knowledge snapshot

A framework for stakeholder actions to minimize harms from online gambling

What this article is about

The Internet provides easy and constant access to gambling. Concerns have been raised that online gambling poses a greater risk for experiencing harms than land-based gambling. Yet, there is little evidence to guide policies on how to create a safe online gambling environment. Behavioural science can identify nudges that compel people to gamble safely while respecting their right to make choices. In this article, the authors present a framework based on behavioural science principles. The framework describes the actions that different stakeholders can take to minimize harms from online gambling.

What was done?

The authors use a customer journey map to illustrate the hypothetical journey of a user, 'Joshua', which leads to increasing harms from online gambling. The authors describe the actions that different stakeholders can take at each step of the journey to help lower the risk of harms.

What you need to know

Individual users

There are many actions that people can take to decrease the risk of harms from online gambling. The authors suggest that people should inform themselves about the features of gambling websites. In this way, they will have better knowledge on how to select the settings they prefer and turn off any features that can drive them towards continued gambling. People should also inform themselves about the tools available to reduce harms. These include tools to help them exercise self-control, such as setting a timer on their gambling session. There are also customer protection tools. For example, pre-commitment tools

Why is this article important?

There is a lack of evidence to guide policies for online gambling. In this article, the authors present a framework that outlines the actions that different stakeholders can take to minimize harms from online gambling. The framework describes how collaborative efforts between stakeholders can help to lower the risk of harms. The authors hope that it will facilitate discussion between stakeholders and serve to guide future work.

allow people to set limits on money and time, and self-exclusion allows people to ban themselves from specific gambling sites for a period of time.

It is acknowledged that some people may find it difficult to exercise self-control over their gambling due to mental health conditions or other factors.

Community groups

Community groups are non-profit organizations that are independent from governments. These groups can work with other stakeholders, such as researchers, to provide people with up-to-date information about the risks of gambling and strategies to prevent harms. Community groups can facilitate access to treatment. They can also work as advocates to bring forth the needs and concerns of people in a community to regulators. It is important that community groups are funded in an independent manner and without restrictions to minimize conflicts of interest.

Gambling industry

The gambling industry should make sure that their websites, apps, products, and marketing are designed to help people gamble at a level that they can afford.

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This includes avoiding designs that distort people's beliefs about their chance of winning or reduce people's ability to reflect on their decision. Gambling operators should verify users' identity before they can gamble. Operators should also identify and provide support to users who are at risk or are experiencing gambling problems. An option is to set customer protection tools as the default option. For example, a time limit could be placed on all users, but users could change the setting if they wish to gamble for longer.

Government and regulators

Policymakers and regulators should commission research and review evidence to guide policy options. They should also consult with other stakeholders and the public when making decisions. Research evidence for land-based gambling can be used to inform online gambling regulation.

Financial institutions

Banks and credit providers can provide people with summaries of their gambling spending on a regular basis. They can provide people with tools to set spending limits and block or notify people when they are approaching their limits. Banks can also help identify people who are at risk or are experiencing gambling problems and stop their access to credit.

Researchers

Researchers from different disciplines can work together to identify which elements of online gambling cause harms. They can also work with gambling operators and financial institutions to create models that will identify people at risk of gambling problems. Researchers can involve other stakeholders in their research to ensure that the issues raised by these groups are addressed.

Finally, the authors recommend open communication between different stakeholders to reach shared goals. They also recommend that stakeholders work together to co-design and co-evaluate projects.

Who is it intended for?

This article is intended for all stakeholder groups. The authors hope that it will facilitate discussion and serve to guide future work.

About the researchers

Sally M. Gainsbury, Nicola Black, and **Alex Blaszczynski** are affiliated with the Gambling Treatment and Research Clinic, Brain and Mind Centre and the Technology Addiction Team at the University of Sydney in Sydney, Australia. **Sascha Callaghan** is with the Technology Addiction Team and Sydney Law School at the University of Sydney. **Garner Clancey** is with the Technology Addiction Team, Brain and Mind Centre, and Sydney Law School at the University of Sydney. **Vladan Starcevic** is with the Technology Addiction Team, Nepean Clinical School and Brain and Mind Centre at the University of Sydney. **Agnieszka Tymula** is with the Technology Addiction Team, School of Economics, Brain and Mind Centre and Charles Perkins Centre at the University of Sydney. For more information about this article, please contact Sally M. Gainsbury at sally.gainsbury@sydney.edu.au.

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

Learn more about GREO by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.