Supporting the digital wellbeing of young people

Recommendations for moving forward using purposeful collaboration

RG PLUS

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Executive summary

Context and rationale

Various sectors are focusing on supporting the wellbeing of young people — both adolescents and young adults — in digital spaces. The COVID-19 crisis has underlined the importance of digital wellbeing, with emerging research showing that many young people are experiencing increased difficulty maintaining control over the time they spend online. While broad efforts are being made to foster the digital wellbeing of young people, many sectors are operating with limited insights and resources, leaving gaps in knowledge and support across online spaces.

Purpose and approach

The current piece of work has been undertaken and designed to address key gaps by answering the following question: *How can stakeholders build purposeful collaborations to advance the digital wellbeing of young people 12–24 years, specifically as it relates to online entertainment — gaming, gambling, and social media use?* It is our hope that this endeavour will inspire positive collaboration and innovation among stakeholders in digital entertainment fields and inform practical action across sectors for supporting the digital wellbeing of young people.

This report outlines initial answers to key questions in order to develop a guide for building purposeful collaborations to support the digital wellbeing of young people. It was developed using the insights generously provided by a diverse set of experienced and knowledgeable stakeholders — 33 people representing 27 organizations — in a series of group discussions and one-on-one interviews.

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Key insights

A shared understanding of what we mean by **digital wellbeing** is needed in order to effectively direct collaboration efforts in this space.

The definition of and programs to support the digital wellbeing of young people should include **online gambling**. In particular, holistic education encompassing risks and risk mitigation strategies ***across*** digital entertainment spaces is needed for young people as well as their parents, peers, and support professionals. Similarly, collaborations should focus on including stakeholders of **various types from across sectors**.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has highlighted areas of need as well as opportunities to be mobilized around the digital wellbeing of young people that can best be targeted through collaboration.

Digital entertainment industries should acknowledge a **shared responsibility** for and take steps to support the digital wellbeing of the people who engage with or on their platforms or products. Efforts should be supported by regulatory and policy focus on supporting **collaboration, consistency, and safeguards** across digital entertainment industries.

Digital wellbeing is the balance between time spent online and offline and the maximization of positive and reduction of negative uses of digital tools and spaces — including gambling — that lead to an overall positive impact for the person and those around them.

While important work is ongoing, there is much room for progress in supporting the digital wellbeing of young people that can be targeted through collaboration, namely the need for more **research**, additional **safeguards**, improved **support options**, and **evaluation** of initiatives.

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Five critical success factors

Purposeful collaboration to support the digital wellbeing of young people is a complex process that requires stakeholders to work across sectors and be committed to and engaged in the partnerships for the long term. **Five critical success factors** have been identified that provide a framework for moving forward in implementing effective collaborations in this space.

1. Centre goals around a shared definition of digital wellbeing, consolidating ambitions, and (industry) insights
2. Assemble stakeholders from across digital entertainment spaces, including young people, frontline expertise, and independent organizations
3. Outline complementary roles for the digital entertainment industry, government, and independent organizations
4. Focus activities on building relationships, generating shareable outputs, and addressing areas of need
5. Evaluate emerging digital initiatives and share learnings to maximize impacts from the front lines to policy

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Implications and next steps

While many important insights have been uncovered in this initial piece of work, more research and discussion is required to further specify what we mean by digital wellbeing and how best to support it. Learnings from the current report are being taken forward in a series of **roundtable discussions** and have also informed a piece of **independent research** being conducted by RG Plus to gather insights on the definition and measurement of digital wellbeing as well as the links between digital wellbeing and online gambling among adults.

Based on the key insights above, the following **next steps** can guide practical actions for building collaborations across digital entertainment fields in efforts to support the digital wellbeing of young people.

Next steps

Infrastructure

- Establish an agreed upon **definition** of digital wellbeing that includes online gambling
- Build (on) **multi-stakeholder groups** like the Digital Resilience Working Group UK in other countries and internationally
- Develop a common set of operating principles for industry to support digital wellbeing initiatives while ensuring the **independence** of non-industry stakeholders and to maximize the impact of sharing these resources

Culture

- Cultivate a culture of **responsibility** where the wellbeing of those using their platforms is a priority within all digital entertainment industries, including approaches directed to people on their platforms as well as initiatives with external stakeholders
- Foster a culture of **evaluation and information sharing** to maximize the use of available resources and inform frontline work as well as policy

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Next steps

Collaboration

Share learnings across sectors, including applying learnings from the **online gambling** field to other digital entertainment fields and vice versa

Capitalize on improved technology and breadth of expertise by engaging in **international** collaborations

Harmonize ambition and foster improved relationships between digital entertainment stakeholders by establishing shared goals, engaging in regular communication to build trust, and focusing on key issues in the context of COVID-19

Mobilize industry resources to identify areas of need and risk, by including stakeholders from across digital entertainment fields in collaborations, to evaluate initiative impacts, and to create outputs that can be used by others, particularly in the COVID-19 context

Education programs

Develop holistic education programs that cover risk and risk mitigation strategies ***across* digital entertainment spaces** and that are targeted at young people, their parents, teachers, and health professionals

Identify and recruit **social media influencers** for the provision of educational messaging

Safeguards and support

Digital entertainment platforms should create **broad and tailored safeguards** and tools for young people that are relevant across spaces, particularly during COVID-19 restrictions

Industry should use its insights and resources to **innovate** ways to support those on their platforms in their digital wellbeing

Identify approaches to support the communication as well as **community and skill building** of young people online, particularly during COVID-19 restrictions

Develop additional wellbeing support options for young people that offer a broad array of **delivery options**, include content on gaming and gambling harm, and integrate with digital entertainment platforms

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Next steps

Regulation

Implement evidence-based regulation that focuses on ensuring **consistency** in supports across online spaces, encouraging stakeholder **collaboration** on key topics, and outlining **safeguards**

Research

Conduct more research on online gaming and gambling **behaviours and opinions**, the positive and negative **impacts** of spending time in digital entertainment spaces, and appropriate **prevention and education** approaches

By implementing the key **insights** and **guide** for building purposeful collaborations outlined in this report, and directing next steps to addressing the **needs** around infrastructure, culture collaboration, education, safeguards, supports, regulation, and research noted above, digital entertainment industries will be well positioned to provide meaningful and widespread support for the digital wellbeing of young people.

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Foreword

Various sectors are focusing on supporting the wellbeing of young people — both adolescents and young adults — in digital spaces. The COVID-19 crisis has underlined the importance of digital wellbeing, with emerging research showing that many young people are experiencing increased difficulty maintaining control over the time they spend online.

Young people are a vulnerable group in particular need of support during this unprecedented time. Studies are reporting increased levels of depression and anxiety among young people, an age group that was already experiencing heightened levels of each before the pandemic. Further, young people engage in online behaviours like gaming, gambling, and social media use at high levels and are at increased risk of experiencing harm from their use.

While broad efforts are being made to foster the digital wellbeing of young people, many sectors are operating with limited insights and resources, leaving gaps in knowledge and support across online spaces. The current piece of work has been undertaken and designed to address some of these gaps, by answering the following question: *How can stakeholders build purposeful collaborations to advance the digital wellbeing of young people 12–24 years, specifically as it relates to online entertainment — gaming, gambling, and social media use*? The goals of this endeavour are to leverage existing knowledge and expertise in digital wellbeing, build awareness around best practices for collaboration, and identify gaps and opportunities for moving forward.

This report outlines initial answers to key questions in order to develop a guide for building purposeful collaborations to support the digital wellbeing of young people, which includes five critical success factors centering on collaboration goals, stakeholders, and activities. It was developed using the insights generously provided by a diverse set of experienced and knowledgeable stakeholders in a series of group discussions and one-on-one interviews.

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It is our hope that this guide will inspire positive collaboration and innovation among stakeholders in digital entertainment fields and inform practical action across sectors for supporting the digital wellbeing of young people.

Finally, we would like to thank all participating stakeholders who contributed their time and insights and Playtech plc for their support.

Dr. Sasha Stark
Senior Researcher, RG Plus

The **Responsible Gambling Council** (RGC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting safer gambling by influencing positive change and advancing responsible gambling standards in Canada and around the world. For over 35 years, **RGC** has worked with regulators, operators, and the gambling public to ensure that gambling safeguards are in place to support the wellbeing of people and communities. **RG Plus**, a division of **RGC**, offers strategic consultation services across all lines of business from online betting and gambling to land-based operations. **RG Plus** guides operators and regulators towards a sustainable business model by evaluating the impact of programs; benchmarking responsible gambling initiatives; contributing evidence to strategy development; offering cutting edge responsible gambling turnkey training solutions; and undertaking independent research and public health consultations.

What is digital wellbeing?

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What is digital wellbeing?

Digital wellbeing is the balance between time spent online and offline and the maximization of positive and reduction of negative uses of digital tools and spaces that lead to an overall positive impact for the person and those around them.

> **You can define it in the therapeutic sense and trying to avoid the negative. Ensuring your digital life is not preventing you from doing things you'd otherwise like to do — financial, work life, social life. […] If you frame it positively, it's a healthy relationship with the digital world. It is yielding positive experiences for you — allowing you to connect to people, have those things that create meaningful relationships.'**

In order to support digital wellbeing among young people, it is important to know what we mean by digital wellbeing. It is particularly important to be clear about our conceptualization of digital wellbeing as there is no agreed definition of the term. Some of the intricacies of defining digital wellbeing were raised by the stakeholders we spoke with. What does 'good' look like? What activities are being undertaken during the time spent online?

To begin, the term digital wellbeing is understood by stakeholders as a **person-level concept** — something that people have or don't have. Digital wellbeing is heterogeneous, looking different for different people. It is often seen in contrast to work done on online safety, which is focused more on the platforms and addressed at the regulator level. As discussed in **Section 6**, digital wellbeing can also be supported by industry and government.

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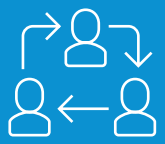
More specifically, the stakeholders we spoke with described digital wellbeing as a combination of certain types of **knowledge**, **behaviours**, and **impacts**:

- Awareness and mitigation of risks in online spaces (i.e. avoidance of underage gambling),
- A balance between time spent online and offline,
- The maximization of positive (i.e. school work, socializing, skill development) and reduction of negative uses (i.e. excessive time or money spent), and
- Overall positive impact on the person and those around them.



Digital wellbeing

Awareness and mitigation	Awareness of risks	Risk avoidance or mitigation
Balance of time and behaviours	Time online and offline	Increase positive and limit negative uses
Net positive impacts	For the person	For those around them

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Where we look at risks in relation to young people, quite often the discourse is that these things are gambling-related but it makes more sense to see that people are more vulnerable to mental health issues more generally. They are usually comorbid. It makes sense to start with mental health and wellbeing more generally, rather than ghettoizing the problem as a gambling issue.'

Online gambling as a component of digital wellbeing

Stakeholders noted that **online gambling** behaviours are rarely included in conceptions of or programs for digital wellbeing. There is both an argument and need for online gambling behaviours to be considered in approaches for supporting young people. Specifically, stakeholders indicated that online gambling should be incorporated because:

- Online gambling is **intertwined** with other digital spaces, like social media (i.e. accounts focused on reporting betting behaviours, influencers) and gaming (i.e. gambling features)
- Like other online behaviours, gambling has both **positive** (among those of legal age, i.e. socializing) **and negative impacts** (i.e. financial and personal difficulties) that should be fully understood
- Like for other digital behaviours, young people need to know when they are at **risk** of harm from gambling and how to get **support**
- Problematic online gambling behaviours can be a **cause** of poor mental health and wellbeing as well as one of many presenting **symptoms** of underlying mental health difficulties

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Approaches to digital wellbeing that neglect to incorporate online gambling fail to provide a **holistic** understanding of and support for the behaviours, risks, and harms that are present across online spaces. Online gambling provides an (additional) **opportunity** to promote digital wellbeing among young people, as many of them engage in certain forms of online gambling.

Stakeholders noted several ways that gambling and other digital entertainment fields can **learn from each other**. While the gambling field can contribute expertise on advertising technology, behavioural indicators of harm, monitoring through population and player data, and education and treatment services, it can learn from other fields about tracking and messaging around time spent as well as appropriate hand off to online treatment services.

Digital wellbeing can be understood as a balance between the time spent online and offline as well as the maximization of positive and reduction of negative uses of online spaces — including online gambling — that result in an overall positive impact for the person and those around them. Digital wellbeing is achieved through awareness and mitigation of risks and controlled consumption. This conceptualization of digital wellbeing — as a person-focused concept of awareness and balanced behaviours and impacts, with repercussions and responsibilities for those beyond the person — will guide the discussion in the following sections of how to support young people through purposeful collaboration.

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COVID-19 and digital wellbeing for young people

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How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed the digital wellbeing space for young people?

For young people, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated digital access inequalities, increased online connection and risks, and changed access to and delivery of support programs.

> **It makes the problem bigger and more intensive, qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative aspect is that the problems got more deep rooted and [the quantitative aspect is that] they relate to more young people than they did before the pandemic.'**

The digital wellbeing of young people was an important area of focus before, and is now even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to outline how best to use collaboration to support young people, we must first consider how this unprecedented and widespread crisis is impacting them. Stakeholders noted that COVID-19 has **accelerated phenomena** that were already occurring before the pandemic and presented **additional and unique circumstances** for young people. Many of these changes have made it more difficult for young people to strike the balance between time online and offline and increase the positive and limit the negative uses and impacts required for digital wellbeing. Three key areas in which the pandemic has changed the digital wellbeing space for young people that were highlighted by stakeholders are **increases in digital access inequalities**, **positive and negative changes to online behaviours**, and **improvements and challenges in the delivery of support programs**.

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Increases in digital access inequality

Digital access refers to whether one has all of the resources required to engage in online spaces: the appropriate device, a stable internet connection, and skills for navigating online. Stakeholders reported that by forcing young people to stay home and conduct the majority of their activities online — socializing, attending school, accessing support services — the COVID-19 pandemic has:

- Made digital access even **more indispensable**,
- **Exacerbated existing structural inequalities** in digital access (i.e. for those who only had access at school), and
- **Reduced wellbeing**, as there is a link between digital inclusion and wellbeing.

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Positive and negative digital behaviours and experiences

As outlined in the table below, those we spoke with discussed how the pandemic has led to positive and negative changes to how young people spend their time online, leading to both benefits and drawbacks. They are **spending more time and money online**, leading to a flattening of experiences and loss of routine, increased digital fatigue and exposure to online risks, withdrawal from news sources, and concern about gambling and gaming problems and future mental health issues. Young people are also using online spaces to **creatively connect with and support each other**, by sharing information on their struggles and mental health resources, dispelling COVID-19 misinformation, and building skills and community through gaming.

Negative COVID-19 changes for young people

- More time spent online, leading to a flattening of experiences (all occurring online) and loss of routine/sleeping and eating habits
- Increased money spent in online spaces (online purchasing, (shift to) online gambling)
- Heightened exposure to online risks (i.e. toxic social media environments) and digital fatigue
- Mistrust of news sources and checking out due to excessive negativity
- Increased concern about gaming and gambling problems and future mental health issues, particularly among those who have experienced harm previously

Positive COVID-19 changes for young people

- Creativity in how they connect
- Using digital means to support each other, share information and resources for supporting mental health
- Dispelling myths about COVID-19 through online channels
- Communicating, building a sense of community, and learning skills through gaming
- Amplification of voices of those who are struggling

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Improvements and challenges in program delivery

According to stakeholders, the pandemic has increased stressors for young people, such as job loss, isolation, and difficulties returning to school, leading to poor mental health. Stakeholders also noted how programs available to support young people with these concerns have also been impacted by COVID-19 in both positive and negative ways, as summarized in the table below. **Access to support and ease of delivery have been reduced**, with limited access to professionals in person, absence of safe locations for digital conversations for some young people, redeployment of staff, and limited staff comfort with and technological issues using digital platforms. In other ways, **digital transformation has improved and extended access** — with quicker access, extended geographical reach, and increased support options and apps — and platforms and organizations are doing more to **share information and implement safeguards**.

Negative program changes during COVID-19

- Lack of access to professionals, particularly in person
- Absence of safe environments for young people to have conversations digitally (i.e. at home)
- Staff/organizations redeployed or occupied with COVID-19
- Steep learning curve for staff to provide effective support using digital means (i.e. intimacy, empathy, non-verbal cues)
- Technological glitches using digital platforms

Positive program changes during COVID-19

- Greatly accelerated digital transformation and innovation in program delivery
- Digital services provide quicker and increased access, extend geographical reach
- Increased options for support (i.e. 24/7, in person or online)
- Increase in wellbeing apps (i.e. mindfulness)
- Social media platforms doing more to protect mental health of those using their platforms
- Organizations using social media to share information and resources for supporting mental health; able to get messages out to wider audiences more effectively
- Gambling operators implementing additional safeguards, messaging, and interventions on their platforms

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During this period of crisis and uncertainty, some **positives** for young people are being seen in digital spaces, such as community building, improved access to support services, and increased information sharing and implementation of safeguards. However, important **negative** impacts are also unfolding, such as harm from increased time and money spent online. These insights begin to suggest **areas of focus** for moving forward to support the digital wellbeing of young people — improve digital access, encourage online information sharing, support provision, and skill building, and provide accessible and widespread programs for preventing and addressing harm. The myriad of impacts that are being seen — which extend across numerous online spaces and include various stakeholders — also highlights the need for a concerted and **collaborative approach** in addressing them.

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What are promising practices for building purposeful collaborations to support digital wellbeing?

Promising practices for purposeful collaborations to support the digital wellbeing of young people include establishing shared and informed goals, engaging a carefully selected and diverse set of stakeholders across digital entertainment fields, and performing a number of activities focused on relationship building, sharing insights, and evaluation.

Both our understanding of digital wellbeing and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for young people implicate various stakeholders, from the young people themselves, to the platforms they use, the programs they access, and the governments that regulate online spaces. Efforts to support digital wellbeing among young people therefore stand to have greater impact if they take a collaborative approach. The stakeholders we spoke with outlined three key areas of focus for building successful collaborations: attention should be paid to the **goals** of the collaboration, the **stakeholders** involved, and the **activities** undertaken.

Establish shared and informed goals to focus activities

Stakeholders agreed that a key to successful collaboration is for all parties to share a clear understanding of the **problem** being addressed and the targeted **purpose** for the work — what is trying to be achieved.

Those we spoke with felt that goals should:

- Be clear, targeted, and outcome specific,
- Be led by data and experience,
- Harmonize stakeholder ambition,
- Focus on the beneficiaries (i.e. young people),
- Target the areas of greatest impact or harm, and
- Contribute to wider social debate and include an element of advocacy.

Stakeholders noted that having goals that are clear and specific, address identified needs in the field, and focus on making positive contributions for target audiences will galvanize stakeholder buy in and direct future activities.

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> **At an organizational level the single biggest thing is shared purpose and shared understanding of what the problem is. Ultimately you both have to want to do the same thing for the same reason. There has to be a bit of a sense of what is it that you are trying to affect and do you both agree'.**

In order to outline a shared understanding of the problem and goals to address it, collaborations will need to adopt a common definition of 'digital wellbeing' as discussed in **Section 3**. Attention will also need to be paid to consolidate stakeholder ambition around a shared goal, as some stakeholders perceived that certain digital entertainment fields can be adversarial as outlined in **Section 6**. However, digital entertainment industries have access to **large amounts of data and insights** on those using their platforms that can be used to identify areas of risk and outline targeted and data-driven goals.

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Recruit likeminded and diverse stakeholders to maximize complementary expertise, access, and resources

There was consensus that a **diverse set of stakeholders**, including those with a stake in the issue at hand and those outside of the core field of interest, is needed for purposeful and effective collaboration.

It was noted that a multi-stakeholder approach is beneficial because it:

- Provides variety of knowledge, expertise, and perspective,
- Leads to the challenging of assumptions,
- Increases stakeholder understanding of the issues,
- Permits problems with complex causes to be addressed,
- Provides access to data, insights, and leavers/approaches otherwise out of reach, and
- Allows for the creation of an evidence base for decision making and initiative creation.

> **A very comprehensive multi-stakeholder perspective is probably required to [support the digital wellbeing of young people] successfully in the long term and to protect from calls of being opportunistic or not being legitimate. You probably need to be diverse — civil society, academics, government, industry — you need that approach.'**

Appropriate stakeholders for inclusion in collaborations for supporting the digital wellbeing of young people were said to include those from various sectors, a variety of subject matter expertise, and different types of organizations. As illustrated below, the key groups include **academics and researchers, industry, government, non-profits, support professionals, the education sector, charities, young people and parents, and industry critics**.

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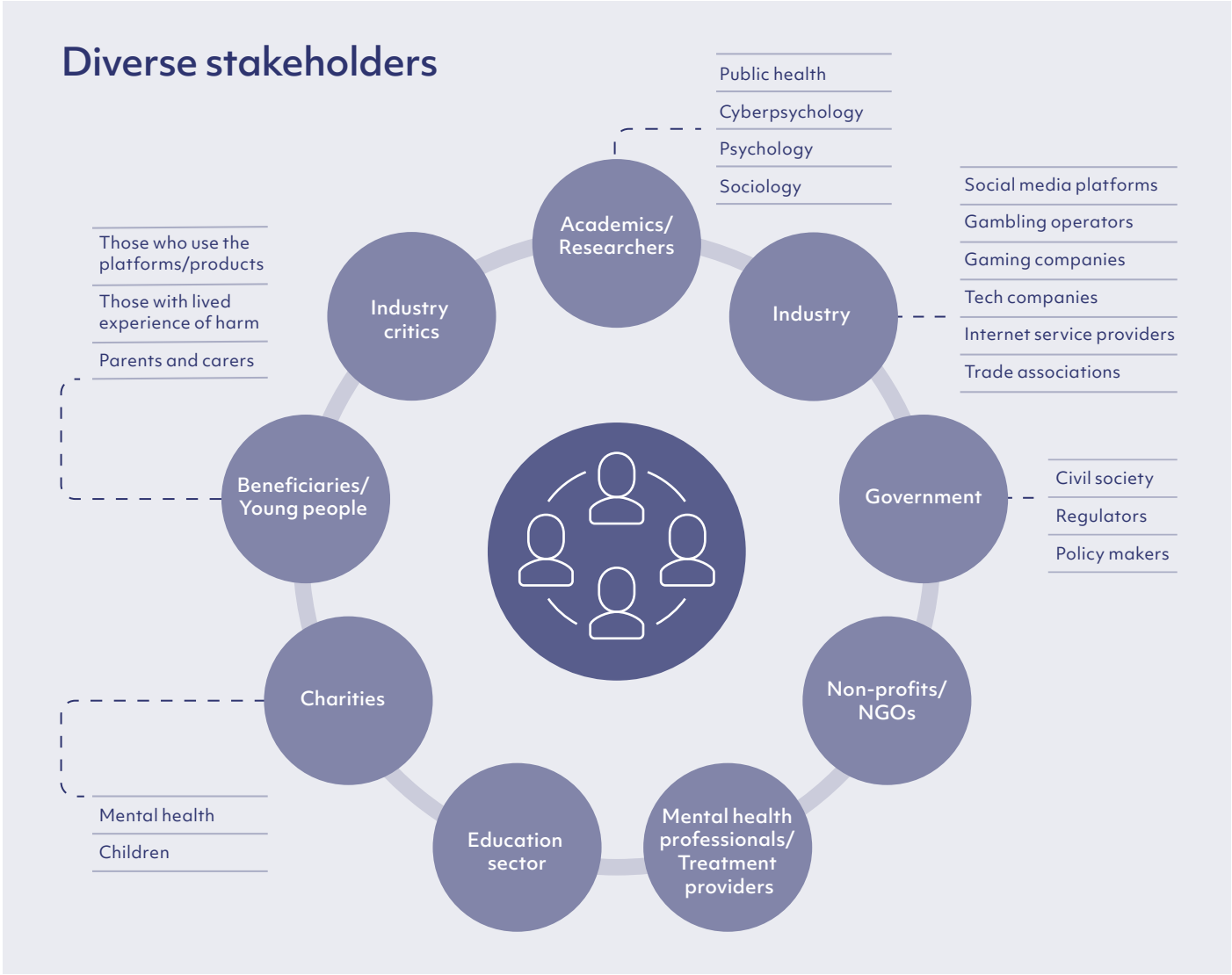
Diverse stakeholders



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Collaborations for supporting the digital wellbeing of young people should strive to include stakeholders from **across digital entertainment spaces — from social media to gaming and gambling** — in order to benefit from the variety of data, insights, skills, and resources afforded by the breadth of digital technologies employed across the various fields; capitalize on learnings from sectors that are at different stages of maturation in focusing on digital wellbeing; and address the complex issue that is digital wellbeing. Care will be required in recruiting like-minded stakeholders in fields that are **less open to collaboration** as mentioned in Section 6, that are **independent** to ensure the legitimacy of the collaboration, and that represent various organization types including **frontline organizations** which may be underdeveloped in certain fields (i.e. gaming).

Stakeholders noted several important considerations for assembling the appropriate set of organizations. Beyond looking simply for diversity, attempts should be made to:

- Identify a **convening organization** working in the field to kick start and broker the initiative,
- Include representation of **frontline expertise (i.e. charities, support providers) and young people** to ensure relevance and authenticity,
- Select stakeholders that are appropriate for the topic, including those with **complementary skills and expertise** and that share **similar social and ethical values/ethos**, and
- Establish the appropriate **size and scope** of the collaboration, as larger more diverse groups can slow progress.

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Engage, develop, evaluate, and share to generate progress and impact

As outlined above, two of the first key activities for building purposeful collaborations are to establish **shared and targeted goals** and to identify and recruit **likeminded and diverse stakeholders**. Other key activities identified by stakeholders for ensuring the progress and impact of the collaboration over time include:

Stakeholder engagement: regular communication between participating stakeholders to build relationships and trust; consider an infrastructure for transparent and independent industry and academic relations; engage with participating and external stakeholders to inform key activities (i.e. addition of stakeholders, program planning)

Beneficiaries engagement: Engage with young people in the spaces they frequent; use flexible and interactive approaches; balance input from young people with evidence-based approaches for program development

Complementary initiatives: Ensure that initiatives are not duplicated within or outside of the collaboration; avoid competitiveness with other stakeholders or collaborations

> **Find a problem and put together a solution. Test it out and see if it works and put it through its paces, and share its learnings and data with everyone we can.'**

Measure and evaluate: Identify how progress towards goals will be measured; evaluate the success and impact of initiatives over the short and long term

Generate outputs: Make visible and tangible progress and outputs to sustain momentum; create tools or resources that can be made available for all/ other stakeholders

Share learnings: Broadly and with those on frontlines (i.e. treatment providers)

Advocate: Share findings with decision makers and campaign for positive changes and support; provide a buffer of academics, charities, and researchers between industry and government to encourage productive discourse

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Regular communications between stakeholders can help **build relationships** within and across fields and **harmonize ambitions** towards shared goals. Frequent communication with stakeholders outside of the collaboration can **reduce the duplication and competitiveness** currently present in some digital entertainment fields, like gambling. The creation of infrastructures to ensure the transparency of collaborations between industry and independent stakeholders can further support the **legitimacy** afforded by the inclusion of stakeholders like academics. As outlined in **Section 7**, evaluation is desperately needed in the digital entertainment space to determine if the numerous innovative programs are having (intended) **impacts**. Sharing of insights can **maximize resources and learnings** across digital entertainment fields that share similar technologies, audiences, and concerns, and inform the development of **robust and measured policies,** which is a challenge for regulation outlined in **Section 6**.

Mobilize the positives and acknowledge the challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic

In addition to having impacts for the digital wellbeing of young people and support programs, the COVID-19 pandemic has also had various positive and negative implications for stakeholder collaborations, as shown in the table below. Those we spoke with reported how the pandemic has helped **sharpen goals**, **opened up time** for certain tasks like meetings due to reduced travel, and improved willingness and tool availability for online collaboration leading to **increased productivity and long distance connections**. However COVID-19 has **shifted attention away** from other issues as well as forced some organizations to concentrate on maintaining operations. **Complex discussion and large meetings are difficult** to hold digitally and **calendars are now filled** with back to back video calls.

> **It's quite tough at the moment, people have back to back video calls for the duration of a day and everything is a lot more structured, well in advance. People's availability is difficult. People are generally a lot busier with business as usual. People are focused on keeping business running — collaboration has dipped a bit.'**

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Positives of COVID-19 for collaboration

- The shared challenge has helped overcome individual needs and sharpened activities (i.e. making support accessible)
- Increased the level of connection among the sector
- Reduced travel allowing more time for meetings and reducing time required for tasks (i.e. document review)
- Improvement in platforms and tools for collaboration allowing for increased scale and achievements
- Increased willingness to use digital platforms for engagement
- Increased facetime and ability to speak with people internationally

Challenges of COVID-19 for collaboration

- Focus on COVID-19 has taken away from looking at issues outside of that context
- Many organizations are occupied trying to maintain their operations, limiting abilities to provide programs or engage in collaboration
- Difficult to have complex discussion and get a feel for how a group is reacting digitally
- Logistics of getting people into a shared video conference more difficult than in person
- Reduced availability with most having back to back video calls

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Focusing in on key issues in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic can help stakeholders in the digital entertainment space curb their various **ambitions** and build **relationships**. Further, **generating outputs** that can be shared with other stakeholders in the field can provide much needed support and resources for organizations that are currently overwhelmed.

Purposeful collaborations to support digital wellbeing must begin with **shared and targeted goals** that focus on having a positive impact for beneficiaries where there is the largest need. These goals should be based on a common understanding of digital wellbeing and seek to harmonize ambitions and maximize the data available in the digital entertainment space.

Likeminded and diverse stakeholders should be selected to represent various sectors, subject matter, and organization types. Stakeholders should be sought from across digital entertainment spaces and attention should be paid to including independent and frontline expertise.

In order to achieve the outlined goals, stakeholders should **engage regularly and meaningfully** with each other, other stakeholders, and beneficiaries, **deliver and evaluate complementary initiatives**, and **generate and share outputs** and findings, notably with decision makers and those on the frontlines. In the digital entertainment space, these activities can go a long way to maximizing resources and learning, assessing impacts, and informing policies.

In the current **COVID-19 context**, efforts should be made to sharpen goals and activities, and use digital collaboration tools to foster international connections and fast track tasks, while being mindful of people's full calendars and organizational priorities during this time. Sharpened goals in the digital entertainment space can improve collaboration and **generate resources** that can benefit organizations that are currently struggling.

The roles of industry and government

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What are the roles of industry and government in supporting the digital wellbeing of young people?

Industry has a role to play in supporting the digital wellbeing of young people by focusing internally on fostering a culture of responsibility and supporting the people using their platforms, and externally on providing access to anonymized data, insights, and funding to external stakeholders through meaningful collaboration. Government should set the minimum standards for and encourage continuous improvement in industry activities, focusing in the areas of stakeholder collaboration, industry consistency, supply and demand reduction, and safeguarding and support for vulnerable groups.

There are two key stakeholders that have been mentioned repeatedly in the discussions above of the definition of digital wellbeing, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the promising practices for purposeful collaboration: industry and government. As industry and government permeate through key considerations around digital wellbeing and collaboration, the roles of these stakeholders in supporting the digital wellbeing of young people are examined here in greater detail. According to those we spoke with, industry should foster a **culture of responsibility**, engage in **responsible use of their access to those on their platforms and their data**, grant **access to insights and anonymized data** to other stakeholders, provide **funding for research, education, and treatment**, and **meaningfully collaborate with external stakeholders**. For their part, government and policy should **set the floor and outline the ceiling** for industry activities, encourage **stakeholder collaboration**, ensure **consistency** across industries and platforms, support **supply and demand reduction**, and outline approaches to **safeguard and support vulnerable groups.**

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Roles for industry

The digital entertainment industry have roles to play internally within their businesses and with those using their platforms as well as outwardly with other stakeholders in supporting the digital wellbeing of young people.

Foster a culture of responsibility

One overarching consideration that can inform, support, and fuel the various roles to be played by industry and platforms is the fostering and promotion of a **culture of responsibility**. Several stakeholders noted that it is critical for companies and sectors within the digital entertainment industry to acknowledge and commit to being 'responsible entities'. Some of those that we spoke with felt that it is important for industry to genuinely care about digital wellbeing and keep it at the front of their minds, otherwise it will be overshadowed by profit motives. Some industries are farther along in this process than others, with the gaming industry noted as being behind in acknowledging both the presence of a problem and a level of industry responsibility.

In offering products that are intended to drive engagement, several stakeholders argued that the industry has a **duty of care** to those using their platforms to balance this goal with preventing negative consequences. They noted that industry needs to take sincere approaches to limit harm and provide a safety net for those using their products to support them in their digital wellbeing. Examples include informing them of how platforms work and available safeguards, and providing warnings for risky features like loot boxes or behaviours like excessive time spent gambling.

> **Businesses, not just gambling operators, need to make some bold moves. All of the products you build are to drive engagement and use which is great, but you have to balance acceptable and overuse. […] What are you doing to spot the negative consequences of it.'**

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Responsible use of access to people on their platforms and their data

Another part of the industry's responsibility to those using their platforms comes from one of their key resources: access. Those we spoke with noted that industry has **unique access to both the people using their platforms and their data**. They have a captive audience, which stakeholders feel puts them in the unique position to **educate** those using their platforms on ways to prevent or limit harm. Digital spaces also extensively track behaviours on their platforms, meaning they have detailed data that stakeholders noted can and should be used to **prevent and provide support** in the case of signs of harm. In particular, attention can be paid to the behaviours of young adults on these platforms. By way of prevention, industry should be providing people with access to their own data so they have information on how they are using the platforms and products.

With this unique access and data source as well as skills and expertise, stakeholders felt the industry is well placed to **innovate** ways to support those on their platforms in their digital wellbeing. While industry is not responsible for their mental health or particular demographics like young people, it was noted that they do need to understand how mental health relates to different subgroups and the implications this has for risk on their platforms.

Share insights and data within and outside of platforms

In addition to using data to support people internally within platforms, stakeholders felt that industry should also provide **access to insights and anonymized data** to those outside the business, such as **charities, researchers, and government**. Because this wealth of data captures the behaviours of large portions of the population, stakeholders fell it is valuable at a societal level. The knowledge to be gained from insights and anonymized data sharing can be used to inform collaboration goals, specific initiatives, as well as broad programs and policies to support digital wellbeing across online spaces.

> **We should be collaborating to make sure there is a good solid evidence base for decisions we are taking, for initiatives we are following. We should be investing in good education to prevent harms and make sure there are treatment options available where there is harm.'**

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Provide targeted funding for research, education, and treatment

In addition to providing the data and insights needed to inform the development of programs and policies for the prevention of and support for digital harms, stakeholders indicated that industry should also **provide funding** to support work in these areas. Providing this type of funding is 'the right thing to do' to ensure a **safe and sustainable industry** — one that mitigates its downsides for the benefit of those who use the platform and the industry as a whole. Some cautioned that depending on the nature of the initiative, industry should not be involved in the design or execution of the programs or research being funded.

Similar to what is being done by the gambling industry, it was noted that funding in other digital entertainment industries should be provided for:

- **Research**: to support the creation of an evidence base for decisions and initiatives
- **Education**: to increase awareness and knowledge for preventing harms
- **Treatment**: to provide accessible and quality treatment and support options

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Collaborate with external stakeholders to benefit all parties

In addition to or within the context of providing access to data and funding, it was noted that industry should **collaborate with external stakeholders** to share best practices and build a better industry. Stakeholders indicated that collaboration benefits the industry in helping them recognize their role in supporting digital wellbeing and also benefits people by providing them with a better and safer experience. External stakeholders like non-profits, researchers, and charities have **expertise** that, when working in collaboration with industry, can improve the support available to people on these platforms. These stakeholders also have **access** to audiences that may be out of reach for industry — such as those who are under legal (gambling) age — for providing education or support.

In order for collaborations involving industry to be successful, stakeholders felt that a multi-stakeholder perspective is required to provide **legitimacy and independence** in the context of trust and privacy concerns around the involvement of industry. **Flexibility** was also said to be required, where stakeholders understand and are willing to work within the realities of the platforms, and industry is willing to identify gaps and make changes to address them.

> **‘There are insights that organizations can provide that are not held by platforms. Collaboration benefits the users. Just because [platforms] have capability to give support and information themselves it’s not necessarily the best way, collaboration is the best way, but requires flexibly on both sides. The support services need to understand the realities and what’s possible within the platforms, and the platforms need to find a way to work together and find those gaps and make small changes.’**

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Roles for policy and regulation

Set the floor and outline the ceiling

Echoing the discussion above around an industry culture of responsibility, those we spoke with described how **government also has a responsibility** to those using online platforms to be fulfilled through policy and regulation because:

- Participation in online spaces is **ubiquitous** which increases government responsibility over them to protect the society, particularly as it relates to how data is used and impacts on young people,
- Research evidence shows there is a **level of harm** in these spaces that should be mitigated, and
- Some businesses and sectors will require **external pressure** to prioritize wellbeing in balance with profit motives.

Those we spoke with felt that regulation should work to circumscribe industry activities in two key ways: **setting the floor** and **outlining the ceiling**. With the *stick* or hard approach, regulation sets the baseline for what is expected of industry through policies and licensing requirements. With the *carrot* or softer approaches, regulation encourages industry to voluntarily improve standards by nudging them to strive for innovation and continuous improvement using tools such as incentives.

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More specifically, it was noted that regulation can support the digital wellbeing of young people by:

- **Encouraging stakeholder collaboration** and outlining appropriate areas of focus as well as keeping track of collaborations to prevent duplication (i.e. require reporting of planned/ ongoing initiatives)
- **Ensuring consistency** across digital entertainment industries (i.e. available safeguards, supports)
- Supporting the **reduction of supply and demand** (i.e. education to increase awareness of risks and mitigation strategies)
- Outlining approaches to **safeguard and support vulnerable groups** (i.e. legal age, data protection for young people)

Harness the innovation of and improve company commitment under self-regulation

Stakeholders discussed how certain digital entertainment industries, like **gaming and social media**, are largely **self-regulated**. They noted how the key premise of this approach is that if industry works together and with other stakeholders to support education and implement safeguards, they can avoid (further) regulation. **Industry** can implement initiatives for supporting those on their platforms that are not currently required of them. **People** who use the products and platforms can also encourage and catalyze changes. For example, young gamers have banded together to successfully have certain monetization features removed from particular games (i.e. extensive in-game purchases to unlock key characters).

> **Policy and regulation need to provide the guidance and the areas and themes and directions that they want us to go in — parameters for the industry to collaborate around because it is such a vast space to be working in. We don't want to be going off down a track that we all think is really making a difference in this area and then realize it is misaligned with the policy direction the regulator is looking for'.**

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While self-regulation can address or avoid some of the challenges of regulation discussed below, stakeholders remarked how it faces other **issues**. Companies do not always follow through on their commitments. Further, some of the approaches used, like video game ratings that indicate the features and maturity level of games, are not fit for purpose (i.e. hard to understand, limited repercussions for companies who engage in questionable design practices). Finally, while some companies are attempting to reach for the ceiling, others are satisfied with only meeting minimal requirements.

> **On policy makers' side, it's hard because they don't promote wellbeing typically and regulation is a blunt tool. […] Policy makers need to think about what the environment is that we need to support and nurture for people to experience wellbeing and that's probably social services and parental support and things that are beyond policy.'**

Consider ways to address the challenges of regulation

In addition to discussing the needs for and roles of regulation, stakeholders noted several challenges or limitations, as noted in the table below. In general, regulation can be hampered by **public resistance** to government intervention, the **time** it takes to implement policies, delays caused by **political events**, **power and resource imbalances** between government and industry, and the **strength of and adherence to the drafted policies**. Specific to digital entertainment industries, certain fields are **disinterested in regulation or adversarial**, **limited knowledge or precedent** leads to a lack of or uninformed policies, there are difficulties identifying **appropriate safeguards**, and fields that fall largely outside of regulation can be of particular importance (i.e. **education, support**).

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Challenges to regulation generally

- Public resistance to (further) government intervention
- Government is too slow in implementing (new) regulations
- Changes in political leaders and political events (i.e. Brexit) can stall progress
- Keeping policies up to date can be difficult
- Use of weak approaches over strong ones
- Industries can be more powerful than regulators (i.e. size, resources)
- Must ensure government and industry are well resourced to implement policies
- There is no silver bullet policy and success depends on people following them

Challenges in digital entertainment specifically

- Adversarial nature of certain jurisdictions or industries, limited industry interest in regulation
- Regulator fear of technology or lack of knowledge of its intricacies/benefits leading to a lack of or uninformed policies
- Limited precedent for creating policies in this space leading to trial and error
- Identifying safeguards that are relevant to individual circumstances (i.e. spend limits for gambling for adults) can be difficult
- Increased importance of education and support services versus policy for supporting digital wellbeing

There are several important roles for industry to play in supporting the digital wellbeing of young people and fulfilling their **responsibilities** to those using their platforms — **using access to people and data responsibly, providing anonymized data and funding for programs, and meaningfully collaborating with external stakeholders**. However, in many cases these roles are not being fulfilled at all or as well as they could be. Regulation can help encourage or force industry to play these roles, by incentivizing **collaboration,** promoting **consistency across platforms,** addressing **supply and demand reduction**, and ensuring effective **safeguards and supports** are in place for vulnerable groups.

However, there are issues with both regulation and self-regulation in the digital entertainment space. A **balanced approach** is required, where both industry and government-led initiatives are needed to support the digital wellbeing of young people. It may be that an **unprecedented level of collaboration** is necessary to identify the most appropriate target areas for each and to ensure policies and programs are informed and impactful.

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What gaps exist in supporting the digital wellbeing of young people?

The digital wellbeing of young people can be further supported through the delivery of holistic education programs for young people and those who care for them, the responsible sharing of content by social media influencers, research on behaviours, impacts, and programs, the availability of broad and tailored safeguards, improved support options separate from and integrated within digital platforms, and the evaluation of initiatives.

The previous two sections have outlined some promising practices for *how* to collaborate to support the digital wellbeing of young people. But *what* types of initiatives or gaps should stakeholders be centering their collaborations around, in addition to those related to COVID-19 impacts discussed in **Section 4**? As noted above, selecting an appropriate and shared goal is important for ensuring that collaboration is purposeful — effecting change around a key problem or area of need — and determining the appropriate or essential stakeholders for inclusion as well as roles for industry and government. The stakeholders we spoke with felt that there is need for **holistic education of young people**, targeting and inclusion of those who **influence and care for young people**, **research** on various topics, implementation of additional **safeguards**, improved **support provision**, and increased **program evaluation**.

It was noted that we must acknowledge that a range of solutions in each of the areas below will be required to address the needs of those of various ages (i.e. adolescents versus young adults).

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Holistic digital entertainment education for young people

Stakeholders spoke the most about the need for increased and immersive education for young people on digital entertainment. Some spoke about specific content that should be covered on gaming and gambling, as noted in the table below.

Education on gaming

- How the games work (i.e. game mechanics)
- The risks and harms of gaming as well as the benefits
- How to limit risk while gaming (i.e. limit dissociation), safer gaming practices

Education on gambling

- Risks and harms across land-based and online games
- Impacts on and associations with peer relationships and health and wellbeing

> **‘There needs a dual piece where education about gambling is sitting alongside excessive gaming, internet use. I think the danger is approaching young people at the moment and they’ll switch off as they say they don’t have a gambling problem. The education should be as related as they are.’**

Many felt that education programs should provide information about a range of online digital entertainment spaces — **gaming, gambling, and social media — alongside each other** instead of separately. Stakeholders noted that a more holistic approach can increase the relevance of the content, as these behaviours often occur together and some behaviours like gambling are not currently engaged in or seen as a problem. Discussing gambling alongside other digital behaviours can also serve to reduce the stigma associated with problem gambling.

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To empower young people to safely navigate across online spaces, stakeholders felt that they should be provide with information on:

- What happens to **their data** online (i.e. how it can be used for unintended purposes, such as targeting them for new and potentially higher risk platforms/sites),
- The **psychological techniques** used across products and platforms to encourage (more than intended) use,
- The **online risks** that are present (i.e. cyber bullying) and how to recognize signs of harm,
- The **groups most at risk** of harm and why (i.e. young people), and
- How to **limit harm** and support digital wellbeing *across* online spaces (vs. in specific spaces).

Those we spoke with argued that such an approach can help young people develop good practices for engaging with a variety of online products and interacting in various online spaces.

Education for and mobilizing the support of influencers and carers

In addition to the young people themselves, stakeholders we spoke with said that those who influence and care for young people — social media influencers, peers, parents, teachers, mental health professionals — are also important groups to target with and mobilize for delivering educational messages.

Social media influencers have extensive reach and impact among young people, and often promote gambling and gaming behaviours. Several stakeholders argued that this impact means influencers have a responsibility to promote digital wellbeing that is currently going unmet. They noted that social media influencers can support the digital wellbeing of their viewers by being more mindful of the content they share, such as delivering educational messages and avoiding content that is risky or inappropriate (i.e. TikTok challenges, gambling content).

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Further, to complement the improved education for young people, stakeholders felt that increased education is needed for **peers, parents, and other carers such as teachers and mental health professionals**, who often don't have sufficient knowledge of or comfort in digital spaces. These groups would benefit from information on:

- The **platforms and games** that are popular with young people and **how they work**,
- Parental **controls and monitoring** approaches,
- Positive and negative **impacts**,
- **Safeguards** and approaches for limiting risk (i.e. parents not facilitating gambling among their underage children), and
- **Signs of harm** for identifying a problem among young people.

Gaps in supporting the digital wellbeing of young people

Education	Research	Safeguards	Supports	Evaluation
Young people, influencers, carers	Behaviours and opinions	Limits and blocking features	Various and new online supports	Identify what is and is not working
Risks and mitigation strategies	Positive and negative impacts	Tailored to young people	Improved resources for gaming and gambling	Examine intended and unintended impacts
Across online spaces	Programing approaches	Behavioural indicators and notifications	Integration with platforms	

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Research on online behaviours, impacts, and programing approaches

As outlined in the table below, stakeholders identified several gaps in knowledge in the digital wellbeing space that could benefit from research attention for informing future programing to support young people. Research is needed on their **online gaming and gambling behaviours and opinions** — particularly of children — and how changes in online content can impact these behaviours. Studies are also needed to identify both the **positive and negative impacts of gaming**, including subtle effects and the prevalence of mental health issues related to online and offline experiences. Additional knowledge is also needed to identify **appropriate programing approaches**, such as the ideal age and approaches for educational interventions, including targeting migration from in-game purchasing to online gambling, and avoiding negative impacts on digital wellbeing of online delivery of programs.

Research on behaviours and opinions

- Gaming behaviours and opinions of gaming features, in particular among young children
- How changes in digital content impact behaviours
- Trajectory from in-game purchasing to online gambling

Research on positive and negative impacts

- Positive and subtle impacts of gaming (i.e. mood) versus focus on problematic play
- Prevalence and causes of mental health issues related to digital spaces
- Whether online and offline stressors (i.e. bullying) have differential impacts on mental health

Research on programing approaches

- Earliest age and best approaches education
- Prevention approaches targeting migration from in-game purchases to online gambling
- Whether digital provision of information and support is inadvertently having negative impacts on digital wellbeing

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Additional broad-based and tailored safeguards

Those we spoke with noted several opportunities to develop and implement additional safeguards in digital spaces, as summarized in the table below. Safeguards can be offered to **all of those using the platform or specifically to young people**, such as a maximum time limits, blocking of gambling features in games, and making tools appealing and specific to young people. Other safeguards can be specifically **tailored to people and their behaviours**, including notifications about use in most recent session, behavioural indicators of harm and advertising technology, and personal involvement limits.

When implementing general or tailored safeguards for young people, it was noted that we must be mindful to not infantilize young adults. A balance must be struck between allowing young people to make their own decisions and encouraging the use of evidence-informed tools.

Safeguards for all or young people

- Ceiling for amount of time that can be spent on platform or product
- Blocking tools to allow gamers to avoid gambling features
- Gambling safeguards (i.e. limit setting, breaks) that are easy to use and appealing for young adults
- Tools and messaging for coming of age gamblers (18-21 year olds), who are at highest risk of harm among young adults

Safeguards tailored to behaviours

- Notification of high risk behaviours (i.e. high level of time or money spent) from last session at the beginning of next session, encouraging relevant tools
- Use of behavioural indicators of harm and advertising technology from gambling industry to inform similar approaches in other online spaces
- Tool to determine person's optimal level of involvement to avoid risk (i.e. time or money limits based on demographics, products used, etc.)

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Expanded support provision and collaboration with platforms

Those we spoke with noted that there are several ways in which support available to young people can be improved, as outlined in the table below. **Core programing needs** include both online and offline services, innovative digital supports, increased resources for gaming harm, and inclusion of gambling content. Several opportunities also exist for increasing the **collaboration between platforms and support services**, by providing support within and tailored to the platform, and improving the hand-off from the platform to the provider.

Core support needs

- Plethora of available support options (i.e. in-person, online)
- New digital means of providing support versus digitization of existing in-person programs
- Increased services for gaming harms
- Inclusion of gambling in tools/apps (i.e. mindfulness, fitness, budgeting) to increase relevance and use

Links between platforms and support providers

Increased collaboration and integration between platforms and support services providers, allowing for:

- support to be provided within but independently from the platforms,
- support to be tailored to activities within the platform (i.e. hate speech), and
- improved hand off from platform to service provider

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Evaluation of programs to measure impacts

Several stakeholders noted that — in addition to being a promising practice for purposeful collaboration as outlined in **Section 5** — there is a significant need for more and more effective evaluation in the digital wellbeing field. Many of the programs and initiatives are relatively new and their efficacy is unknown. Evaluation was said to be imperative in order to:

- Determine **what is working and what is not**,
- Identify **unintended consequences**, and
- Assess **long term impacts** on young people, which may not manifest until sometime after program delivery.

Much important work remains to be done in the digital wellbeing space to support young people. **Holistic education** is needed to inform young people as well as their parents, peers, and other carers, about risks and harm mitigation strategies across digital entertainment spaces. **Additional research** on online behaviours and opinions, positive and negative impacts, and programing approaches is required to inform future prevention and support initiatives. The **safeguards** available to protect those using the platforms as well as the services available to **support** them when they experience harm need to be expanded and diversified, making use of the access, insights, and data held by platforms and products. To ensure efforts are appropriately targeted, **evaluation** is critical for ensuring developed education, safeguard, and support activities are having their intended impacts.

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A guide for building purposeful collaborations to support the digital wellbeing of young people

Concerted efforts are required to support the digital wellbeing of young people, particularly in light of the current and long term impacts of COVID-19. Purposeful collaboration can help maximize efforts in this area, given the scope and intricacies of the problem to be addressed. Five critical success factors have been identified in speaking with stakeholders across digital entertainment spaces that provide a framework for moving forward in implementing effective collaborations for supporting young people.

1 Centre goals around a shared definition of digital wellbeing, consolidating ambition, and (industry) insights

- Base goals on a shared **definition of digital wellbeing**, which considers both positive and negative uses and various online spaces including online gambling
- Have a clear understanding of the **problem** being addressed and a targeted and shared **purpose** for the work that harnesses individual ambitions
- Set goals that are **specific and informed** by the wealth of insights available from stakeholders in the digital entertainment field as well as relevant research and practice evidence
- Target the areas of **greatest impact** or harm, including COVID-19 impacts

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Building purposeful collaboration for digital wellbeing

Goals

- Clear, targeted, and outcome specific goals that consolidate ambition
- Founded on shared understanding of digital wellbeing
- Address areas of need as identified by wealth of industry data, research, and practical evidence, including COVID-19 impacts

Stakeholders

- From diverse jurisdictions, sectors, subject areas, and organizations
- Including those from various digital entertainment spaces, industry and government, independent researchers/organizations, as well as frontline expertise and young people
- Similar social and ethical values, in efforts to improve relationships
- Complementary skills and resources

Activities

- Regular and meaningful engagement to inform initiaitves and build relationships
- Roles for industry, government, and independent organizations
- Deliver complementary and evaluate the impacts of initiatives
- Generate and share outputs and learnings to support other stakeholders and policy making
- Address areas of need in COVID-19 impacts, education, research, safeguards, support, and evaluation

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Diverse stakeholders

- Academics and researchers
- Industry
- Government
- Non-profits
- Support professionals
- Education sector
- Charities
- Young people and parents
- Industry critics

2 Assemble stakeholders from across digital entertainment spaces, including young people, frontline expertise, and independent organizations

- Recruit stakeholders from within and outside the core field of interest, in particular those from across digital entertainment spaces — social media, gaming, and gambling; with **complementary expertise and resources**
- Bring in like-minded stakeholders that share **similar social and ethical values and a commitment to meaningful engagement**, which can help build relatonships across and within fields
- Partner with **independent** stakeholders to ensure the legitimacy of collaborations involving industry
- Include **frontline expertise and young people** to ensure relevance and authenticity
- Capitalize on technology and online collaboration tools to enable participation by **international stakeholders** enhancing diversity and perspectives globally
- Consider the ideal **size and scope** of collaboration to maximize decision making

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3 Outline complementary roles for the digital entertainment industry, government, and independent organizations

- Identify a **convening organization** to broker and facilitate the initiative
- Ensure stakeholder roles and initiatives are **complementary**, which will help limit duplication of efforts and competitiveness
- Outline appropriate roles for **industry** in relation to those who use their platforms and in collaboration with stakeholders
- Identify roles for **government** in terms of setting a baseline for activities and the incentives for encouraging industry to exceed minimum requirements
- Create a common set of operating principles to ensure the **independence and transparency** of the involvement of arm's length organizations and legitimacy of the collaboration

Industry roles

- Culture of responsibility
- Responsible use of access to people and data
- Provide data access
- Targeted funding of research, education, and treatment
- Collaborate with external stakeholders

Government roles

- Set floor and outline ceiling
- Encourage collaboration
- Ensure consistency across industries
- Outline standards for safeguards and support
- Outline approaches for safeguarding and supporting vulnerable groups

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4 Focus activities on building relationships, generating shareable outputs, and addressing areas of need

- **Engage regularly and meaningfully** with participating and external stakeholders as well as young people to inform key activities, harmonize ambition, and build relationships in digital entertainment fields
- Work towards **visible and tangible outputs** to sustain momentum and that can be shared with organizations with fewer resources, in particular during in the COVID-19 context
- Target efforts to **areas of need** as identified by industry data, research, and practice evidence, including COVID-19 impacts, education, research, safeguards, and supports

Areas of need

COVID-19 impacts	Education	Research	Safeguards	Supports
Digital access inequality	Young people, influencers, carers	Behaviours and opinions	Limits and blocking features	Various and new online supports
Positive and negative online behaviours and impacts	Risks and mitigation strategies	Positive and negative impacts	Tailored to young people	Improved resources for gaming and gambling
Support access	Across online spaces	Programing approaches	Behavioural indicators and notifications	Integration with platforms

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5 Evaluate emerging digital initiatives and share learnings to maximize impacts from the front lines to policy

- Identify how progress towards goals will be **measured** (i.e. measurement tools, KPIs), relating back to the shared definition of digital wellbeing
- Assess the **intended and unintended consequences** of the various emerging digital initiatives over the short and long term
- **Share learnings broadly** with other stakeholders and collaborations in relevant sectors, decision makers as well as with those who work directly with young people to maximize resources, learnings, and impacts, and inform the development of government policies around digital entertainment

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Case studies: Illustrating the five critical success factors

Digital Resilience Working Group: Example of multi-stakeholder collaboration

The Digital Resilience Working Group (DRWG) is one of the six working groups of the UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS). To guarantee online safety in the UK, UKCIS works with diverse stakeholders such as the government, the tech community, and charities. The goal and purpose of the DRWG is to develop a digital resilience strategy to support the development of online digital skills that help individuals to stay safe. To date, the DRWG has defined digital resilience, created a digital resilience framework, and launched a digital hub of resources and case studies. The DRWG is co-chaired by Vicki Shotbolt, founder of *Parent Zone* and Dr. Richard Graham, *Good Thinking: London's Digital Mental Wellbeing Service*.

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To ensure objectives are delivered, the group works with multiple government departments such as the Home Office; Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport; Department for Education; and Department of Health. The DRWG also brings together organizations from different spaces, such as industry, charities, and non-profits, including those who provide support and education (i.e. Google, Facebook, BBC). Member organizations include *Parent Zone* (www.parentzone.org.uk), whose aim is to provide support and information to parents, guardians, children, and schools. *Parent Zone* works with families, government, and businesses to help them understand the impacts and opportunities of digital in order to improve outcomes for children. Another member organization, *The Mix,* is the UK's leading digital support service for young people aged 25 and under. They offer free, non-judgmental support, where and when young people need it, most via social media and their website, telephone helpline, and counselling service. They are unique in talking about everything in young people's lives from drugs to housing to relationships with a focus on supporting positive mental health. They reach some three million young people in the UK every year and run innovative partnerships with popular brands (*Now TV, V05, Hollister*).

Critical success factors

- Shared definition of digital wellbeing
- Clear goals and outputs
- Diverse stakeholders, from across digital entertainment spaces
- Involvement of industry, government, and independent stakeholders
- Inclusion of organizations that target parents and use youth engagement
- Co-chairs leading the group
- Regular engagement between stakeholders
- Share learnings with decision makers and broader audience

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Critical success factors

- International academic and industry collaboration
- Research independence
- Access to industry data
- Responsible use of user data
- Funded by industry
- Focus on safeguards tailored to player behaviours
- Evaluation
- Share learnings

Gambling safeguards, Harvard, and Entain: Example of industry sharing of anonymized data for research

Entain, formerly GVC Holdings, has developed markers of protection algorithms to identify players who may be experiencing gambling harm and require intervention in the near future. In addition to this, Entain has developed strategies to minimize these harms including providing feedback to players that outlines how their play behaviours compare to the majority of players. As part of this effort, Dr. Howard Shaffer, Dr. Debi LaPlante, and Dr. Sarah Nelson at the Division on Addiction at Harvard Medical School have partnered with Entain to evaluate the effectiveness of the current algorithms, intervention messaging, and responsible gambling tools. This work is being conducted independently using anonymized player data and financial support provided by Entain. Results of this work are being published in peer reviewed academics journals and presented at international conferences.

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Key considerations and next steps

This initial consideration of how to support the digital wellbeing of young people through purposeful collaboration has been very generative in outlining areas of need and potential ways forward. While many important insights have been uncovered in this piece of work, more research and discussion is required to further specify what we mean by digital wellbeing and how best to support it.

Learnings from this report are being taken forward in a series of **roundtable discussions** with participating and other relevant stakeholders to identify practical next steps for collaboration and initiatives. This work has also been used to inform a piece of **independent research** being conducted by RG Plus that is designed to gather insights on the definition and measurement of digital wellbeing as well as the links between digital wellbeing and online gambling among adults.

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Several **key insights** have been identified by this project that are useful for informing future work in this space.

A shared understanding of what we mean by **digital wellbeing** is needed in order to effectively direct collaboration efforts in this space.

The definition of and programs to support the digital wellbeing of young people should include **online gambling**. In particular, holistic education encompassing risks and risk mitigation strategies across digital entertainment spaces is needed for young people as well as their parents, peers, and support professionals. Similarly, collaborations should focus on including stakeholders of **various types from across sectors**.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has highlighted areas of need as well as opportunities to be mobilized around the digital wellbeing of young people that can best be targeted through collaboration.

Digital entertainment industries should acknowledge a **shared responsibility** for and take steps to support the digital wellbeing of the people who engage with or on their platforms. Efforts should be supported by regulatory and policy focus on supporting **collaboration, consistency, and safeguards** across digital entertainment industries.

While important work is ongoing, there is much room for progress in supporting the digital wellbeing of young people that can be targeted through collaboration, namely the need for more **research**, additional **safeguards**, improved **support options**, and **evaluation** of initiatives.

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Five critical success factors

Purposeful collaboration to support the digital wellbeing of young people is a complex process that requires stakeholders to work across sectors and be committed to and engaged in the partnerships for the long term. **Five critical success factors** have been identified that provide a framework for moving forward in implementing effective collaborations in this space.

1. Centre goals around a shared definition of digital wellbeing, consolidating ambitions, and (industry) insights
2. Assemble stakeholders from across digital entertainment spaces, including young people, frontline expertise, and independent organizations
3. Outline complementary roles for the digital entertainment industry, government, and independent organizations
4. Focus activities on building relationships, generating shareable outputs, and addressing areas of need
5. Evaluate emerging digital initiatives and share learnings to maximize impacts from the front lines to policy

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Based on these key insights, the following **next steps** can guide practical actions for building collaborations across digital entertainment fields in efforts to support the digital wellbeing of young people.

Next steps

Infrastructure

- Establish an agreed upon **definition** of digital wellbeing that includes online gambling
- Build (on) **multi-stakeholder groups** like the Digital Resilience Working Group UK in other countries and internationally
- Develop a common set of operating principles for industry to support digital wellbeing initiatives (i.e. through collaboration, by providing access to those on their platforms, anonymized data, and/or funding) while ensuring the **independence** of non-industry stakeholders and to maximize the impact of sharing these resources

Culture

- Cultivate a culture of **responsibility** where the wellbeing of those using their platforms is a priority within all digital entertainment industries, including approaches directed to people on their platforms as well as initiatives with external stakeholders
- Foster a culture of **evaluation and information sharing** to maximize the use of available resources and inform frontline work as well as policy

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Collaboration

Share learnings across sectors, including applying learnings from the **online gambling** field to other digital entertainment fields and vice versa

Capitalize on improved technology and breadth of expertise by engaging in **international** collaborations

Harmonize ambition and foster improved relationships between digital entertainment stakeholders by establishing shared goals, engaging in regular communication to build trust, and focusing on key issues in the context of COVID-19

Mobilize industry resources — expertise, access to those on their platforms, insights and anonymized data, funding – to identify areas of need and risk, by including stakeholders from across digital entertainment fields in collaborations, to evaluate initiative impacts, and to create outputs that can be used by others, particularly in the COVID-19 context

Education programs

Develop holistic education programs that cover risk and risk mitigation strategies ***across* digital entertainment spaces** and that are targeted at young people, their parents, teachers, and health professionals

Identify and recruit **social media influencers** for the provision of educational messaging

Safeguards and support

Digital entertainment platforms should create **broad and tailored safeguards** and tools for young people that are relevant across spaces, particularly during COVID-19 restrictions

Industry should use its insights and resources to **innovate** ways to support those on their platforms in their digital wellbeing

Identify approaches to support the communication as well as **community and skill building** of young people online, particularly during COVID-19 restrictions

Develop additional wellbeing supports for young people that offer a broad array of **delivery options**, include content on gaming and gambling harm, and integrate with digital entertainment platforms

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Regulation

Though there are many challenges to regulation in the digital entertainment space, digital wellbeing can be supported through evidence-based regulation that focuses on ensuring **consistency** in supports across online spaces, encouraging stakeholder **collaboration** on key topics, and outlining **safeguards**

Research

Conduct more research on online gaming and gambling **behaviours and opinions**, the positive and negative **impacts** of spending time in digital entertainment spaces, and appropriate **prevention and education** approaches

By implementing the key **insights** and **guide** for building purposeful collaborations outlined in this report, and directing next steps to addressing the **needs** around infrastructure, culture collaboration, education, safeguards, supports, regulation, and research noted above, digital entertainment industries will be well positioned to provide meaningful and widespread support for the digital wellbeing of young people.

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Methodology

This report reflects the insights and experience of various stakeholders across the fields of digital entertainment. It was developed through a series of group discussions and one-on-one interviews with stakeholders representing:

- Diverse subject matter areas (gambling, gaming, mental health, digital wellbeing, young people, collaboration, sustainability, international development),
- Various sectors (education, treatment, public health, lived experience),
- Different stakeholder types (charities, industry, researchers), and
- Jurisdictions (UK, Canada, US, Australia).

In total, three group discussions and 19 interviews were held with 33 people representing 27 organizations. These conversations focused on gathering in-depth perspectives on promising approaches and opportunities for purposeful collaboration to advance the digital wellbeing of young people.

RG Plus independently completed all data collection, performed the data analysis, and drafted the current document. This study received ethical approval from the Advarra Institutional Review Board (protocol number Pro00045611, obtained August 11 2020). Advarra is a private, independent company that specializes in ethics reviews for research involving human subjects in Canada and other countries.

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Playtech is committed to working in partnership to generate new and practical insights to raise standards and forge cross sector partnerships to advance positive digital wellbeing, safer gambling, and mental health outcomes. Thank you all the contributors who provided their time, insights and perspectives.

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