



Best Practice Made Better:

Updating the RG Index

Responsible Gambling Council
April 2025

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About This Report

This report provides gambling operators, regulators and other stakeholders with a comprehensive guide to the rigorous and consultative research process the Responsible Gambling Council (RGC) undertook to produce the latest update of our RG Index – the best-practice-based standards and criteria that underpin RGC’s RG Check accreditation program for land-based venues and online gambling (iGaming) sites.

RG Check is the most comprehensive responsible gambling (RG) accreditation program in the world. Developed by RGC in consultation with policy makers, gambling providers, players and people who have experienced gambling harm, RG Check helps gambling sites and venues evaluate, monitor and manage all aspects of their RG program.

The goal of the RG Index update is to maintain RG Check’s trusted status as the industry’s leading accreditation program by ensuring that the standards on which it is based are comprehensive, relevant and up-to-date. It is our intention that various aspects of these findings and insights can also be leveraged by those seeking to raise RG standards across multiple jurisdictions. This report focuses on the concepts and principles that guide our work, the research we conducted, and the key themes and findings that emerged.

The Index update was conducted between September 2023 and December 2024. It included a public consultation, research review, four-country player survey, advisory panels and interviews with subject matter experts from various research and regulatory perspectives and jurisdictions.



Highlights



Project Scope:

- 16 months of data collection
- 1,000+ players from four countries surveyed
- In-depth interviews with 10 international RG experts
- Global stakeholder consultation
- Extensive literature review
- Operational experience gained from 68 iGaming and 65 land-based RG Check accreditations active in 2024



Project Objectives:

- Deliver relevant and meaningful recommendations to promote safer play
- Identify key opportunities and challenges in global jurisdictions
- Highlight the impact of cultural differences across multiple jurisdictions
- Drive continuous improvement



Guiding Principles:

- Use best available evidence
- Stakeholder input and consultation
- Precautionary decision-making



Standards Updates Across Seven Critical Topics:

- Leading with accountability, transparency and integrity
- Supporting vital interactions
- Communicating across the player journey
- Incentivizing, promoting and normalizing safer play
- A collaborative approach to trust, credibility and program excellence
- Effectively responding to players
- Marketing bonuses, promotions and inducements

Fostering Safer Play with Globally Relevant Standards

I am pleased to present this summary report on the methodology and findings from the latest RG Index standards and criteria update, the foundation of our industry-leading RG Check accreditation program.

RGC is a global leader in preventing gambling-related harm, driven by a commitment to excellence and continuous innovation. By expanding our knowledge base, engaging with world-class experts, and staying ahead of emerging trends in responsible gambling research, player behaviour, and industry best practices, we ensure that our programs set the standard for impact and effectiveness.

This report reflects our dedication to applying the latest insights and forward-thinking strategies to shape the future of responsible gambling. I trust that you will find these findings informative, illuminating and valuable in elevating responsible gambling practices worldwide.



Sarah McCarthy
Chief Executive Officer

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah McCarthy".

We launched this RG Index update to ensure both the Index and RG Check continue to capture key elements of leading-edge RG programs as well as respond to rapid growth and innovation in the global gambling sector.

This report provides valuable insights – from player perspectives on RG tools to expert views on training gaps and RG culture. For me, the most critical aspects were the variety of inputs and global scope.

I sincerely thank the contributors to all the various inputs as your feedback has helped us equip all RG stakeholders with the insights and takeaways needed to ensure players worldwide have the information and resources they need.

For almost 15 years, RG Check, guided by the RG Index, has been the world's most rigorous independent accreditation program, ensuring operators uphold high standards while adapting to emerging trends. This update strengthens that foundation and reinforces our commitment to advancing RG standards globally.



Tracy Parker
Vice President of Policy,
Standards and
Accreditation

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracy Parker".



RG Index Update



Project Overview

This project set out to examine how best to apply comprehensive, organization-wide, leading-edge RG program elements across multiple jurisdictions, taking into account variations in regulations, customer segments and operating environments, as well as differences in player RG awareness and behaviours. We sought to identify key opportunities and challenges in operating globally, while also addressing the pace of change in the industry including the emergence of digital payment systems, evolution of marketing trends and loyalty programs, developments in employee training and support, and refinement of player engagement. As a result, we have highlighted broad industry-wide recommendations that incorporate this complexity and can be applied consistently across multiple jurisdictions.

Since RGC first developed the RG Index and launched the RG Check program in 2011, we made a commitment to review the RG Index standards and criteria, and the metrics used in operator assessments, to ensure they reflect the current realities of the gambling industry and global best practices. Given the pace of change and increasing globalization just noted, data gathering for this RG Index update focused on outreach and engagement as well as research scans. We took these steps, detailed below, to ensure that not only is the RG Check program uniquely positioned to help operators around the world strengthen their RG strategies, but that regulators and other stakeholders will also be aided in pursuing greater player safety.



Data Gathering

We used several different approaches and consulted multiple sources to collect the array of information needed. These included subject matter expert interviews, stakeholder consultation, a four-country player survey, literature reviews and ad hoc feedback from industry employees, clients and other stakeholders.

Before the fact-finding, we conducted a research study examining the principles and other foundational concepts underpinning the development of standards by regulators and non-regulatory standards-setting organizations within and beyond the gambling sector.

That study and three other elements of our research – the stakeholder consultation, the player survey and the subject matter expert consultation – warrant a closer examination before we discuss the update’s key findings.



Complete Standards Coverage

Information gathered in this update cut across all current standards areas in the RG Index:

iGaming Standards

**RG POLICY, STRATEGY AND CULTURE**

**EMPLOYEE TRAINING**

**SELF-EXCLUSION**

**ASSISTING PLAYERS WHO MAY BE EXPERIENCING HARMS FROM GAMBLING**

**INFORMED DECISION MAKING**

**MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

**ACCOUNTS AND PAYMENT**

**SITE AND PRODUCT DESIGN**

**STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

Land-Based Standards

**RG POLICY, STRATEGY AND CULTURE**

**EMPLOYEE TRAINING**

**SELF-EXCLUSION**

**ASSISTING PLAYERS WHO MAY BE EXPERIENCING HARMS FROM GAMBLING**

**INFORMED DECISION MAKING**

**MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

**ACCESS TO MONEY**

**VENUE AND GAME DESIGN**

Guiding Principles Research

We initiated the update by reviewing the principles of standards development to establish a solid foundation for the work ahead. Specifically, we aimed to ensure that the balance of our consultations and evidence collection considered not only the rapid changes in the industry but also reconciled the tensions between the incomplete nature of many RG metrics and operators' desire for research-informed recommendations.

This study led to the development of three concepts that guided our research through the remainder of the RG Index update process:

Best available evidence: The best available evidence, verified by multiple sources and metrics, is foundational in developing the RG Index. It includes both evidence of harm as well as promising practices in risk/harm mitigation. The term “best available” signifies and acknowledges that research in the field of RG, while expanding, is often not definitive. RGC is committed to rigorously and transparently assessing and evaluating the best available evidence and communicating our findings.

Stakeholder input and consultation: We commit to seeking the advice and input of the broad, diverse community of participants, including recognized gambling industry experts, players, experienced RG practitioners, researchers, regulators and staff. In conjunction, we recognize the diverse needs of all players across the spectrum and throughout the player journey.

Precautionary decision-making: Our foundational premise is that lack of evidence of harm does not mean that harm is not occurring. As such, the absence of evidentiary certainty will not be used as a reason for postponing decisions where there is a risk of serious or irreversible harm. When assessing critical risks, RGC will consider the threat, the scale and reversibility of potential harms, its manageability, and the level of community impact.

Stakeholder Consultation Survey

We began our formal outreach by surveying stakeholders on four topics: organizational culture, gambling myths and misconceptions, player education, and marketing communications. Participants were drawn from various organizations, including industry associations, regulators, government, treatment providers, consultants and land-based and online operators. While many countries and regions were represented, most respondents were operators based in Canada and the U.S. We came away with three principal findings:

- Communication from senior leadership and the tone from the top are crucial for enhancing employee engagement and fostering a strong, responsible gambling culture within an organization.
- It is essential to educate both players and employees. By prioritizing transparency and accuracy, organizations can create a more enjoyable gambling experience and promote informed decision-making among players.
- There is untapped potential to find new ways to incentivize safer gambling practices and improve player gambling literacy through loyalty programs.



Four-Country Player Survey

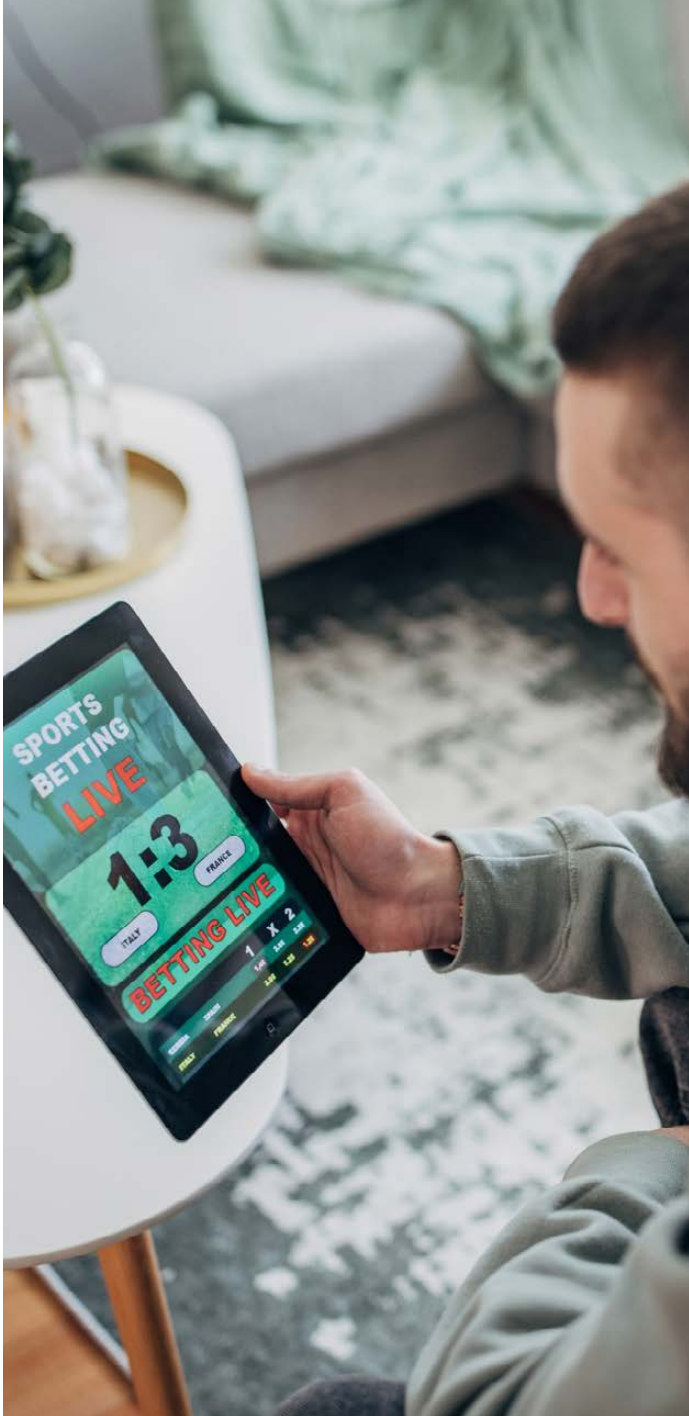
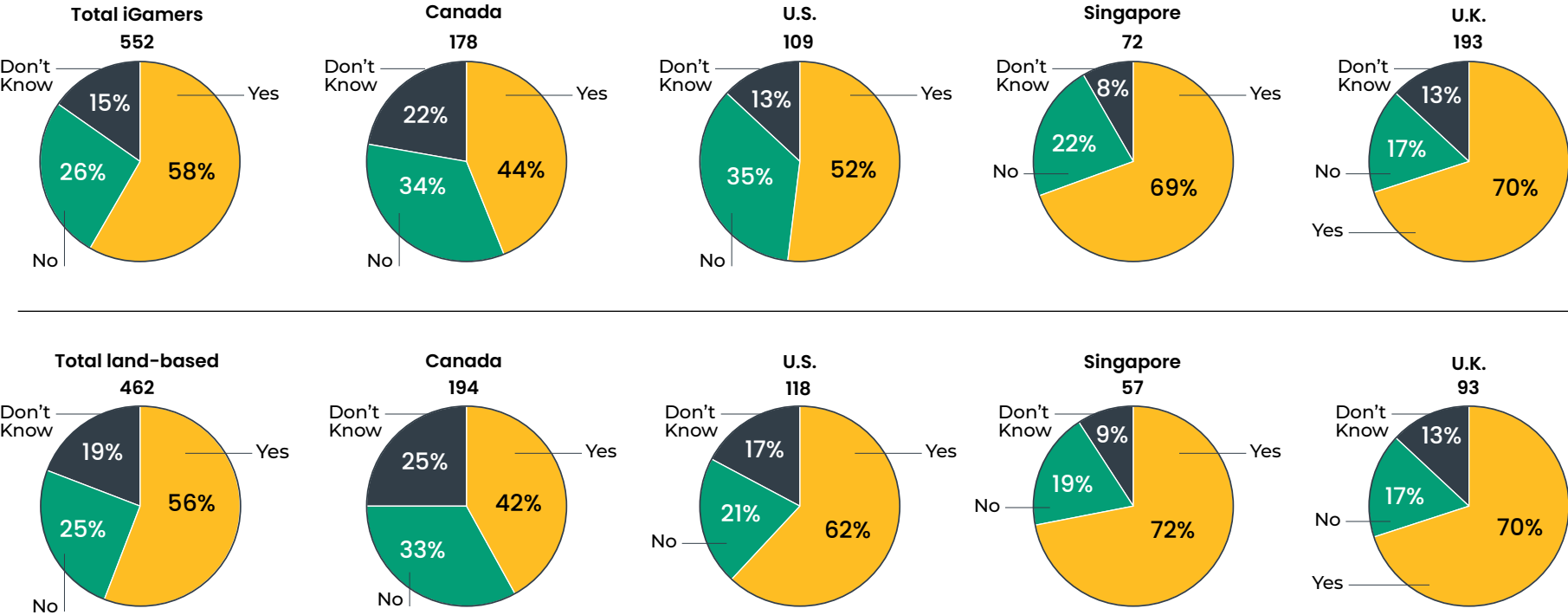
As per our guiding principles, gathering and understanding the experiences and opinions of players is essential to the integrity and value of the RG Index. This survey received feedback from over 1,000 iGaming and land-based players, with low-to-moderate risk profiles, aged 25 and older. Respondents were based in Canada, the U.S., Singapore and the U.K.

The survey was designed to provide insights into players’ perspectives on where in the player journey to encourage safer gambling behaviours, discourage negative gambling behaviours and direct players to support.

Insights from this survey enhanced our understanding of the importance of giving players in every jurisdiction multiple

opportunities to track and review their play history. Results also consistently highlighted the potential for gambling sites and venues to incentivize players to use responsible gambling tools and develop positive gambling behaviours. Finally, the feedback from players in different countries also underscored how their levels of interest in and acceptance of RG programs vary by location.

Interest in receiving personalized play feedback (%) among those who do not know or have not received personalized play feedback



Subject Matter Expert Consultation

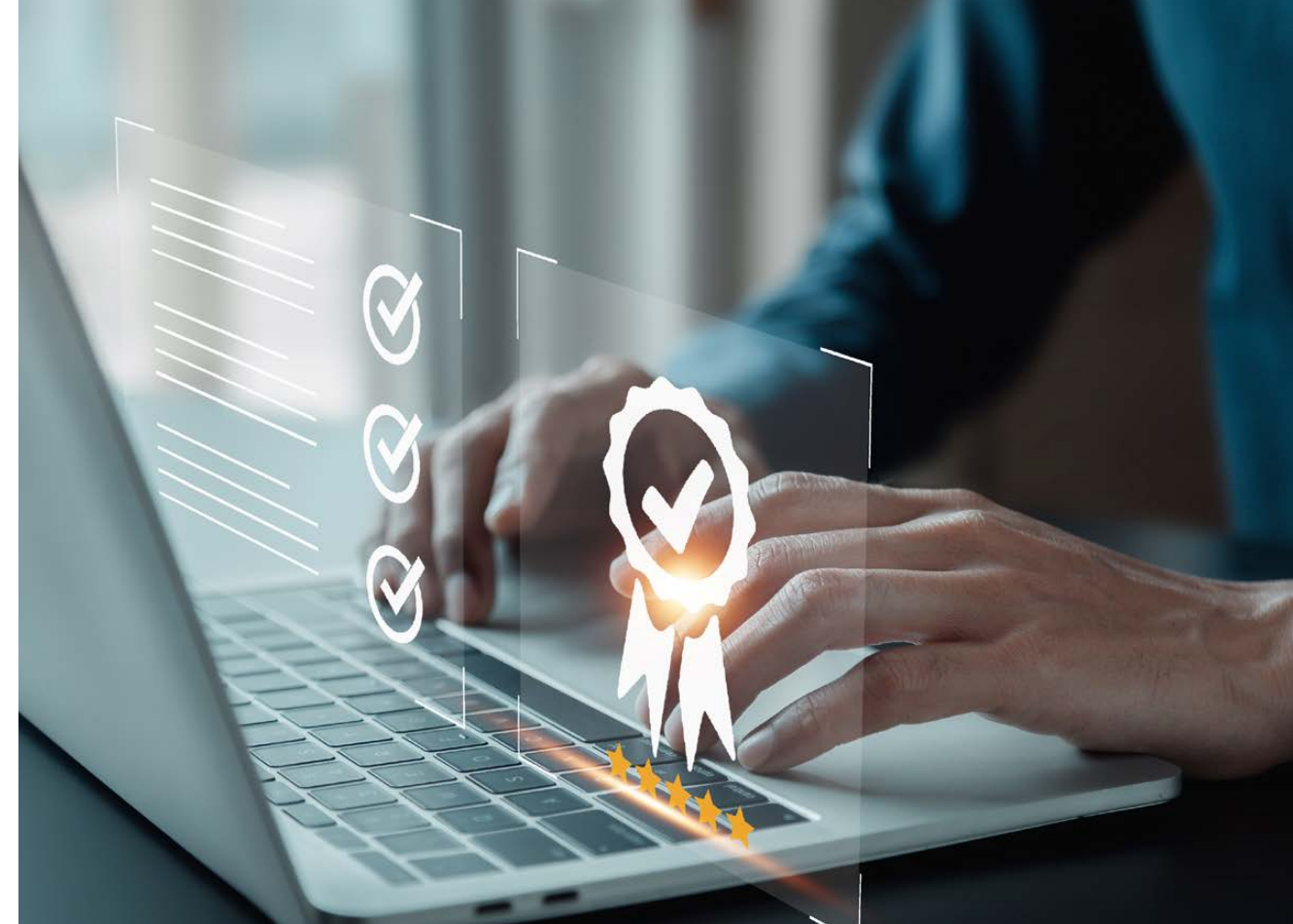
We rounded out our work by seeking further feedback from regulatory and research experts. We conducted in-depth interviews with 10 practitioners whose expertise spanned academic research, clinical/treatment services, regulation, law and policy development. Collectively, this group had worked in the field of responsible gambling in 11 countries.



The participants were asked a range of detailed questions focusing on five primary areas: corporate culture, employee training and support, engaging with players, marketing, and payment technologies. Analysis of the responses identified six recurring themes:

- Require measurement of impact for key standards.
- Recognize variation in RG culture across different regions.
- Harmonize standards with local regulations.
- Participate in international regulatory development.
- Identify emerging standards.
- Provide incentives for operators that exceed standards.

There was also universal agreement on the need to normalize RG behaviours as part of the playing experience. This could be done by presenting RG tool options, such as deposit or playing time limits, in tandem with account sign-up or deposit functions, and also by providing players with more metrics about their playing behaviour to increase their knowledge and self-awareness.



“RG needs to be normalized as part of the regular player journey. So, any kind of RG tool, whether it’s a deposit limit, a calculator or a check-in, should be part of the general account tools.”

Expert Consultation Participant

Key Findings and Outcomes

Many months of research, expert interviews, surveys and other forms of fact finding and data gathering conducted by RGC yielded a rich return. We gained many new insights about how players, operators and staff relate to and engage with RG issues, features and programs. We were pleased to discover that many of the findings supported existing RG Index standards and criteria while identifying several areas that could benefit from further development and emphasis. We also developed a greater appreciation for areas in RG programming that are especially effective and those with the greatest shortcomings.

After conducting a comprehensive review of this work, we've identified seven topic areas that are pivotal to realizing the RG goals of fostering a safer playing experience, reducing risk and harm, and providing players in need with knowledge of solutions and how to access them. The following outlines our response in each of these areas and the highlights of our findings.

1. Leading with accountability, transparency and integrity

We will reinforce the importance of leadership, accountability and tone from the top in establishing an effective RG culture, as well as how incentives, communication and balancing priorities can contribute.

A corporate culture that prioritizes player protection needs to address the inherent conflict that can exist between RG goals and operator profit. This dynamic heightens the need for an intentional approach to leadership, governance, accountability and communication. An intentional approach, in turn, engenders policies, procedures and practices that systematize communications to employees, support competitive executive incentive programs and guide a comprehensive approach to employee training.

"Yes, it's a component of performance reviews and a regular agenda item. Fine and good. But the incentivization structure of an organization is a really important one. So, including real targets for senior management and executive management that are incentivized on a similar level or on the same level as commercial targets is, for me, a crucial component to really integrate RG within the organization."

Expert Consultation Participant

Effective action on corporate culture also depends on measurement. In our outreach and analysis, the importance of applying feedback mechanisms to collect employee perspectives and insights into the effectiveness of the overall RG program, especially from the frontline staff, was emphasized.





2. Supporting vital interactions

We will continue to highlight best practices in developing and implementing employee training programs that equip frontline employees with fundamental tools, information and support to take action and help create a safe and fun environment for players.

Similar to a leadership approach that acknowledges the potential conflict between profit and RG, training content also needs to be transparent about the harm that gambling can cause. Organizations can recognize and acknowledge this risk by providing training information on high-risk player behaviours and game features, as well as effective ways to reduce harm. In best-practice, this information typically is provided through partnerships and with the support of independent research and practitioners.

“There’s a lot of anxiety amongst staff about what happens when someone gets aggressive, sad or defensive. Preparing them for those conversations is really critical.”

Expert Consultation Participant

Training requirements for vital and sensitive employee-player interactions that can include suicidal threats are extensive and need to be supported with related policies and procedures. Emphasis on practicing skills and building confidence through scenarios and role-playing to manage highly sensitive conversations, in a non-threatening and non-judgmental way, was reiterated by several groups in our analysis.

Innovative training approaches increasingly include a focus on empathy training (often by incorporating lived experience perspectives), ongoing employee support and a focus on self-care. More insights and improvements will come from continued evaluation of training effectiveness.

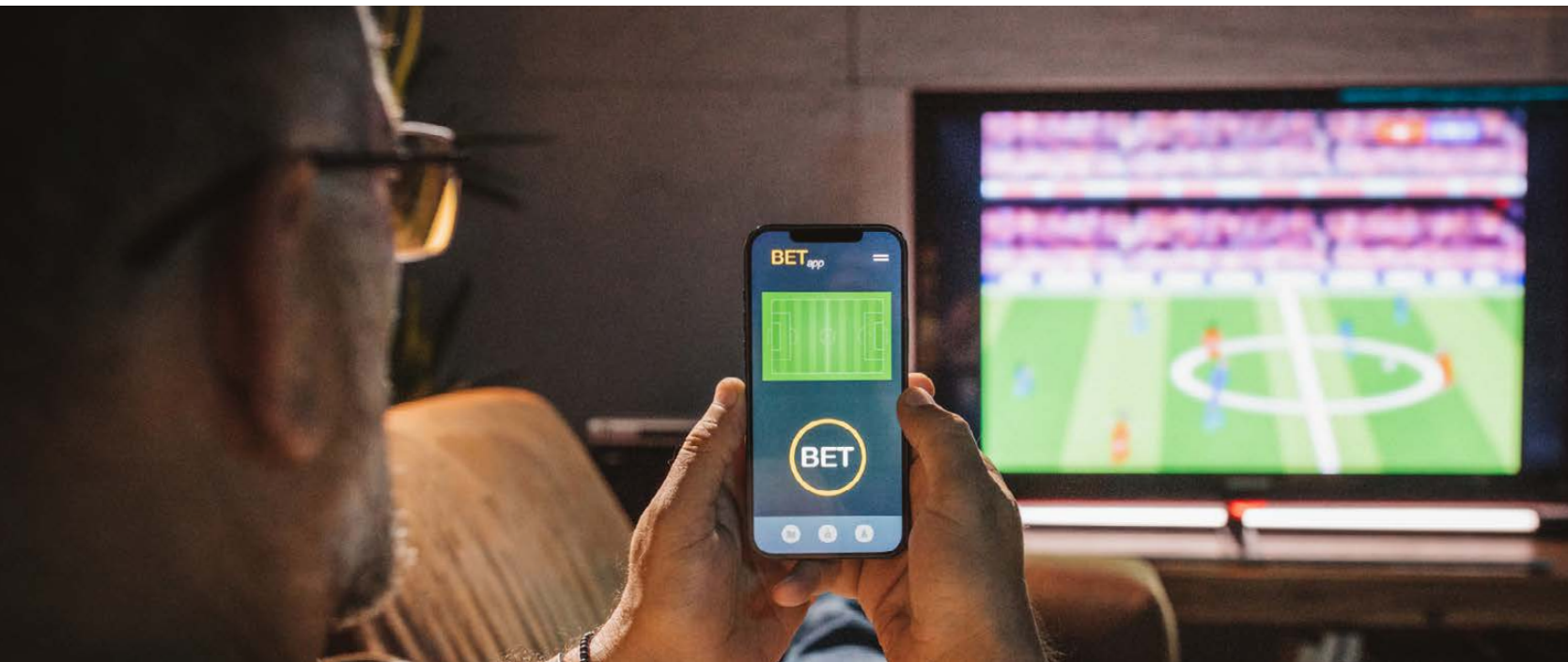
3. Communicating across the player journey

We will increasingly emphasize the myriad of touchpoints across the player journey that provide operators with opportunities to apply greater sophistication and diversification in their RG messaging to better reach all of their player populations.

There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all RG program. What's more, evidence shows that due to the limited effectiveness of generalized key RG messaging, at-risk player groups have been traditionally underserved by social responsibility strategies. Therefore, there is an onus on operators to recognize that variations in players' age, experience, ethnicity, socio-economic background and game choices, along with their wide-ranging information needs, requires a sophisticated and multifaceted approach to player engagement to mitigate gambling risks and foster sustainable play.

Our consultation responses highlighted the potential for operators to leverage the many touchpoints in each player's journey through their site or venue to assist players with both information and support. Key locations identified for iGaming sites were account registration and deposit pages, while loyalty program registration and private areas such as washrooms were the key locations for land-based venues. Furthermore, the player survey indicated that player feedback messaging and play history reports can be powerful tools for promoting responsible gambling and positive play.

Targeted and personalized messaging tied to limit-setting tool engagement is considered to be best practice in this regard. The content in the feedback can include a historical gambling data report and other opportunities for players to review their behaviours, risk level, and tips to lower risk. In addition to providing such information, operators' RG practices should also include an active process of collecting player feedback to understand their awareness and knowledge of key RG concepts, resources and tools.



"What I would look out for in an operator is that they have an opportunity to identify risk **at all levels** so that they have information available that helps them to better understand at what kind of risk level a player is, and to act accordingly."

Expert Consultation Participant

4. Incentivizing, promoting and normalizing safer play

We will promote recognition and wider use of existing player engagement tools and socialization channels to normalize and encourage safer gambling behaviours, increase player awareness and specifically increase their uptake of RG tools.

Our analysis revealed many untapped opportunities to incentivize, promote and normalize lower-risk play behaviour. This can be achieved by applying two complementary measures: 1) promote the use of limit-setting tools and player check-ins/touchpoints where they can proactively access information, help and support as a normal and expected part of the player experience, and 2) take steps to destigmatize safer play among players as well as the industry through integration of player tools and information throughout the player experience. Framing of RG messages and communications should reflect the player's risk profile, all with the goal of creating positive associations linked to high standards of customer service.

Loyalty programs have the potential to serve as a valuable channel where players can be provided with personalized information regarding their play history and other information that fosters greater self-awareness and supports responsible gambling behaviour. In both our consultation and subject matter expert interviews, however, we heard caution regarding the conflicting goals of incentive programs that convey RG messaging yet at the same time also promote more gambling. A number of measures were suggested to help kickstart a culture shift. In particular, it was noted that operators can increase emphasis on non-monetary incentives and reward players not only for how much they spend but also for their safer habits. The latter could include behaviours such as setting time or money limits and staying within them, using a risk self-assessment tool, or completing interactive quizzes and watching videos to increase their gambling literacy.

"[operator employee] started using RG as a way of building the relationship. So, you know, like checking in on the person, asking them how they're doing. Even when, you know, like when you're promoting RG, it doesn't need to be a negative connotation...if you do it proactively in a very personalized manner and in a more individualistic manner, it can really help to increase the loyalty, especially with the brand."

Expert Consultation Participant



5. A collaborative approach to trust, credibility and program excellence

We will elevate the importance of operator engagement with external expertise as a way to deepen understanding of player behaviours and preferences related to RG and to help drive continuous improvement and enhancements to their RG programs.



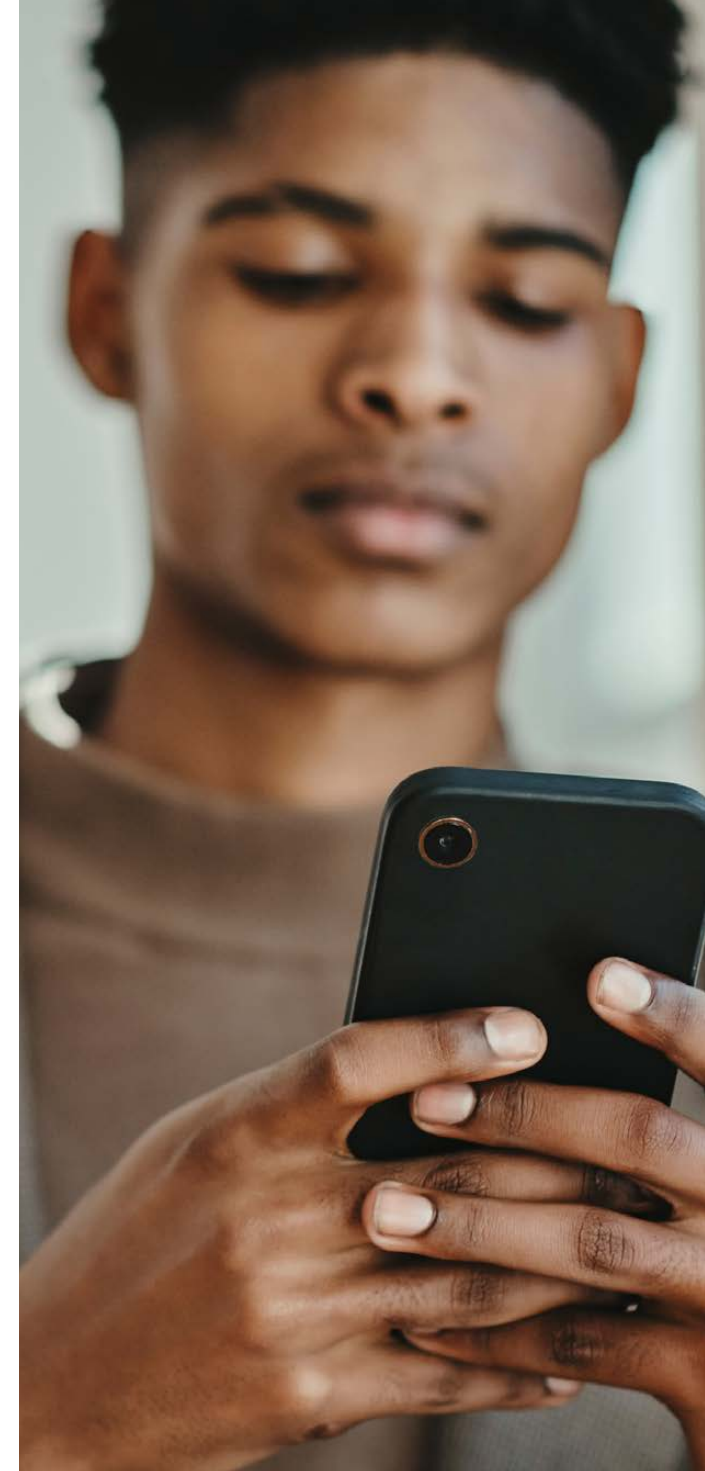
Addressing issues related to gambling harm prevention and mitigation requires a collaborative approach. Not only is stakeholder engagement essential for promoting responsible gambling practice, but our findings underscored how operator engagement with specialists, practitioners, players, researchers and community agencies can offer benefits and insights to improve RG program relevancy and effectiveness and help support an operator's player base.

A documented approach to stakeholder engagement is fundamental. It should be communicated organization-wide and used to identify risks and opportunities for program improvements, generate collective buy-in, build trust and facilitate transparency. This trust is essential for maintaining the integrity of the gambling industry and ensuring that it operates in a socially responsible manner. Engaging with stakeholders also holds gambling operators accountable for their actions. By involving stakeholders in decision-making processes and regularly communicating with them about policies and initiatives, operators demonstrate their commitment to responsible gambling practices and to the community.

6. Effectively responding to players

We will continue to support the use of data-gathering tools that can improve early interventions and enable timely interactions based on players' risk level.

The RG Index's existing criteria address gathering player data and augmenting collection points across the player journey to help operators better understand a player's risk level and to respond accordingly with well-informed player interactions and interventions. The proliferation of risk-monitoring algorithms and new research exploring markers of harm has the potential to make identification of risk behaviours more sophisticated and effective. This could facilitate more targeted interactions such as automated messages that encourage players to take a break or inform them when they're spending more than usual, customized marketing and promotions, and limits on promotion when they might be detrimental to player safety. Enhanced player data can also help inform customer service calls and other forms of direct outreach.



7. Marketing bonuses, promotions and inducements

We will encourage operators to make player inducements transparent and to prevent excessive or extended play by taking greater accountability for the potential impact of their broader advertising and marketing channels.

Our research found that the growing use of social media, influencers, endorsers and affiliates to market and promote gambling sites and venues is difficult to monitor. Unlike traditional TV, radio and on-site advertising, it can extend beyond an operator's or a regulator's purview. We also heard concerns related to direct marketing outreach, especially offers of bonuses, promotions and inducements.

Bonuses and other inducements appear particularly fraught. Players report that it becomes more difficult to track their actual spending as it becomes muddled with "free" money. Inducements with time limits or other restrictions create a sense of urgency, while leaderboards and other social displays can raise social pressure.

In response, we heard support for giving players greater choice, control and transparency over being able to opt out of all or some types of marketing. Also, at minimum, messaging around bonuses and inducements needs to incorporate clear conditions to reduce player confusion. Existing criteria related to impulsive betting and misleading depictions of gambling apply to some of these scenarios, but more can be done.



"There should be fewer inducements and promotions. It's coercive and encourages people to play more. It also makes it more difficult for them to know how much they're actually betting, winning and losing."

Expert Consultation Participant

Implications for RG Check



In addition to updating the content of the RG Index's standards and criteria, RG Check will incorporate the findings and insights of the analysis in the following ways:

- Reweighting and restructuring of indicators scored in the RG Check accreditation process
- Modifications to the evidence lists and document request list
- Revisions to the employee survey and interview questions
- Revised wording within the RG Check Accreditation Report



What's Next

Our work in updating the RG Index and the RG Check accreditation program will keep pace with developments and evolution of the gambling industry as well as research in harm prevention and mitigation. Going forward, this process will be informed by the same mainstay principles and approach used to develop our latest RG Index update: seeking best available evidence, extensive consultation and stakeholder engagement through the gambling-harm ecosystem, and in the absence of evidentiary certainty, a precautionary assessment of critical risks and the scale of potential harm.

Four Areas of Further Study

At this stage, the following four key areas have been identified for further monitoring and analysis.

Importance of the Customer Service Function

Customer service is a high-risk environment where vitally important and sensitive engagements occur. Given this, it is an area that deserves more focus and research, particularly related to the most appropriate and effective training content and delivery models. Also of interest are best-practice policies and procedures that facilitate an intentional approach to customer service, player protection and regulatory compliance models especially in the online environment of customer service centres.

"It is an inbuilt conflict, I think, between profits and harm minimization, or profits and duty of care... the conflict will land in the lap of the employee. So, the management, the top level needs to help them with this."

Expert Consultation Participant



Other important development areas include best-practice measurement of effective interactions, real-time protocols for severe cases of gambling harm and policies, procedures and employee incentives that do not pressure at-risk players.

Greater understanding of this function is best achieved through direct engagement such as focus groups and collaborative working groups. A broad operational understanding will also help ensure that support centre operations are integrated and aligned with other departments such as marketing.

Loyalty and VIP Programs

People who gamble frequently and spend significant amounts of money on gambling are at increased risk of gambling harm. VIP programs that promote and reward players for increased spend and duration of play can potentially exacerbate these risks.

A deeper understanding of how to effectively engage with high-value players in regard to responsible gambling practices is needed. Highly sensitive and protected by the business, VIP players require an intentional and studied approach to ensure player well-being and sustainable relationships. Several pieces of our data collection suggested that VIPs are prime candidates for regular affordability checks as well as an important consideration for regulators. Most of the subject matter expert interviewees specifically suggested this group should be subject to affordability checks and additional analyses, with regular check-ins and RG conversations as part of the relationship.

Investigations into what triggers rewards and unique warning signs of at-risk behaviours can be driven by leveraging data-driven insights and player focus groups. Current concerns related to the risks of triggering players who have slowed or stopped play through inducements and loyalty rewards need to be addressed. Further examination of this important group can also provide insights into the most effective prevention messages to support safer play practices.

Risk Detection, Player Monitoring and Best-Practice Interventions

The value of advances in risk identification, data collection and AI tools to track player behaviour, identify markers of harm and determine if/when it is necessary and/or appropriate to intervene is clear. Best practices in this area are still taking shape. The increased availability of player behavioural data is changing the expectations from regulators and players related to the responsibility of operators. As a result, there is now a need for defined best-practice standards related to risk-detection, player monitoring and interventions that are correlated with measures of effectiveness. Beyond the development of standards for markers of harm, we also need to better understand the tools and metrics to determine the timing and types of interventions. The markers of successful interventions also require further analysis, to examine both the intended and unintended impact.



Monitoring and Preventing Financial Harm

There is mounting evidence that financial behaviours are telling indicators of risk or harm. Tackling this issue with stakeholders not traditionally associated within the RG space, such as financial institutions, credit agencies and payment providers, has the potential to yield new and innovative ways to engage and empower player protection.

Outreach with these groups, focused on the transaction points in the player trajectory where risk of financial harm is most acute, holds the potential to establish evidence-based best practices around financial behaviours as risk indicators and to generate insights on effective strategies and tactics for player protection.

Tactics such as affordability checks are gaining traction among certain regulators but are not yet universally supported or understood by operators or players. We intend to examine the effectiveness of available strategies to protect against overspending, balanced with a player's right to privacy and practical operational considerations. We are interested in ways to leverage these advances to inform innovations in monitoring, messaging and the creation of better tools for players, as well as innovations to engage other actors in the ecosystem to assess risk and provide timely, relevant information about play habits and risk. This is an area that requires better understanding of the roles of regulators, operators, RG specialists, financial institutions and players themselves.

“Digital payment systems are an area rich with data. Analytics there would be highly beneficial for operators with respect to how risk is assessed or how player behaviour is assessed.”

Expert Consultation Participant



The Responsible Gambling Council (RGC) is an independent, non-profit organization that has been dedicated to gambling-related harm prevention, globally, for over 40 years. We promote safety in gambling by working with all sides to ensure sustainable gambling spaces and help those at risk.

RGC is committed to bringing together all perspectives in the reduction of gambling harms including those of people with firsthand experience with gambling problems, gaming providers, regulators, policy makers and treatment professionals.

Visit our website for more information about RGC, the RG Check program and our accreditation standards and criteria for land-based venues and iGaming.

Visit ResponsibleGambling.org

