

# Researchers study gambling-harm-minimization tools and their impact on gambling behavior

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Dr Ben Riley, Flinders University psychological therapy researcher and clinician with the State Gambling Therapy Service. Credit: Flinders University

Like driving a car, gamblers should always prepare for a rocky ride—even if they believe they don't have a problem, Flinders University experts say.

This follows a review of global research which confirms that tools and warnings about the hazards of gambling are commonly ignored by punters who usually regard the notices as only applicable to problem gamblers.

With gambling in Australia estimated to be the highest in the world per capita, and renewed calls for bans or restrictions on gambling advertising, the need for more effective wagering controls has never been more important, says Flinders University expert Dr. Ben Riley, lead author of a new article in the [\*International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health\*](#), titled "Gambling harm-minimisation tools and their impact on gambling behavior: A review of the empirical evidence."

"No-one is immune to the gambling trap—so take precautions early," says Flinders University psychological therapy researcher Dr. Ben Riley, a clinician from the State Gambling Therapy Service in South Australia.

He says motorists are required to use seatbelts to reduce their risk—and so should even casual gamblers take heed of free preventative advice available in the community.

"Seatbelts are a simple safety measure to protect all drivers regardless of drivers' individual risk profile, as driving is associated with a level of risk.

"We argue that the range of tools, if they are found to be effective, should be promoted for use by all gamblers, not just those with problems—just like seatbelts are enforced for use in cars."

Gambling losses in Australia, with a population of just 27 million, are estimated at \$25 billion a year.

Taglines such as "Chances are you're about to lose," "Think. Is this a bet you really want to place?," "What are you prepared to lose today? Set a deposit" can direct consumers to helpful advice and tools.

"Unfortunately, people who only place an occasional bet do not usually consider themselves at risk, so do not take heed of the consumer protection notices—to set wagering limits, take a break or abstain, or buy necessities first before gambling," says Dr. Riley.

"Many of the tools and messaging do not have an impact and there is little evidence they are effective in reducing gambling behavior in the long term.

"One of the reasons for the low uptake is that people view these [consumer products](#) as tools for gamblers with existing problems rather than for all gamblers as a safety measure."

The review evaluated the effectiveness of harm-minimization tools such as safe-gambling messaging including generic pop-up messages, voluntary and involuntary exclusion, and other active and passive early intervention and [prevention programs](#) in 55 peer-reviewed articles.

"Inconsistencies around the promotion and implementation of harm-minimization tools by gambling operators may be due to the largely self-regulatory nature of the various codes of conduct," researchers say in the paper.

"Alcohol experts have voiced similar concerns about self-regulatory measures and responsible drinking messages from the alcohol industry."

An alliance of leading Australians has demanded the government impose a total ban on gambling ads in a country that racks up some of the biggest losses per person in the world. Even during the period of COVID-19 measures that closed many pubs, clubs and casinos in the 2020–2021 financial year, Australian state government statistics showed [gambling](#) losses exceeded \$24 billion.

Researchers are calling for a multidisciplinary approach to improve promotion and uptake of the tools available—including more research into new therapies and interventions.

**More information:** Ben J. Riley et al, Gambling Harm-Minimisation Tools and Their Impact on Gambling Behaviour: A Review of the Empirical Evidence, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2024). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph21080998](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21080998)

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