

**CHALLENGE(S)**

Insufficient awareness and recognition of gaming disorders leading to limited availability and accessibility of specialised treatment services and facilities for youth gaming disorders, coupled with a lack of reliable screening and assessment tools, few resources allocated for support services and counselling specifically tailored to gaming addiction, present significant barriers to early identification, treatment, and recovery.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND GENERAL RECOMMENDATION**

For young people, gaming is a fun and sociable activity. When used with healthy boundaries, gaming can be a positive experience but for a minority of young people, gaming can start to negatively affect their mental well-being if it becomes too much. They may need professional support to change the situation. The intricate relationship between gaming and mental health is a subject of growing interest among researchers, clinicians, and the general public. Recognizing the potential impact of gaming on mental health and integrating mental health services into the gaming landscape is crucial. Dealing with gaming disorders can be challenging, especially when it comes to finding help. Treatment options for addiction include formal counselling, cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), and rehabilitation programs. In-person services are available through counselling centres, therapists, and treatment centres. Video game addiction is most commonly treated by a mental health professional such as a licensed therapist, psychiatrist, or psychologist specialising in video game addiction. Some individuals may choose to receive support from a video game addiction specialist such as a video game addiction recovery coach. A counsellor or therapist can provide emotional support and help to make sense of the role gaming is playing in their life. They can also help them to develop other ways of coping with difficult feelings. Online counselling doesn't work for everyone, but for some teenagers, it can be a good way of trying counselling out and getting some short-term support – which might help them feel ready to talk to someone face-to-face.

**STAKEHOLDERS ADDRESSED**

- Youth workers and Educators
- Parents, Families and Friends
- Caregivers and healthcare professionals
- Mental health professionals and clinicians
- Policymakers and government bodies

**BARRIERS**

- Young people, their families and the social environment are not yet aware of gaming disorder and its impact on mental health and social life. There is also resistance to accepting that problematic gaming habits are actually a behavioural addiction that needs medical attention and treatment. This resistance is linked to the social stigma around addictions and seeking treatment.
- The state does not have an organised strategy against gaming disorder, which in turn perpetuates the limited awareness of it. In many cases, the legal framework for gambling works as an umbrella for gaming disorder as well. Gaming disorder being a legal leisure activity with a proven impact on the cognitive and emotional development of children and adolescents demands a different and separate legal approach.
- The lack of visibility of organisations specialised in preventing and treating gaming disorders and their concentration in big urban centres accentuates the difficulty of the population living in small cities and villages to reach the support they provide.
- The limited resources, including funding, staffing, and access to specialised care. Video game addiction has not received the same level of attention from mental health experts and research funding as other disorders like gambling and substance abuse.

## SHORT-TERM GOALS

1. Youth organisations can act as guides, serving as a bridge between individuals struggling with gaming disorders and professional mental health services, helping individuals navigate the complexities of finding appropriate mental health professionals, clinics, and resources.
2. Cooperation between many stakeholders is needed to deal with youth who are struggling with gaming disorders. Through partnerships with local healthcare providers, youth organisations ensure that individuals in need receive timely and appropriate interventions. Collaborating with licensed therapists, counsellors, and psychologists to provide accessible assessment, counselling, and treatment resources and, if needed, refer young people to mental health professionals specialising in addiction or gaming disorders.

## LONG-TERM GOALS

1. Through social media, events, and collaborations, youth organisations can launch awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of mental health for youth gamers. They can also advocate for including gaming-related mental health support in schools, communities, and healthcare systems. By raising awareness about the specific needs of youth gamers, they also contribute to a more comprehensive approach to mental health care.
2. Collaborate with local mental health organisations, schools, and government agencies to create a united front against gaming disorders.
3. Advocate for policies and regulations related to gaming and its impact on mental health.

## SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- ✓ Produce a mapping of all the specialised services and organisations that can deal with gaming disorders with contact information.
- ✓ Develop a guide that includes general information on gaming disorder intervention strategies, alternative activities, support mechanisms, ready-to-use tools and activities with instructions.
- ✓ Set up hotlines or online chat support where individuals and their families can seek help or advice regarding gaming addiction.
- ✓ Create online support communities or forums and implement peer support programs/peer support groups where young people can connect with others facing similar issues and share their experiences, challenges, coping strategies and successes in dealing with gaming disorders.
- ✓ Create support groups or forums for parents to share experiences and strategies for managing gaming-related issues.

## LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- ✓ Advocate for policy changes to include gaming disorder in mental health strategies and youth work frameworks.
- ✓ Write articles or letters to local newspapers or online platforms to raise awareness and advocate for change.
- ✓ Establish specialized training programs on gaming disorders for youth workers, educators, and healthcare professionals and stay updated on the latest research and best practices, ensuring that all are equipped with the most effective resources and tools.
- ✓ Foster partnerships between mental health organizations, gaming industry stakeholders, and youth work organisations to promote awareness and support.
- ✓ Youth organisations should provide information and educational sessions about gaming disorders to both young people and their parents/guardians to raise awareness about the signs, symptoms, and potential consequences of excessive gaming.

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

**Rutland Addiction Treatment Centre (Ireland):** The Rutland Centre's gaming addiction program provides individuals with tools and support to overcome compulsive gaming behaviours and regain control of their lives. It combines evidence-based therapeutic approaches, individual counselling, group therapy sessions, and family support for a holistic treatment experience. Through a thorough assessment, the centre tailors the treatment plan to meet each person's unique needs, emphasising self-awareness, behaviour modification techniques, and healthy coping strategies. Group therapy sessions create a supportive environment for individuals to connect with peers, share experiences, and learn from each other. The centre's multidisciplinary team of experienced professionals employs cognitive-behavioural therapy, motivational interviewing, and other evidence-based interventions to address the psychological, emotional, and behavioural aspects of gaming addiction.

**Game Quitters (USA)** is a supportive community dedicated to helping individuals quit playing video games and reclaim control of their lives. They collaborate with parents, gamers, teachers, and professionals worldwide to offer comprehensive assistance to those seeking help. On their community website, they provide a guideline called "Healthy Gaming Habits for Kids, Teens, and Adults". This guideline is designed to help individuals who either have gaming disorders or are at risk of developing them. By following these guidelines, they can recognise and prevent addiction, promoting a healthier relationship with gaming (Game Quitters, 2021).