

Gambling Business Group raises the pressure on Commission to release its data on suicides

DATA

Dawn Butler MP recently cited the discredited "one suicide per day" statistic in a first person assault on the industry in the Guardian. It's doubtful that anyone will call her out over the fantasy stat - the Commission and Office for National Statistics have denounced it on numerous occasions but it's still being quoted. The **Gambling Business Group**, however, has come up with a solution: the Gambling Commission should fund research on the actual number of gambling-related suicides in the UK. To assist, the GBG has gone to gambling harm campaigner Sir Iain Duncan Smith, urging the former Tory leader to join them in trying to persuade the regulator to fund research into suicide numbers and put an end to the UK's reliance on an irrelevant Swedish survey conducted in a Scandinavian medical facility on Swedish addicts over a decade ago.

The Gambling Business Group has stepped up its pressure on the Gambling Commission to release data, collected over the past 18 months, on the number of gambling related suicides in the UK.

The trade group has written to Sir Iain Duncan Smith, chair of the Gambling Reform APPG, to seek his support in persuading the regulator to release the findings from its current analysis on gambling related suicides, and to allocate funds from the Statutory Levy to research and define the accurate number of gambling related suicides in the UK.

In a letter to IDS, seen by Coinslot, GBG chief executive Peter Hannibal wrote: "We have asked the Gambling Commission repeatedly for the number of suicides that have been reported since the new requirement came into force, but they have so far refused to impart that information. Perhaps you might be more successful were you to ask?"

That 'new requirement' referenced by Hannibal refers to a specific Licence Condition introduced in April 2024 that all gambling operators must report any suicides among their customers or their families to the Commission, whether gambling related or not.

Indeed, a Freedom of Information request from Coinslot earlier this year for the Commission to release the data met with a three-page response that could be summarised in just two letters - no.

The GBG chief is among a growing number of stakeholders who are becoming increasingly frustrated by the Commission's posture on this matter, which it defends on the grounds of sensitivity.

As a counter-point, it should recognise that there seems to be very little sensitivity on this specific issue from charities such as Gambling with Lives, MPs includ-



ing Dawn Butler, and in the broader sphere from campaigning groups who have literally flooded the zone by callously persuading gambling addicts to out themselves in public and self confess.

Hannibal did not shy away from the suicide issue in his letter to IDS. "The fact that people with gambling disorder are at elevated risk of self-harm is not disputed," he wrote. "Much more should be done to understand and address this risk - but it is critical that we base action on sound evidence. What is certain is that we absolutely need to understand more about suicide and its relationship with gambling, and we encourage using the proceeds of the new Levy for this very purpose."

Next week, Coinslot will be issuing a new FOI request to the Commission and, hopefully, the GR APPG will agree to join the Gambling Business Group campaign for evidence to be released.

So, why the intensive pressure on the Gambling

Evidence rather than emotion

Gambling Business Group said...

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Commission - and why now?

The Gambling Act Review is clearly one reason; the misuse of suicide data is undoubtedly playing a role in the stuttering progress of reform, not least because of intense lobbying by the government's very own MPs.

In an op-ed in the Guardian two weeks ago, Dawn Butler, a now out and proud gambling prohibitionist, wrote: "With approximately more than one person every day dying of a gambling-related suicide, it's clear that, along with everything else, this is a public health crisis."

It is very unlikely that she has any factual evidence to back her statement. In fact, it would shock even the Gambling Commission if she had been advised of many, or indeed any gambling-related suicides at all.

But if she does, give us the numbers.

According to her commentary, Dawn Butler should now have information of almost 550 gam-

bling related suicides since April 2024 - that's when the Commission first started its suicide reporting condition on gambling operators.

We don't expect an answer from DB on this request - least of all 550 recorded suicides.

But it's not just Butler citing unsubstantiated stats: there are literally hundreds of others from political figures to gambling charities through to media outlets.

In parliament, for example, earlier in the year there were three separate references to 400 suicides in the Westminster Gambling Halls debate and a reference to 300-500 suicides at the Health & Social Care Committee session on Gambling Related Harms.

Well, who started this 'one suicide per day' number rolling?

It appears it originated in September 2021 from Public Health England and subsequently in January 2023 by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) which published reports

using the line "one (gambling related) suicide per day".

If one wanted to discredit the figure, look no further than the widely discredited and lazy-arsed PHE which was shut down and thrown in the bin four years ago. And you can see why: their suicide 'statistic' came from a Swedish study of Swedish gambling addicts in a Swedish institution over ten years ago.

The Gambling Commission, in their defence, stated it was "wholly unacceptable" to misuse the statistic and claim that one problem gambler dies by suicide every day in England; and this year the Office for Statistics Regulation wrote to the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee about misusing these suicide figures in a letter to the Parliamentary Undersecretary for Public Health Secretary. In fact, the OHID had to apologise and effectively disown the stat.

"We cannot extrapolate from Swedish studies, from Norwegian studies - it doesn't work," it noted.

No it doesn't. So we can assume you have stopped using the one suicide per day stat? Yeah right.

So what would work?

OK, here's a radical idea: what about a UK analysis into UK gambling related suicides, using UK data about players in the UK?

And what about using some of the millions of pounds of funds from the Levy to investigate gambling related suicides?

Well those questions could be answered by Sir Iain Duncan Smith if, of course, he is willing to work with the Gambling Business Group and the industry to get the facts released and a new data-set established.

And maybe then, the gambling minister Baroness Twycross can make her decisions based on evidence and facts rather than the rantings of a very high profile Labour MP.