

Submission to the Inquiry into *Interactive Gambling Amendment (Gambling Reform) Bill 2026* and *National Self-exclusion Register (Cost Recovery Levy) Amendment Bill 2026*

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About

Turning Point is a national addiction treatment centre, dedicated to providing high quality, evidence-based treatment to people adversely affected by alcohol, drugs, and gambling, integrated with world-leading research and education. Turning Point is part of Eastern Health and is formally affiliated with Monash University. Turning Point reduces the harms caused by alcohol, drugs and gambling and promotes recovery through integrated activity that: increases access to support and evidence-based practice using innovative technologies; delivers high quality evidence-based practice and supports health care professionals nationally and internationally to do the same; educates and trains the workforce to deliver programs to a broad range of populations; and underpins policy and practice relevant research and the provision of key national population level data that informs expert comment and policy advice to state and federal governments.

The **Monash Addiction Research Centre (MARC)** brings together world-leading expertise from across Monash University and the sector to provide solutions to the challenges of addiction. MARC draws on the multidisciplinary strengths and capabilities of researchers across the University to develop and test novel, scalable prevention and treatment approaches. MARC’s mission is to provide national solutions to addiction, leveraging expertise in basic and social science, clinical, and epidemiological research to develop new knowledge to shape government policy and evidence-based approaches.

1. Summary of recommendations

Turning Point and the Monash Addiction Research Centre welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications' Inquiry into the *Interactive Gambling Amendment (Gambling Reform) Bill 2026* and *National Self-exclusion Register (Cost Recovery Levy) Amendment Bill 2026*. While these reforms are welcome, they do not go far enough, and we urge the Committee to recommend stronger action to prevent and respond to online gambling harms.

Gambling harms range from financial distress, family breakdown, lost productivity, and mental harms that seriously impact individuals and communities:

- Australians lost \$629.67 billion to gambling between 1975 (when records began) and 2024 (the most recently available data),¹ having lost a record \$32.2 billion in the 2024 financial year alone.
- The Productivity Commission found in 1999 that every year 2900 Australians attempted suicide, and between 35 and 60 died by suicide, due to gambling harms.² The number today is likely much higher due to the explosion in online gambling since then, and the nearly 3.5 million Australians who are at risk of or already experiencing gambling harm.³
- Between 22% and 81% of people receiving treatment for gambling harm have thought about suicide, while 7% to 30% have attempted suicide.⁴
- Almost half of all people who gamble are at risk of or already experiencing gambling harm,⁵ and for every individual directly experiencing these harms, another 6 are also affected.⁶

To ensure the legislation before Parliament effectively addresses these significant harms, we make the following recommendations:

1. Amend the *Interactive Gambling Amendment (Gambling Reform) Bill 2026* to implement a total ban on online gambling advertisements, as recommended by the Murphy inquiry's *You Win Some, You Lose More* bipartisan report.
2. Failing a total online gambling advertising ban, the Bill could be amended to:
 - a. ban wagering advertising content during both live and non-live sporting events to break the link between gambling and sport;
 - b. ban wagering advertising content during scheduled and unscheduled breaks in play overnight (i.e., 8.30pm - 6.00am), not just during the daytime (6.00am - 8.30pm);

¹ Queensland Government Statistician's Office, *Australian Gambling Statistics, 1998-99 to 2023-24* (Summary Tables, No 40, 10 September 2025) 4 <<https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/statistics/theme/society/gambling/australian-gambling-statistics>>.

² Productivity Commission, *Australia's Gambling Industries* (Inquiry Report, No 10, 26 November 1999) 18 <<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/gambling/report>>.

³ Roy Morgan, *Over 620,000 'Problem Gamblers' in Australia – and the Majority are Aged Under 35* (Report, 28 October 2025) <<https://www.roymorgan.com/findings/10003-problem-gambling-severity-index-pgsi-august-2025>>.

⁴ Virve Marionneau and Janne Nikkinen, 'Gambling-Related Suicides and Suicidality: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Evidence' (2022) 13 (October) *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 1, 2.

⁵ Australian Gambling Research Centre, *Gambling Participation, Experience of Harm and Community Views* (Report, March 2023) 2 <<https://aifs.gov.au/research/research-snapshots/gambling-participation-experience-harm-and-community-views>>.

⁶ Belinda Goodwin et al, 'A Typical Problem Gambler Affects Six Others' (2017) 17(2) *International Gambling Studies* 275.

- c. include horse, harness and greyhound racing in the definition of “sporting event” so that the ban on wagering advertising content also applies to them, and remove the exception for “dedicated racing or wagering programs or channels” from the maximum 3 ad per 60-minute daytime limit;
 - d. ensure online content services (i.e. streaming services) operating in Australia play by the same rules as the rest of the Australian media landscape and are subject to the same advertising restrictions as non-internet based media channels; and
 - e. require users of online content services to be opted out of wagering advertising content by default.
3. Amend the *National Self-exclusion Register (Cost Recovery Levy) Amendment Bill 2026* to expand the scope of levy funds to support treatment services directly responding to gambling harms and addiction, delivered by professionals from the addiction field (e.g., *Gambling Help Online*).

If we are to seriously tackle gambling-related family breakdown and suicide, strengthened legislation needs to be coupled with increased investment in treatment and support for people who are currently experiencing gambling harms. The best way to ensure sustainable investment in support services for gambling harms and addiction is to build it into the legislated levy.

2. Interactive Gambling Amendment (Gambling Reform) Bill 2026

The Murphy Inquiry’s bipartisan report recommended a total ban on gambling advertising, which is supported by 77% of Australians.⁷ The report was unequivocal: “A phased, comprehensive ban on all gambling advertising on all media, that leaves no room for circumvention, is needed. Partial bans on gambling advertising do not work. The 2017 media reforms resulted in gambling advertising on television increasing. Harmful industries have shown they will identify and capitalise on any gaps in marketing restrictions and that they are taking advantage of the less regulated online environment.”⁸ The Bill as presented and read a first time before Parliament, falls well short of a total ban.

The Bill would ban wagering advertising content only during *live* sports events across all platforms,⁹ including scheduled and unscheduled breaks in play between the “daytime” hours of 6:00am and 8:30pm.¹⁰ However, wagering advertising content would still be permitted during scheduled and unscheduled breaks in play between the “overnight” hours of 8:30pm to 6:00am.¹¹ This represents a one-hour increase in allowable advertising time, as wagering advertising content is currently

⁷ The Australia Institute, *Polling - Banning Gambling Advertisements* (Report, 11 May 2026) <<https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/polling-banning-gambling-advertising/>>.

⁸ Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, Parliament of Australia, *Inquiry into Online Gambling and its Impacts on Those Experiencing Gambling Harm* (Final Report, June 2023) 5.139.

⁹ *Interactive Gambling Amendment (Gambling Reform) Bill 2026* (Cth) ss 62K, 62L, 62R (‘*Gambling Reform Bill*’).

¹⁰ *Ibid* s 62K.

¹¹ *Ibid* s 62L.

prohibited during breaks in play between the hours of 5:00am and 8:30pm.¹² The Bill also exempts horse, harness, and greyhound racing from this live sport wagering advertising content ban by excluding them from the definition of “sporting event”.¹³

The Bill introduces a maximum limit of 3 ads during any 60-minute period for all other programming during the hours of 6:00am to 8:30pm (with no limit outside this time window). However, “dedicated racing or wagering programs or channels” are exempt from this maximum 3 ad per 60-minute daytime limit,¹⁴ which will also not apply to “online content services” (i.e. streaming services that use the internet). While the Bill introduces a prohibition on wagering advertising content on online content services,¹⁵ it also introduces an exception whereby such advertising is permitted if the online content services take “reasonable steps” to prevent children, or anyone who has opted out, from receiving wagering advertising content.¹⁶

This means that in effect there is no cap on advertisements at any time for online content services,¹⁷ which are used by 91% of Australians,¹⁸ should they take such reasonable steps—including limiting gambling advertising to accounts with adult users, and providing users the option to opt out of seeing such ads.¹⁹ However, it is unrealistic to suggest that because a streaming service account is linked to an adult that children will not be able to access it, and we also know uptake of opt-out features is poor (e.g., among 12 million *SBS On Demand* users, just over 1000, or 0.12%, have opted out of gambling ads).²⁰

We support a total ban on online gambling advertisements, but failing this, and given the clear need to strengthen the existing measures contained in the Bill, would welcome amendments including those made in recommendations 2a–e above.

We understand one of the arguments against a total ban on online gambling advertising is that it will reduce revenue for Australian media companies during a time of upheaval for traditional media. While maintaining a strong media industry in Australia is rightly a consideration, doing so is not necessarily mutually exclusive with a total ban on gambling advertising. For example, media companies could be compensated through a levy imposed on online gambling companies’ that will support local Australian content; a levy that should also support treatment and support services for people experiencing gambling harms, such as Australia’s national online support service *Gambling Help Online*, which currently receives no federal investment.

¹² *Broadcasting Services (Online Content Service Provider Rules) 2018* (Cth) pt 3; Free TV Australia, *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice* (Code, 2019) Appendix 3 <https://www.freetv.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Free_TV_Commercial_Television_Industry_Code_of_Practice_2018.pdf>.

¹³ *Gambling Reform Bill* (n 9) s 10A(3).

¹⁴ *Ibid* s62M(3).

¹⁵ *Ibid* s 62P.

¹⁶ *Ibid* s 62P(2)

¹⁷ *Ibid* s 62M(1)(b).

¹⁸ Australian Communications and Media Authority, *How We Watch and Listen to Content* (Report, March 2026) 2 <<https://www.acma.gov.au/publications/2026-03/report/communications-and-media-australia-how-we-watch-and-listen-content>>.

¹⁹ *Gambling Reform Bill* (n 9) s 62P(2)(a-c).

²⁰ Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 5 November 2024, 80 (James Taylor, Managing Director at Special Broadcasting Service Corporation).

3. Urgent need for federal investment in early intervention services for gambling harms

Strengthened regulation alone is not enough. Consistent with the Murphy Inquiry recommendations, we need investment in early intervention, treatment, and support services that people can access before they reach crisis point.²¹ This includes investment in services dedicated to supporting people experiencing gambling-related mental harms and addiction and their families, not just financial helplines that primarily help people manage gambling-related financial harms.²²

In addition to saving lives, counselling for addictive behaviours saves between \$4 and \$23 for every dollar invested.²³ But counselling for gambling harms and addiction is not as accessible as it could be. Limited face-to-face service locations and trading hours make it difficult for workers and people living in regional and remote communities to access support. Stigma is also a significant barrier to help-seeking.²⁴

Turning Point operates *Gambling Help Online*, Australia's national online service supporting Australians experiencing gambling harms. The service overcomes the barriers of stigma and geography as it can be freely accessed anonymously, anywhere, anytime—which is especially important for Australians living in rural and regional areas lacking in-person support services.

The service is experiencing record demand associated with increasing gambling harms across the community, as well as the saturation of online gambling advertising. The requirement to promote the *Gambling Help Online* website and phone number at the end of all online gambling advertisements ensures Australians now know where to go for help, however, *Gambling Help Online* currently receives no Commonwealth Government investment, and the service continues to struggle to keep up with demand. Current funding only allows an immediate supportive response, without the opportunity to provide a period of structured follow-up and ongoing support. This represents a missed opportunity to engage with people unlikely to access in-person services due to stigma or geography and intervene early before harm escalates.

Telephone-based counselling for addictive behaviours is significantly more cost-effective than face-to-face counselling.²⁵ Multiple evaluations of Turning Point's follow-up phone counselling service have demonstrated high levels of client satisfaction, major improvements in client mental health and

²¹ Recommendation 9. Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, Parliament of Australia, *Inquiry into Online Gambling and its Impacts on Those Experiencing Gambling Harm* (Final Report, June 2023).

²² Gambling companies among others contribute to the independently administered Financial Counselling Industry Fund, but as its name suggests this fund only supports financial counselling services. There is no equivalent sustainable investment vehicle to support services responding to gambling harms and addiction like *Gambling Help Online*.

²³ Alexandra Voce and Tom Sullivan, *What are the Monetary Returns of Investing in Programs That Reduce Demand for Illicit Drugs?* (Report, No 657, 8 September 2022) 7 <<https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi657#>>.

²⁴ Sara Rolando, Chiara Ferrari and Franca Beccaria, "'To Me, It Was Just a Vice'. Stigma and Other Barriers to Gambling Treatment in Piedmont, Italy' (2023) 39(4) *Journal of Gambling Studies* 1909, 1914-1916; Katarzyna Dąbrowska, Jacek Moskalewicz and Łukasz Wieczorek, 'Barriers in Access to the Treatment for People with Gambling Disorders. Are They Different from Those Experienced by People with Alcohol and/or Drug Dependence?' (2017) 33(2) *Journal of Gambling Studies* 487, 493.

²⁵ Peter Gates and Lucy Albertella, 'The Effectiveness of Telephone Counselling in the Treatment of Illicit Drug and Alcohol Use Concerns' (2015) 22(2) *Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare* 1.

addictive behaviours, and engagement of people within regional, rural, and urban settings who struggle to access traditional in-person services.²⁶

For as little as \$3M p/a, *Gambling Help Online* could be enhanced to meet demand and provide a period of structured support, which will prevent missed opportunities for life- and cost-saving early intervention.

Everyone should have timely access to the treatment, care and support for gambling harms they need and deserve. If we're serious about tackling gambling-related family breakdown and suicide, we need a health-led response that matches the scale of the problem.

We urgently need federal investment in early intervention services that respond directly to gambling harms and addiction, delivered by professionals from the addiction field. This could be achieved through amendments to the *National Self-exclusion Register (Cost Recovery Levy) Amendment Bill 2026* that ensure the levy goes beyond recovering costs from industry to support the national BetStop self-exclusion register and its promotion, to also support treatment services directly responding to gambling harms and addiction, including the national *Gambling Help Online* service Australians already know and trust.

²⁶ Jasmin Grigg et al, 'Ready2Change: Preliminary Effectiveness of a Telephone-Delivered Intervention Program for Alcohol, Methamphetamine and Cannabis Use Problems' (2022) 41(2) *Drug and Alcohol Review* 517, 523; Chloe Bernard et al, 'Client Experiences of a Telephone-Delivered Intervention for Alcohol Use: A Qualitative Study' (2020) 20(1) *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* 522, 527-31.