

Areas of Research Interest in Gambling Related Harms and Public Health

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Executive Summary

Background

Gambling related harms are a significant public health issue in Wales and can affect individuals, families, communities and wider society. Harms may impact mental and physical health, financial wellbeing, relationships, employment, education and housing. Whilst awareness of these harms has increased in recent years, important evidence gaps remain regarding the identification, prevention, and reduction of gambling related harms.

What we did

To support future research, policy and practice, Public Health Wales undertook an online stakeholder led research prioritisation workshop informed by Welsh and UK evidence, expert stakeholder engagement and recognised principles for health research priority setting.

What we found

Through this process, five areas of research interest for gambling related harms research in Wales were identified, reflecting shared stakeholder priorities and key areas for further research:

1. Digital and commercial environments
2. Population level prevention and regulation
3. Health inequalities and vulnerable populations
4. Early intervention across the life course
5. Systems response, treatment and recovery

Work with us

The five areas of research interest provide a framework for identifying critical evidence gaps and informing future research funding and investment decisions. They also support collaboration and partnership working to generate evidence that can inform policy and practice aimed at preventing and reducing gambling related harms across Wales.

These areas of interest should be read alongside Public Health Wales' broader Areas of Research and Evaluation Interest for 2026. Gambling related harms provide a focused example of a cross-cutting public health issue that aligns with Public Health Wales' wider interests in the commercial determinants of health, mental wellbeing, healthy behaviours, health inequalities, prevention and early intervention, and sustainable whole-system responses.

1. Background

Gambling related harms occur across a spectrum and may affect individuals, families, communities and society more broadly.^{1,2} Harms can include financial hardship, debt, poor mental and physical health, relationship breakdown, housing insecurity, reduced workplace productivity, criminal justice involvement and suicide-related behaviours.¹⁻⁴ Importantly, harms often extend beyond the individual gambling and can affect partners, children, family members, and others affected by another person's gambling.^{1,5,6}

A public health approach recognises that gambling related harms are shaped by a complex interaction of commercial, social, environmental and individual factors.^{1,2,8} Gambling products, marketing and advertising, online and digital environments, accessibility, socioeconomic circumstances and individual vulnerabilities can all influence gambling behaviours and associated risks, including affected others.^{1,5,8} Consequently, reducing gambling related harms requires coordinated action across multiple sectors, including public health, healthcare, education, workplaces, local government, regulation and community organisations.^{2,5,6}

In Wales, there is growing recognition of the need to prevent and reduce gambling related harms. The Welsh Government Task and Finish Group on Gambling Related Harm highlighted the importance of adopting a public health approach,⁸ while the Gambling Health Needs Assessment for Wales identified opportunities to strengthen prevention, improve pathways to support and develop a more coordinated response across services.²

Public Health Wales is the national public health agency for Wales, working to protect and improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. The Public Health Wales Long-Term Strategy 2023-2035 sets out a vision for a healthier, longer-living population in Wales where everyone has fair access to the conditions needed for good health and wellbeing.¹⁰ As part of this role, Public Health Wales is committed to generating and using evidence to support population health improvement, inform policy and practice, and address emerging public health challenges. Public Health Wales has also been appointed by Welsh Government to coordinate gambling harms prevention across Wales and therefore has an important role in supporting the development of a robust evidence base to inform policy, practice and future investment.¹¹

This report complements Public Health Wales' broader areas of Research and Evaluation Interest by providing a focused framework for research on gambling related harms, a cross-cutting public health issue identified within Public Health Wales' wider research and evaluation agenda.

To support this agenda, Public Health Wales has drawn on multiple sources of evidence, including the Gambling Health Needs Assessment for Wales,² analysis of the National Survey for Wales data,¹² the School Health Research Network (SHRN)^{13,14} and findings from the Gambling Survey for Great Britain.¹⁵ These sources provide insights into gambling participation, gambling related harms, vulnerable populations and wider determinants associated with gambling behaviour in Wales.^{1,12,14}

Analysis of the National Survey for Wales data¹² demonstrates opportunities to examine gambling related harms alongside a range of health, wellbeing and socioeconomic indicators. In 2022/23, 4,748 respondents answered questions relating to gambling participation. Among respondents with usable Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) data, 1% were classified as high-risk or problem gamblers, 2% as moderate-risk gamblers and 6% as low-risk gamblers. Findings from two SHRN reports also highlight gambling among young people in Wales, particularly boys. In 2023 14% of boys and 8% of girls reported spending their own money on gambling in the previous seven days.¹⁴ Earlier SHRN research found around two-fifths (41%) of 11-16 year olds had gambled in the previous 12 months.¹³

Despite growing awareness of gambling related harms, important evidence gaps remain. A rapid evidence assessment undertaken by the Policy Institute at King's College London identified significant gaps in understanding the financial, social and health impacts of gambling, the experiences of vulnerable populations and the effectiveness of interventions designed to prevent or reduce harm. The review also highlighted limited evidence regarding the costs of gambling harms to individuals, communities and public services.¹⁶ Similarly, the Gambling Commission's Evidence Roadmaps identified areas requiring further investigation relating to early gambling experiences, gambling related harm and vulnerability, product characteristics and risk, gambling environments, and the effectiveness of interventions.¹⁷ The Commission also highlighted the importance of evaluation of interventions, including the voice of those with lived experience of gambling related harms and evidence that can inform policy and regulatory decision-making.

The National UK Research Network for Behavioural Addictions (NUK-BA) has also identified priority areas for research, including improved understanding of gambling harms and vulnerability, enhanced surveillance and measurement, evaluation of interventions and the development of evidence-informed approaches to treatment and recovery.¹⁸

Recognising the need to ensure future research investment addresses the most important evidence gaps in Wales, Public Health Wales undertook a Gambling Harms Research Prioritisation Workshop. The workshop brought together stakeholders from Welsh Government, Health Boards, local authorities, academia and Public Health Wales to identify and prioritise future research needs. The resulting areas of research interest are intended to support researchers, policymakers, practitioners and funders to focus efforts on areas where additional evidence can contribute to preventing and reducing gambling related harms in Wales.

2. What we did

Evidence review

The areas of research interest were developed through a combination of Welsh and UK evidence, alongside stakeholder expertise and professional experience. Evidence mapping exercise was undertaken drawing on key sources including:

- The Lancet Public Health Commission on Gambling ¹
- Gambling Health Needs Assessment for Wales ²
- Understanding gambling related harms: a proposed definition, conceptual framework and taxonomy of harms ³
- Welsh Government policy development relating to gambling related harms ⁸
- Public Health Wales Long-Term Strategy 2023-2035¹⁰
- National Survey for Wales: April 2022 to March 2023¹²
- School Health Research Network 2019, 2023 ^{13,14}
- Gambling Survey for Great Britain¹⁵
- Policy Institute at King's College London Rapid Evidence Assessment on Gambling Related Harms¹⁶
- Gambling Commission Evidence Roadmaps ¹⁷
- National UK Research Network for Behavioural Addictions (NUK-BA) research priorities ¹⁸

The evidence mapping exercise identified key areas for further research and generated approximately 50 research questions relating to the prevention, treatment and recovery of gambling related harms in Wales. A multidisciplinary group of eight Public Health Wales staff with expertise in gambling harms reviewed the questions and grouped related topics into preliminary themes. This process resulted in eight initial thematic areas:

- Prevention
- Early intervention
- Treatment and support
- Children and young people
- Health inequalities
- Data and surveillance
- Lived experience
- Digital and online gambling

Stakeholder workshop

Public Health Wales convened an online Gambling Harms Research Prioritisation Workshop on 15 June 2026. Twenty-four participants from across Wales attended, representing Public Health Wales, Welsh Government, Health Boards, local authorities and academia, with expertise in addiction and gambling harms prevention. As direct public and lived experience representation was not included at this stage, the areas of research interest should be viewed as an evolving framework that will be refined through future lived experience engagement and emerging evidence.

The workshop used a stakeholder led, consensus based research prioritisation approach informed by the principles for health research priority setting described by Viergever et al.¹⁹ The purpose of the workshop was to identify and build consensus around the most important evidence gaps and research needs for Wales. Drawing on expertise from policy, practice, research and academia, participants considered current gaps in knowledge, emerging challenges and opportunities for research that could strengthen prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of adopting multidisciplinary approaches that draw on public health, healthcare, social sciences, economics, data science and lived experience perspectives to better understand the complex and interconnected factors that contribute to gambling related harms and inform effective responses.

The workshop opened with a series of presentations covering policy developments, public health approaches, treatment services and the current evidence base. Participants then took part in facilitated breakout discussions to explore gambling harms in the Welsh context, identify populations most affected by harm and consider where additional evidence was needed.

Building on the preliminary themes identified through the evidence mapping exercise, participants reviewed and refined the proposed research areas, identified additional areas requiring further investigation and discussed priorities for future research in Wales. Discussions were captured through workshop notes, breakout room feedback and contributions to a Miro board.

Following the discussions, participants completed a prioritisation exercise to identify the areas they considered most important for future research investment. Research areas were assessed according to their urgency, potential public health impact, feasibility, contribution to reducing inequalities, relevance to policy and practice, and opportunities for collaboration.

Following the workshop, the Public Health Wales project team reviewed the evidence mapping themes, workshop outputs, breakout feedback and Miro board contributions. Areas of overlap were consolidated into five overarching areas of research interest, reflecting shared stakeholder priorities and key evidence gaps for Wales.

3. What we found

Areas of research interest

The five areas of research interest are presented in Table 1. These are underpinned by Public Health Wales' wider approach to research and evaluation, which seeks to generate evidence that is prevention focused, equity oriented, policy relevant, and co-produced where appropriate.

Each area is accompanied by a summary description and a set of indicative research questions. These reflect key research needs identified through evidence mapping and stakeholder engagement and are intended to inform future research activity in Wales. The questions are not comprehensive and should be viewed as a starting point for further enquiry. Researchers, practitioners, policymakers and funders are encouraged to translate these broad topics into focused, answerable studies that are relevant to the Welsh context, address health inequalities and, where appropriate, incorporate the perspectives of people with lived experience of gambling related harms.

The framework is intended to be used as a working document and will continue to evolve through ongoing stakeholder engagement, lived experience input, emerging evidence, and changes in policy and practice. Advancing these areas will require multidisciplinary approaches that draw on expertise from public health, healthcare, social sciences, behavioural science, implementation science and health economics.

Table 1. Five Areas of Research Interest

Priority area	Research questions	Focus
Digital and Commercial Environments	What causes gambling related harms?	Understanding how commercial and digital systems, products and practice create or amplify gambling related harms.
Population-Level Prevention, Regulation and Surveillance	What prevents gambling related harms?	Identifying effective policies, regulations, population-level interventions and surveillance approaches to reduce harm.
Health Inequalities and Vulnerable Populations	Who is most affected by gambling related harms?	Understanding unequal exposure, vulnerability and impacts on affected others, and identifying approaches to reduce inequalities.
Early Intervention across the Life Course	When and how do gambling related harms develop?	Understanding the development of gambling attitudes, behaviours and harms across childhood, adolescence and adulthood, and opportunities for early intervention.
Systems Response, Treatment and Recovery	How should systems and services respond to gambling related harms?	Strengthening identification, treatment, recovery, support pathways and coordinated whole-system responses.

3.1 Digital and Commercial Environments

Digital and commercial environments were identified as a priority due to the growing influence of online platforms, gambling product design, advertising, sponsorship, and marketing on gambling behaviour.

Future research should examine how gambling products, digital technologies and commercial practices influence gambling behaviours and contribute to gambling related harms. Key areas for investigation include online gambling, personalised marketing, sponsorship, product design and the relationship between gambling and other risk behaviours.

Indicative research questions include:

- Which product characteristics and design features are associated with an increased risk or severity of gambling related harms, and for whom?
- How do online gambling environments, including platform design, personalisation and digital engagement features, influence gambling participation, intensity and risk of harm?
- What impact do gambling marketing, advertising and sponsorship have on gambling behaviours and gambling related harms?

3.2 Population Level Prevention, Regulation and Surveillance

Population level prevention and regulation were identified as priorities because they focus on preventing harm before it occurs. Stakeholders highlighted the need to understand how policies, regulation and environmental interventions influence gambling behaviour and reduce harm across the population.

Key areas for investigation include the effectiveness of policies addressing gambling environments, advertising, sponsorship and accessibility, as well as opportunities to strengthen population level monitoring and surveillance and improve understanding of the costs and benefits of prevention focused approaches.

Indicative research questions include:

- Which population level interventions are most effective at reducing gambling harms?
- What is the return on investment of population level prevention and regulatory interventions?
- What impact do regulatory changes have on gambling participation and harms?
- What data and indicators are needed to monitor gambling participation and gambling related harms in Wales?

3.3 Health Inequalities and Vulnerable Populations

Gambling harms are not experienced equally and may cluster alongside wider forms of disadvantage. Stakeholders identified a need to better understand how social, economic, and environmental factors influence vulnerability to gambling related harms and contribute to unequal experiences, as well as to identify effective approaches to reducing these inequalities.

Indicative research questions include:

- Which populations experience the greatest burden of gambling related harms in Wales?
- How do social, economic and environmental factors influence vulnerability to gambling related harms?
- Which interventions are most effective in reducing inequalities in gambling related harms?
- How can families and affected others be better supported to prevent or mitigate gambling related harms?

3.4 Early Intervention across the Life Course

Early intervention was identified as a priority because gambling attitudes and behaviours may develop throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of understanding early exposure to gambling and identifying opportunities to prevent harm before it becomes established.

Key areas for investigation include children and young people, families and affected others, and the role of schools, sports settings and community environments in shaping gambling attitudes, behaviours and associated risks.

Indicative research questions include:

- How does exposure to gambling advertising, marketing and sponsorship influence gambling attitudes and behaviours among children and young people?
- What factors across the life course contribute to the development of gambling behaviours and gambling related harms?
- Which prevention approaches are most effective in schools, sports settings and community environments?

3.5 Systems Response, Treatment and Recovery

Stakeholders identified the need for a coordinated whole-system response involving healthcare, public health, social care, housing, education and justice services.

Further evidence is needed to understand how services can better identify, respond to and prevent gambling related harms. Areas for investigation include treatment and recovery models, pathways to support, and responses to co-occurring harms such as substance use, mental ill-health and gambling related crime.

Indicative research questions include:

- How can gambling related harms be identified earlier and more consistently across health, social care, housing, education and criminal justice services and linked to appropriate support and care?
- What treatment, recovery and peer-support models are most effective for reducing gambling related harms and supporting long-term recovery?
- How can services better respond to people experiencing co-occurring harms, including mental ill-health, substance use, financial hardship, homelessness and contact with the criminal justice system?
- What barriers and facilitators influence access to treatment and recovery support for different population groups in Wales?

Cross Cutting Themes

Several cross-cutting themes apply across all five areas of research interest. Future research should incorporate lived experience and co-production where appropriate, reflect the Welsh context, and consider the needs of Welsh speaking communities, as well as the accessibility of research, prevention initiatives and support services in both Welsh and English. Consideration should also be given to groups at increased risk of harm, including people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, mental ill-health, substance use problems, neurodivergence, and those affected by another person's gambling.

4. Summary

This report identifies five areas of research interest for gambling harms research in Wales, developed through a combination of evidence mapping and stakeholder engagement.

The report complements Public Health Wales' broader Areas of Research and Evaluation Interest for 2026. While the broader document identifies gambling as an area of interest within Public Health Wales' wider healthy behaviours agenda, this report provides a more detailed framework for research on gambling-related harms.

The areas of research interest focus on improving understanding of how gambling related harms arise, who is most affected, how harms develop across the life course, and how they can be prevented, identified and addressed. They also emphasise the importance of reducing inequalities, incorporating lived experience, and generating evidence that is relevant to the Welsh context.

While presented separately, these areas provide an interconnected framework for future research on gambling related harms in Wales. This is intended to guide future research activity, support evidence informed policy and practice and strengthen collaboration across sectors and communities.

The next step is to translate these areas of research interest and indicative research questions into collaborative, funded research programmes that generate evidence and support action in Wales. Continued partnership working will be essential to generating the evidence needed to prevent and reduce gambling related harms and improve health and wellbeing in Wales.

Work with us

The areas of research interest presented in this report are intended to inform future research activity in Wales and will continue to evolve through ongoing collaboration and engagement. Public Health Wales welcomes opportunities with researchers, funders, policymakers, third-sector organisations, practitioners and people with lived experience to further develop and refine these areas of research interest.

Those interested in working in partnership with Public Health Wales are invited to contact the team using the email address below:

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Appendices

Appendix A: Five Areas of Research Interest

ID	Research Priorities Focus	Rationale	Welsh Government/Statutory Levy Alignment
1	Digital and Commercial Environments	Understanding how commercial and digital environments contribute to gambling related harms	Gambling behaviours are increasingly shaped by online platforms, product design, advertising, sponsorship and marketing practices. These commercial and digital environments can increase exposure, influence behaviour and elevate the risk of harm, particularly when interacting with cognitive, psychological and social vulnerabilities. Research is needed to understand the mechanisms through which these environments contribute to gambling related harms and wider societal impacts.
2	Population-level Prevention and Regulation	Understanding what prevents gambling related harms at a population level	Population-level approaches seek to prevent harm before it occurs by addressing gambling environments, accessibility, product design, advertising and sponsorship. Research is needed to identify which prevention and regulatory approaches are most effective, equitable and cost-

			effective, and how gambling participation and harms can be monitored over time to inform policy and practice.	
3	Health Inequalities and Vulnerable Populations	Understanding who is most affected by gambling related harms and why	Gambling harms are not distributed equally and are shaped by social, economic and environmental factors. Harms may cluster alongside financial hardship, poor mental health, neurodivergence, substance use and involvement with the criminal justice system, while also affecting family and friends, contributing to compounded disadvantage. Research is needed to understand patterns of vulnerability and identify effective approaches to reducing inequalities.	Prevention and early intervention. Supports identification of populations disproportionately affected by gambling harms and informs targeted prevention and support efforts.
4	Early Intervention across the Life Course	Understanding when and how gambling related harms develop	Gambling attitudes and behaviours can develop across childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Exposure to gambling through advertising, sponsorship, digital technologies, gaming environments, family influences and sport may shape future behaviours and risk of harm. Research is needed to understand	Prevention, commissioning and safeguarding. Supports upstream prevention by reducing exposure, normalisation and early uptake of gambling among children and young people.

			developmental pathways, early risk factors and opportunities for prevention and early intervention.	
5	Systems Response, Treatment and Recovery	Understanding how services and systems can better respond to gambling related harms	Effective responses to gambling harms require coordinated action across healthcare, public health, social care, housing, education and justice services. Research is needed to improve identification, referral pathways, treatment and recovery support, and to understand how systems can respond to co-occurring issues such as mental ill-health, substance use, debt and gambling related crime.	Coordinated cross-sector response. Reflects the statutory levy approach by supporting integrated prevention, treatment, recovery and research activity across sectors.

Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Affected others	Individuals who experience harm as a result of another person's gambling.
Co-production	Working in partnership with people with lived experience throughout the research process.
Gambling harm	The adverse impacts of gambling on health and wellbeing.
Health inequalities	Unfair and avoidable differences in health experienced by different groups.
Lived experience	Direct personal experience of gambling harms, either personally or as an affected other.
PGSI	Problem Gambling Severity Index.
Population level prevention	Approaches designed to reduce risk and prevent harm across entire populations.
Public health approach	An approach focused on prevention, reducing inequalities and improving population wellbeing.
Statutory gambling levy	Mandatory levy paid by gambling operators to support research, prevention and treatment activities.
Systems approach	An approach recognising that gambling harms are influenced by interconnected social, commercial, environmental and individual factors.
Vulnerable populations	Groups that may be at increased risk of gambling related harms due to social, economic or health related circumstances.
Whole-system approach	Coordinated action across sectors and organisations to address complex public health issues.

Cite this publication

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