

Evaluation of Improving Outcomes Fund to address gambling harms among women and minority ethnic and religious communities

What this report is about

The Improving Outcomes Fund (IOF) is a funding program developed by GambleAware to address gambling harms among women and minority ethnic and religious communities across Great Britain. The IOF program was created in response to three research studies commissioned by GambleAware, which found that minority groups experience greater gambling harms but have low uptake of support services, while women experience gambling in different ways from men. These projects also revealed structural barriers and inequalities in accessing support.

The IOF-funded projects were put in place to address barriers to seeking support, including stigma, mistrust, and a lack of culturally appropriate services. Many projects were led by or co-designed with people with lived experience of gambling harms. A total of 25 projects were funded between 2024 and 2026, with grants provided to 24 projects in 2024. The IOF-funded projects aim to raise awareness of gambling harms and have engaged professionals in the health and financial sectors as well as community leaders. Projects deliver support in various ways, including training for professionals in identifying gambling harms, counselling for people experiencing gambling harms, and trust-building activities through wellness sessions. Some projects have a national or regional reach.

New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) was commissioned by GambleAware NPC to conduct an evaluation of IOF-funded projects from September 2024 to

Why is this report important?

This report was prepared by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) in partnership with GambleAware. NPC was commissioned to evaluate the Improving Outcomes Fund (IOF) designed to reduce gambling harms among women and minority ethnic and religious communities across Great Britain. The evaluation included focus groups, case studies, learning events, and monitoring reports.

The findings highlight that gambling harms are linked to broader social inequalities, such as stigma and discrimination, as well as financial pressures and social factors like isolation. There are shared and unique barriers to seeking support for women and minority communities. The findings also reveal that community-based approaches can improve engagement; however, limited funding and fragmented referral pathways are major challenges. Recommendations include greater collaboration, long-term funding, and more culturally appropriate and gender-specific support services that are informed by lived experience.

October 2025. An initial scoping phase captured the learning from the first six months of the IOF, which informed the learning and evaluation plan for the main phase. The work conducted by NPC was supported by two groups of experts. The first were Partners in Learning (PiL), which comprised people with lived experience. They directly contributed to

learning events and provided input for reports. Second, a group of organizations that received support from the IOF volunteered to be part of a sounding board. These organizations helped to co-design the evaluation process by providing input into learning questions, contributing to learning events, and supporting the development of a tailored Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning framework for IOF-funded projects.

NPC completed a scoping report in January 2025 that included 10 key learning questions. Several research activities were conducted to explore the key learning questions and themes identified in the scoping report between February and October 2025. The present report highlights findings about drivers of gambling among women and minority communities, barriers to seeking support, how the IOF-funded projects have worked to provide tailored support, and what structural factors affect their success.

What was done?

First, four online focus groups were conducted with people involved in 17 IOF-funded projects. These projects were selected to represent diverse regions and intervention types. The focus groups explored the experiences of gambling harms among women and minority communities and what resources, practices, and approaches can best support them.

Next, NPC selected six projects for case studies to represent different approaches across the projects. Each organization took part in a 60-minute interview, and responses were compiled to create the case studies.

Third, NPC hosted a learning event over Teams in April 2025 with 14 IOF-funded projects to explore what was working and what needed to be done. NPC hosted a second online event in July 2025 with 16 projects, focusing on collaboration, shared learning, and challenges. An in-person learning event was held in October 2025. This session followed the announcement of GambleAware's managed closure and focused on networking and knowledge sharing across the Improving Outcomes, Community Resilience and Aftercare funding programs.

Finally, NPC examined monitoring reports that were submitted by the projects as part of grant reporting. A total of 22 projects submitted reports on a 6-month basis to GambleAware between November 2024 and May 2025. Two projects submitted reports to the National Gambling Support Network (NGSN). These reports provide an overview of each project's performance against their target activities, including challenges and successes.

What you need to know

A key theme is that there is considerable overlap in the experiences of women and minority groups with gambling, as well as distinct challenges and experiences.

Drivers of gambling

Two main drivers of gambling were identified. In terms of *social drivers*, people gamble as a way to connect with others and to cope with social isolation and personal problems. Loneliness was found to be an important factor, especially at night when gambling is one of the few available options. Women who experience domestic abuse frequently use gambling as a way to cope. Of note, gambling can also help some people escape from racial discrimination, sexism, and multiple caring responsibilities. At the same time, gambling can lead to social isolation and further increases the need to cope with it, which drives further gambling.

In terms of *financial drivers*, gambling is used as a means of making money. Financial pressures are also linked to increased stress and subsequent gambling as a coping mechanism. Financial pressures were especially noted among refugees, asylum seekers, international students, and single mothers.

Barriers to seeking support

There are shared and unique barriers to seeking support for women and minority communities. Shared experiences include discrimination, shame and stigma, lack of engagement with social and health services, and low awareness of support available. Unique barriers for women include burden of caregiving, domestic abuse, and lack of gender-specific supports. Unique barriers for minority

communities include language barriers, a lack of trust in institutions rooted in experiences of racism and discrimination, and a lack of culturally relevant supports. In some communities, gambling is socially acceptable. This presents a different challenge to how organizations engage these communities, highlighting the need for tailored approaches.

Tailoring support

A key strategy is embedding gambling support into broader topics, such as workshops on wellbeing, financial advice, or parenting. This helps reduce stigma and makes conversation about gambling less intimidating. Other strategies include using more discrete methods for disseminating gambling harm information (e.g., QR codes for people to access resources privately), framing gambling conversations around related topics like gaming, translating information to different languages, involving community champions as trusted figures to open conversations, and physically meeting with people to offer support in familiar settings.

What works well in supporting women and minority communities to tackle gambling harms

Three key components of successful community engagement were identified: (1) *Consistent and responsive outreach* is needed to engage community leaders and community members. This may include finding ways to provide support in a confidential way that guarantees anonymity. (2) *Taking time to build trust and understanding*, and (3) *maintenance of existing community relationships* are important. Focus group participants noted that building trust within communities, especially with religious leaders and women, can take a long time. While IOF funding might have helped organizations build new relationships, it was noted that organizations relied on existing relationships. Limited funding meant that organizations must be selective and prioritize relationships deemed to be beneficial to them and the communities they work with.

Including people with lived experience is an effective way to reduce stigma and inform project design and delivery. However, it can be emotionally taxing and potentially retraumatizing for people with lived experience to be involved in projects. In addition, it

was noted that projects often relied on a small pool of people with lived experience, as people need to be in a stable stage of recovery to feel ready to share their experiences. There must be safeguards and support for people with lived experience in place. In some cases, involving people with lived experience is not appropriate, particularly when working with children and young people.

A key aim of the IOF program was to shift gambling support from traditional clinical models toward holistic, community-based approaches. The funded projects introduced several innovative approaches. These included online peer support spaces, embedding gambling support into wider social services, and using storytelling methods to reduce stigma and encourage conversations about gambling harms.

Structural factors that hinder success

Several structural factors were identified that influence the success and failure of projects.

- *Lack of culturally appropriate and gender-specific services.* There is also limited integration of gambling harms into wider systems.
- *Lack of long-term and sustainable funding.* A key challenge mentioned by participants is the lack of long-term, sustainable funding under the voluntary levy system. Participants described this as the most significant barrier to effective support. Sustainable funding is needed to retain staff, maintain established relationships, evaluate long-term impact, support people in recovery consistently, and sustain community-led initiatives.
- *Under-recognition of local grassroots and community-led projects.* Participants noted that local grassroots and community-based organizations are often undervalued despite being highly effective at delivering support. They are often overlooked in favour of larger accredited organizations. For these organizations, barriers include accreditation requirements, limited funding, administrative burden, and unequal partnerships with larger organizations.

- *Fragmented nature of sector referral pathways.* Participants noted that while the NGSN plays a role in improving connection and coordination, larger and more established organizations may hesitate to work with newer organizations with less of a “track record”. Referral pathways were described as fragmented. As a result, organizations often need to build referral networks on their own. Participants also noted that unstable short-term funding weakens referral pathways. They recommended the creation of an independent national board to improve oversight, build connections, and support smaller organizations.

Lastly, participants identified stigma related to GambleAware’s historical industry-funded model. Some organizations were reluctant to collaborate despite limited evidence of industry influence. The introduction of the statutory levy in April 2025 was viewed as a potential opportunity to help with this.

Who is it intended for?

This report could be of interest to policy makers, funders, public health professionals, and community-based organizations, among others. The report provides insight for stakeholders involved in designing, delivering, or evaluating gambling support for women, and minority ethnic and religious communities.

What does the report recommend?

The funded projects described in the report highlight the value of culturally appropriate and gender-specific approaches that are informed by lived experience. For IOF-funded projects, the report recommends:

- Emphasizing low-cost collaborations, such as joint training sessions and co-located drop-ins.
- Sharing knowledge, resources, and expertise.
- Building informal alliances by establishing regular communication channels.
- Emphasizing mutual benefits.

For future funders and commissioners, the report recommends:

- Ensuring culturally responsive, community-centred, and trauma-informed approaches that include people with lived experience.
- Integrating gambling support into broader services, training professionals, and incorporating screening into routine care.
- Developing wider strategies to address inequalities and cost-of-living pressures.
- Providing long-term funding to organizations focused on minority groups and women and those with community-led approaches.
- Streamlining referral pathways and building greater connections between organizations.
- Providing opportunities for smaller organizations to take part in research and networking

About the researchers

Jessica Weir is a Principal Consultant at New Philanthropy Capital in Scotland. **Lily Meisner** is a Consultant at New Philanthropy Capital in Scotland. **Brendan McGowan** is a Senior Consultant at New Philanthropy Capital in Scotland.

Citation

Weir, J., Meisner, L., & McGowan, B. (2025, December). *Improving Outcomes Fund: Learning and evaluation report*. GambleAware.
<https://www.gambleaware.org/our-research/publication-library/articles/improving-outcomes-fund-learning-and-evaluation-report/>

Study Funding

New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) was commissioned by GambleAware to prepare this report.

About Greo Evidence Insights

Greo Evidence Insights is an independent, non-profit organization specializing in research, knowledge mobilization, and evaluation in the health and well-being sectors. Greo transforms research and insights into actionable strategies to prevent and reduce harm related to gambling, gaming, technology use, and substance use. To learn more about funding for Research Snapshots visit [our website](#).