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Policy Brief

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Public Health Gambling Messaging in the UK

Research Team: Devashish Ray[1], Aikaterini Grimani[2], Laura McGowan[1], Ty Hayes[2], Ivo Vlaev[2], Michael P. Kelly[1, 3], Emily Oliver[1], Philip Newall[4], Henrik Singmann[5]

Affiliations: [1]NIHR Policy Research Unit Behavioural and Social Sciences, Newcastle University; [2] NIHR Policy Research Unit Behavioural and Social Sciences, Behaviour Science Group, Warwick Business School, University of Warwick; [3]Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge; [4]School of Psychological Science, University of Bristol; [5]Experimental Psychology, University College London.

This Policy Brief synthesises independent evidence on public health gambling messaging and provides actionable recommendations for policy and practice.

About the research

Gambling-related harm affects individuals, families and communities. Messaging is one component of a wider public health response and can contribute to prevention and early harm reduction by increasing awareness, correcting misperceptions and shaping attitudes. However, messaging alone is unlikely to produce sustained behaviour change.

In the UK, gambling-related messaging has often relied on slogans such as “Gamble responsibly” and “When the fun stops, stop.” These messages fit an individual responsibility framework and can be perceived as unrealistic or unhelpful by people affected by gambling-related harm. They can reinforce stigma and underplay wider influences on gambling behaviour, including marketing, product design and accessibility.

A **public health messaging approach** acknowledges that gambling harms are shaped by social, commercial and environmental contexts as well as individual behaviour. Evidence indicates that independent, factual and compassionate messages—especially those correcting common misconceptions—are rated as more credible and helpful than conventional responsibility slogans.

Key recommendations

- Ensure **independence from industry** and move beyond narrow “responsible gambling” framings.
- Use **evidence-informed targeting** to improve relevance across groups while maintaining a consistent public health frame.
- Prioritise **factual and compassionate content**, including correcting misconceptions and signposting to independent support.
- **Deploy clusters of messages** and rotate content to maintain salience and reduce unintended effects.
- **Position messaging within a wider strategy** (regulation, environments and services), with realistic expectations of impact.
- **Avoid stigmatising or moralising language**; use neutral, non-judgemental wording.

Methods (summary)

This brief draws on a programme of independent research integrating:
(1) Evidence synthesis about gambling messaging and transferable lessons from tobacco and alcohol;

(2) Qualitative research with under-represented groups: adults and children affected by someone else’s gambling; and

(**3) Experimental testing** of message perceptions and short-term behavioural outcomes.

Note on strength and limits of evidence

- Evidence supports effects of messaging on awareness, salience and attitudes.
- Evidence of behavioural impact is mixed.
- Short-term experiments may not capture longer-term or population-level impacts.
- Messaging should be implemented and evaluated as part of wider policy action.

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Key Findings

Overall, informational and positive-emotional (non-judgemental) messages are perceived more favourably than conventional "responsible gambling" slogans, while behavioural effects are small and context-dependent.

1. Independence and framing

- Responsibility slogans locate harm within individuals, which can reduce credibility and reinforce stigma, particularly among those harmed.
- Public health framing acknowledges wider social, commercial and environmental drivers and can avoid blame.
- This framing can support credibility, engagement, and policy coherence.

2. Targeting and acceptability

- No single message works for everyone; perceptions vary across message types and population groups.
- Targeted approaches can improve relevance and credibility.
- Targeting should avoid stereotypes and maintain a consistent public health frame.

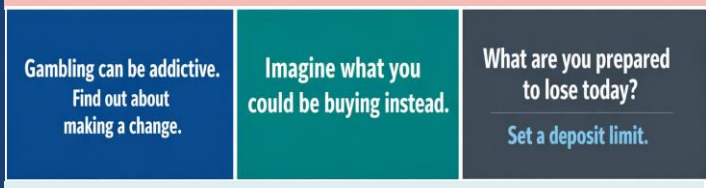
3. Factual and compassionate content

- Messages correcting gambling misconceptions, such as beliefs about the odds of winning, and control over outcomes, are rated as more credible and useful than responsibility slogans.
- Messages acknowledging emotional, relational and family impacts can increase acceptability.
- Compassionate framing can support reflection and help-seeking, without shaming.

4. Population-level effects of messaging

Messaging can shift awareness and attitudes, with small effects potentially meaningful at scale.

Examples of promising message taglines



Implications for policy and practice

1. **Use clusters and rotate content**

- Use clusters of complementary messages rather than single slogans.
- Rotate content to maintain salience and reduce unintended effects.
- Plan sustained delivery and adequate campaign intensity.

2. Position messaging within a wider strategy

- Embed messaging within regulatory, environmental and service-based interventions, rather than treating it as a standalone tool.
- Align communication with measures that reduce marketing exposure and support safer products and platform environments.

3. Ethical and inclusive communication

- Avoid messaging that blames, judges, or implies moral failure, which risks disengagement.
- Use respectful, non-stigmatising framing to support disclosure and help-seeking.

References

Available on request (including evidence syntheses and experimental study outputs).

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Declaration of interest

The research team declares no interests beyond receiving public research funding.

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