

Problem Gambling in the Aging Population

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COMPASS MARK

SCIENCE-BASED ADDICTION PREVENTION

About Us

Compass Mark has been a leader in addiction prevention in Lancaster & Lebanon Counties for over 50 years.

Our mission is to prevent addiction through **education, skill building, and community mobilization.**



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Objectives

After this presentation participants will be able to:

- Identify signs of problem gambling in seniors.
- Explain the reasons problem gambling can be especially dangerous for an aging population.
- List resources available to help prevent and treat problem gambling in seniors.

Definition of Gambling

- To risk money, or something of value, on an unknown outcome.
- 2 questions:
 - Do you have to pay money, or risk something, to play?
 - Are you guaranteed to get something in return?

Terminology

- **Disordered Gambling:** Persistent and recurring problematic gambling behavior leading to clinically significant impairment or distress. A diagnosable disorder listed in the DSM-5.
 - Listed under behavioral addictions.
 - Formerly known as pathological gambling.
- **Problem Gambling:** Any gambling behavior that disrupts your life.
 - Exhibits some of the behaviors in DSM-5 but not enough to be diagnosed.

Gambling Facts

- Approximately 2.5 million (1%) Americans meet the diagnostic criteria for Disordered Gambling, according to the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG).
- Another 5-8 million (2.3%) would be considered problem gamblers.
 - Do not meet the criteria for diagnosis, but are experiencing problems due to gambling.
- The NCPG estimates that the national social cost of gambling is \$14 billion. These costs include job loss, bankruptcy, gambling-related healthcare and other consequences.
- The majority of adults gamble responsibly!

Good News!

- Overall we are living longer!
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the average life expectancy (as of 2022) is at 77.5 years for the entire population!
- For males the average is 74.8 years.
- For females the average is 80.2 years.

Gambling and Seniors

- According to Leaders Advancing and Helping Communities, people age 65 and older are the fastest growing population of gamblers.
- 10% of that group are at risk of financial problems due to gambling.
- 8-10% have some level of addiction or dependence to gambling.

Why are Seniors at Risk?

- According to the Administration on Aging, 17% of the population, or 1 in 6, are aged 65 or older.
 - That equates to 55.7 million people!
 - Can be looking for a means of social connection.
- Less time to recoup significant losses.
- Easy access to gambling, virtually and in-person.
- A rise in “grief gambling”.
- Less likely to recognize signs of addiction, and less likely to self-report.
- Lack of regular screenings by primary care doctors.

Grief Gambling

- Using gambling to cope with losses.
 - Loss of loved ones
 - Loss of autonomy/freedom/routine
- Escapism
 - Easy to forget pain or loss
 - Gives a false sense of social connection

Medications and Problem Gambling

- In May of 2016 the FDA reported that compulsive or uncontrollable urges, like those to gamble, have been reported with the use of the antipsychotic drug aripiprazole.
 - Abilify, Abilify Maintena, Aristada, and generics
 - Side effects of these medications remove or limit impulse control
- A 2023 study showed that patients with Parkinson's Disease, Restless Leg Syndrome, and other conditions treated with dopamine agonists are vulnerable patient groups with theoretically increased risk of developing gambling disorders (Wolfsclag, et al.).
 - Popular medications to treat Parkinson's include Mirapex, Levodopa, and Carbidopa

Its Not Gambling, Its Just Bingo!

- Gambling, in most forms, has become normalized behavior.
 - Blurred lines- Video Gaming Terminals/PA Skill Games
 - Even “free” games can have negative consequences
- Advertisements are everywhere!
 - Sports gambling and Daily Fantasy Sports lead this charge.
- Gambling is sometimes called a hidden addiction.

Casinos-The New Senior Centers

- Casinos offer many attractive services for older adults!
 - Will provide mobility equipment if necessary.
 - Some will provide oxygen or places to dispose of diabetic needles
- Casinos create an atmosphere of connection!
 - Send birthday/holiday cards
 - If absent too long, casinos will send a card saying that they miss you
- Casinos are easily accessible!
 - Casinos will send shuttles to senior living centers or the centers will run bus trips to casinos, bingo, etc.
 - Casinos will often add incentives like free chips or free/discounted food

What Happens When the Casino is in Your Hand?

- Gambling in all forms is more accessible than ever by electronic means.
- We are starting to see the most technologically advanced group of seniors.
- Most traditional casinos have mobile apps.
- Most sports betting and fantasy sports have mobile apps.
- Social media have “free” social casino and bingo games.
 - At best they normalize gambling and at worst can lead to problem gambling behaviors.
- The majority of seniors prefer non-strategic games with the highest prevalence of disordered gambling in casino games such as slots and lotto.

Is That Social Game Really Free?

- Most “free” games come with in-app purchases.
 - Clicks don’t always seem like real money!
- Ads during social games can be for pay-to-play games.
- Online casinos and sports betting sites will match an initial deposit up to a certain amount.
 - Advertised as “free money”.
 - Some offer “bet protection” where you can get money back if the first wager does not win!
- Free trial periods are offered by online betting sites.
 - The algorithm of the game changes after the free trial making it harder to win

Marketing Gambling to Seniors



Why Should Caregivers Learn About Problem Gambling in Seniors?

- If problem gambling does develop in an older adult, they have less time and opportunity to recover their losses.
- If older adults spend a large amount of time alone the signs of problematic behavior can be easier to hide or go unnoticed.
- If seniors are educated about problem gambling, they are more likely to recognize behaviors in themselves or others.
- Talking about problem gambling can help with the stigma that can prevent people from obtaining help.

Warning Signs of Problem Gambling

- An unhealthy preoccupation with betting or wagering.
- Only talking about wins/not discussing losses.
- Rapid decline in physical health/mental health.
- Paying bills late or putting off refilling medication.
- Having sudden and immediate need of money.
- Neglecting friends, family members, or personal needs.
- Lying about gambling or trying to hide gambling behavior.
- Gambling alone and more frequent gambling.
- Gambling to calm nerves or reduce stress.

Seniors Asking for Help

- According the Council on Compulsive Gambling of PA, the largest number if callers to 1-800 GAMBLER are men.
 - Male-1779
 - Female-794
- The number of seniors seeking help are the third highest age demographic.
 - 55+: 444
 - 25-34: 607
 - 35-44: 518

What can you do?

- Reflect on why we are gambling.
- Learn to recognize the signs when gambling has become problematic.
- Speak up if you feel that your gambling is becoming an issue.
- Speak up if you think that someone you know may be having gambling problems.
- Make sure that we keep gambling recreational!

Keeping Gambling Recreational

- Acknowledge that you are more likely to lose than to win.
- Set a money limit that you can afford to lose and stick with it!
- Do not gamble on credit and take only cash.
- Avoid chasing lost money.
- Set a time limit and use the buddy system.
- Don't substitute gambling for other activities or gamble to deal with problems.
- Take a break!
- Seek help if problems do arise!

Help is Available!

- There are various options for people dealing with all levels of gambling issues.
- Early intervention key in all populations, but especially with seniors.
- There are certified counselors available to work with all age groups.
- Self-Help groups exist to help not only problem gamblers, but friends and loved ones as well.

Early Intervention

- One of the keys of early intervention is self-monitoring.
 - Being aware of one's own feelings and behaviors around gambling.
 - Being able to notice when problems begin to arise, before they become overwhelming.
- Knowing the risks and harms that can come with problem gambling.
- Setting and maintaining goals around gambling behaviors.
- Planning alternate activities to avoid gambling inappropriately.

Certified Gambling Counselors

- The International Gambling Counselor Certification Board (IGCCB) certifies counselors to work with all age groups.
- There are a variety of different therapeutic options:
 - Outpatient counseling
 - Inpatient Counseling
 - Individual, group, family therapy
- Treatment of underlying conditions like anxiety, depression, OCD, ADD/ADHD.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has been shown to be effective for late onset problem gamblers.
 - CBT works with individuals to identify, question, and change behaviors.
 - Finding alternative behaviors/activities to replace gambling behaviors.

Self-Help Groups

- Gamblers Anonymous works to support problem gamblers.
- Gam-Anon supports friends and loved ones who have been effected by someone's problem gambling.
- SMART Recovery is an abstinence-oriented organization for individuals with addiction issues.
- There are various other web-based support groups for selective populations.
 - Women
 - Veterans
 - Seniors

Self-Exclusion

- Someone can request to be excluded from gambling activities in the following areas in Pennsylvania:
 - Casinos
 - Fantasy Contests
 - iGaming
 - Video Gaming Terminals (VGT's)
- Exclusion Period can be 1 or 5 years or lifetime.
- Violation of self exclusion can be grounds for arrest or fine.
- Applications for self exclusion can be made with the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board.
- Self exclusion can also be made at individual casinos.

National Council on Problem Gambling

- NCPG is responsible for the national Helpline for local problem gambling resources.

1-800-GAMBLER

- 24-hour availability
- NCPG made up of state affiliates
- 1-800-Gambler is now the national helpline.

Council on Compulsive Gambling of Pennsylvania

- Local helpline- 1-800-Gambler
 - Online chat available on website
 - 24-hour text line at 1-800-522-4700
- Host regular trainings for prevention, treatment, and recovery providers.
- Has resources for the various self-help groups we have discussed.

Contacts

- National Council on Problem Gambling:

www.ncpgambling.org

1-800-GAMBLER

- Council on Compulsive Gambling of PA: www.pacouncil.com

1-800-GAMBLER

- Compass Mark: www.compassmark.org
- Gamblers Anonymous: www.gamblersanonymous.org
- Gam-Anon: www.gam-anon.org
- Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board:
www.gamingcontrolboard.pa.gov

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Thank You!



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