

Dame Caroline Dinenage MP  
Culture, Media and Sport Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

17 August 2023

Dear Dame Caroline

I am writing in response to remarks recently made by Michael Dugher in oral evidence to your committee's gambling regulation inquiry, where he referenced Samaritans' message that suicide is complex in response to a question about the safety of gambling products.

It is important to recognise that suicide is usually caused by a number of inter-relating factors but this doesn't mean that there aren't particular experiences or occurrences that can put people at higher risk – including stressors that trigger feelings of shame or hopelessness, which can be antecedents to suicidal thoughts. It is recognised now by experts that gambling can be a dominant factor in a suicide without which the death would not occur.


I am concerned that Samaritans' messaging around talking about suicide responsibly is being deliberately used to evade recognition of the established link between gambling and suicide risk. People experiencing gambling related harms are an at-risk group for the experience of suicidal thoughts, attempts and death by suicide. Samaritans provided further detail about the links between gambling related harms and suicide risk in written evidence to the inquiry and it's important to note a recent inquest where the coroner concluded that gambling disorder was the medical cause of the individual's death.

There is a clear imperative to take a public health approach to reducing gambling related harms, including assessing products against harm indicators, slowing the speed of play and the scale of losses, an end to irresponsible VIP schemes and a complete ban on communications to customers who have self-excluded. While the proposals in the Gambling White Paper may go some way towards addressing these issues over time, there is nevertheless room for gambling operators to increase safety in the here and now, well in advance of any future regulatory requirements.

It is always important to talk about suicide responsibly, to reduce the risks of suicide contagion and – as Charles Ritchie, Chair of Gambling with Lives, noted in his subsequent oral evidence – to ensure that there is no barrier to help seeking for anyone who needs it.

**The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF**

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 020 8394 8300 (UK)

 [admin@samaritans.org](mailto:admin@samaritans.org)

 [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)

It is also vital that suicide prevention, including the role that the gambling sector can play in reducing risk, receives proper political scrutiny. Samaritans regularly works with parliamentary committees and individual parliamentarians to support discussions of suicide, and we would welcome the opportunity to brief the Committee further.

Yours sincerely,



Julie Bentley  
Chief Executive

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