# Gambling Research Summary 2020-21

## About the Gambling Research Summary 2020-21

The Gambling Research Summary is a review of gambling research published between January 2020 and September 2021. It is the third in a series commissioned by the Responsible Gambling Fund (RGF) to ensure we keep track of the latest research and evidence in the field and identify any gaps.

We funded a team of researchers, led by Dr Anna Thomas, to conduct a review of recent Australian and international gambling research. They ran searches, reviewed the data, and then summarised the research for six research themes.

The report is a summary of what's new in gambling research, highlighting key findings, gaps and implications. The complete report can be accessed here https://www.gambleaware.nsw.gov.au/.

## Why did we do it?

We recognise the importance of research in addressing gambling harm in NSW. We commission and fund research to build an evidence-base for gambling harm minimisation, guided by our Research Agenda 2021-24. We will use the Summary to ensure we continue to build on existing research and fund priority research areas. It will help us identify evidence gaps and recognise opportunities to focus our effort where it is most needed.

The Summary also aims to make it easier for researchers, policy makers and program staff to access the most up-to-date and relevant evidence base. We share our summary with stakeholders to facilitate evidence-informed decision making, planning, and program delivery.

## What does it cover?

The Summary 2020-21 summarises Australian and international research and identified over 15,200 articles, with 444 papers included and 70 studies highlighted based on their quality, innovation, and Australian relevance.

The study is organised around the six research themes of the RGF Research Agenda 2021-2024:

- Gambling prevalence and harm

- Individual and community level prevention and early intervention

- Efficacy and effectiveness of treatments

- Gambling among vulnerable groups

- Emerging technologies and new trends, and

- Regulation of gambling products, practices, and environments.

## What did we find?

The results largely reflect those of the 2020 gap analysis, suggesting that the body of research is consolidating in some areas but that gaps remain in other areas.

Key findings for each of the six themes are listed on pages 2-3. An expanded discussion can be found in the full report.

## Measuring and understanding gambling prevalence and harm

Research in this area has focused on identifying prevalence estimates, with multiple state and territory prevalence surveys finding consistent estimates of problem and moderate-risk gambling but variable estimates of gambling participation and low-risk gambling.

The review also identified studies with mixed findings that continue to debate how best to measure gambling harm, highlighting the need for further research in this area. Research following gamblers over a longer time-period found that a range of psychological, social, health and economic factors predicted problem gambling.  Low-risk gambling limits for use in Australia were also identified.

## Community level prevention and early intervention

Most research has focused on early intervention, with very few studies on prevention or self-management. No Australian prevention studies have been published in this review period, highlighting a significant and ongoing knowledge gap. The evidence presented for early intervention came mostly from systematic reviews that indicated the need for further intervention development and testing. Screening with personalised feedback was found to be effective when combined with resources and information. Allied and mental health professionals were found to be receptive to delivering gambling screening and brief intervention.

## Effectiveness and efficacy of treatments

Research has focused on the efficacy of treatments for gamblers, with findings showing support for cognitive behavioural therapy and motivational interviewing, as well as the potential for internet-delivered and brief interventions. Dropout from psychological gambling interventions is high and only a small proportion of gamblers and affected others were found to seek treatment, highlighting a need for public health efforts to address motivators and barriers to help-seeking.

## Gambling among vulnerable groups

Most research continues to be qualitative or look at data at one specific point in time, as well as focus on youth or young adult gambling. The nature of youth and young adult gambling is shifting away from traditional forms and towards new technology delivered options. The relationship between simulated gambling and gambling harm was a continued research focus. The review identified fewer gambling studies relating to CALD and Indigenous communities and very few on family violence or homelessness. High rates of family violence related to problem gambling were found amongst treatment seekers and in the community. The two studies on homelessness indicated the importance of screening for gambling amongst the homeless or those with unstable housing.

## Emerging technologies and new trends

Research in this area has focused on emerging technological gambling features and activities, followed by the relationship between gambling and gaming. The main findings included the consistent positive association between loot box engagement and gambling problems. There was a lack of research exploring emerging technologies and trends in payment methods and the impact on gambling behaviour.

## Regulation of gambling products, practices, and environments

Research emphasis was on individual-level support mechanisms rather than control of supply. Findings emphasised the value of good design to increase uptake and use of responsible gambling tools, and that dynamic and targeted messaging is more effective than static messaging as a responsible gambling strategy. There was also evidence that

restricting accessibility to EGM venues led to reduced gambling and related harms. Confirming previous evidence, digital gambling marketing was found to increase awareness and encourage engagement in gambling, with this type of marketing particularly targeting sports betting, young men and vulnerable groups.

## What should future research focus on?

The identified research gaps suggest a range of future focus areas, including:

- following gamblers over a longer time-period, to better understand how and why people move between gambling risk categories

- measuring gambling harm in the population

- evaluating self-management programs and interventions for family and friends of gamblers

- understanding help-seeking behaviours and differing treatment responses

- exploring the impact of emerging technologies and trends in payment methods

- testing the effectiveness of responsible gambling tools and marketing restrictions

- the effectiveness of self-exclusion programs, particularly those using new technology to facilitate multi-venue exclusions.

The review found overall that there is a need for more studies that test whether interventions and programs are working, as well as research that builds sequentially on previous findings, such as implementation and evaluation research to test evidence-informed interventions. Continued effort to disseminate and translate research into practice and policy was also highlighted.

An expanded discussion of the research gaps and future focus areas can be found in the full report here.

## What else came out of the Gambling Research Summary?

The findings from this review, read in conjunction with the prior 2020 gap analysis report, have important implications for policy and programs, including that:

- internet-based early interventions may be an effective way of expanding the reach and access to gambling support and treatment

- screening, brief intervention and tools for self-management of gambling harm by gamblers and affected others show promising outcomes

- public health activities are needed to address barriers to help-seeking

- high rates of gambling treatment dropout are likely to impact positive outcomes and should be addressed in treatment design and delivery

- venue staff training to recognise indicators of gambling problems, requires clear industry and government guidance on approach protocols

- action is needed to overcome barriers to voluntary self-exclusion programs, and new technologies used to avoid breaches and to enable multi-venue sign-up

- prevention initiatives are required to address the link between simulated gambling, including loot boxes, and gambling problems

- targeted education of at-risk individuals is needed on the link between simulated gambling engagement and gambling.

## What will we do next?

We will use the results of the study to inform our research, programs and services, in particular our annual research plan.

A number of research initiatives already underway are supported by these findings and will continue to be delivered and evaluated.

For the full report: [here](here).

## The Office of Responsible Gambling

The Office of Responsible Gambling leads the development of responsible gambling strategy and public policy advice to the NSW Government.

The Office develops and implements programs and initiatives, as part of a strategic approach that supports responsible gambling and prevents and minimises the risk of gambling related harm in the community.

## For further information

To find out more about the research:

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This summary is intended as an educational guide and does not replace or add to current legislative or regulatory requirements. July 2022