
Reducing the Harm Caused by Gambling

Tabled 18 March 2021



Objective

This audit looked at whether the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (the Foundation) is effectively reducing the severity of gambling harm.

We examined whether it is achieving its intended outcomes and if its programs are preventing and treating gambling harm.

Conclusion

We found that the Foundation does not know whether its programs are effectively reducing the severity of gambling harm.

While the programs may have helped some people, the Foundation lacks an outcome-based framework to develop programs or measure if it has reduced harm in the community.

Also, while the Foundation had done a lot of good research and evaluation, it does not always use the evidence to improve its programs.

Background

Around 70 per cent of Victorian adults gamble on a range of products, including on pokies, casino tables and betting.

Online gambling is increasingly popular. It makes up 71 per cent of all sports betting.

The Foundation's research from 2017 shows that gambling harm costs Victorians around \$7 billion a year, through damage to relationships, health and wellbeing, monetary losses and other social problems.

In comparison, gambling generated around \$1.7 billion in taxation revenue for the state in 2019-20.

Conclusion



Set up in 2012 as a statutory authority, the Foundation's role is to reduce gambling prevalence and harm, and to foster responsible gambling. It does not regulate gambling activity.

In 2018–19, the Foundation received \$153 million in funding over four years. In 2020–21, it allocated over \$30 million to its prevention and treatment programs, which are delivered by funded agencies.

Its prevention programs are aimed at raising awareness and early intervention. They target schools, gambling venues, sporting clubs and groups that can be vulnerable to gambling harm such as culturally diverse or socially isolated communities.

The Foundation funds Gambler's Help—a counselling and support service that is free and confidential for Victorians experiencing gambling harm. It includes face-to-face counselling, online and telephone support available any time, and programs for at-risk groups.

Issue 1: Preventing gambling harm

The programs that the Foundation funds community agencies to deliver do appropriately target identified at-risk groups. However, most programs lack clear aims and impact measures and the Foundation's program evaluations focus on outputs, such as number of educational sessions delivered, rather than on outcomes and impacts. This makes it hard to track if the programs are preventing harm.

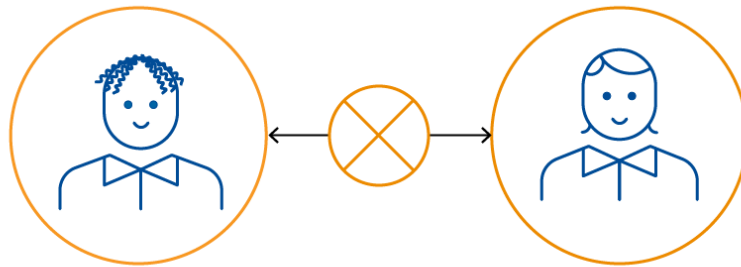
Further, the Foundation has not provided adequate guidance to its funded agencies to help them build capacity in preventing harm.

The Foundation is starting to address these gaps by setting up communities of practice and agreeing to develop an outcomes framework.

Issue 2: Treating gambling harm

The Foundation also does not know the overall impact of its Gambler's Help services, as it does not measure if and how the services help their clients.

Issue 4: Supporting people with co-occurring conditions



Issue 3: Using evidence

Despite collecting extensive service data and evaluating all of its major prevention programs, the Foundation has not used the findings strategically to improve program design and service delivery.

Issue 4: Supporting people with co-occurring conditions

For example, its research found that many gamblers also have issues with mental health, alcohol and other drugs, homelessness and family violence. However, the Foundation has not supported its funded agencies to coordinate referrals for people to connect with the appropriate services.

What these issues mean

This means that the Foundation, as the sole public funder of programs targeting gambling harm, does not know if it is having an impact. It is also missing the opportunity to improve its programs with its research and evaluation.

Recommendations

We made seven recommendations to the Foundation:

- three about developing an outcomes framework to improve how it funds, evaluates and promotes better practice in reducing gambling harm
- two concerning applying research and evaluation to improve its programs
- one to improve how Gambler's Help refers clients between different services
- one to assess the effectiveness of different prevention approaches and
- we made one joint recommendation to the Foundation, the Departments of Justice and Community Safety, Health, and Families, Fairness and Housing to work together to better support clients with co-occurring conditions.