How to reduce the stigma of gambling harms through language

A language guide

GambleAware

What is this document?

This document has been produced for anyone that wants to avoid stigmatising others with the language they use.

It aims to give people more actionable guidance after the overarching principles were previously covered in a more-detailed language guide and animated video.

It references evidence collected within a published scoping review and campaign background document.

Why is stigma an issue?

People who experience gambling harms are widely stigmatised. Stigma results in people being judged and viewed as being of lesser worth than the rest of the population. As people are worried about being discriminated against, stigma is a barrier to self-identifying as someone who has experienced gambling harms, and is a substantial barrier to opening up about gambling and seeking support.

Since stigma can result in people being discriminated against, bullied, and socially excluded, it has real and damaging impacts on people's self-worth, mental health, and wellbeing, and may be associated with a higher risk of experiencing violence, abuse, and suicide.

Some experiencing harms may find it difficult to recognise the stigma they, and their communities, are subjected. This is because stigmatising narratives are so common in our every day lives and assumed to be "true".

Sometimes, it is only retrospectively that we fully recognise the presence of stigma (e.g., by keeping gambling a secret from others).

How can I reduce stigma?

Using stigmatising language does real harm, but this can be avoided by using respectful and non-judgemental language. Although this guidance does not intend to change the language of those with lived experience of gambling harms, we all have responsibility to think about the wellbeing of the communities we work with and/or are members of.

This is especially the case for those who represent their wider communities and leaders of organisations and networks.
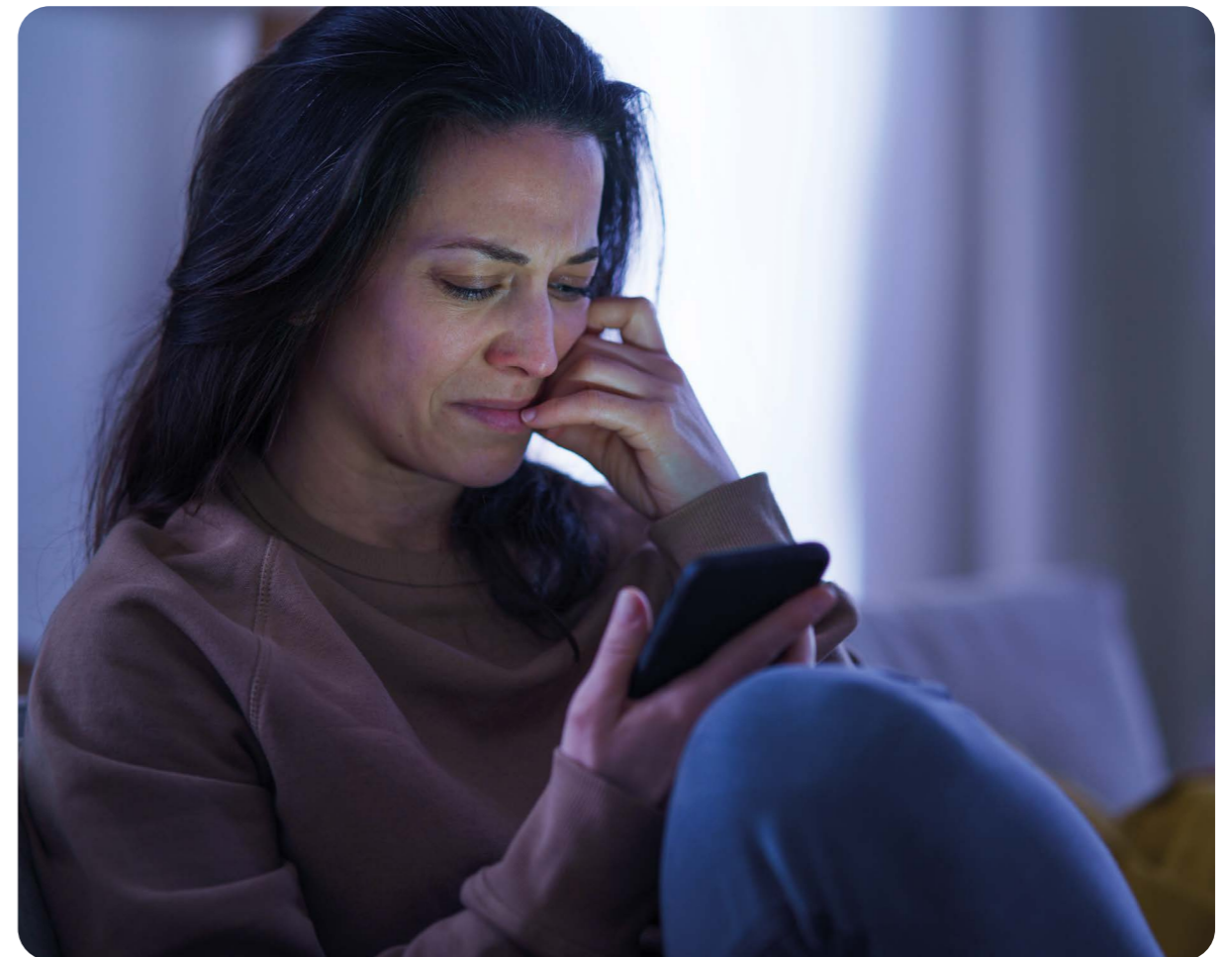
General guidance on reducing stigma in language

Don't use these terms	Instead use these terms
• Terms that reduce someone to their stigmatised behaviour (e.g., problem gambler)*	• Descriptive and/or person-centred ('person/people who') language
• Judgemental, unpleasant, or nasty terms about people	• Inclusive, empathetic language
• "Us" and "them" language (i.e., othering or suggesting others are not "normal")	• Language that emphasises our similarities and normalises/humanises people

*For guidance on reporting PGSI, please see page 5

Specific guidance on reducing stigma in language

Below are some commonly-used phrases which drive stigmatising narratives towards those experiencing gambling harms but can be altered to reduce stigma.

Don't use these terms	Instead use these terms
Terms for those who gamble	
• Gambler • Gambling habit	• Person who gambles • Gambling dependency
Terms for those experiencing gambling harm[1] *(for most of these labels, experiencing gambling harm can be used as an umbrella term)*	
• Gambling addict	• Has a gambling addiction[2]
• Disordered gambler	• Meets the criteria for a diagnosis of a gambling disorder as defined by the DSM/ICD
• Problem gambler	• Is experiencing 'problem gambling' (a score of PGSI 8+) as per the PGSI
• Harmful/pathological/compulsive/ excessive/impulsive gambler • Gambling misuse/abuse	• Person who has difficulties with gambling • Person experiencing gambling harms
• Victim of gambling harms	• Person experiencing harms from gambling
• Addiction battle • Vicious cycle	• Actively trying to reduce or stop gambling • Someone struggling to reduce or stop gambling
• Addictive personality	• Person who has persistent difficulties with gambling/drugs/alcohol etc

Don't use these terms	Instead use these terms
Terms for those who have previously experienced gambling harm	
• Former addict/reformed addict/ former disordered gambler etc. • Clean/sober	• Person who no longer gambles/ used to gamble/with lived experience of gambling harms • Person in recovery/is abstaining from gambling
• Relapsed/lapsed	• Person experiencing a recurrence of harm from gambling/experiencing gambling harms/ difficulties with gambling again
Terms for lower-risk gambling	
• Responsible gambling	• Lower-risk gambling • Harm reduction activities/interventions • Safer gambling[3]
• Gamble responsibly • Play safe	• Reduce risk of harm • Follow lower risk/harm reduction guidelines

[1] We are mindful that "affected others" is a commonly used term across the sector, and although it goes against much of the general guidance we do not currently have a better alternative beyond a non-reductive label (e.g., negatively impacted by someone else's gambling). As such, we will monitor how wider discussions develop around this topic and ideally include guidance in our next language guide iteration.

[2] Although notions of addiction can be "loaded" with negative connotations, there may be times where individuals want to use the word addiction to show the severity/seriousness of problems with gambling. However, when speaking more generally we would recommend using "a person who has difficulties/problems with gambling or someone experiencing gambling harm", this represents gambling harms on a spectrum rather than making it a binary issue of only addiction being a problem.

[3] Please note that "safer gambling" is not the same as "safe gambling". If someone gambles then they will not be able to be "safe" from gambling, as all gambling carries risk. However, it is disempowering to suggest that individuals cannot do anything to reduce their risk of harm through things such as the data-driven Lower Risk Gambling Guidelines.

The PGSI language guidance

The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) is a widely used measurement tool used in gambling harms research. However, it includes stigmatising language by labelling individuals as "problem gamblers", situating people as a "problem" rather than someone currently experiencing a problem.

We recommend moving away from reductive terms such as "low risk gambler" or "no risk gambler", and highlight that anyone that gambles is potentially "at risk" of gambling harms. In contrast, we provide terminology below that focuses on the level of problems an individual is experiencing.

Prevalence estimates based on PGSI alone are likely underestimates of overall gambling harm as they do not include:

- Others negatively affected from someone's gambling
- Legacy harms
- Children as either directly affected or as affected others (most data is among adults)

As such, we recommend using statements such as "according to the PGSI" and the PGSI score in brackets to clearly show the population the data relates to. For example:

- Person experiencing no reported problems from gambling (PGSI 0)
- Person experiencing a high level of problems from gambling or 'problem gambling' (PGSI 8+)

The authors

This document was peer reviewed and informed by those with professional and lived experience expertise, and intersections of the two. The authors named below are members of stigmatised communities and/or have worked directly with and for marginalised communities and their networks.

- **Colin Walsh** (Lived Experience Manager, GamCare; Trustee, Gambling Lived Experience Network) is an expert in community capacity building and uses both his own experience of gambling harm and recovery, as well as insights and learning from the diverse lived experience community he represents, to ensure that services across the National Gambling Support Network are shaped by the people they are designed to support.

- **Dan Riley** (Research Lead, GambleAware) is a specialist marketing researcher having previously evaluated leading advertising campaigns by the UK government and third sector. At GambleAware he led a research programme to help develop and evaluate their stigma reduction campaign.

- **David Quinti** (Founding member, Gambling Lived Experience Network (GLEN) & Member of Lived Experience Council, GambleAware) has expertise in the development of the lived experience community movement in Great Britain, and has been in recovery from gambling harms for over 9 years. His lived experience expertise informs his support of others and in tackling the stigma associated with gambling harms.

- **Dr Jay Levy** (Head of Inequalities Research, GambleAware) has researched the stigmatisation of people who use drugs, sex workers, LGBTQ+ people, and people living with HIV for two decades internationally. His publications include The Harms of Drug Use: Criminalisation, Misinformation, and Stigma and The Drug User Peace Initiative: Stigmatising People who Use Drugs.

- **Dr Joanne Lloyd** (Reader in Cyberpsychology, University of Wolverhampton) is a gambling harms researcher and expert who has studied processes of stigmatisation and discrimination in people experiencing gambling harms, as well as other marginalised communities.

- **Dr Sokratis Dinos** (Head of Health at the National Centre for Social Research) is a chartered psychologist with expertise on risk profiles and health/wellbeing outcomes for stigmatised and marginalised communities.

It is worth noting that language considered non-stigmatising continues to evolve and develop overtime, thus updated guidance may be required as changes emerge. To provide any feedback please contact us at **research@gambleaware.org***.*

If you're worried about how gambling makes you feel, we can help. For free and confidential advice, tools and support, search **GambleAware** or contact the **National Gambling Helpline**, available **24/7**, on **0808 8020 133**.