

# A Path Forward

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## Reducing Gambling Harm in WA: Summary and Recommendations



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## Understanding Gambling and Its Impacts in WA

This summary of the *Reducing Gambling-Related Harm Scoping Study* provides an overview of the current gambling landscape in WA, including initiatives underway to address gambling-related harm and areas where further action is needed. It is intended as a brief snapshot of the full report, which is available on the [WACOSS website](#).

### Gambling-Related Harm

Gambling-related harm refers to the negative consequences of gambling products on both individuals and those people around them (who may or may not use gambling products).<sup>1</sup> Gambling harm can be experienced on a spectrum, ranging from minor negative experiences to crises, and is not always proportionate to the level of gambling participation.

Gambling harm can include:

- **relationship harm** (e.g. conflict within relationships, neglect of responsibilities)
- **health harm** (e.g. stress, depression, reduced sleep)
- **emotional/psychological harm** (e.g. feelings of regret, worthlessness, failure)
- **financial harm** (e.g. credit card debt, reduced spending on essentials)
- **work/study harm** (e.g. reduced performance due to tiredness, absenteeism).<sup>2</sup>

### The Hidden Costs of Gambling in WA

There is a prevailing belief that because of the limits around Electronic Gaming Machines (EMGs), gambling-related harm is not an issue in WA; this is not the case. Successive studies have found WA to have a high prevalence of gambling. Data from the National Gambling Prevalence Study Pilot 2024 suggests a general increase in national gambling participation (65% of Australian adults in 2024), with Queensland having the highest current prevalence (70.2%) followed closely by WA (69.6%).<sup>3</sup>

Online gambling is a significant and growing cause for concern in WA, as it is elsewhere. The 2022 - 2023 Commonwealth parliamentary inquiry and subsequent report into online gambling and its impacts (the Murphy report) found that the scale of online gambling harm in Australia is excessive and is enabled by a weak and fragmented regulatory system. Inconsistencies across states and territories have created significant gaps, allowing online gambling companies to base themselves in the weakest regulatory environment. In Australia's case, this has meant that most major operators are licensed in the Northern Territory, undermining the ability of other states to enforce stronger consumer protections or restrict harmful products and practices.<sup>4</sup> Despite the inquiry's substantial findings and comprehensive recommendations for reform, the Australian Government has not yet implemented the proposed measures.

Gambling is creating significant levels of concern throughout the community, including in the community services and public health sectors. The demand for these sectors' services is increasing, in part due to the impacts of gambling on both individuals and the network of people seeking support from the consequences of an individual's gambling.



## Key Findings


### Regulatory Responsibilities and Current Focus

- The regulation of online gambling falls under federal jurisdiction.
- State governments have responsibility for a range of aspects of gambling regulation.
- The WA Government's current review and reform of gambling in WA has not been guided by a public health perspective and key proposed legislative changes are unlikely to be implemented before 2030 at the earliest.
- The WA Government has prioritised some aspects of the implementation of the recommendations of the Perth Casino Royal Commission (PCRC). However, while the government has voiced support for the PCRC recommendation that the Problem Gambling Support Services Committee (PGSSC) be replaced with an independent advisory body, this recommendation has yet to be implemented.
- Under its legislation the Gaming and Wagering Commission (GWC) has the responsibility for addressing gambling harm. The GWC, however appears to be primarily focused on reform to the casino and on prosecuting illegal gambling.

### Current Structures and Resources

- The Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety (DLGIRS) oversees the PGSSC, which currently has responsibility to consider issues relating to gambling harm.
- Despite the recommendation of the PCRC, the gambling industry appears still to have representation on the PGSSC.
- DLGIRS provides support for some initiatives, including the Gambling Harm Awareness Week, a 24-hour gambling telephone help service and gambling harm counselling service.
- WA has in the past contributed to Gambling Research Australia (GRA), however there is no publicly available data detailing how much of GRA's funding is specifically spent within WA or on WA-targeted projects.


### Emerging Issues and Gaps

- Online gambling is a major concern, driven by its increasing popularity and widespread availability.
  - The Australian Government has not implemented the recommendations of the Murphy report.
  - Gambling activities beyond the casino, including online platforms, sports betting, racing and lotteries require a comprehensive approach to reduce and address gambling-related harm across all gambling platforms.
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## Lack of Strategic Direction and Coordination

- The Departments of Health, Communities, and the Mental Health Commission, have all acknowledged the presence and impact of gambling harm. However, they have advised that addressing gambling harm does not currently fall within their formal responsibilities. To date no specific directive or mandate has been issued by the government to guide their involvement in this area.
- Currently there is no coordinated approach to addressing gambling-related harm by the community services sector.
- There is currently no organisation within the community services or public health sectors that addresses gambling harm as a core service. This has led to a lack of coordination and collaboration across the system, resulting in fragmented responses and limited integration of gambling harm into broader health and social support frameworks.
- Insufficient dedicated resources are allocated to gambling harm, limiting the ability of services to deliver effective responses. Although many services and organisations support individuals affected by gambling harm, they typically do so in the context of other presenting issues, such as mental health, housing, or financial stress.

## Opportunities for Change

- Strengthen gambling harm prevention and response in WA through coordinated action both within and between state and federal governments, focusing on improved regulation, policy reform, and strategic investment in support services.
  - Resource community services and public health sectors to be able to address gambling-related harm through;
    - Advocating for policy change
    - Delivery of programs including prevention, early intervention, treatment services, and ongoing support for affected individuals and families and public and targeted education.
  - Strengthen responses to gambling-related harm in community services and public health sectors by integrating it into organisational policies and strategies.
  - Establish an independent advisory body to provide oversight of gambling regulation and harm minimisation.
  - The inclusion of community services, health sector representatives, and people with lived experience on advisory and decision-making bodies to improve gambling harm prevention and responses.
  - The exclusion of the gambling industry from decision-making roles and committees related to the prevention and reduction of gambling-related harm.
  - Comprehensive research into issues including the direct and indirect costs to individuals and society, and measures to reduce gambling harms.
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## Recommendations

### Fostering Sector Collaboration and Capacity to Support Engagement in Gambling Harm Reduction

Building coordinated approaches within the health and community services sectors is essential to developing a coordinated and sustained response to gambling-related harm in Western Australia. Establishing formal networks or working groups can help facilitate this collaboration, enabling organisations to co-design approaches, pool resources, and amplify their collective voice.

### Establish a coordinated advocacy mechanism in WA

A coordinated mechanism is needed to provide a clear pathway for sustained, unified action that strengthens prevention and support initiatives across WA. This mechanism could take different forms depending on available resources, for example, commissioning an existing WA organisation to lead the effort, creating a new WA-based body for this purpose, or exploring alternative models in partnership with organisations across Australia.

### Priority Areas in Addressing Gambling-Related harm in WA

#### Increasing Public and Government Awareness of Gambling-Related Harm in Western Australia.

Promote broader public understanding of the personal, social and community impacts of gambling harm in WA, while encouraging increased recognition and responsiveness from government stakeholders. This includes highlighting the systemic nature of gambling-related harm and the need for policy and funding initiatives that reflect its significance as a public health and social issue.

#### Explore Legislative Options to Regulate Gambling Advertising and Promotion in Western Australia

Undertake a review of potential state-level legislative measures to address the regulation of gambling advertising and promotional activities. This should include consideration of jurisdictional challenges and assess opportunities to strengthen consumer protections and reduce exposure to gambling-related harm and support implementation of the Murphy reports recommendations to phase out gambling advertising.

#### Cross-Sector Commitment to Address Gambling-Related Harm

Encourage coordinated action across key social policy sectors, including Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs, Housing and Homelessness, Financial Counselling, Aboriginal Health, and Family and Domestic Violence, to recognise and respond to gambling-related harm. This includes integrating gambling harm into relevant strategies, frameworks, and action plans to ensure a holistic and inclusive approach to prevention and support.

### **Funding for Service Coordination and Targeted Workforce Training to Address Gambling-Related Harm**

Dedicated funding is needed to support the coordination of health and community services and the delivery of targeted training across sectors. This will strengthen the capacity of frontline workers and organisations to identify, respond to, and prevent gambling-related harm through integrated and informed approaches.

### **Independent Decision-Making and Inclusive Representation in Gambling Harm Policy and Governance**

The gambling industry should not be involved in any decision-making related to the prevention and reduction of gambling-related harm. Relevant governance and advisory bodies should include diverse community representation such as public health experts, service providers, researchers, young people and individuals with lived experience to ensure policy and decisions are transparent, evidence-informed, and aligned with community needs.

### **National Advocacy Efforts and Focus**

#### **Support the full implementation of the Murphy report's recommendations**

Support the full implementation of the Murphy report's recommendations by state, territory, and Commonwealth governments, with a particular focus on those measures that will have the greatest national impact on reducing gambling-related harm. These include phasing out advertising, development of a comprehensive national strategy, establishing a national regulator, and delivering research-based public education.

#### **Support the development and implementation of research-informed warning messages across all forms of gambling product promotion.**

Support the development and implementation of research-informed warning messages across all forms of gambling product promotion. These messages should be grounded in behavioural science and public health evidence, designed to counteract the misleading nature of gambling advertising and raise awareness of the risks associated with gambling. Consistent, prominent, and well-tested warnings, similar to those used in tobacco and alcohol regulation, can play a critical role in shifting public perceptions, reducing stigma, and encouraging help-seeking behaviour.

#### **Support strengthened and more transparent regulation of online wagering services based in the Northern Territory**

Advocate for strengthened and more transparent regulation of online wagering services based in the Northern Territory, given their national reach and impact on gambling harm in WA. The Northern Territory's relatively permissive regulatory environment and low taxation have attracted the majority of Australia's online gambling operators, limiting the effectiveness of harm reduction efforts across jurisdictions. WA should engage with national policy forums and regulatory bodies to support reforms that ensure consistent consumer protections and targeted harm minimisation strategies for online gambling, regardless of the operator's licensing location.

## Conclusion

These findings of the scoping study highlight the urgent need for WA to adopt a comprehensive, coordinated and well-resourced public health response to gambling-related harm. Despite growing and unequivocal evidence of widespread impacts of gambling, ranging from financial hardship and mental health issues to social disruption, current responses remain limited, with a narrow focus on casino regulation and insufficient attention to emerging risks such as online gambling. Without strategic direction, adequate resources, or a clear mandate, the health and community services sectors are left to address gambling harm incidentally rather than through coordinated, planned, or evidence-informed interventions.

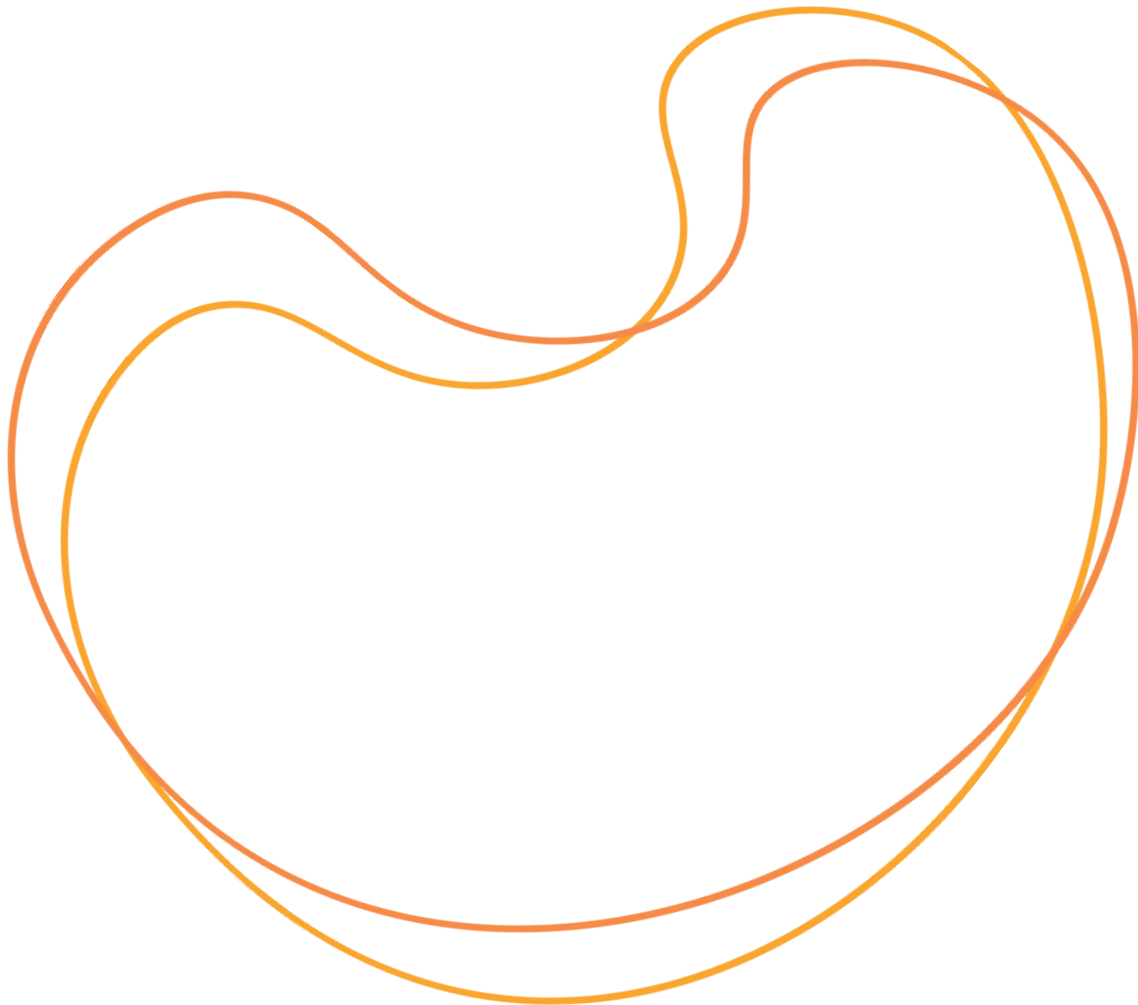
The recommendations set out a pathway for meaningful change. They call for WA to support overdue national action, including the full implementation of the Murphy report's reforms, strengthened restrictions on gambling advertising, and more consistent national regulation - particularly of online wagering operators headquartered in the Northern Territory's permissive regulatory environment. At the state level, the establishment of a dedicated organisational mechanism to lead gambling harm reduction in WA is essential to drive coordination, accountability, and strategic planning.

Equally critical are cross-sector collaboration, the inclusion of public health experts and people with lived experience in decision-making, and investment in sector coordination and workforce development. These measures recognise that gambling harm intersects with mental health, alcohol and other drugs, housing, financial stress, family and domestic violence, and broader social determinants of health. Only a whole-of-system response can effectively address this complexity.

Advancing these priorities will position Western Australia to reduce gambling-related harm in a meaningful, equitable, and sustainable way. By strengthening regulation, investing in prevention and support, and ensuring that community voices guide policy and governance, we will reduce gambling-related harm and protect individuals, families and the community.

Find the full report at [wacoss.org.au](https://wacoss.org.au)





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<sup>1</sup> Healthway (2025). [Submission to the Review and Reform of Western Australian Gambling Laws.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies (2021) [Understanding Gambling Harm and Ways to Identify Those at Risk.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Australian Gambling Research Centre (2025) [National Gambling Prevalence Study Pilot 2024: Key findings.](#)

<sup>4</sup> House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs (2023) [You win some, you lose more: Inquiry into online gambling and its impacts on those experiencing gambling harm.](#)