30 July 2026

Environment and Communications Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submitted via Committee website

Dear Committee Members,

headspace National welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry on the *Interactive Gambling Amendment (Gambling Reform) Bill 2026* (the Bill).

About headspace

headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, providing early intervention mental health services to 12- to 25-year-olds. headspace has 175 services across Australia in metropolitan, regional and remote areas, and offers online and phone support services and digital resources through eheadspace. headspace provides multidisciplinary care for mental health, physical health, alcohol and other drug use, and work and study needs.

Gambling and the impact on young peoples' mental health and wellbeing

Young people are particularly vulnerable to gambling-related harms and to gambling addiction.[1]

The recent work of the Australia Institute highlights how common gambling is among young people, with teenagers more likely to gamble than play any of Australia's most popular sports.[1] The Centre for Gambling Research's survey highlighted the particular impacts of gambling on young people aged 18 to 24, who are most at risk of, and experience harm, at disproportionately high rates.[2]

The harms of gambling are also well known: gambling can lead to serious financial and legal problems, relationship difficulties, and health and psychological harms.[3] First Nations communities and multicultural people are at higher risk of experiencing harm from gambling and can be less likely to seek help.[4]

[1] Livingstone, C. 2026, Young people are being exposed to gambling too early. Here's what we can do, *The Conversation*, Young people are being exposed to gambling too early. Here's what we can do.

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The role of gambling advertising

Most young people report being exposed to gambling advertising on social media, print media, on the radio, on billboards and buses, at the supermarket and more[2] – describing it as pervasive, inescapable and creating an environment where gambling is normalised and expected.[3]

A member of headspace's Youth National Reference Group (hYNRG) described their exposure to gambling advertising:

> *I see gambling advertising regularly across sport, social media and other digital platforms, but I notice it becoming particularly frequent during major sporting periods. For example, around the recent FIFA World Cup, I felt as though I was seeing much more gambling-related advertising and content than usual. This included advertising surrounding sports coverage, sports-related posts, streaming content and online discussions about matches.*
>
> *Even outside major tournaments, gambling advertising often appears through sponsored posts, short-form videos, websites and streaming platforms. I may not be actively searching for gambling-related content, but it can still appear simply because I am engaging with sport or general online content.*

Young people recognise and endorse the need for more effective regulations around the content and frequency of gambling marketing and sponsorship.[4] As a member of hYNRG noted:

> *Strong bans are needed because young people should not carry the responsibility of constantly recognising, resisting and avoiding highly targeted advertising. Parents and families also cannot realistically monitor every advertisement appearing across television, social media, streaming services, shared devices and sporting content.*

Online environments, in particular, should be designed, operated and regulated to be safe for young people by default. This requires either a total ban on gambling advertising online, or 'opt-in' systems (rather than 'opt-out') to offer default protection for young people engaging with online services and platforms.

headspace encourages the Committee to consider these reforms in the context of the Australian Government's broader work to strengthen digital duty of care obligations and

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[2] South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2024, Teenagers and gambling: Views and experiences of South Australian young people on gambling, Project Report No. 47.
[3] Royce, B., Crawford, G, Francis, L. et al, 2025, Exploring perspectives towards the gambling industry and its marketing strategies among young people in Western Australia, *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 36(2): e955.
[4] Pitt, H., McCarthy, S., Randle, M., et al, 2024. "It's changing our lives, not for the better. It's important that we have a say". The role of young people in informing public health and policy decisions about gambling marketing. *BMC Public Health*, 24(1)

online safety protections. Young people's exposure to gambling is shaped not only by direct advertising, but also by the ways gambling-related content is promoted, shared and recommended through social media platforms and digital services. As Australia considers stronger expectations on platforms to prevent foreseeable harms, gambling-related harms should be included within this approach. Digital platforms should be required to take reasonable steps to identify, mitigate and reduce young people's exposure to gambling content and promotions, consistent with safety-by-design and digital duty of care principles.

The proposed amendments

We note that the proposed amendments to the *Interactive Gambling Act* 2001 consider the impacts of online gambling harms for young people and include restrictions on gambling advertising, stronger regulation of illegal gambling operators, changes to gambling products such as online keno services, and reforms to the National Self-Exclusion Register (BetStop).

These changes will go some way towards reducing gambling advertising. As a member of hYNRG noted:

> *The Bill contains several important reforms and is clearly a step in the right direction. In particular, banning gambling advertising during live sport within the specified hours, in sporting venues, on uniforms and through athletes, celebrities and influencers recognises that gambling has become too closely connected with sport.*

However, even with these changes, young people will still face significant exposure to gambling advertising and promotions. A member of hYNRG described the risks:

> *However, I do not think the Bill offers sufficient protection on its own. Allowing up to three gambling advertisements per hour on television between 6.00 am and 8.30 pm means young people may still experience regular exposure outside live sporting broadcasts. This risks continuing the broader normalisation of gambling even if some of the most visible sports-related advertising is removed.*

headspace supports a ban on all online gambling advertisements, consistent with the Murphy report,[5] to be implemented by the Australian Government in collaboration with state and territory governments. While such a ban is being phased in, any exposure to online gambling should be via an opt-in process, where only people who actively choose to receive gambling ads can access them.

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[5] Parliament of Australia, 2023, You win some, you loose more: Online gambling and its impact on those experiencing gambling harm. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, Canberra.

The amendments also need transparent monitoring and evaluation, although it's not clear how outcomes will be measured. As member of hYNRG noted:

> *Government should also publicly measure whether the reforms actually reduce young people's exposure to gambling advertising, gambling participation and gambling-related mental health harm.*

Addressing the harms of gambling more broadly

While the proposed legislative reforms will help to reduce and mitigate the harms of gambling, more support is required to address the normalisation of gambling, and to provide support for young people experiencing gambling related harms.

We note Government's proposed public education campaign on the harms of gambling. This could also be supported by additional prevention and early intervention, such as:

- invest in prevention initiatives that build financial literacy, digital literacy and resilience to persuasive marketing among children and young people
- supporting sporting organisations to transition away from gambling sponsorships through alternative funding models, reducing financial reliance on the gambling industry
- encouraging media reporting that avoids glamourising gambling wins and instead presents balanced information about the likelihood of losses and associated harms.

In line with best practice and recent research, headspace recommends the design and implementation of additional protections should be done with the young people that will be most impacted by these changes to enhance the likelihood of their effectiveness.[6]

Further information

headspace would welcome the opportunity to discuss the proposed amendments with the Committee in more detail.

Yours sincerely



Jason Trethowan
Chief Executive Officer

[6] Pitt, H., McCarthy, S., Randle, M., et al, 2024. "It's changing our lives, not for the better. It's important that we have a say". The role of young people in informing public health and policy decisions about gambling marketing. *BMC Public Health*, 24(1).