

# research snapshot

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## Process evaluation of a public health program on gambling policy development and implementation

### What this research is about

New Zealand's *Gambling Act 2003* mandated a national strategy to prevent and reduce gambling harms. One of the public health programs developed to do this was Policy Development and Implementation (PDI).

PDI has three policy focus areas. The first is on 'workplace/organisational gambling policies'. This area aims to increase the adoption of policies to reduce gambling harms among employees and clients of different organizations. The second focus area is on 'non-gambling fundraising policies'. It aims to encourage fundraising methods that do not involve gambling and non-acceptance of gambling funding. The third focus area is on 'council policies on electronic gaming machine (EGM) venues'. It aims to have city councils include community concerns on policies regarding the location and distribution of EGM venues.

The current study describes a process evaluation to gain insights into the PDI program's delivery. The evaluation aims to identify practical information (e.g., program strengths and challenges, program reception) that can be used by program planners and implementers to improve its effectiveness. The evaluation findings can also be used to guide similar public health initiatives in other places.

### What the researchers did

The researchers evaluated the PDI program using the 'service specification' set out by the government. This required that implementers identified and worked with relevant partners (e.g., councils, businesses, education providers, sports clubs). It also required that implementers educated organizations on

### What you need to know

The current study describes a process evaluation of the Policy Development and Implementation (PDI) program in New Zealand. The PDI is a public health program with three policy focus areas. Encouraging workplace/organizational policy development requires raising awareness of risks and costs to employers and society. Encouraging non-gambling fundraising policies is challenging as many community groups rely on funds from gambling proceeds. To date, most efforts have not gone beyond encouraging alternative fundraising practices. There is a need for public debate on ethical aspects of accepting funds from gambling proceeds to encourage policy consideration. Public involvement in council decisions on EGM policies has strong implications for policy effectiveness. There is a need to negate the perceptions that gambling revenue has economic benefits.

gambling harms and the importance of policy. So, "target group identification" and "relationship development" were included in the criteria.

The researchers reviewed over 100 six-monthly progress reports submitted by all program implementers between July 2010 and June 2013. The reports detailed activities delivered, outcomes, and some findings from implementers. The researchers also gained information from a focus group with eight public health staff. The researchers analyzed the reports and staff feedback for common themes.

### What the researchers found

The PDI program resulted in development of some workplace/organizational gambling policies, little development of policies on non-gambling fundraising, and some positive influences on councils' decisions on EGM policies. Each focus area had unique requirements to influence policy uptake. Overall, policy uptake depended on recognizing the seriousness of gambling issues and the need for policies. It also depended on collaborative relationships and a sense of shared responsibility in addressing gambling harms.

Evaluating the development of workplace/organizational gambling policies suggested that awareness raising on the seriousness of gambling harms was needed. To advocate for these policies, it was necessary to provide evidence of the range of risks and costs to employers. Challenges included getting organizations to recognize problem gambling as a relevant issue. It was important to understand organizational and community contexts in order to influence policy uptake.

Advocating for policies on non-gambling fundraising was the most challenging. It was targeted at stakeholders, such as community groups and sports clubs, that typically relied on funds from gambling proceeds. For many implementers, progress did not go beyond encouraging alternative fundraising practices. The evaluation suggested that advocacy should increase understanding of the ethical implications of accepting funds from gambling proceeds. Also, it should include providing other fundraising ideas.

Evaluating the process that led to positive influences on council EGM policies suggested a need to downplay perceptions about the economic benefits from gambling revenue. Also, policy advocacy should involve the public, including people impacted by gambling harms.

### How you can use this research

Policy-makers, program funders, and public health workers can use the information from this process evaluation to guide similar policies in other places

that have growing gambling activities. They should focus on the development of tools, resources and awareness raising materials to help with policy advocacy work.

### About the researchers

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### Keywords

Workplace, organizational, fundraising, and electronic gaming machine gambling policies, gambling harm reduction, problem gambling public health programme

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### Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (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 responsible 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.

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