

We are gambling with our health, says Chief Medical Officer

In his second annual report, *Gambling with our Health*, Dr Atherton calls for more support for those experiencing gambling-related harm in Wales, better research and monitoring of the impact of gambling on health, and for greater regulatory control of gambling in Wales and the UK.

In Wales, 61% of adults gambled in the last 12 months. 1.1% of the population, which is equivalent to 30,000 people, self-reported as having a problem with gambling. A further 3.8% of people in Wales are estimated to be at risk of problem gambling in Wales.

Whilst recognising that gambling can be a source of enjoyment, it can lead to financial difficulty and harm, including anxiety, stress, depression and alcohol and substance misuse. Gambling does not just affect the individual; it can impact on their family, friends and wider society.

Dr Atherton is calling on the Welsh Government to agree a strong and ambitious action plan to reduce gambling-related harm across Wales, to make effective use of its existing powers to minimise the harm from gambling, and to seek to extend these powers. He also calls on the UK Government to take stronger action to restrict advertising of gambling products, to improve player protection, and to impose a levy on the industry to research, prevent and correct the adverse effects of gambling.

The Chief Medical Officer launched his annual report at the Newport Citizens Advice Bureau today. He was joined by Tim Miller, executive director of the Gambling Commission who welcomed his report.

Dr Atherton said:

“I’m pleased to present my second report as Chief Medical Officer for Wales, and I intend to use this as a platform to highlight areas of emerging or underestimated public health importance, which is why we have decided to focus on gambling-related harm.

“While it may be harmless fun for some, gambling has great potential to cause harm to individuals and can have devastating effects on the people closest to them, and communities.

“There are still big gaps in our understanding of this issue, and we need to reduce stigma around gambling so that more people who require help come forward.

“I hope my annual report will help highlight this issue, to be addressed, before it becomes a major public health issue.”

Tim Miller, executive director of the Gambling Commission said:

“Gambling related harm is a public health concern and the Gambling Commission is committed to preventing that harm. We’re pleased Dr Atherton is raising awareness of the impacts that gambling can have to both individuals and those around them.

“As the gambling regulator, we will continue to work with public health professionals, government and the industry to forge a sustained, world-leading approach to make gambling safer for people across Wales and the rest of Great Britain.”