

Paul Scully MP  
Minister for Technology and the Digital Economy  
100 Parliament Street  
London  
SW1A 2BQ  
United Kingdom



23<sup>rd</sup> November 2022

Dear Minister,

### **Tackling Gambling Stigma – The case for action**

Last week our organisation Tackling Gambling Stigma, convened an expert roundtable of academics, clinicians, Parliamentarians and people with lived experience of gambling harm to discuss the forthcoming Gambling White Paper and the need to tackle the stigma and discrimination attached to gambling harm. Stigma can mean people affected and others impacted by harm are reluctant to seek the help and support they need. This adds further damage to their mental health and is a reason why gambling is the addiction most linked to suicidality. Furthermore, we discussed the fact that the Government discriminates by treating gambling differently from other harmful products. Again, this causes gambling harm and adds to the sense that people harmed by gambling do not matter and are to blame.

By way of background, tackling gambling stigma is an online resource where people can learn what it is like to experience gambling harm by reading, listening, or watching people sharing their experiences. We invite you to use this resource to hear first-hand from people with lived experiences the causes and consequences of the gambling harm, stigma, and discrimination they experience.

We have learnt that from all sides, people got the message that they were solely to blame for the harm they and those around them experienced. Meanwhile, people do not have the same protections, rights, and support services for gambling as other harmful activities, like drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. Or even as they do for everyday consumer goods. Currently, people have more protections for buying a cup of coffee than they do for gambling – when gambling is harmful and addictive.

Stigma means that people experiencing harm often feel a deep shame that stops them from getting help. Stereotyping and blaming people harmed by gambling justify discrimination in how regulatory bodies, financial services providers, healthcare, and justice systems deal with gambling. Stigmatising the people harmed hides the real causes and extent of harm, preventing the Government from making vital changes.

No longer should blame for gambling harm rest with the individual, while Government does not provide protections, rights, and support services and this was a key theme in our recent roundtable discussion. The roundtable of experts agreed and recommended that:

- There must be no further delay to the publication of the Gambling White Paper. Without a legislative vehicle to implement change, the discrimination towards those suffering from gambling harm will continue.
- The White Paper must treat gambling harm as a public health issue just as we already do for drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. The Government has stated that gambling is a public health issue. This means Government must be unequivocal in that gambling is harmful and the products are addictive. This is why a public health approach is required. The Government should adopt a cross-departmental public health approach when considering gambling reforms. At the core must be effective regulation of the gambling industry to protect public health and prevent harm. Everyone is vulnerable to an addictive product, and gambling regulation should reflect this.
- Language and attitudes towards those suffering from gambling harm need to change. Current language about gambling always suggests that those experiencing harms are responsible rather than clear public health messages that gambling is harmful. Organisations funded by the industry still produce messages that go out to the public and tell people to control themselves

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without explaining how gambling can be harmful and addictive. We know from evidence and people with lived experiences that these campaigns cause harm. The Government needs to lead by being clear to the public that gambling is harmful and with public health messages based on evidence of what works.

We believe that these recommendations are critical to ensuring that gambling is less harmful in this country, and we urge you to act on them in the process of reform around the upcoming white paper.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'A. Källman'.

Alexander Källman

Managing Director  
Tackling Gambling Stigma  
[www.tacklinggamblingstigma.com](http://www.tacklinggamblingstigma.com)