

# Communities Addressing Gambling Harms

Summary of idea generation sessions

## Introduction

The GMCA hosted an online event to launch the Communities Addressing Gambling Harms fund on 24 June 2021, inviting representatives from organisations working across Greater Manchester to join a new Community of Practice working to prevent and reduce gambling harms. This document summarises discussion and ideas generated during four breakout sessions to inform the development of projects and proposals under each of the four identified priority areas.

This document should be read alongside the Communities Addressing Gambling Harms in Greater Manchester funding prospectus which includes details of case studies shared during the breakout sessions. This document and details of how to apply for funding are available on the [GMCA website](#).

## Tackling inequalities

Anyone who gambles is vulnerable to harm, however gambling harms can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and inequalities. For example, despite there being a higher rate of gambling disorder among people who gamble of ethnically and culturally diverse heritage, people from these groups are underrepresented in treatment and support services and are more likely to report shame and stigma as a barrier to disclosing a gambling disorder.

Strengths and opportunities of this approach:

- Place and demographic based approaches are important, as is the feeling that those raising awareness about gambling are 'from' or connected to the community of interest.
- Leadership from within the community was felt to be a real strength of successful projects (taking example of efforts to increase vaccination take-up

among under-represented groups) as understand community cultural norms and use the same 'language' as those facing difficulties – cultural references were felt to be very important, and this applies across all communities of interest.

- Highlighted that thinking about gambling harm links to wider issues around debt which may provide a 'softer' messaging tool to access targeted communities without using the phrase 'gambling harm'.
- Activities to raise awareness of the risks of gambling will play an important role in the battle against stigma associated with talking about gambling.
- There is an opportunity to include consideration of gambling alongside other harms, addiction, and mental wellbeing initiatives.
- Screening tools and brief interventions are available to support wider conversation and generate referrals to specialist services where this may be appropriate.
- A focus on the assets of communities is valuable to support recovery, for example, providing alternative recreational activities as a diversion from gambling (i.e. so it is not seen as the only source of entertainment within a community or social group).

Potential challenges and weaknesses to consider in this approach:

- It is difficult to provide a one-size-fits-all approach, for example, must not ignore the female demographic, with gambling behaviours differing between genders. Projects should take a nuanced approach to reach different cohorts.
- Stigmatisation in any community of interest is a huge barrier to accessing support.
- Screening tools must be simple enough to use, with those using them provided with appropriate training to support having meaningful conversations.
- Very important to ensure that all those who are affected by gambling addiction are supported, for example in PTSD treatment, friends and family also suffer alongside the person with PTSD and equally require support. This may also

be very specific practical support, for example, gaining control of finances from the person experiencing gambling disorder.

- Concern expressed that gambling harm could become 'just another thing' to add to the burden of front-line staff.

## Reforming public services

With the broad range of harms associated with gambling disorder, it is likely that people may be receiving support from 'public service organisations' without gambling disorder being identified as a possible 'root cause' of the harm.

Key points to consider:

- Recognition that public service organisations have both a significant 'customer' base and workforce. Considerable opportunities lie with both to reach a significant proportion of the population at risk of harm.
- There is a need to raise awareness across public services about gambling harm and that gambling can be a recognised addiction, with gambling only recently being viewed in the same way as other more traditional 'public health' issues.
- Risk in referring to public services as a cohesive entity – they are not. Different services provide different opportunities to engage with people experiencing gambling disorder, at different stages in an individual or family's journey.
- Opportunities in looking at existing public services and how an understanding of gambling related harm can be better integrated into these e.g. debt services, mental health, assessment mechanisms.
- Need to think about impact on Children and Young People through the public service lens e.g. role in schools, degree to which this issue is considered in formal 'safeguarding'.
- Need to think how we better educate/raise awareness amongst public service workforce – what do we want them to know and what do we want them to do?

Caution around yet another issue-based training input rather than a holistic 'person-centred' approach.

- What evidence and data might we need to provide a truly place-based approach to gambling harm reduction – how do we determine what the issues are among the cohort of people that each 'service' supports?

What might a 'no wrong door' response to gambling related harm look like? (note that this is a summary of discussion and is not intended to be an exhaustive list of opportunities available)

- Need to have a baseline/minimum level of understanding across different public services so that opportunities for preventative interventions are not missed. This currently varies massively.
- How might there be better join up across Criminal Justice System, Housing, Finance services in terms of helping to jointly manage an action plan with an individual?
- Primary Care offer a specific area of focus both in terms of raising awareness, screening, referral for advice, support, and social prescribing.
- Opportunities to explore how ideas or projects could be incorporated into existing public service transformation programmes (e.g. Live Well) rather than build something separate.
- Tenancy support / council letting could have a role to play in supporting tenants where gambling harm is identified as an underlying issue.

## Community-led activities and sports clubs

Community-led activities and sports clubs are grounded in the communities they serve and are an opportunity to engage with priority audiences using more informal mechanisms to raise awareness and provide support to people who may be at risk of experiencing gambling related harms.

The following points were discussed for consideration in the development of proposals:

- These sorts of projects aren't new and there is a lot of evidence available about using sport as a 'jumping off' point for health interventions. We can learn from previous delivery what works, how they work and use this to replicate activity in relation to gambling.
- May need to be careful about the dynamics of sport for gambling, particularly for those who have developed strong associations between sport and participating in gambling.
- Success of previous club, peer or community-led programmes have been reliant upon inclusion of talking therapies and professional input to ensure participants are receiving appropriate support – it may be appropriate to link with existing support providers and groups.
- There are a lot of schemes led by professional sports clubs, however these are not right for everyone therefore we need to ensure we are including the whole system, for example, involving gardening and walking groups to reach different demographics.
- Language is important – terms and approaches such as 'responsible' or 'safer' gambling are associated with gambling industry campaigns which individualise responsibility. Involving experts by lived experience and the recovery community in project development would be useful in developing effective messaging.
- There is a big gap in terms of messaging relating to 'big event' days such as the Grand National or Euro 2020. These are times when gambling advertising peaks but there is not a similar surge in counter-marketing messages or promotion of support available to those who may be at-risk of harm.

## Children and young people

Although the legal age to participate in gambling is 18yrs (currently 16yrs for the National Lottery, but scheduled to increase to 18yrs), children and young people are particularly at risk of developing a gambling disorder. Experts by lived experience of gambling disorder cite early exposure to gambling as a factor with a consensus that there is little or not enough information or resources available for children and young

people / families and relevant organisations in relation to gambling and gambling disorder.

Opportunities identified during breakout sessions to engage children and young people:

- Education could be provided through schools from a very early age (6-7 year olds) with more structured, focussed engagement from Year 7 (11-12 year olds) onward, ensuring this is drip-fed at key moments during a child's development with age-appropriate resources and support.
- In-school activities would need to be followed up with a holistic approach to include the wider family network to raise awareness of the warning signs and provide advice as to how to have productive conversations about the risks of gambling.
- Schools are one route to engage, however it may be more effective to engage children through more specific groups and activities they are engaged in to provide more targeted information, e.g. sports clubs, gaming communities, etc.
- Create a range of infrastructures that stimulate conversations around this issue ensuring those key stakeholders have the tools to spot the warning signs/stimulate open conversations/support individuals who require help.
- Platforms where young people are most active, such as TikTok and SnapChat, may be more effective than traditional media approaches – we should go to where young people are rather than bringing them to 'our' platforms.
- Students were also identified as a particular community of interest noting that it is a time of transition with first independence from home and access to large monetary lump sum (student loans) – universities could play a key role in raising awareness before issues arise.

The following challenges should be considered in the development of projects:

- Schools are often hard to engage as they either don't perceive gambling or gaming addiction to be a problem in their school, or they simply do not have

capacity to 'add another issue' onto an already full pastoral support menu. With schools becoming increasingly independent from local authority control it is harder to obtain buy-in therefore other mechanisms may be required, for example inclusion of County Lines in OFSTED inspection criteria.

- Some children struggle to engage in a classroom or group setting, particularly if they are affected by someone else's gambling (i.e. a parent or sibling), therefore safe spaces should be created for children to come forward and seek support.