

Presentation at the official launch of the EmJEU Coalition

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Created in 1969, Loto-Québec, a public corporation whose mission is to oversee games of chance and gambling in Quebec, is celebrating 35 years of operation. Our son was also born in 1969. We won't be celebrating our son's 35th Birthday however. He killed himself at the age of 25, almost 9 years ago. Like thousands of other Québec citizens, he was an uninformed consumer exposed to the deadly affects of a dangerous and addictive product – the vlt- made accessible to him by a multi-billion dollar industry that continues to place profits above people and the sanctity of life.

On May 6, 2004, for the first time, Loto-Québec admitted it has not fulfilled its social responsibility. Why has it taken Loto-Québec 35 years to recognize the necessity to minimize the social costs associated with games of chance and to adopt new measures to combat compulsive gambling?

Why has Loto-Québec, a public corporation, never assumed its duty of care to?

"Assure that Québécois have all the information required to reduce the risk of developing a gambling problem."

Why has Loto-Québec, a public corporation, never assumed its duty of care to?

"See to it that all those who are experiencing gambling-related problems can receive appropriate treatment and know where and how to access such care and support."

Why has Loto-Québec, a public corporation, never assumed its duty of care to?

"Develop and promote awareness programs targeted at the population at large, and in particular, at those individuals experiencing problems."

Are you aware that 27,000 youth in Quebec, between the ages of 13 and 17, are suffering from problem and pathological gambling? Can you imagine the outcry if 27,000 Quebec youth were suffering from polio or any other infectious disease?

Children in Quebec today routinely receive immunizations for diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, influenza, measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis, meningitis. What programs are available today from the Minister of Health and Social Services to ensure that Quebec youth are spared the misery and devastation of a gambling addiction?

Who is telling parents that gambling is not a benign form of entertainment? Our children are faced with pro-gambling messages and the glamorization of gambling wherever they go. Why has it taken so long for the Quebec government to inform families of the addictive qualities inherent in gambling activities? It is the lack of public awareness that is contributing to the increasing number of children and adolescents who are currently struggling with gambling problems.

Who is educating parents about the risks associated with gambling? Has anyone told you that your child's bad habit can turn into a severe illness that will result in lying, cheating, stealing, cross-addiction, depression and suicide? Has anyone told you that the rate of attempted suicide among pathological gamblers is higher than all other addictive behaviours and that a Québec study of college students found that 26.8% of pathological gamblers had attempted suicide? Are there treatment programs for our children? Do you think that for some children the thought of fighting a gambling addiction the rest of their lives might also contribute to their feelings of hopelessness and helplessness?

Are you aware that arcades across the street from high schools, sandwiched between billiard halls with rows of vlts frequented by underage pool players, are introducing the next generation of addicted gamblers to electronic gambling via poker machines designed to hook the unwary?

I have come forward to warn you. The Québec government must change its gambling policies, stop the unnecessary and dangerous expansion and put in place legislation, education, prevention and treatment programs to ensure a healthy future for our children. We do not need more research! We must not tolerate the idea, that in gambling research, this could be at the expense of our children's lives.

Our mandate as parents is to raise strong and healthy children, Québec's most precious commodity and its future. Gambling is a public health issue. We can no longer ignore the gambling industry's role in the problem gambling epidemic. **We must all challenge the legitimacy and credibility of the industry marketing the product.**

An election has just been announced. Where are our political leaders? Why hasn't this become an election issue? It is the most important ethical issue facing our democracy today. Is it any wonder that the editorial in the Saturday Globe and Mail concluded that there is a vicious cycle of cynicism that is poisoning public life in Canada today?