

MORE INVESTMENT IN EFFECTIVE PUBLIC HEALTH MESSAGES IS NEEDED TO REDUCE GAMBLING HARMS

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KEY FINDINGS



- The investment in safer gambling messages is dwarfed by overall gambling ad spending. For example, the spend for one of the main safer gambling campaigns 'Bet Regret' was just £3.3 million in 2019[1], compared to £1.5 billion a year[2] of paid-for advertising to promote gambling products – 'Bet Regret' therefore represents approximately 0.22% of total industry advertising spend.
- Funding for gambling harms research lags very far behind parallel public health issues, such as alcohol, smoking and substance abuse. There have been more than 30 times more studies into alcohol (700) than gambling research studies (23) funded by Research Councils UK and the National Institute for Health Research.[3]

[1] GambleAware, 2020. Avoiding Bet Regret. An overview of the campaign to date.

[2] House of Lords, 2020. Gambling harm – time for action. Select Committee on the Social and Economic Impact of the Gambling Industry

[3] Advisory Board for Safer Gambling: Advice to the Gambling Commission on a statutory levy (2020).

Existing 'safer gambling' messages do not change behaviour

In theory, 'safer gambling' messages engage players with information about 'safer gambling' behaviours and strategies, with the aim of increasing their awareness and knowledge, shifting their attitudes towards gambling and ultimately changing what they do in ways that prevent or reduce gambling harms. The evidence about the effectiveness of these messages is limited, but generally indicates existing messages are ineffective at changing behaviour. However, our new research provides indications for how more effective messages could be developed:

- Messages need to be tailored: Respondents' reactions to the different messages were strongly shaped by their age and levels of gambling engagement.
- Messages to reduce stigma could also help reduce harm: Messages should produce a positive emotional response with a clear call to action and avoid evoking negative emotions such as shame.

Messages are needed for people affected by someone else's gambling

- Around 4.5 million adults and children in Britain are negatively affected by someone else's gambling[1]- messages are needed to signpost these people to support.

Statistically, women are more likely to experience the full range of negative impacts of being affected by someone else's gambling (e.g. impacts to health and wellbeing, personal relationships, financial impacts). Yet we found no existing messages in the UK for people affected by someone else's gambling.

[1] GOV.UK/Public Health England. 2021a. Gambling-related harms evidence review: Quantitative analysis of gambling involvement and gambling-related harms among the general population in England.



What needs to change

- Gambling advertising is a focus of the government's review of the 2005 Gambling Act. More resources are needed for the development and testing of effective public health messages that can help prevent and reduce gambling harms across Britain.
- Evaluation of the Time to Change campaign (to reduce stigma and discrimination regarding people with mental illness) shows that well-funded, long-term social marketing campaigns can help reduce stigma and harm. This is a useful model for new communication campaigns to prevent and reduce gambling harms.
- Key audiences for public health harm prevention and reduction messages must include people who gamble regularly but do not recognise they may be at risk of harm; and people affected by someone else's gambling.

Methods

This briefing is based on research carried out by the University of Bristol's Personal Finance Research Centre and The Behavioural Insights Team, funded by abrdn Financial Fairness Trust. The research included a review of existing evidence about the efficacy of 'safer gambling' messages, group discussions with 45 people who took part in betting or gambling to test 'safer gambling' messages and an online pilot of existing messages and novel alternatives with a nationally representative sample of 987 people.

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An independent research centre based at the University of Bristol, specialising in social research across all areas of personal finance.

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