

Leading academics call for statutory levy on gambling firms to reduce harm

July 1 2020



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Leading UK academic scientists are urging the government to introduce a statutory levy on gambling firms to deliver reductions in gambling harms.

In an [open letter](#) to the culture minister, Oliver Dowden and the [health secretary](#), Matt Hancock, published by *The BMJ* today, they warn that the current voluntary system gives the industry too much influence on how the money is spent.

Their call comes as the Betting and Gaming Council's (BGC's) five largest members announced they will give £100m to the charity GambleAware to improve treatment services for problem gamblers. This funding was first promised to the charity Action Against Gambling Harms in August 2019.

Last week, the Advisory Board for Safer Gambling called for a statutory levy in their first progress report on the National Strategy to Reduce Gambling Harms. The House of Lords will also publish its report *Gambling Harm—Time for Action* on Thursday.

The letter says irrespective of which organisation funds are given to, the BGC's announcement "exemplifies the long-standing weakness of a funding system that allows the gambling industry to regulate the availability and distribution of vital funds to address gambling harms across our communities."

The authors argue that reducing harms "requires a dual focus on treatment but also preventing harms from occurring in the first place." Yet the BGC announcement "focuses on funding for treatment and says nothing about prevention."

They also believe that funds for research into gambling harms and their reduction should be distributed through recognised independent organisations, such as UK Research and Innovation and the National Institute for Health Research.

"Delivering an [effective strategy](#) to reduce gambling harms requires

surety and certainty of funding to enable effective planning and delivery of long term objectives," they write. "A voluntary system, reliant on the good-will of the industry, is an inadequate way to develop such a system."

Instead, a statutory levy "provides an opportunity to deliver harm reductions by ensuring a fair, independent and trusted system for developing effective prevention activities," they explain. "Effective prevention in turn delivers societal benefits through reductions in the [social costs](#) associated with gambling harms and a levy creates an equitable system by which all members of the industry contribute to addressing the harms they generate," they add.

"We urge you, the Secretaries of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and for Health and Social Care, to review current funding arrangements and implement a statutory levy to deliver reductions in [gambling](#) harms," they conclude.

More information: Open letter from UK-based academic scientists to the Secretaries of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and for Health and Social Care regarding the need for independent funding for the prevention and treatment of gambling harms, [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.m2613](#)

Provided by British Medical Journal

Citation: Leading academics call for statutory levy on gambling firms to reduce harm (2020, July 1) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-07-academics-statutory-levy-gambling-firms.html>

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