

MICK ANTONIW MS/AS

Member of the Senedd for Pontypridd
Aelodau O'r Senedd dros Bontypridd



27 October 2020

First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS

Dear Mark,

Gambling Addiction Clinics: A Welsh Response

In my capacity as Chair of the Senedd Cross Party Group on Problem Gambling I would like to draw your attention to an important letter published in the Lancet from eminent Welsh academics about the need for gambling disorder clinics in Wales.

This is an issue the Committee has discussed on a number of occasions after hearing evidence not just from these Welsh academics but also those from other countries which face similar public health issues over the growth of online gambling.

Gambling addiction is a growing public health problem that risks becoming a pandemic if it is not already. It is no coincidence that during our current Covid emergency when so many people are having to spend more time at home that the evidence indicates a significant growth in gambling related problems. The industry is exploiting the opportunity to engage more and more people through online gambling and this is particularly affecting young people and women.

Wales was the first country in the UK to recognise gambling addiction as a public health hazard. In the current environment, with more and more people exposed the ruthless stream of online gambling adverts we need to take action to tackle this issue.

The Committee fully supports the need to establish gambling addiction clinics in Wales. As a country we recognise the impact of alcohol and drug addiction and we provide treatment centres and support for these. Gambling is the new 21st Century addiction and one where the industry can access and exploit the population 24 hours a day online. No one is immune. We believe that now is the time for Welsh Government to act. As we focus on the growth of mental health problems related to Covid restrictions it is important we recognise the link between mental health and gambling addiction.

Research by the Gambling Commission back in May indicated that 24% of the Welsh population reported spending increased time and money on gambling activities. There is a real likelihood that when we come out of the Covid pandemic we will have the legacy of a significant gambling addiction problem that will need to be addressed.

We are pleased that Eluned Morgan MS has been given the ministerial responsibility for mental health, including gambling addiction and we have copied her into this correspondence.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely

Mick Antoniw MS

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cc. Vaughan Gething MS, Minister for Health and Social Services
Eluned Morgan MS, Minister for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Welsh Language