

Gambling related harm

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KEY MESSAGES

- Awareness of harmful gambling has increased in recent years due to widespread public concern and the high-profile campaign against high stakes fixed odd betting terminals (FOBTs), the clustering of betting shops on high streets and a growing concern regarding the volume of gambling advertising on television.
- The LGA welcomes steps taken by parliamentarians and the Government to ensure that the reduction of FOBT stakes to £2 takes effect from April 2019. There is still more than needs to be done to tackle gambling related harm.
- We played a prominent role in the successful campaign to reduce FOBT stakes to £2 and to support councils we have published [guidance](#) on taking a whole council approach to tackling gambling related harm.
- Although councils are not responsible for treating gambling addictions, they may encounter gambling addiction when providing a range of services to their residents. These could include children's services, financial inclusion, housing and treatment services and can play a key role in signposting to help that is available.
- The LGA has called for the Government to introduce a mandatory levy on the gambling industry to fund research, education and treatment. This view is supported by other organisations, including GambleAware, the charity responsible for minimising gambling-related harm.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Definitions and prevalence

Gambling harm is defined as an individual's gambling that disrupts or damages personal, family or recreational pursuits. In a severe form it becomes an addiction which is recognised as a clinical psychiatric diagnosis, 'disordered gambling'.

Gambling behaviours occur along a continuum, with possible harms and benefitsⁱ present dependent on level of involvement. Harmful gamblingⁱⁱ is defined as any type of repetitive gambling that disrupts or damages personal, family or recreational pursuits. In its most extreme form, gambling is recognised as an addiction by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), as well as by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the International Classification of Diseases.^{iiiiv}

At risk gamblers refers to people who are at higher risk of experiencing negative effects due to their gambling behaviour, but they are not classified as problem gamblers. Gambling related harm is a broad concept that impacts a wide range of people including families, colleagues and those within the wider community who may not have been involved in gambling themselves. Harms may include financial

Briefing

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hardship, relationship breakdown, domestic violence, mental health problems and suicidal thoughts.

The most recent Health Survey statistics for England found that 56 per cent of the population in England have spent money on at least one gambling activity in the past year.^v

The Health Survey statistics also indicate that in 2016, 0.7 per cent of people in England (approximately 300,000 people) identified as problem gamblers, with 3.6 per cent (approximately 1,610,000 people; 6.6 per cent of gamblers) at low or moderate risk based on their gambling. Due to imitations in how this data is collated, it is likely these estimates are conservative, and may not capture some vulnerable population groups such as homeless people and students.

Recent research by Leeds Beckett University for Leeds City Council^{vi} has concluded that gambling behaviour and problem gambling are not equally distributed across England and that certain areas - such as large urban metropolitan areas - experience higher rates of problem gambling.

The Gambling with Lives charity has also highlighted the link between gambling and suicide, although there is currently a lack of clear evidence to support this.

In 2015-6, Geofutures' Gambling and Place Research Hub undertook research^{vii} for Westminster and Manchester City Councils to explore the concept of area vulnerability to gambling related harm. The research, which was part funded by the LGA found evidence to support suggestions that the following groups are more vulnerable:

- Children, adolescents and young adults (including students)
- People with mental health issues, including those experiencing substance abuse issues (problem gambling is often 'co-morbid' with these substance addictions)
- Individual from certain minority ethnic groups, such as Asian/Asian British, Black/Black British and Chinese/other ethnicity
- The unemployed
- The homeless
- Those with low intellectual functioning
- Problem gamblers seeking treatment
- People with financially constrained circumstances
- Those living in deprived areas

Using this list as a basis, Geofutures collected local level data to show where people with these characteristics might be. This was combined into a single risk index and mapping tool identifying local hotspots at greater risk of gambling related harm.^{viii} The National Centre for Social Research's report Gambling behaviour in Great Britain in 2015^x includes further analysis of at risk and problem gambling, in particular highlighting significantly higher rates among men compared to women.

Impact of problem gambling

The impact of problem gambling extends beyond individual gamblers themselves. A recent investigation published by Citizens Advice reported research suggesting that for every problem gambler there are on average between six to ten additional people who are directly affected by it.^x The potential impact can extend from those closest to the problem gambler (such as families and colleagues), whose physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing may be severely affected, and in some cases impact across local communities (for example, where problem gambling is

associated with crime or homelessness) and society as a whole (in terms of the costs that may be created by problem gambling).

LGA Guidance: council's role in tackling gambling related harm

The LGA has developed [guidance](#) for councils on developing a 'whole council' approach to tackling gambling related harm.

Whilst councils are not responsible for treating gambling addiction, there are several ways in which councils can try to support those individuals and families who are experiencing harm from gambling without taking on responsibility for treatment. This is in addition to their statutory licensing responsibility to try to prevent local gambling premises causing harm through gambling.

The guidance sets out where councils might be coming into contact with people impacted by problem gambling through a range of services, including housing and homelessness, financial inclusion, children's services and addiction services. The guidance also explores how councils can work with local partners and build links with support organisations to help develop specific local referral routes, and ensure these can be accessed from across the full range of local services.

Councils should ensure that frontline staff are given training so they recognise potential cases and direct residents to the national treatment network via the National Gambling Helpline. As frontline awareness and identification of harmful gambling develops, councils can develop a better understanding of the extent of the problem, its impacts and associated costs.

Public health teams can play a role in ensuring that this data, and related data about at-risk groups, is collected and shared. They can also work with local partners and through health and wellbeing boards and clinical commissioning groups to develop a coherent approach to harmful gambling, including focused preventative work.

The LGA has also been represented in the recent GambleAware led project to develop a responsible gambling public information campaign.

ⁱ <https://infohub.gambleaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/816-2437-1-PB.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Harmful gambling is also referred to as problem gambling, compulsive gambling, irresponsible gambling, gambling disorder or pathological gambling. It is an umbrella term that captures those who have a diagnosable gambling addiction as well as those experiencing elevated levels of harm due to their gambling behaviour.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://dsm.psychiatryonline.org/doi/book/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>

^{iv} <https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http://id.who.int/icd/entity/1041487064>

^v <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/PDF/survey-data/England-Health-Survey-Findings-2016.pdf>

^{vi} <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Problem%20Gambling%20Report.pdf>

^{vii} <http://www.geofutures.com/research-2/gambling-related-harm-how-local-space-shapes-our-understanding-of-risk/>

^{viii} <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/gambling-research>

^{ix} <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/PDF/survey-data/Gambling-behaviour-in-Great-Britain-2015.pdf>

^{*} <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/policy/policy-research-topics/consumer-policy-research/consumer-policy-research/out-of-luck-an-exploration-of-the-causes-and-impacts-of-problem-gambling/>