiar relationships with their patrons.

This local and familiar role of bars, lounges and other types of VLT sites can serve as a strong base for the further development of RG policy for non-casino gambling. The question is: how can the policy framework for RG help reflect and reinforce the social aspects of hospitality gambling while, at the same time, curbing problematic gambling?

Like most 'responsible gambling' policies and programs, the safeguards for hospitality settings are designed to enhance the entertainment value of gambling while promoting safe play practices. That means:

- Providing accurate and timely information about:
 - o How games work

- o The realistic chances of winning and losing
- o Ways to gamble safer
- o Available help for anyone with a gambling problem
- o Gambling myths and misconceptions
- Encouraging players to take breaks
- Providing players with up-to-date tools to help manage their play
- Responding appropriately to players in distress or exhibiting 'red flag' behaviours.

Enhancing Player Protections

It seems fundamentally fair that if the risk to players is similar to casino and online gambling, the safeguards set in place in hospitality-based gambling should be equally robust. But, robust does not mean identical.

It is important to acknowledge that VLT safeguards have been improved in many ways in recent years (see summary p. 11/12). This report proposes a number of further enhancements which would assure VLT gamblers of a set of safeguards that are as robust as those in casinos and online gambling. In addition to the policy changes related to greater integration of the VLTs in hospitality environment, this Insight report proposes measures to strengthen staff training and enhanced player education and play management tools.

Site Owner Roles and Responsibilities

It is clear that the provincial gaming authorities have taken the lead in RG policy and program development. It is often unclear about the scope of the role and expectations of the site owners with regard to player protections.

In recent years provincial gaming authorities have tended to take on virtually complete responsibility for player safeguards based on the fact that the provinces do not run the hospitality sites directly. It is not possible, however, to assure players of the level of safeguards they deserve without greater engagement of the site holders. When a hospitality site applies to have VLTs, does that approval come with expectations that the owner will take some level of responsibility for the wellbeing of the players, their customers? The model proposed in this report looks to a stronger engagement of site holders in supporting their customers, many of whom have moderate to severe gambling problems.

Levels of Safeguards Appropriate to the Size of the Venue and Prizes

Not all VLT sites are the same. While most are relatively small settings with few machines integrated into the establishments, some are larger, more dedicated to gambling. Yet, in most cases, the policies and practices of the smaller sites are the same as those of larger ones.

It seems appropriate for provincial policy makers to ensure that RG safeguards, i.e. policies and programs, are commensurate with the intensity and scope of the gambling in those venues and that the distinctions between VLT sites and casinos is clearly established. More specifically that means that the more the sites is geared to gambling the greater the safeguards set in place.

Introduction

In the past two decades, there has been a considerable increase in our understanding of responsible gambling (RG) policies, strategies, and safeguards for players in different gambling settings. The preponderance of the 'best practices' research and analysis, however, has been focused on gambling venues such as casinos and, more recently, online gambling sites. RG programs and player supports in hospitality establishments such as bars, lounges and restaurants have received far less attention. This report is intended to be one contribution towards closing that gap.

The report provides an up-to-date picture of VLT gambling, as well as the RG policies, player safeguards, and resources currently in place across Canada¹. The report offers a series of recommendations which constitute a framework of best practice safeguards specific to VLT play in hospitality settings.

The data gathered for this report includes:

1. An examination of research documents, operating information, and the empirical literature;
2. A review of current RG provisions for VLTs in hospitality settings across Canada and Australia;²
3. Surveys and focus groups with VLT players;³ and
4. Interviews with gaming operators.⁴

This report was made possible through the financial support of the *Atlantic Lottery Corporation*, the *British Columbia Lottery Corporation*, *Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries*, the *Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation*, the *Alberta Liquor and Gaming Commission*, the *Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority* and the *Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation*.

The RGC appreciates the support of the above organizations in contributing their experience, perspectives, and funding of this Insight project, but assumes sole responsibility for its analysis and conclusions.

¹ There are many local and regional variations to the general picture. We have tried to capture many of the atypical situations but have not captured every one.

² The Australian States have extensive gambling in hospitality settings and have evolved several state-wide RG policies and practice frameworks specific to clubs and hotels.

³ In the summer of 2017, RGC conducted an online survey of 987 VLT players in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador. All players were asked about decision-making; gambling history and behaviour; gambling environments; gambling preferences, motivations and experiences; and RG behaviour, awareness and attitudes. The detailed results from these surveys is available in the companion document, *Preventing Harm and Improving Player Supports in Video Lottery Terminals and Keno*.

⁴ 7 interviews were conducted with 12 gaming officials.

VLT Gambling in Hospitality Settings

Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs)

VLTs are electronic gaming machines (EGMs) that offer a variety of games, including traditional line games as well as poker, Keno and other video-style games. Unlike slot machines, which are also EGMs, VLTs tend to be more widely dispersed in the community (i.e., in bars, lounges, etc.), while slots tend to be located in larger gaming venues such as casinos (Canadian Partnership for Responsible Gambling, 2015). While there are exceptions, VLTs usually have smaller jackpots. Unlike slot machines, VLTs are typically linked to a centrally located server that gathers information about the machines for financial accounting, downloading games, etc. The systems currently do not have the capacity to gather individual, or RG-related, play information.

Hospitality Settings

For purposes of the present report, the term *hospitality setting* refers to venues where gambling is a relatively smaller entertainment option within a larger establishment. Unlike dedicated gaming venues such as casinos or bingo halls where the main attraction is gambling, the main feature of hospitality settings is usually socialization with alcohol service and/or dining. They are typically liquor-licensed venues such as bars, lounges, restaurants, and similar establishments. While most venues are entirely age restricted (e.g., bars), others allow minors in the non-gaming areas (e.g., restaurants), and/or the gaming areas at certain times of day (Atlantic Provinces).

It is important to note that, while specific management arrangements vary, the provincial governments across the country own all the VLTs in the network and operate the central computers, the core of the network. While provincial authorities have direct responsibility for the machines, they do not run the premises where the machines are located. Thus, while provincial gaming authorities decide whether or not hospitality sites have machines or not, they have less authority over the operations of the site itself. In the case of casinos, provincial policy makers can set out requirements for all aspects of the gaming venue. In VLT sites the provincial authority is much more tied to the placement and operations of the machines themselves.

There tends to be two main categories of hospitality establishments: 1) Those with relatively few machines (e.g., 5 or 6) that are usually in an open setting, and 2) those with a larger number of machines (e.g., 15 to 40) that are usually, but not always, in a separate room. In many jurisdictions, these venues with larger concentrations of VLTs are categorized differently than other VLT establishments. For example, in Alberta, they are referred to as *Gaming Entertainment Centres* (GECs), while in New Brunswick they are categorized under the brand name, *Coasters*.

Availability of VLT Gambling in Canadian Hospitality Venues

VLTs were first introduced in Canada in the early 1990s, starting with New Brunswick, and then other provinces soon after. They were introduced as a means of stimulating economic development, reducing illegal gambling activities, and generating non-tax government revenue in age-controlled establishments other than casinos (HLT Advisory 2006).

Today, VLTs are widely available across the country – all provinces except British Columbia and Ontario offer this form of gambling. As shown in Table 1, Quebec has the greatest number of hospitality venues with VLTs (1,735), followed by Alberta (854).

Table 1. Availability of VLT Gambling in Canadian Hospitality Venues

Province	VLTs	VLT Venues
British Columbia	0	0
Alberta	5,992	854
Saskatchewan	4,200	578
Manitoba	6,349	479
Ontario	0	0
Quebec	10,837	1,735
Atlantic Canada		
New Brunswick	2,000	219
Nova Scotia	2,694	323
Prince Edward Island	280	37
Newfoundland and Labrador	1,896	389

Note: In Manitoba, there are an additional 140 VLTs at one racetrack; in Quebec, there are an additional 163 VLTs at 2 gaming halls. Number of VLTs and VLT sites in Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia include those on First Nations reserves.
Source: Canadian Partnership for Responsible Gambling (2016/17).

Patron and Staff Views of VLT Gambling in Hospitality Venues

Patron Perceptions

As discussed earlier in this chapter, there are some notable differences between hospitality settings and other types of gambling venues such as casinos. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, evidence gathered through the player survey for this project, as well as other research, suggests that patrons of hospitality settings view gambling at these venues quite differently as well. For example, compared to casinos or bingo halls that are considered primarily as destinations for *gambling*, patrons view bars and other hospitality settings as more familiar, *social* environments – closer-to-home places to go with friends. Indeed, participants in the present study most commonly reported playing VLTs socially, with friends or family. Regular players also reported developing friendships with employees and, thus, viewed staff more positively than in larger venues.

The perception of hospitality venues as social environments is supported by some research demonstrating that VLT gambling can provide a forum for social interaction and reinforce local ties. For example, based on observation and interviews conducted in bars over a five-year period in a small town in Newfoundland and Labrador, Davis (2006) noted that VLT gambling reflected an expression of solidarity with the community.

One of the observations emerging from the largely qualitative evidence base in the literature is that local gambling can have positive effects on the reinforcement of social ties within communities. Games can be part of positive social environments when positioned as supplementary to more valuable opportunities for social interaction.

Staff Perceptions

Similar to patrons of hospitality settings, staff who work at these venues do not view them as primarily for gambling. In a 2012 study conducted in Alberta by RGC, retailers, and staff quite often expressed interest in the well-being of their customers and were open to further guidance regarding RG.

The Need for VLT Safeguards

While patrons, staff, and owners of hospitality settings don't see these establishments as *primarily* for gambling, the fact remains that gambling in these settings is still *gambling*. As a result, it still carries with it some level of risk. While the risk of problem gambling in hospitality settings is comparable to that of casinos and online gambling, the level of RG *safeguards* is often not comparable. Since provincial gaming authorities do not have comprehensive responsibility for the premises of VLT sites, hospitality settings do not have self-exclusion, nor are most hospitality venues configured for closely managed access, facial recognition technology or optimal ATM placement. Moreover, if owners of hospitality establishments don't see themselves primarily as gaming providers they are less motivated to commit to more player safeguards. Hospitality providers are also less likely to have resources to allocate to these initiatives.

VLTs and Links to Problem Gambling

EGM Related Risks

It has long been understood that VLTs have strong links to problem gambling – a finding strongly supported by a recent meta-analysis of Canadian data which found that the risk of gambling problems is highest among those who play VLTs, compared to those who engage in other forms of betting (MacLaren, 2016). Also consistent with this finding and other research, the survey conducted for the present study found a relatively high risk of gambling problems among the VLT players examined. According to the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), moderate and high-risk gamblers made up nearly 30% of the sample (n=284), while high-risk gamblers alone made up nearly 13%. This high proportion of risky gambling in this study is consistent with previous research (Afifi, Cox, Martens, Sareen, & Enns, 2016; MacLaren, 2016; MQO Research, 2014).

As to the specific features of VLT gambling that might elevate problem gambling risk, research has consistently shown that certain characteristics of VLTs facilitate game absorption and sustained flow states. In turn, these can increase risk of gambling harm, especially for those who are most susceptible to uncontrolled gambling behavior.⁵ These characteristics include rapid and continuous game speeds, frequent payout intervals of low amounts, multi-line betting options, and engaging lights and sounds.

⁵ States of play where one feels in “the zone,” external stimuli are less perceptible, and the awareness of time may be reduced.

Access Related Risks

Compounding the risks associated with the inherent game features of VLTs is access to these forms of gambling. It is clear from a large body of research that this is a contributing factor to gambling problems: the easier the access, the greater the likelihood of problems. Thus, ease of access is an important consideration in hospitality settings, since they are deliberately located to cater to local customers.

From the literature, it is clear that the motivation among players for more frequent visitation, as well as time and money spent playing, are related to characteristics of the machines and games. It is also connected to the appeal of local environments that may be seen as welcoming, private oases where individuals can go to pass the time and interact socially.

Among VLT players surveyed for the present report, the travel time to visit one's regular venue was most commonly less than 10 minutes. When PGSI status was analyzed as a function of travel time, results revealed that those whose travel time was 5 to 10 minutes had a 58% increased probability of being a *high-risk* gambler.

Besides proximity to the gaming venue, another access-related consideration for hospitality gambling is the type of neighborhood the venues are in. VLTs, for instance, are often disproportionately situated in lower socio-economic areas (Gilliland & Ross, 2005). Similar to other research, the present study also found that VLT licensing in bars was higher in poorer neighborhoods than in more affluent ones.

Current VLT Safeguards in Canadian Hospitality Settings

The research conducted for this Insight project found that provincial governments that permit hospitality-based gambling have established a range of player safeguards for these venues. The research includes a review of available policy documents, as well as information gathered from interviews conducted with gaming providers across the country. Table 2 below summarizes the current safeguards in place in Canada.

Table 2. Current VLT Safeguards in Canadian Hospitality Settings⁶

	AB	SK	MB	QC	NS	ATL
Advertising & Promotion						
VLTs cannot be advertised/promoted inside venue	-	-	-	-	-	-
VLTs cannot be advertised/promoted outside venue	-	-	-	-	✓	Varies
Assisting Patrons						
Staff trained to respond to questions/concerns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Staff trained to ID/respond to red flag behavior	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Game Features						
Account-based play	-	✓	-	-	-	✓
Automatic cash-outs (after set amount of time or money spent)	Time / \$	Time / \$	Time	Time	Time / \$	Time / \$
Mandatory limit setting (time and/or money)	Time	Time	Time	Time	-	-
Mandatory time outs/breaks in play	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maximum bet per spin	\$5.00	\$4.00	\$2.50	\$2.50	\$2.50	\$2.50
Maximum preload/cash-in	\$100	\$100	\$60	\$100	\$60	\$60
Maximum jackpot	\$2,500	1.5M	\$2,500	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000 in PE \$500 in NB & NL
Money shown in cash (or cash and credit)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Player can track time and/or money expenditures	-	Time/ \$	Time/ \$	✓	-	Time/ \$
Progressive/linked jackpots	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Stop button prohibited	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Informed Decision Making						
Game-based information						
All screens (e.g., clocks, helpline number)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cash-out tickets	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
On-screen button with menu of information	1.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pop-ups/scrolling messages	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Venue-based information						
Brochures, flyers	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓
On-site awareness events	-	-	-	-	Varies	-
Posters, digital displays	✓	-	-	✓	✓	✓
RG Policies, Strategies, Codes of Conduct						
There's a written RG Policy/Code of Conduct/Strategy for VLTs	-	-	✓	✓	-	✓
Self-exclusion						
Self-exclusion available	-	-	-	-	-	-
Staff Training						
RG training mandatory for managers/owners	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
RG training mandatory for customer-facing VLT staff	✓	-	✓	-	-	-
In-person training available	-	-	-	-	-	-
Online training available	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Frequency of re-certification/refreshers	5 years	5 years	5 years	-	2 years	2 years
Venue Features						
At least one RG trained employee must be on duty at all times	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-
ATMs must be certain distance from VLTs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cheque-cashing prohibited	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Offering credit prohibited	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

⁶ Table 2 excludes VLTs on First Nations sites

Gambling while visibly intoxicated prohibited	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
VLTs prohibited from operating 24 hours per day	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
VLTs prohibited from being visible outside venue	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓
Age-restricted venues (minors not allowed anywhere)						
Gaming area must be segregated	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gaming area must not be segregated	-	-	-	✓	-	-
Non-age-restricted venues (minors allowed in some areas)						
Gaming area must be segregated	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

NOTE: ATL refers to the four Atlantic Provinces. P = Planned in the near future

A Framework for RG Safeguards in Hospitality Venues

RG Policies & Strategies

Key Policy Considerations

From Segregation to Integration

For many years VLT policies and programs have been emerging from a time when professional opinion and 'responsible gambling' programs were largely based on keeping VLT gambling out of sight, less attractive and uncomfortable as an unstated deterrent. Sites were expected to create walls to segregate VLT play in bars and other settings. But, as later discussion will elaborate, however well meant, this strategy tends to exacerbate rather than mitigate gambling problems. It makes VLT play less attractive to those who do not have gambling problems. It fits many of the self-destructive inclinations of high-risk players - anonymity, isolation, dissociation and, as a result, stigma.

The policies and programs proposed in this updated model of RG for hospitality sites is based on the view that VLT play ought to be better integrated into sites rather than segregated. That model is also based on the view that players in VLT sites should be assured of robust player protections. It also assumes that since RG programs in hospitality settings can't reasonably mirror the range of safeguards in casinos, it is important to make optimal use of the RG programs that do fit with these types of gambling settings. Specifically, that means player communications, machine-based safeguards and staff training.

Reinforcing the Social Aspects of Hospitality Gambling

It is clear from this Insight project and the literature that a distinguishing feature of hospitality gambling is the local socialization element. This is not unlike the tradition of the British "local", the bar close to home where friends and neighbours gather. Developing the concept of non-casino gambling as a community-based socialization/entertainment, then, can serve as a fundamental principle for future policy development that also includes strengthening the supports for players. Within this policy stance, the question is: how can the policy framework for RG help reflect and reinforce the social aspects of hospitality gambling while, at the same time, curbing problematic gambling?

Like most 'responsible gambling' policies and programs, the policy safeguards for hospitality settings are designed to enhance the entertainment value of gambling while promoting safe play practices. That means the hospitality setting encourages safe play practices by:

- Providing accurate and timely information about:
 - o How games work
 - o The realistic chances of winning and losing
 - o Ways to gamble safer
 - o Available help for anyone with a gambling problem
 - o Gambling myths and misconceptions
- Encouraging players to take breaks
- Providing players with up-to-date tools to help manage their play
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It is important to acknowledge that VLT safeguards have been improved in many ways in recent years (see summary p. 11/12). This report proposes a number of further enhancements which would assure VLT gamblers of a set of safeguards that are as robust as those in casinos and online gambling. In addition to the policy changes related to greater integration of the VLTs in hospitality environment, this Insight report proposes measures to strengthen staff training and enhanced player education and play management tools.

Levels of Safeguards Appropriate to the Size of the Venue and Prizes

Not all VLT sites are the same. While most are relatively small settings with few machines integrated into the establishments, some are larger, more dedicated to gambling. Yet, in most cases, the policies and practices of the smaller sites are the same as those of larger ones.

It seems appropriate for provincial policy makers to ensure that RG safeguards, i.e. policies and programs, are commensurate with the intensity and scope of the gambling in those venues and that the distinctions between VLT sites and casinos is clearly established. More specifically that means that the more the sites is geared to gambling the greater the safeguards in place.

Site Owner Roles and Responsibilities

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In recent years provincial gaming authorities have tended to take on virtually complete responsibility for player safeguards based on the fact that the provinces do not run the hospitality sites directly. It is not possible, however, to assure players of the level of safeguards they deserve without greater engagement of the site holders. When a hospitality site applies to have VLTs, does that approval come with expectations that the owner will take some level of responsibility for the wellbeing of the players, their customers? The model proposed in this report looks to a stronger engagement of site holders in supporting their customers, many of whom have moderate to severe gambling problems.

Staff Training

Since RG programs in hospitality settings do not have as many options as casinos and online gambling, it is important to make the best use of the instruments that are available. One of those is staff training.

All provinces require RG staff training for at least one person per site— usually the owner or manager. Increasingly, provinces are tightening their requirements to make the training mandatory for all customer-facing staff. Such training usually covers how games work, common gambling myths, RG, problem gambling warning signs, where to go for help, how to respond to questions or comments that suggest someone might have a gambling problem, and strategies for dealing with challenging situations. While staff in some jurisdictions may be trained in how to identify and respond to red flag warning, it is not the norm across the country. Training is, for the most part, delivered online with some jurisdictions requiring that those trained be certified. The duration of validity for such certification depends on the jurisdiction.

Hospitality venue staff are often well-versed in customer service and have received alcohol service training. As well, many have developed friendly rapport with regular patrons. These conditions give client-facing staff an advantage when it comes to augmented RG training.

Research has shown that RG training can help improve staff knowledge of gambling risks and best practices; attitudes towards players and high-risk gambling; and the ability to identify – and in some cases – intervene when players appear to be in distress.

While research on staff training relating to VLT and other forms of non-casino EGM play are very sparse, some examples do exist. In a controlled pre-post experiment in Quebec, 826 employees were surveyed at 82 VLT venues (Dufour, Ladouceur, & Giroux, 2010). During the experiment, employees received a three-hour training workshop to raise awareness and understanding of high-risk gambling, signs of problems, support resources, and proactive attitudes towards gambling issues in the workplace. Surveyed staff were generally satisfied (75%) with the training and indicated that they had a better understanding of high-risk gambling (90%). At follow-up, 30% stated that training should be provided every year, while 28% agreed every two years would be ideal. Attitudes towards high-risk gambling (i.e., the importance of informing and supporting problem gamblers) significantly increased from baseline. As well, increased knowledge was found in the following areas: high-risk gambling, how to intervene when someone is suspected of having a gambling problem, and available resources for those in need.

These results mirror those found by Ladouceur et al. (2004) who also investigated VLT staff training in Quebec. This randomized control study tested the effectiveness of a 2-hour information session with VLT retailers covering the identification of excessive gamblers, how to approach them, the myths associated with VLT gambling, and the risks of problematic play. Six months following the training sessions, participants were re-evaluated for changes in their perceptions and behaviours. Results indicated that after the training session, participants were convinced of the importance of RG information and the attributes of those with gambling problems were also better understood.

Since staff training has been shown to have positive effects, it seems beneficial that such training be provided on a more comprehensive and consistent basis and that *all* client-facing staff have basic RG training.

User-friendly Training Formats

Given the issues of staff turnover⁷ and limited resources in many local establishments, it is, undoubtedly, useful to ensure that training materials and sessions are as user-friendly as possible. For example, an online module no longer than one hour, along with built-in evaluations and feedback components, would be useful.

In Manitoba, RG training is integrated with responsible service of alcohol training – a strategy that may also make for efficient training of bar staff.

⁷ As a reflection of staff turnover, interviews with gaming corporation staff in Alberta and Saskatchewan indicated the numbers of hospitality staff who received RG training were 5000 and 4000 respectively.

Core Training Content

While hospitality staff training will likely never be as intensive as that for casino staff, the core content should be the same. These concepts include:

- How games work (e.g., payout rates, RNGs, randomness)
- Realistic chances of winning and losing
- Appropriate and inappropriate language
- Gambling myths and how to respond to them
- How to respond appropriately to someone who discloses a gambling problem, appears to be in distress, or shows 'red flag' warning signs
- Community resources available to help people with gambling problems

Refresher Training

Currently, most VLT sites are required to provide refresher training – and sometimes re-certification – usually every 5 years. While there is ample educational evidence that re-training is important, recent professional thinking suggests that refreshers are best delivered every two or three years.

Enhanced Response Training

As in other gambling settings, staff in establishments offering VLTs will encounter patrons who exhibit signs of distress, agitation, or other 'red flags' which may or may not be indicators of a gambling problem. It is critical for staff to have clear direction and expectations about their role. At a minimum, this translates into training employees about what to observe and report; how to respond to 'trigger' comments; and how to respond appropriately to a player presenting signs of distress or expressing anxiety about their gambling.

There is no doubt that such interpersonal demands are very difficult. Yet, surprisingly, our player surveys found that just over 5% of VLT players reported that they had had interactions with staff members on topics of gambling risk and RG (in general, these interactions staff appeared limited to smaller venues such as bars, where regular players had already developed a friendly relationships). This evidence suggests that even in the absence of clear expectations, some staff do take it upon themselves to have conversations with patrons about problem gambling risk and behaviours.

VLT survey and focus group participants in the present project were asked under what circumstances it might be okay for staff to approach them to speak about their gambling. Answers included: *if they had been losing a lot* (35%), *looked upset* (32%), or *had been playing for a long time* (30%). However, roughly 32%, said that it would never be okay if a staff member approached them to talk about their gambling. Focus group participants were also ambivalent about the role of venue staff. As stated by one player, *"I don't think the owners or staff have the right to control another person's gambling."*

These findings reflect earlier RGC survey and focus group findings, and present a picture of a sensitive area for patrons and staff. On the one hand, staff are often familiar with patrons and know some who they believe are headed for problems or are already experiencing them. On the other hand, understandably, they are uncomfortable dealing with such sensitive issues. This dilemma underlines the importance of establishing clear policies and guidance for frontline staff and more specialized training for individuals who can manage these more demanding situations.

Most 'red flag' training for frontline staff involves 'observe and escalate'. In casinos, that escalation involves a staff person advanced training and skill in dealing with more sensitive situations and conversations. However, such advanced training does not exist in the hospitality network, therefore, escalation involves

referring the individual to a manager or owner whose skills to respond may be no greater than those of frontline staff.

It is common practice in the Australian hospitality sector to provide more intensive/specialized RG training to a smaller number of key staff--usually managers or owners. They receive more specialized training focused on strategies for dealing with customers who may be problematic, in addition to managing more delicate situations. This strategy would help compensate for the challenge of staff turnover by having individuals on site who can provide more informed advice and backup. Moreover, as noted earlier, certain VLT venues, due to their size, warrant stronger safeguards.

Game Features

Clocks and Cash Displays

As noted earlier, the absence of certain RG safeguards available in other gaming settings places greater importance on the protections that can be built into the VLTs themselves. Virtually all Canadian jurisdictions have either updated their VLTs to include new RG features, or have plans to upgrade the machines to include these features when new machines are put into place.

Currently, most gaming machines incorporate clocks to enable players to keep track of their time. As well, most machines display player funds in the form of cash as opposed to credits. While there is relatively little research into the impact of these features, Ladouceur and Sevigny (2009) found that the clock feature was noticed by the majority of participants in his study (89%), though 73% of participants also said that time was not an important factor for them during a gambling session. In addition, the large majority of participants (86%) tended to use cash displays instead of the credit display option, with approximately 60% arguing it was more useful and helpful for controlling gambling activities. In terms of efficacy, Schellinck and Schrans (2006) also found that the on-screen clock had a significant impact on time and money tracking and decreased the risk of problem gambling. In the same research, the cash display feature was also regarded as helpful by a majority of participants (58%).

Most VLTs in operation in Canada now also include pop-up messages reminding players of the length of time they have been playing, usually in 15 minute increments.

Wynne and Stinchfield (2004) provide one of the first extensive examinations of pop-up message usage in Alberta. Their study took 302 VLT players (controls=150) in a pre-post interview design that, in part, investigated the effectiveness of pop-up time reminders. Their research findings show that patrons were well aware of pop-ups at the 30-minute mark (70%), but this decreased considerably at 60 minute (31%) and 90 minute intervals (11%). Overall, pop-up reminders were not utilized by 80% or more of the participants to control gambling behaviour.

Schellinck and Schrans (2006) also found that pop-up time reminders and five-minute cash-out warnings at 145 minutes were quite effective. Compared to players who used older VLTs without these features, those who used newer machines that had them were able to reduce their playtime exposure. In addition, players reported losing track of money and time (e.g., playing beyond desired time limits) less often than in the control group.

Additional Tools

After the initial development of clocks, cash displays, and pop-up messages, many jurisdictions began to pressure manufacturers for additional play management tools. Currently, for example, the Australian State of Victoria requires all gaming machines to have displays providing:

- Cash-in
- Amounts played
- Amounts won
- Session wins and losses
- Cashouts
- Time played, and
- Time of day

These tools are now typical for EGMs in the clubs and hotel sectors in Australia.

Pre-commitment, Time Outs and Breaks in Play

Pre-commitment, a concept originally created by the Australian researcher Mark Dickerson, recommends that players 'pre-commit' to their own limits in advance of play. Pre-commitment tools embedded in the newer generations of VLT networks are now widely in use in Canada and Australia.

Pre-commitment is a control mechanism involving limit-setting tools aimed to help gamblers establish budgets and boundaries for money and time spent playing. While the basic concept of pre-commitment is clear, its implementation can vary. For instance, pre-commitment mechanisms can be voluntary or mandatory; the limits themselves can be customizable or pre-set, and outcomes resulting from approaching or reaching one's limits can trigger different events – such as pop-up reminders or cash-outs.

Pre-commitment (limit-setting) and machine-based player tools have been broadly identified in the literature as positive influences in the promotion of safer gambling.

One survey of RG experts, treatment providers, and recovered problem gamblers across seven countries rated the suitability of RG features, including pre-commitment options (Wood, Shorter & Griffiths, 2014)⁸. Findings showed that player-defined limits on money spent, maximum bet limits, and time limits (mandatory use) were highly recommended for online use. Overall, the authors concluded that mandatory player-defined limits were more heavily supported than operator-defined limits.

Most recently, researchers looking at Ontario's *My PlaySmart* pre-commitment and behavioural feedback pilot program for slot machines noted significant improvement in limit-setting adherence when pop-up messages appeared *before* limits were hit – at 70% and 90% of one's limit (Hollingshead & Wohl, 2017). In both cases, players were more likely to stop gambling and not play to their full pre-set limit, compared to controls who received a pop-up when their limit was reached. The most common response was that players *kept track of both time and money* (47%), followed closely by those reporting they *kept track of the money they spent* (38%). Few participants (6%) reported *tracking only time* and 10% noted *not really keeping track of time or money*. Finally, *high-risk gamblers* had 6.58 times higher probability of *not tracking time nor money*, compared to other gambling risk groups.

⁸ The countries were: Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia, Holland, and Denmark.

Player Views about Built-in RG Features

In the Insight survey, nearly half of respondents reported that they *kept track of the money spent playing*, followed by approximately 40% who said they *kept track of both time and money*. *Keeping track of time*, alone, was endorsed only by about 8% of respondents. This is consistent with past research that has found players to view tracking and limiting time spent gambling as lower priorities (Ladouceur & Sevigny, 2009). It was significant to find that younger adults (18-34) had 2.6 times the probability of *tracking time*, while older respondents reported the opposite effect. Among *high-risk gamblers*, it was unsurprising yet noteworthy to see a significantly strong and increased risk of *not keeping track of either time or money* that was 4 times that of the rest of the sample.

Setting a personal budget is an established pre-commitment strategy that has been found to lower the likelihood of a player being assessed as being at-risk or a problem gambler – particularly if budgets and limits are set before play (Nower & Blaszczynski, 2010; Wood & Griffiths, 2014). Use of personal budgets before play were reported by over 90% of sampled VLT players.

In the present survey, a few basic features were presented to participants for their opinions. These included money limit-setting and pop-up reminders; money limit-setting automatic cash outs; time limits and pop-up reminders. Money limits and pop-ups were the most popular option with 74% stating it was a good idea. Time limits and pop-ups were thought to be a good idea by two-thirds of the sample (66%). While still popular, the least endorsed built-in features were money limits and cash outs (58%), as well as time limits and cash outs (50%).

Many jurisdictions participating in this study have already taken steps to introduce pre-commitment for VLTs. What they require are consistent, uniform and validated toolsets that can easily be promoted, explained and used – tools that are not perceived as barriers to play but, rather, enhance player. Providing players with consistent tools to set limits before play on a machine has become the adopted practice in some VLT jurisdictions and is undoubtedly an emerging best practice.

Time-based or Money-based Cash-outs

Many VLT jurisdictions set time-based cash-outs as a way to limit continuous play and promote breaks. While time, until such cash-outs occur, varies across jurisdictions, they tend to cluster around two hours.

The rationale for such measures is clear. Based on the actual experience of VLT players in Alberta (RGC Report 2012), it appears that 95% of players are on machines for less than two hours – with the average time being 20 minutes. Moreover, in a study conducted in Nova Scotia by Schellinck and Schrans' (2003), the authors found that problem VLT gambling was associated with play durations of over 2 hours, which was also associated with exhibiting signs of agitation and disorderly behaviour (e.g., hitting machines, playing two machines at the same time), in addition to groaning, sighing, and threatening machines (Ibid.).

Most Canadian and Australian jurisdictions have VLTs programmed for mandatory cash-outs. In some cases, that means a cash-out after a win (for example, a win over \$1,000). More commonly, machines are programmed to cash out at a certain time limit, usually two hours. Cash-outs – both win-based and time-based – are a valuable tool to promote breaks in play and represent a standard best practice in VLT gambling.

Player Services Account

Beyond the provision of tools for players, Saskatchewan has enabled players to set up a Player Services Account, which permits them to track and limit their play across VLTs and gambling sessions, access their

play history and other features. The Saskatchewan account system enables the player to remain anonymous by accessing the system through a user-generated password.

The main advantage of account-based play for the player is the capability to keep track of their play over time. The information available is historical, thereby allowing players who wish to keep track of their play over time. The anonymity feature⁹ is important since many players are concerned about the use or misuse of their play information.

The most significant challenge of account-based play systems is the low take-up rates. This means that in addition to the availability of account play, gaming providers have to adopt strategies to promote its use. This means campaigns to sell players on the benefits of the account. It also means creating additional benefits which appeal to players but do not promote additional gambling (e.g. coupons for restaurants or other non-gaming amenities).

Account-based play can have significant benefits to players who use it and shows great promise once the incentives and marketing hurdles are passed. There are many opportunities for future RG enhancements with account-based play and other provinces are watching the Saskatchewan experience carefully.

Opportunities Related to the Analytical Capacity of Server-based Play

Since all VLTs in Canada are linked to central servers through a variety of systems, operators now have or can have in the future the capability to create certain monitoring and analytic features, in addition to account-based play (discussed above).

Although players are highly sensitive to schemes in which 'big brother' is tracking their play and monitoring their behavior, there is nevertheless ample scope to build in analytics based on aggregate data that respects the anonymity of the player but still assess play patterns, monitors the session trends in different locations, gathers typical play trends and identifies 'hot spots' where play is unusually intense.

Maximum Cash Accepted, Bet Size, and Winnings

In most jurisdictions, the maximum amount a player can insert in the VLT is between \$60 and \$100. Maximum bet size is usually \$2.50 to \$5.00.

Generally, players can win a maximum jackpot of \$1,200 to \$2,500, although some jurisdictions have introduced linked 'progressive' jackpots of up to \$1.5M.

It is important to ensure that the maximum cash accepted, bets per spin and winnings reflect the concept of hospitality gambling. Is the venue a hospitality setting with gaming as a component or a gaming venue? Larger venues, stakes, and winnings begin to challenge the 'hospitality' model and beg the question about the adequacy of the 'responsible gambling' provisions. This suggests the importance of matching the intensity of the gambling to the levels of safeguards.

⁹ Anonymity in this context means that the player can establish their own unique identifying number without disclosing their name to the operator.

Stop Buttons

All VLTs are created with features that are intrinsic to the play on the machine including the speed of play. Typically, in Canada, there are intervals of 2-3 seconds between spins. Some machines, however, incorporate a 'stop button' which allows the player to interrupt the spin and shorten it. This feature allows the player to reduce the intervals between spins and speed up the game. There has been considerable research suggesting that the rate of spin contributes to increased risk.

There can be little question that enabling players to stop spins can contribute to false perceptions among players about their ability to control play outcomes. As early as 2001, Loba et al., identified features such as the stop reel function as problematic, pointing to the danger that this function could facilitate shorter intervals between games and reinforce illusions of control. As a result, most jurisdictions ban the use of the stop button. This is undoubtedly a 'best practice' and has been adopted by all Canadian VLT jurisdictions.

Venue Features

Though they may differ slightly across jurisdictions, all hospitality sites have venue features in place designed to promote safer behaviours. For example, venues must keep gambling out of the sight of minors and the location of ATMs often must be a certain distance from VLTs. Such venue features are sometimes referred to as 'nudges' – modifications in the environment designed to influence behavior in a positive way. Examples of other venue RG features are presented below.

Access to Money

VLT sites are not permitted to extend credit to patrons or to cash cheques.

Service of Alcohol

Bars and other hospitality sites are subject to the same regulatory controls relating to the service of alcohol, and do not permit intoxicated patrons to gamble. Since VLTs are usually restricted to establishments that sell alcohol, the vast majority of staff will have enrolled in various server intervention training programs before they start work. Those courses, however, generally do not address gambling while intoxicated. It is therefore important to make explicit policies that prohibit visibly- intoxicated individuals from playing VLTs. This policy is widespread across Canadian jurisdictions.

Hours of Operation

Since hospitality settings are required to close at night, VLT gambling in these venues is not available continuously for a 24-hr period.¹⁰

Game Visibility outside the gaming area

As noted earlier, due to the service of alcohol, VLT gambling is typically available in age-restricted, liquor-licensed venues such as bars, lounges, etc. When VLT venues do allow minors (e.g., restaurants), the gaming areas must be segregated and cannot be visible from other parts of the venue. As well, regardless

¹⁰ In the Province of Quebec, VLTs will be "automatically deactivated outside business hours specified on the establishment's liquor permit" though the sites may be open for longer hours.

of whether or not minors are permitted inside, venues that have VLTs must ensure that people cannot see them from outside of the venue.

Location of Games

One venue feature common to many VLT sites is the requirement that VLTs be segregated within the site; that is, behind a wall or in a separate room. Findings from the present VLT survey show that slightly more than half of participants reported gambling in separate and private areas of the venue.

While segregating VLTs in separate rooms and cubicles was once thought to reduce the temptation to play these machines, more recent analysis suggests that these original assumptions did not take into account several aspects of problem gambling. Evidence now suggests that keeping machines in a separate area can counter the hospitality purpose of many sites. It can limit socialization, make supervision by staff more difficult, facilitate isolation, and contribute to dissociation and excessive gambling (Ladouceur, Jacques, Sevigny, & Cantinotti, 2005).

For some players, VLT gambling can be isolating and solitary – an attribute that shares a positive linear relationship with at-risk and high-risk gambling (Corney & Davis, 2010; Hing, Cherney, Gainsbury, Lubman, Wood & Blaszczynski, 2014; Rockloff, Moskovsky, Thorne, Browne & Bryden, 2016). Research has also identified anonymity, privacy, and isolation as problematic gambling preferences. Rockloff and colleagues (2016), for example, provide an emerging look at the gambling preferences and motivations of non-casino and online EGM gamblers in Victoria, Australia. The authors point out that gamblers with problems are less likely to value the company they share while playing, compared to all other PGSI categories. In addition, they found that EGM problem gamblers placed a stronger emphasis on privacy while playing. Overall, anonymity, privacy, and isolation were player preferences most closely associated with risky gambling and potential problems. The key findings from this body of literature were that players screened according to a high-risk gambling profile often preferred non-casino VLT and EGM play to be private and isolated. This preference spoke to the value of not being disturbed or distracted from game immersion. In other instances, players preferred isolation and privacy in order to mitigate feelings of stigma and embarrassment associated with machine play.

The survey of VLT players undertaken for this project found that 44.9% of respondents reported *agreeing or strongly agreeing with liking games where they get into the “zone” and feel in control*. This notion reflects an endorsement of dissociative gaming and maladapted self-efficacy—confidence in one’s ability to achieve intended objectives. Over one-third (37.4%) of survey respondents *agreed or strongly agreed to often losing track of time when playing*.

On balance, the promotion of socialization and reduced risk would suggest that the best practice means ensuring that are integrated into the bar or lounge setting and are visible to staff at all times.

The arguments for greater integration of machines into sites is not meant to negate the necessity to ensure machine are out of sight of family and public areas.

Informed Decision Making

Responsible gambling messaging is a mainstay support option utilized since the early days of legalized gambling in Canada and abroad. While the message content has changed over the years to reflect more sophisticated understanding of responsible gambling programs and the art and science of influence, the importance of communication with players about safety and help remains an essential element of all RG programs. All the jurisdictions examined in this Insight project identified player messaging as essential.

In the VLT player survey, the majority of respondents (77%) reported *noticing posters and brochures* with information on gambling risks and player support resources for problematic gambling in VLT venues. *Younger adults (18-34)* had the highest probability of noticing these environmental features (3.58 times higher than other age groups).

When asked about the appropriateness of raising awareness, promoting responsible gambling and gambling risk information programs in venues players in the focus groups acknowledged these steps as reasonable.

In Canadian provinces and Australian states communications with players can take place in 3 channels: machine-based information, on-site posters and pamphlets or websites, such as GameSense. Machine-based information has been discussed in a prior section of this report.

On-site RG Messaging

Gaming corporations have substantial capabilities to communicate with patrons and considerable experience with 'responsible gambling' messaging – yet that expertise is underutilized in VLT settings. In most jurisdictions, posters, brochures, and information cards are available. More can be done to promote safer gambling in these venues.

VLT establishments represent a 'captive market' for safety messages. With some additional effort, it would be possible to introduce more point of sale messaging, thereby moving the current passive approach to information to a more active mode. That could mean several options: one option would be annual or bi-annual mini-campaigns with posters, brochures, electronic messaging where possible, and other collateral; another option might be on-site events similar to the awareness event provided in many casinos and bingo halls. One of the interviewees for this report noted that interactive kiosks such as those in casinos across the country might be another means of creating more active RG programs in hospitality sites.

Most Canadian gaming providers have established RG websites which may be part of a broader communication strategy, such as GameSense and PlayWise. In some cases, these websites offer player information specific to VLTs. In many cases, however, these central websites are geared to other forms of gambling and to generalized gambling information and do not include information appealing specifically to VLT players. Such websites are a key opportunity to enhance the information provided to VLT players and, with some customization and modification, can serve these audiences better.

The combination of yearly campaigns, events and stronger VLT content on websites could enhance the player safety messaging and move it from a passive mode to an active one.

Self-exclusion

One of the mainstay RG initiatives for casinos and online gambling sites is voluntary self-exclusion. This program is not available in hospitality settings, as it is simply not feasible given the lack of requisite infrastructure (e.g., security and surveillance). Moreover, issues of staff turnover, independent ownership, and readily available local competitors make enforcement highly unlikely.

Several gaming operators interviewed for this study noted that self-exclusion from VLTs in hospitality venues would possibly work only if a card-based system for VLTs was in place.

Advertising and Promotion

With some exceptions, VLT sites are prohibited from advertising outside, as well as inside, the venue. In some jurisdictions, though, while the retailer is not allowed to promote *playing* VLTs or post any advertising that entices the patron to play, they can advertise that VLTs – or new VLT games – are available. Similarly, some provinces allow sites to also advertise how many players have won. So, for example, the retailer might have a sticker on the outside window that says, “VLTs available here,” or they might have a poster inside that advertises a new VLT game or the number of players who have won playing them.

The provisions regarding advertising and promotion of VLTs must balance the inherent risks of EGM gambling against the potential that the prohibition itself contributes to the stigma attached to VLT play. This suggests that the internal and external advertising of VLTs is likely best balanced by permitting limited advertising and promotions which inform player of the availability of the games and portray healthy gambling attitudes and behaviours. Such advertising and promotions would emphasize the entertainment/hospitality and avoid focusing on spending or winning.

Proposed Best Practices for VLT Gambling in Hospitality Settings

This chapter presents a consolidated list of proposed best practices in terms of actionable/measurable set of standards.

Policies and Strategies

Policy makers create clear policies and strategies addressing the goals and expectations for the hospitality network and RG within that network.

Policies promote the socialization/entertainment aspects of hospitality-based gambling while ensuring safe practices and help for those experiencing problems.

Responsible gambling policies and agreements create the clear expectation that hospitality settings have a role in player protections and clearly outlining expectations regarding that role.

Gaming policy makers develop policies matching levels of safeguards to intensity of gambling, including such considerations as size of venue, amounts bet and prizes.

Staff Training

All customer-facing hospitality staff receive RG training.

Training is provided in a way that is easy to use, based on current and evaluated adult education principles.

RG training for hospitality staff includes:

- How games work (e.g., payout rates, RNGs, randomness)
- The realistic chances of winning and losing
- Appropriate and inappropriate language
- Gambling myths and how to respond to them
- How to respond appropriately to someone who discloses a gambling problem, appears to be in distress, or shows 'red flag' warning signs (escalation)
- Community resources available to help people with gambling problems

Refresher training is provided every two years.

At least one staff person at each site has enhanced training in both managing sensitive situations and communications with players who exhibit 'red flag' behaviours.

Game Features

All VLTs have visible clocks and display cash values for funds deposited.

All VLTs provide easily accessed, machine-based information including:

- How the games work (RNG and payout rates)
- Realistic chances of winning and losing

Signs of a problem and sources of help

All new VLT systems incorporate displays that enable the player to readily see:

- Cash-in
- Amounts played
- Amounts won
- Session wins and losses
- Cashouts
- Time played, and
- Time of day

All new VLT systems incorporate pre-commitment options that enable the player to set time or money limits.

Pre-commitment enabled VLT systems require players to choose limits when beginning to play and advise players of the time used throughout the play period.

All new VLT systems incorporate the capacity for players to establish anonymous accounts that allow them to track play history over time.

Gaming administrators have in place play analytics that enable operators to capture aggregate data in order to understand customer behaviours, track play patterns and machine usage while maintaining player anonymity.

VLTs are programmed to cash out at predetermined levels and after 2 hours of continuous play.

No VLTs have stop buttons.

Venue Features

Site providers do not provide credit or cash cheques.

Intoxicated patrons are not permitted to gamble.

VLT gambling is linked to regular closing hours and not available on a 24-hour basis.

VLTs are located in open, well-lit places in the hospitality environment within direct view of staff.

VLTs do not incorporate any form of direct funds transfer.

ATMs cannot be accessed from any VLT without leaving the machine.

Informed Decision Making

Provincial VLT managers create yearly strategies to equip players with key responsible gambling information and provide coordinated messaging through some combination of:

- Point of sale posters, brochures etc.
- Electronic messaging
- Information kiosks
- Yearly events

- RG websites

Advertising and Promotion

Advertising and promotions are carefully managed to focus on availability and entertainment value of VLT play and not on spending and winning.

Promotion do not encourage overspending.

Conclusion

Video lottery play in hospitality settings in Canada is evolving toward a new model; one which is more integrated into the fabric of hospitality settings and which incorporates a stronger framework of RG safeguards. That framework must speak to the unique challenges and opportunities of offering gambling products in a setting that is not specifically and exclusively set up for gambling and not within the direct operation of provincial authorities. Since hospitality-based gambling cannot incorporate some of the key safeguards of casinos and online offerings, it must shift its focus to optimize the strengths of its particular operating environment. In the case of hospitality settings, that means, better staff training to build on natural relationships; and the incorporation of stronger safeguards into the machines for greater player knowledge and the tools to enable them to play within safe bounds.

This report has been developed to provide an up-to-date RG framework for VLT gambling and to provide a blueprint for the future. It urges greater attention to staff training, informed decision making, the integration of machines within hospitality settings, as well as inclusion of state of the art tools for players to manage their gambling.

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