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College of Psychiatrists welcomes proposed legislation announced today that will move to instigate an outright ban on gambling advertisement in sports

Gambling Disorders are a real and fast-growing public health issue, with the medical illness resulting in detrimental consequences for those with the severe addiction and for their families. In line with their position paper on Gambling Disorder, launched in late 2020, the College believes any move now to address one of many actions required to tackle this issue is not only positive, but timely and urgent.

The College has previously highlighted the immediate need for action to tackle the hidden epidemic of gambling addiction in Ireland through a number of measures. In addition to strict advertising controls, these measures include the funding of dedicated treatment pathways within mental health services, a regulator and other responsible gambling measures inbuilt in the industry.

Recent anecdotal information from Consultant Addiction Psychiatrists indicates a particular and concerning rise in gambling disorder referrals since Covid-19 restrictions were introduced. Companies are now capitalising on the knock-on effects of 'lockdown', which include isolation, boredom and more opportunity to gamble while working from home through huge, targeted online advertising campaigns.

There is particular cause for worry with regard to the insidious manner in which this advertising is aimed towards young people who, due to their still-developing brains, are more vulnerable to addiction and the related effects on mental health.

Gambling Disorder is what is known as a behavioural addiction, one that can cause severe consequences and distress for individuals and their loved ones. Sharing certain features with substance addiction, such as difficulty regulating moods, loss of relationships or employment and financial problems, gambling addiction is often dealt with in secret, easier to disguise, with no obvious physical symptoms. The effects on mental health for some are severe, with high rates of suicide in those with gambling addiction.

Discussing advertising standards, Professor Colin O’Gara, Consultant Addictions Psychiatrist specialising in the area of gambling addiction says:

“We cannot continue to ignore the links between problem gambling and the enormously high volume of betting ads we are seeing at present – be that in traditional TV ads, internet marketing or even on team jerseys and side-line banners. Betting has become strongly linked with the enjoyment of sports. We are normalising gambling as a behaviour.

Much like tobacco, in ten years I think we will look back on the proliferation of gambling advertising in sport and entertainment and ask ourselves how we let it get so out of control. Currently gambling advertising in Ireland is much too common and, critically, occurs before the adult television watershed.”

On current concerns for those with gambling disorders, President of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland, Dr William Flannery says:

“The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have been felt harshly by those struggling with problem gambling. Key drivers in the development and relapse of an addiction include loneliness, isolation and boredom – all unfortunate side effects of the necessary social distancing restrictions put in place to stop the spread of the virus since last March.

Even in the absence of live sports, people are finding it difficult to avoid triggers, with increased visibility of online gambling ads and the rollout of new betting platforms. We need to support people with tighter controls and responsible gambling measures inbuilt in the industry.”

The College supports any efforts made to reform and legislate in the area of gambling advertising, in order that we protect the health of our population and particularly our vulnerable young people who are increasingly more prone to the detrimental effects of very visible gambling advertising.

To read the position paper on Gambling Disorder in full, see [here](#).