

## The need for gambling disorder clinics in Wales

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According to the Welsh Problem Gambling Survey (2016), 1.1% of respondents were identified as problem gamblers. The proportion of the Wales population vulnerable to gambling-related harm increases to 3.8% when the sub-threshold 'at risk' category of gamblers is included, with the greatest risk evident among 16 to 24 year-olds. The social impact of problem gambling in Wales has a complex set of drivers across a continuum of harm<sup>1,2</sup>, with excess fiscal costs of between £40-70 million per year<sup>3</sup>. Public Health Wales has estimated that the most deprived communities of Wales are increasingly vulnerable to gambling-related harms<sup>4</sup>; this area-based vulnerability is based on such factors as local population numbers and the availability of treatment services, with the greater the distance from treatment sites leading to increased risk of harm. During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, 24% of respondents from Wales report spending increased time and/or money on one or more gambling activities<sup>5</sup>.

Both the Welsh Government and the Chief Medical Officer for Wales have prioritised tackling the harm produced by gambling disorder and taken steps to minimise the public health consequences through the provision of free online counselling for people with gambling problems and improving the links with support for people undergoing treatment for substance misuse, among other initiatives<sup>2</sup>. Pilot studies of early identification and intervention for gambling problems and the development of treatment referral pathways are also underway in two health boards in Wales, while research on gambling has a growing base in Welsh universities<sup>2</sup>.

Despite this, there are currently no NHS-funded gambling disorder clinics in Wales. The absence of local NHS treatment provision inevitably leads to increased referrals elsewhere. Since January 2017, there have been 18 referrals from Wales to the National Problem Gambling Clinic in London, which is just over 1% of all clinic referrals. Between 2015 and 2018, 4% of callers to the National Gambling HelpLine gave a Welsh postcode, while recently the number of clients from Wales seen by GamCare's network of partners has increased from 213 (2018-2019) to 285 (2019-2020; these figures include both those with gambling problems and affected others). Other local treatment settings, such as The Living

Room Cardiff's Beat The Odds service, has seen a total caseload of 142 individuals since 2015.

The need for NHS-funded gambling disorder services in Wales is stark, and we urgently call on the Welsh Government to use its devolved authority to address this anomaly.

### References

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