

The WAGER, Vol. 29(13) - Gaps and needs for improving voluntary self-exclusion programs in seven jurisdictions

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[Voluntary self-exclusion \(VSE\)](#) programs are designed to minimize gambling harm by allowing gamblers to exclude themselves from entering casinos or signing into online gambling websites. Multiple jurisdictions have VSE programs, which vary in how they are implemented and enforced. VSE shows promise at [reducing harm](#) at the individual level, but the broader [public health impacts](#) of these programs may be limited. This week, The WAGER reviews a [study by Ludwig Kraus and colleagues](#) that examined expert perspectives on VSE and needs for improvement in seven jurisdictions.

What were the research questions?

How do representatives from gambling-related sectors view the current VSE strategies and regulations in their jurisdiction? What are the gaps and needs for improving these programs?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers surveyed 102 representatives from various gambling-related sectors (e.g., regulators, researchers, addiction treatment professionals/support providers) in seven jurisdictions¹ in December 2020 - October 2021. Experts were asked about their experiences with and opinions on VSE strategies, and suggested improvements for regulations within their respective jurisdiction. Survey questions were both [closed](#) and [open-ended](#). The researchers calculated [means](#) and percentages for the responses to the close-ended questions, and they analyzed the open-ended questions to identify suggested areas for improvement.²

What did they find?

Participants from all jurisdictions agreed that VSE programs were needed and important, but that current VSE regulations were insufficiently implemented and enforced. Suggested improvements varied according to the jurisdiction's

regulations. Broadly, participants spoke of: (1) the need to simplify VSE initiation and termination processes, (2) increase flexibility in the length of bans, and (3) improve visibility of VSE as an option (see Figure). Participants were concerned with the ease with which self-excluded gamblers circumvent VSE to continue gambling. They suggested improvements to address VSE breaches, such as a comprehensive and centralized VSE register. Finally, most participants agreed that VSE is only one part of a larger system that is needed to protect gamblers from harm.

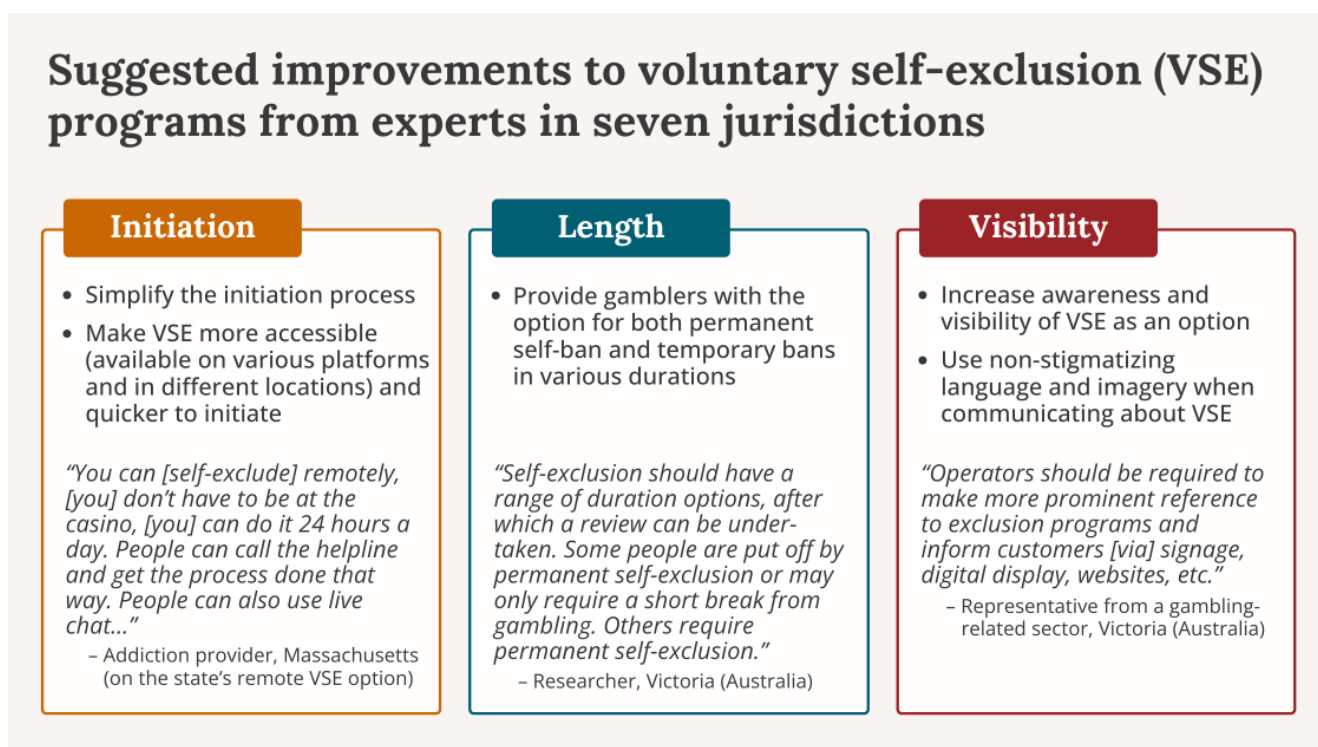


Figure. Selected suggested improvements to VSE programs, from representatives from various gambling-related sectors in seven jurisdictions (n = 102). Bulleted items are broad suggestions from participants and quotes are direct comments from participants pertaining to the suggested improvement. Click image to enlarge.

Why do these findings matter?

These findings suggest that, to increase the utilization of VSE and reduce gambling-related harms, changes are needed to improve current VSE programs. Changes that facilitate the exclusion process, such as making it easier, more accessible, and more flexible, might increase utilization of these programs. It is common for gamblers who have self-excluded to [breach VSE](#), in part because VSE regulations are often specific to only one venue type (e.g., casinos) and don't extend to unauthorized online gambling operators. Stricter enforcement of VSE is

needed to prevent breaches. This approach might include state/national, or even [global](#), comprehensive registers. Such registers should include all gambling venues and locations, and additional measures could be taken to [block unlicensed operators](#). Finally, gamblers should have access to a wide array of treatment and support services in addition to VSE (e.g., [financial counseling](#)).

Every study has limitations. What are the limitations of this study?

Participants were not evenly distributed across gambling-related sectors, and some jurisdictions were missing respondents from one or more sectors. These 102 individuals were not a [representative sample](#), and the findings might not [generalize](#) to the various gambling-related sectors and jurisdictions as a whole.

For more information:

Do you think that you or someone you know might have a gambling problem? Visit the [National Council on Problem Gambling](#) for screening tools and resources. Massachusetts residents can learn about the state's VSE program from the [Gaming Commission](#). For additional resources, including gambling and self-help tools, visit our [Addiction Resources](#) page.

— Kira Landauer, MPH

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1. These seven jurisdictions included: (1) Finland, (2) Germany, (3) Italy, (4) Massachusetts (USA), (5) Norway, (6) Sweden, and (7) Victoria (Australia).
 2. This review primarily focuses on the results from the open-ended questions and readers interested in the closed-ended results can see Tables 1 and 2 in [the article](#).
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