

knowledge snapshot



Best practices for the prevention of gambling problems among older adults

What this article is about

Older adults face unique factors related to aging that may make them vulnerable to problem gambling. These include loneliness, social isolation, and lack of alternative activities. As many older adults have limited and fixed income, gambling losses can lead to serious financial problems. This article describes best practices for the prevention of gambling problems among older adults. These best practices are drawn from various sources of evidence, including current research evidence, expert opinions, and professional practices. They are intended to evolve as more research and new knowledge become available.

What was done?

The Prevention Work Group selected information from various sources, including: 1) a review of studies from January 1994 to January 2015 on prevention and treatment of gambling problems in adults; 2) a telephone survey of English-speaking older adults aged 55 and over living in Ontario; 3) a review of best practice guides from organizations dealing with mental health and addictions; and 4) interviews with 10 key informants with professional experience in prevention and treatment of problem gambling. The best practices were then developed through a cycle of review and revision. A draft was also sent to the key informants and six knowledge users with expertise in mental health and addictions for feedback.

Several frameworks were used to inform the best practices, including: 1) a public health approach which considers the effects of gambling on the person, family, and community; 2) the bio-psycho-social model which examines biological, psychological, and

Why is this article important?

This article presents best practices for the prevention of gambling problems among older adults. The best practices are organized into nine areas, including: 1) entertainment options; 2) education content; 3) onsite support; 4) development and implementation; 5) information delivery and location; 6) format for information delivery; 7) style or language; 8) target audience; and 9) gambling policy and staff training. The best practices are offered to enhance current practices and stimulate further research in the field.

social factors; 3) a harm reduction approach that aims to reduce harms without requiring the person to stop gambling; 4) a cultural competence approach that addresses social and cultural barriers to health; and 5) consideration of risk factors unique to specific groups.

What you need to know

1. Entertainment Options

It is important to encourage older adults to engage in other leisure activities aside from gambling. For many older adults, the options may be limited due to declining physical health and lack of finances. Alternative activities may range from more individual activities (e.g., dancing, gardening) to community-oriented options (e.g., volunteer work).

2. Education Content

Many gamblers do not understand the nature of gambling (e.g., random chance) and have erroneous beliefs. Interventions need to educate people about how gambling works, risk factors, how to safeguard against problem gambling, and where to obtain help.

3. Onsite Support

Gambling venue staff should be trained to recognize and assist people showing signs of problem gambling, and raise awareness of self-control tools. Many older adults are reluctant to seek help. Overcoming barriers to help-seeking may require connecting with family and friends.

4. Development and Implementation

Interventions need to be based on theories that are appropriate to the target audience and desired outcomes. Initiatives should involve many stakeholder groups and be evaluated to identify successes and adverse consequences. Multiple initiatives should be coordinated and have consistent core messaging.

5. Information Delivery and Location

Information should be tailored to the severity of gambling problems and type of care being received. Information should be accurate, accessible, easy to understand, and available in a wide range of settings.

6. Format for Information Delivery

Older adults may prefer personal contact (e.g., face-to-face or telephone) and be more open to receive information from their peers. The article provides guidelines on how to ensure age-friendly printed materials, websites, and audiovisual displays.

7. Style/Language

Older adults are diverse in terms of age, experiences, and cultural background. Thus, messages need to use appropriate language and respect their experiences and knowledge.

8. Target Audience

Messages should be targeted not just to older adults, but others who are involved in their life (e.g., family, caregivers, friends).

9. Gambling Policy and Staff Training

Policies need to be in place for training gambling venue staff to respond to and assist older adults of different ages. It is important to coordinate and ensure interventions are aligned with policies.

Who is it intended for?

This article is intended for knowledge users, including service providers, policy makers, and researchers.

About the researchers

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Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in responsible gambling policies, standards and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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