

Knights of Saint Columba

Accrington Council 188

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Source Christian Institute

Health Secretary Matt Hancock has urged a crackdown on betting companies which encourage people to continue gambling even after they choose to quit.

He called for a ban on 'bet-to-view' sports, free bets, and VIP experiences for high-spending gamblers.

It comes as it is revealed that around 500 people commit suicide for reasons reportedly connected to gambling every year.

Mental health

The NHS's mental health chief Claire Murdoch recently wrote to all major gambling companies to get them to take more responsibility for the harms they are causing.

Hancock has now backed Murdoch, saying: "Gambling-related harm is a growing priority of the NHS".

He added: "I strongly support the work that Claire Murdoch is doing to insist that betting companies do what is necessary."

Incentives

Betway, a major bookmaker which sponsors West Ham, the Grand National and Test cricket, has been one such company targeting its 'biggest losers' to get them to continue gambling beyond their means.

The Daily Mail revealed that the company used personal 'VIP managers' to befriend addicts and put 'bonus' money into their accounts, even when they admitted they were losing money.

Gamblers were also treated to tickets to high-profile sporting events such as the Champions League, FA Cup and Cheltenham races.

They were also offered the chance to have all-expenses-paid trips to Las Vegas as an incentive to keep betting.

VIP managers

Ben Jones was jailed for stealing £370,000 from his employer to fund his habit.

Betway VIP Manager Simon Kent exchanged hundreds of chatty emails with Jones over the course of two years, encouraging him to keep betting.

Kent placed £500 in Jones's account on his birthday in 2016, and the following year upped that bonus to £1,000 after Jones said he was giving up.

Suicides

Charles and Liz Ritchie founded Gambling With Lives after their son Jack ended his life. They say they have now been approached by more than 50 families whose children have killed themselves.

Charles said: "We are seeing so many deaths, disproportionately of bright young men whose sense of self-worth gets destroyed. This is the devastating impact of an activity sold as fun."

Gambling Commission figures estimate that five per cent of betting addicts had tried to kill themselves in the twelve months before the study – roughly equivalent to 21,500 adults and 2,750 children nationally.

Bernard Holden MBE JP

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