

knowledge snapshot



Improving safer gambling messages for race and sports betting based on alcohol and tobacco research

What this article is about

Sports and race betting is the main form of online gambling in Australia. It also contributes greatly to gambling harm. But there is no consistent national approach to safer gambling messages. Safer gambling messages are one public health strategy used to reduce gambling-related harm. The most common messages ask people to “gamble responsibly”. Such messages have drawn criticism for being ineffective.

The authors reviewed research from other public health domains (i.e., alcohol and tobacco) to learn how the design of safer gambling messages for race and sports betting can be improved.

What was done?

The authors considered research evidence from other public health domains. The authors discussed health warnings on tobacco packages and alcohol containers. They then identified five potential areas for further messaging-based research in race and sports betting.

What you need to know

Previous research has found that the use of larger and more graphic warnings of smoking’s consequences is most effective. But people who smoke on a daily basis may pay the least attention to tobacco warnings. The authors looked at warnings on alcohol containers. Past studies found that including graphic warnings around alcohol’s health risks increased participants’ intention to reduce and quit consuming alcohol.

Tobacco and alcohol messages often use emotions to influence behaviours. Messages that use fear and negative emotions can be more effective when they suggest that people have the power to change. Messaging around alcohol that draws on positive

Why is this article important?

Safer gambling messages are one public health strategy used to reduce gambling-related harm. There is not much research on safer gambling messaging for race and sports betting. This review summarizes research on gambling and other public health domains (alcohol and tobacco messaging). Based on their review, the authors discuss five potential areas for improving messages for race and sports betting: (1) teaching safer gambling practices; (2) correcting gambling misperceptions; (3) boosting conscious decision making; (4) norm-based messages; and (5) emotional messages. This review is useful for policy makers and researchers concerned with designing safer gambling messages for race and sports betting.

emotions may better support intentions to reduce alcohol consumption.

There is less evidence on warnings about gambling-related harm compared to alcohol and tobacco warnings. Research on safer gambling messages is partly limited because (1) what counts as harmful gambling depends on a person’s characteristics (e.g., available time and financial resources); (2) harms from gambling are not as graphic as those from tobacco or alcohol; and (3) it can be hard to communicate the signs of harmful gambling in a textual warning. The authors describe five potential message themes based on previous research.

Teaching safer gambling practices

The authors suggest that safer gambling messages can provide information on behaviours and self-management techniques linked to non-harmful

gambling. But the effectiveness of this type of messages depends on the characteristics and behaviours of people who gamble, as well as the environment supporting their decisions.

Correcting gambling misperceptions

People with problem gambling tend to have incorrect beliefs about luck and random chance. Messages that aim to correct these thoughts are designed so that they can hopefully modify behaviours. But corrective thought messages applied to electronic gambling machines (EGMs) may not be useful for race and sports betting. Moreover, research has found that such messages can increase people's knowledge but are less effective at changing behaviours. The authors suggest that corrective thought messages should not be the main content type of safer gambling messages.

Boosting conscious decision making

Safer gambling messages could help boost people's level of conscious decision making by encouraging analytical thinking. For example, messages could inform people that being on a "lucky" streak does not improve the odds of winning on their next bet.

Norm-based messages

Messages that include feedback about how a person's behaviour differs from their peers might reduce gambling frequency and spending. Such messages need to be designed to reduce the likelihood of backfiring (i.e., people gamble even more).

Emotional messages

While messages that draw on fear and negative emotions can be effective, messages that evoke too much fear may be stigma-inducing and ineffective. Contrastingly, safer gambling messages that induce positive emotions appear under-researched.

Who is it intended for?

Researchers can use this review to guide future studies. Policy makers can use this review to strengthen safer gambling messages.

About the researchers

Philip W. S. Newall is affiliated with the School of Psychological Science at the University of Bristol in

Bristol, UK, and the Experimental Gambling Research Laboratory in the School of Health, Medical and Applied Sciences at CQUniversity in Sydney, Australia. **Matthew Rockloff**, **Nerilee Hing**, and **Matthew Browne** are affiliated with the Experimental Gambling Research Laboratory in the School of Human, Medical and Applied Sciences at CQUniversity in Bundaberg, Australia. **Alex M. T. Russell** is affiliated with the Experimental Gambling Research Laboratory in the School of Health, Medical and Applied Sciences at CQUniversity in Sydney, Australia. **Hannah Thorne** and **Tess Armstrong** are affiliated with the Experimental Gambling Research Laboratory in the School of Human, Medical and Applied Sciences at CQUniversity in Wayville, Australia. For more information about this study, please contact Philip Newall at philip.newall@bristol.ac.uk.

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