



Strategy for gambling harm prevention in the ACT

A public health approach 2019 – 2024



ACT
Government



Gambling & Racing
Commission



Statement of support from the Gambling and Racing Commission Chair

I am very pleased to be able to present on behalf of the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission (the Commission) the *Strategy for Gambling Harm Prevention in the ACT* (the Strategy).

The prevention and reduction of gambling harm are core objectives of the Commission. Providing effective gambling harm prevention initiatives in the ACT is pivotal and underpins the Commission's roles and functions.

The development of this Strategy has evolved from years of academic research and widespread support for a public health approach to reducing gambling related harm. The Strategy provides the Commission with an evidence-based, practical plan for applying a public health approach to preventing gambling harm in our community. It also provides a roadmap for the Commission to work towards achieving our vision of a Canberra free from gambling harm.

The Commission released a draft of this Strategy for comment in October 2018 and we have proactively engaged with all interested parties including gambling industry representatives, community groups, help service providers, and Government. We are sincerely grateful for the time and effort stakeholders have taken to provide feedback. It has been invaluable in ensuring our harm prevention and reduction initiatives provide real, measurable progress in addressing gambling harm in our community.

This Strategy will guide the Commission in the development and delivery of effective, coordinated, evidence-based activities over five financial years, from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This demonstrates the Commission's long-term commitment to adopting a public health approach to preventing gambling harm in the ACT.

The adoption and implementation of a public health approach has placed the ACT amongst international and Australian jurisdictions progressively leading the prevention and reduction of gambling harm.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Baxter', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Paul Baxter

Chairperson, ACT Gambling and Racing Commission

Gambling harm from a public health perspective

This Strategy provides a guide for developing, implementing and monitoring initiatives designed to prevent and reduce harm in the ACT. It outlines the rationale, principles and objectives for adopting a public health approach over five financial years, from 2019/20 to 2023/24.

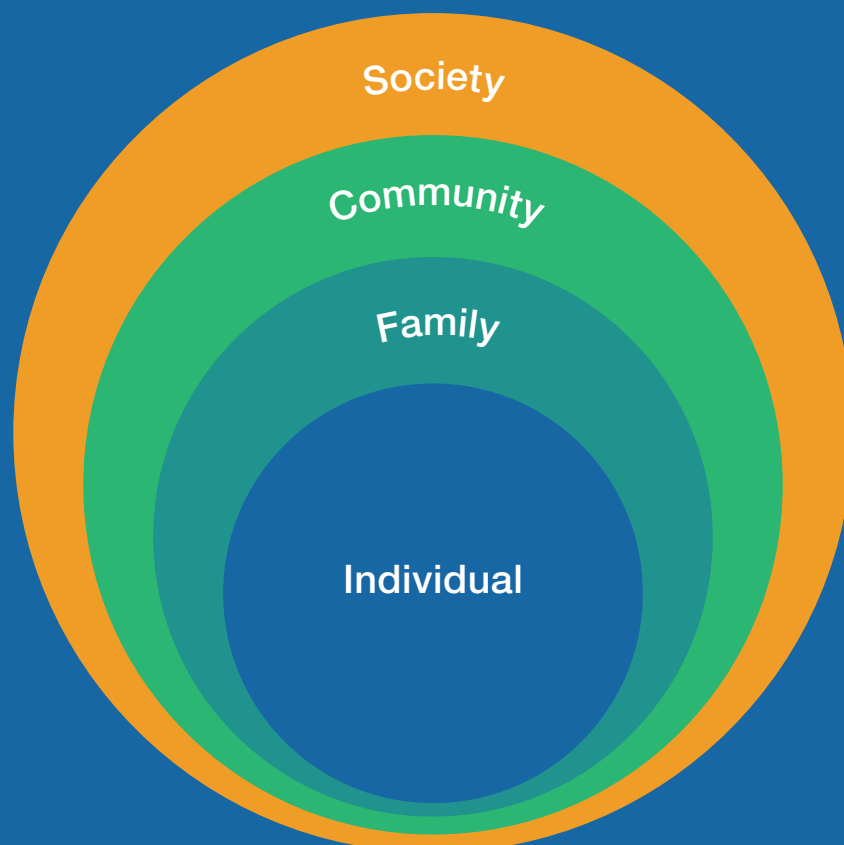
The Commission has adopted a public health approach to gambling harm, which takes a broad perspective about responsibility and areas for action. Instead of focusing only on treating ‘problem gamblers’ it also aims to prevent problems and promote wellbeing. It is commonly defined ‘as the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organised efforts and informed choices of society, organisations, public and private, communities and individuals’.

Gambling is an activity that many people enjoy, yet the significant social and individual harms that can arise from it mean it also arouses ambivalence and opposition.

Gambling products are not homogenous, some are more harmful than others. Some types are relatively benign. Other types can more easily lead to harm, particularly those involving regular, prolonged participation because they are continuous in nature and entail an element of skill or perceived skill. These include poker machines, casino table games, horse track and sports betting.

There are gambling-specific as well as more general factors that increase the likelihood that a person will experience gambling harm or increase the burden of existing harms.

The ACT Government ‘Will deliver on our commitment to implement strong gambling harm reduction measures while supporting a sustainable, diverse and vibrant club industry that continues to make a valuable contribution to the ACT community.’ Gordon Ramsay MLA, ACT Attorney General.



Strategy principles

The Commission commits to adopting the following public health principles in preventing and reducing gambling harm in the ACT.

1. Gambling harm is any negative consequence caused or made worse by gambling.

The Commission recognises that harms from gambling are diverse and can be experienced by people who gamble, people around them and at the community level. Gambling harm isn't experienced by all individuals in the same manner.

2. Gambling harm lies on a continuum.

The success of a public health approach to gambling harm relies on co-ordinated, evidence based initiatives directed along the entire continuum of harm.

3. Gambling activity is not homogenous, some products are more harmful than others.

The Commission recognises that gambling refers to a wide range of activities. Some types of gambling are relatively benign while others can more easily lead to harm. A balanced approach is needed, that prioritises individual activities based on risk and harm.

4. Gambling harm prevention and reduction requires a multifaceted approach.

Preventing gambling harm relies upon a diverse array of stakeholders recognising their roles and responsibilities. It requires collaborative and strategic engagement across multiple stakeholders and settings.

5. Initiatives need to be appropriately targeted and tailored.

A public health approach recognises the importance of targeting initiatives at factors influencing gambling harm amongst different population groups, including the general population, people with heightened risk, youth, vulnerable individuals and those already experiencing gambling harm. Initiatives need to be appropriately tailored to increase resilience and reduce risk for these groups.

6. A public health approach requires comprehensive and co-ordinated activity.

Meaningful harm prevention is most likely to come from the collective impact of a number of co-ordinated initiatives. Initiatives should be strategically planned across the public health principles and mapped out over time to ensure the best possible outcomes for the Canberra Community.

Strategy objectives

The objectives for this Strategy will guide the development, implementation and evaluation of gambling harm prevention and reduction efforts over the next five years.

1. Ensuring Government policy and initiatives prevent and reduce gambling harm.

The Strategy seeks to promote the adoption of policies and initiatives to prevent and reduce gambling harm. Government policies and initiatives will span a range of sectors, including industry, local communities and gambling information and support services.

2. Increasing understanding about gambling harm amongst government, gambling industry, communities, families and individuals.

Communications highlighting the broad range of harms that can result from gambling for people who gamble as well as their surrounding family, friends and communities, will raise awareness, reduce the stigma associated with gambling harm, and encourage those individuals who may require information and assistance to seek it.

3. Providing a wide range of accessible, responsive and effective services and initiatives that prevent and reduce gambling harm.

A range of initiatives are required that prevent and reduce the full spectrum of gambling harm as experienced by the different people affected by gambling in our community. The Commission commits to ongoing development, maintenance, evaluation and improvement of such services and initiatives that prevent and reduce gambling harm.

4. Ensuring gambling environments and providers prevent and reduce gambling harm.

The *Gambling and Racing Control (Code of Practice) Regulation 2002* sets out the minimum standards that gambling providers or venues must meet when providing gambling products in the ACT. The Commission will continue to work with gambling providers and other key stakeholders to develop, identify and implement in-venue opportunities to prevent gambling harm.

5. Supporting and building the evidence base for gambling harm prevention strategies and initiatives.

The Commission recognises the importance of building a stronger evidence base, through research and evaluation, regarding best practice for gambling harm prevention strategies and initiatives. The Commission will continue to support and build upon research relating to the prevalence, incidence and causes of gambling harm as well as gambling harm prevention initiatives.

Moving forward together

The purpose of this Strategy is to provide a framework that ties together current initiatives and an overarching narrative for planning, implementing and evaluating future harm prevention efforts. The Strategy's principles are founded upon recognising the broad range of harms associated with gambling for individuals and across the community, and differences in risk across products, as well as the components of a public health approach.

The Strategy outlines three levels for targeting the prevention and reduction of gambling related harm as experienced among the general population, people at heightened risk and people already experiencing heightened levels of harm. Those levels are:

1. Universal – initiatives that target the prevention and reduction of harm in the general population. Measures should be limited to actions that are 'safe for everyone and can be acted upon by anyone, without risk and without first needing to consult a health professional'. Examples include:
 - o Community based communication strategies designed to increase awareness and knowledge and decrease stigma
 - o Campaigns targeting resilience and risk amongst all youth.
2. Selective – initiatives that target prevention and reduction of harm amongst groups considered at heightened risk of gambling harm because of a shared characteristic. The risk may be imminent, or it may be a lifetime risk. Risks may be social, environmental, psychological or biological factors associated with gambling harm. Examples include:
 - o Making changes to gambling environments including accessibility and products, e.g. capping the number of venues or machines, modifications to products and restricting access to cash
 - o Increasing consumer knowledge about how to reduce harm, e.g. providing support kits containing information about gambling harm for staff and patrons of venues.
3. Indicated – initiatives that target the reduction of harm amongst people already experiencing heightened levels of gambling harm. Examples include:
 - o Developing and providing formal self-exclusion procedures - where people experiencing harm can exclude themselves from gambling
 - o Co-ordinating awareness and appropriate management of gambling harm across a range of health, wellbeing, financial counselling and other community services.

The Strategy maps a way forward towards achieving the Commission's vision of a Canberra free from gambling harm. A Canberra where people are making informed choices about gambling in safe environments, which are created by the community, gambling providers, support services, Government and the Commission effectively working together to prevent gambling harm.

