

Kenny Alexander
Chief Executive
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By e-mail

Claire Murdoch
National Mental Health Director

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Dear Mr Alexander,

I am writing regarding the increasingly clear and worrying links between gambling and mental ill health.

As the head of England's mental health services and a nurse of more than 30 years' experience, I have seen first-hand the devastating impact on mental wellbeing of addiction and am concerned that the prevalence of gambling in our society is causing harm.

In particular, the reports of certain tactics used by firms to target those of your customers who have already lost sums and are willing to bet more, to seek to recover losses are concerning.

If reports are correct I am concerned that offering people who are losing vast sums of money free tickets, VIP experiences, and free bets, all proactively prompt people back into the vicious gambling cycle which many want to escape.

You will know that in response to the fact that 430,000 people now have a serious betting problem, the NHS is opening gambling addiction clinics across the country.

For seven decades the NHS has adapted services in response to current challenges, but we should not be expected to pick up the pieces from lives damaged by avoidable harm.

In order to operate safely, the gambling industry has a responsibility to prevent the occasional flutter turning into a dangerous habit.

Worryingly some of the incentives apparently offered by individual firms to continue betting, appear designed to undermine people's ability to stay in control: bet to view streaming; pervasive advertising; and rewards in exchange for bets, all are likely to make decision-making for vulnerable people significantly harder.



As such, I am requesting that you please provide urgent detail on actions that your firm – and the industry – is taking to reduce the likelihood and severity of gambling addiction.

An industry-wide effort is needed to tackle this, and I am seeking reassurance that your organisation is taking measures, including the following, to minimise harm:

- Immediately ban credit card bets from your websites – ahead of the gambling commission’s restrictions due to come into force later this year - helping ensure people don’t spend money they don’t have and potentially rack up life changing debt and the anxiety that comes with it;
- Stop the targeting of high-loss customers with the so-called ‘VIP’ treatment which includes incentives such as free tickets and bets;
- End bet to view commercial deals which require a stake in exchange for sports streaming access.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Claire Murdoch'.

Claire Murdoch
National Mental Health Director

cc: Neil McArthur, Chief Executive Gambling Commission
cc: Brigid Simmonds, Chair Betting and Gaming Council