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Ymchwiliad i'r Adolygiad Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Iechyd, Gofal
Cymdeithasol a Chwaraeon

Inquiry into the Priorities for the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Ymateb gan: Cyngor ar Bopeth Casnewydd

Response from: Newport Citizen's Advice

01 09 2016

Consultation

Priorities for the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Gambling

In recent years gambling has changed beyond recognition, in 2016 it is available 24/7 and widely viewed as an acceptable form of leisure. The industry is worth billions and brings huge money into the economy. However gambling comes with risk and it is vital that we address this and safeguard vulnerable people. Newport Citizens advice welcomes and urges the Welsh Government to make Gambling and Gambling Related Harm a key priority for the forth coming Fifth Assembly. Gambling related harm has a devastating impact on the physical, mental and public health well-being of the people of Wales. We have been involved in gambling harm minimisation since March 2012 and have witnessed first-hand the devastating affected problem gambling can have.

With the advances in technology, changes in regulation and increased marketing young people and other vulnerable groups are exposed to gambling in way that previous generations never were. Children and young people are especially vulnerable to gambling related harm (Gambling Commission, 2015). This can be in a number of ways directly as a result of gambling or indirectly through someone else's problem gambling. Types of gambling related harm include debt, deprivation, mental health issues, education problems and greater risk of self-harm and suicide. A third of calls to the National Problem Gambling helpline are worryingly from those under the age of 24.

If we are to learn from lessons from alcohol research it is important that we act now to prevent an epidemic of people experiencing gambling related harm. Safeguarding and education is the way forward. Despite the huge visible presence of gambling the addictive behaviour remains hidden and people are unaware of issues until lives are devastated. To prevent this we need to raise awareness; educating and offer accessible support to people. With the aim to reduce the impact of gambling related harm on individuals, families and the wider community.

In Wales there is little known about the prevalence of gambling? No statistics are gathered in our health surveys. Both Public Health England and Scotland gather information about gambling. Gambling and importantly E-gaming (blurred boundaries of what constitutes gambling) should be included in national health surveys. More research is required and support services funded. We believe that other services away from traditional addiction agencies play an important role in the identification and early intervention. Frontline advice agencies, such as Citizens Advice are already seeing vulnerable groups of clients with issues such as debt, homelessness, relationship breakdown etc. This makes them perfectly positioned to identify and

offer early intervention. The work that Newport Citizens Advice is doing is aiming to mitigate the impact of gambling related harm by training advisers to identify issues earlier.

Greater awareness should be made in the educational context in a similar way to other risky behaviours such as sex, alcohol, drugs and bullying. Teachers should be made aware of gambling behaviours. It is widely accepted that gambling is not just a problem for the gamblers; some research suggests that up to 15 people can be affected by one problem gambler. Problem gamblers are more likely to attempt suicide than any other addictive type behaviour. The cost to the economy for one suicide runs into millions! The emotional cost to a family is devastating.

In times of austerity vulnerable groups are more likely to turn to risky behaviour as a way to escape their situation or to fund their lifestyle. Now more than ever we need greater investment and support from government.

Newport Citizens Advice is delivering services across South Wales and the larger Citizens Advice Network. We can offer awareness, training, education and advice and support for anyone worried about gambling related harm. We strongly believe that Gambling should be included as a priority during the Fifth assembly and would welcome seeing it included on the agenda for long-term work by the newly established Health Social Care and Sports Committee. We are happy to get involved with any committee to discuss things further

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