

# The Council Connection

Council on Compulsive Gambling of NJ  
**800-GAMBLER**<sup>®</sup>

February 2023

## A Message from the Executive Director

### **Awareness About Underage Betting Must Confront 'Pro-Gambling' Landscape**



The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) again joined with the New Jersey Lottery this holiday season in a campaign urging adults to refrain from gifting Lottery tickets to teenagers. This message is all the more critical given the current “pro-gambling” landscape and important research about the worsening condition of youth betting. The campaign stresses that playing the lottery qualifies as gambling, and giving minors lottery tickets for the holidays, or anytime, condones youth gambling and that it’s ok to break the law.

The National Council on Problem Gambling indicated that adolescent problem gambling is on the rise, with 4 to 6 percent of high school students struggling with a gambling addiction. Kids’ excessive use of smart phones and gaming apps, coupled with the legalization of sports betting has drawn more youth into betting on games as well as placing in-game wagers. Terms like

‘over-under’ have been incorporated into the broadcast of every sporting contest. According to the National Library of Medicine’s Peer Review Journal, in an article authored by Dr. Mark Potenza, adolescence is an important developmental period characterized by high rates of risk-taking behavior. Children are especially impressionable as they grow and they are still developing. And studies have shown that if a child engages in a potentially addictive activity, they are more apt to develop a related problem later in life.

Accordingly, many adults who become problem gamblers often are first exposed to betting as adolescents. Calls to our 800-GAMBLER Helpline come from many adult callers who indicate they began gambling during their childhood and calls have increased from parents concerned about their teenagers’ emerging gambling problem. Gambling is much more acceptable in today’s world and pervasive in our society, and always presented as an activity with no downside. As a result, it is more important than ever to sponsor

campaigns to raise awareness about gambling risks to kids, similar to efforts designed to educate teens about the harmful effects of drug use and the impact it can have on their future.

Lottery tickets have something in common with purveyors of other at-risk behaviors: kid-friendly packaging. Whether it's Joe Camel enticing youth to smoke cigarettes, alcopops use, the marketing of marijuana edibles, or the "kid friendly" appearance of lottery tickets, all are designed to appeal to the public to use their products, including young people. In fact, a recent CCGNJ gambling prevalence survey revealed that 47 percent of New Jersey residents agree with the perspective that gambling ads target youth.

The Gift Responsibly Campaign is supported by respected research institutions, including McGill University's International Centre for Youth Gambling and High-Risk Behaviors, the World Lottery Association, among others. While the campaign may not be able to prevent adolescent gambling altogether, it's a step in the right direction to educate adults and kids that underage gambling comes with risks young people are ill prepared for, is illegal and may significantly impact their adult lives in years to come.

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## Glut of Gambling Advertising Prompts Assembly Resolution

The New Jersey Assembly introduced a resolution, AR-168, condemning the excessive gambling advertising now inundating sports broadcasts, websites, radio, and print outlets. The resolution states, in part, that "gambling has long been recognized as a potentially addictive activity." The volume of advertising in recent years - the majority of which promotes various sports books - makes it nearly impossible to escape pro-gambling messaging.

Assemblyman Ralph Caputo (**pictured**), one of the resolution's sponsors and Chairman of the Assembly Tourism, Gaming and the Arts Committee, has previously taken issue with the barrage of gambling ads. During an informational hearing before his committee in the spring, the Assemblyman labeled the volume of gambling advertising "obscene."



Among the expert witnesses who testified at the hearing was Felicia Grondin, executive director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ). Ms. Grondin recently conveyed support of AR-168 for recognizing how gambling ads can contribute to the state's worsening gambling problem. She noted that gambling ads are so abundant that they can be considered "predatory."

The CCGNJ recommended that the State of New Jersey identify methods to control the degree and content of gambling advertising, through state or federal legislative and/or regulatory initiatives.

Gambling advertisements, especially those related to sports betting, encourage the public to gamble, through offers for "free bets" and lines of credit. Ms. Grondin drew a comparison between gambling promotions and the marketing of other potentially harmful behaviors: "When I was growing up, cigarette and alcohol commercials on television were frequent and common place. Since then, restrictions have been enforced, due to the addictive, harmful nature of smoking and drinking, and today there are no television or radio cigarette advertisements, and alcohol commercials are infrequent and limited in content. "

A CCGNJ poll found widespread support for warning labels to appear on all gambling-related products and locations. The CCGNJ requested lawmakers to consider legislation to require labels at brick-and-mortar casinos and online gambling sites warning consumers

that excessive wagering can lead to gambling addiction, like those on cigarettes. A statewide gambling prevalence survey the CCGNJ commissioned found broad support (82 percent) for requiring such warning labels.

CCGNJ noted that it will take time for restrictions to curtail gaming companies from their repetitive messages. Ms. Grondin said it is therefore important that the State of New Jersey deliver Public Service Announcements about gambling's potential for addiction, akin to PSAs focusing on drug addiction prevention.

Ms. Grondin's testimony stated that efforts to curtail gambling ads and incorporate warning labels on all gambling sites will help to educate NJ residents and assist in reducing the number of New Jersey residents who develop a gambling disorder.

In August, CCGNJ was invited to submit an opinion on the topic of gambling ads for the sports business publication *Sportico*. The article suggested that it may well be preferable for the gambling companies to self-regulate rather than have the Legislature impose rules and restrictions. To read the article go to: [Sports Betting Companies Should Rein In Advertising Blitz – Sportico.com](#)

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## Legislature Takes Testimony on Bill to Extend Online Gambling to 2033



The New Jersey Legislature recently considered a bill to extend online gambling for another 10 years, until 2033, a measure that is all but certain to pass. The first hearing on the bill, S-3075, took place in November before the Senate Government, Wagering, Tourism and Historic Preservation Committee. Several witnesses testified, but only one, Felicia Grondin, executive director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling on New Jersey, urged the lawmakers to consider the costs that come with the state's increased online wagering.

Ms. Grondin acknowledged that online gambling revenue contributes significantly to the state's budget but noted that online betting also represents a significant threat to more and more New Jersey residents. She asked committee members to carefully consider the related potential ills to society, including the risk of more people developing a gambling problem and youth exposure to gambling.

Calls to the 800-GAMBLER Helpline from problem gamblers include stories of people losing their retirement funds, children's college funds, and their homes. In the worst cases, problem gamblers lose their lives to suicide; gambling addiction has the highest attempted suicide rate (20%) of all addictions.

Online apps have transformed the betting landscape with their easy access to wagering. The impact of this change is reflected in a gambling prevalence study the CCGNJ commissioned last year. The survey found that nearly three in ten people said ease of betting access through apps as a significant factor in their gambling activities.

Betting apps are also a factor in youth gambling, despite their not being able to legally gamble. It is difficult to quantify how many adolescents are gambling given its an illegal activity for anyone under 21. Nonetheless, there are numerous anecdotes of children accessing their parents' online gambling apps, resulting in unauthorized and exorbitant charges to their parents' accounts.

Ms. Grondin authored a 2016 study conducted by the Levenson Institute of Gambling, Hospitality & Tourism at Stockton University, which revealed that 37 percent of children surveyed were, in fact, gambling. That study was in the early days of online gambling. Given that youth are so comfortable with technology and gambling is more socially acceptable and accessible, it no surprise that youth are gambling in far greater numbers.

CCGNJ's public awareness efforts face a considerable challenge in trying to counter gambling industry marketing. In 2021 the State of New Jersey collected \$311 million in tax revenue from online gambling, reflecting an increase of over 1588 percent since it was legalized in 2013. When comparing this total to the CCGNJ's 2021 budget, 07% was allocated to gambling prevention and treatment while helpline calls have surged by 61% over the last decade.

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## The CCGNJ's 40th Anniversary Gala to Honor Arnie Wexler

The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) will mark its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a Gala that will honor Arnie Wexler (**pictured**), a seminal figure the treatment and recovery of problem gamblers and their families. Mr. Wexler is a former executive director of the CCGNJ, having headed the organization from 1986-1994. The Gala will take place June 9, 2023, at the New Jersey Law Center in New Brunswick.



As CCGNJ celebrates its four decades of dedication to helping the problem gambler and raising awareness about gambling issues, its services and programs have never been more needed. Online and sports betting in New Jersey have caused a dramatic increase in problem gambling in our state. CCGNJ's 800-GAMBLER Helpline has had a 57 percent increase between 2018, the first year of legalized sports betting, and 2022.

Mr. Wexler's contributions to individuals and families impacted by gambling addiction are hard to overstate. Mr. Wexler is one of the foremost experts on the subject of compulsive gambling and has been involved in helping problem gamblers for more than 35 years. He has appeared on many of America's top television shows, including Oprah, Nightline, and 48 Hours. He and his wife, Sheila, present workshops, and seminars on gambling addiction and have trained over 35,000 casino employees and executives, in addition to working with gaming companies to help formulate Responsible Gaming Programs. Mr. Wexler has also done trainings for Fortune 500 corporations, legislative bodies, colleges, and the National Football League.

The upcoming Gala will provide sponsorship opportunities for individuals and companies to support the CCGNJ's efforts to help the problem gambler through its 800-GAMBLER Helpline and its public awareness initiatives. A Gala Ad Book will give supporters the chance to offer congratulations to the Council and Mr. Wexler. For Gala ticket information and all related information, please go to [CCGNJ GALA](#)

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*The New Jersey Lottery and the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey partnered on their annual public awareness campaign to discourage the gifting of lottery tickets to adolescents. New Jersey Lottery Executive Director James Carey (right) and CCGNJ Executive Director Felicia Grondin discuss underage gambling, with NJ Lottery's Public Information Assistant Dean Ialacci moderating.*

## **New Jersey Lottery Partners with CCGNJ in Holiday Campaign to 'Gift Responsibly'**

The New Jersey Lottery (NJL) delivered its annual holiday message that Lottery tickets do not make suitable gifts for kids. Every year, the NJL partners with the Council on Compulsive of New Jersey, Inc. (CCGNJ) in this holiday awareness campaign, joining other lotteries around the country to build public awareness that lottery products should not be given to minors. The annual Holiday Gift Responsibly campaign includes the messaging, "Tis the season to gift responsibly. Lottery is not child's play".

"Lottery tickets are popular gift choices to slip into a card or include as a stocking stuffer during the holiday season, and we caution parents and other adults against gifting lottery tickets to children," said NJL Executive Director James A. Carey, Jr. "New Jersey law requires lottery purchasers to be 18 years of age or older. While the law does not prohibit adults from giving tickets to minors, research suggests that this is not a good idea."

Felicia Grondin, executive director of the CCGNJ, expressed her appreciation to NJL for discouraging the gifting of Lottery tickets to anyone under the age of 18. "The Lottery is a valuable partner with the Council on Compulsive Gambling in efforts to remind residents that lottery tickets are not an appropriate gift for minors and should only be given for individuals of legal age. Adult problem gamblers frequently report that they begin to gamble during childhood, often at ages 9 or 10."

Youth gambling has become a growing concern, with the CCGNJ's 800-GAMBLER helpline taking more and more calls from parents about an adolescent child's emerging problem with betting, most stemming from online betting apps despite the legal age being 21. As with the Lottery, some parents facilitate underage gambling by giving their adolescent children access to their online betting accounts.

The Gift Responsibly Campaign is supported by research institutions, including McGill University's International Centre for Youth Gambling and High-Risk Behaviors and the World Lottery Association, among others. While this effort may not be able to prevent underage gambling entirely, it helps to educate adults and kids that gambling comes with risks young people are ill prepared for, is illegal and may significantly impact their adult lives in years to come.

To reinforce their message, the Lottery and the CCGNJ developed a video to urge

residents to use good judgment when making holiday gift selections for children. The video, which is available for viewing at [https://youtu.be/n3LA3G\\_7Odo](https://youtu.be/n3LA3G_7Odo), explains the potential danger in involving minors in the lottery play and other forms of gambling before they are old enough to understand the risks.

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## **A Recovery Story Steeped in Service to Others**

Jon G's gambling addiction began at age 16, when his father handed him a roll of quarters in an Atlantic City casino and the slot machine he played poured out a few hundred dollars in winnings. That stop in Atlantic City, a detour enroute to a family vacation at the Jersey Shore, would take Jon down a troubled path for nearly 35 years. When recovery finally came for him, a revelation that serving others with candor about his gambling addiction proved to be his salvation.

Recalling his introduction to gambling in that casino, Jon said his slot machine win was the worst thing that could have happened. From that point on, gambling quickly overtook his life. As a high school junior, he became a regular at the casinos. Jon took pride in having a player's card for each of Atlantic City's casinos. When he wasn't in Atlantic City, he was placing sports bets with bookies. He dedicated entire days to handicapping pro and college games of all types.

He stole money from his mother to finance his gambling throughout the rest of high school. College lasted three semesters, and during that time the lion's share of Jon's attention was on sports betting. His life revolved around trips to the casinos and race tracks and placing sports bets.

Once he began working, the amount of work he did at any given point hinged on whether he was up or down in his wagering. Unsurprisingly, his gambling left him in debt with a number of bookies. Jon's gambling only escalated as he entered his 20s. He made his first half-hearted attempt at GA in 1989, when he was in his early 20s. He went to one single meeting.

Over the next 10 years he would marry and start a family, but gambling was his focus. With the approach of football's Big Game in 1999, just after the birth of his daughter, his wife had enough and demanded that he get help and put a stop to his betting. Jon went to a meeting to appease his wife. He had no intention of stopping gambling, although he did have a six-month hiatus from gambling during this time.

With the turn of the century, he was back gambling and would add a second addiction: prescription drugs. He had begun seeing a psychiatrist, and before long he had a prescriptions for Klonopin and Xanax. These benzodiazepines numbed any anxiety he had felt about losing money.

It was also during this time that he began counseling with a psychologist, and during those sessions the root cause of his gambling surfaced. His therapist helped him to identify terrible trauma that he had long suppressed: he had been sexually abused from the ages of five to eight. As is generally the case with those struggling with an addiction, his addictions to gambling and substances were a symptom of a deep-seated issue too painful to face.

The combination of gambling and substance use left Jon in a haze that lasted nearly two decades. During this time, he said he self-medicated with a vengeance. He missed countless major events in the lives of his four children, though he somehow managed to financially support his family throughout these years. He admits that providing for his family was the extent of his parenting.

Although he was making good money working in finance, it was not enough to keep pace with his gambling. Jon began committing crimes to support his gambling addiction. Before long, his criminal acts caught the attention of the FBI, who began an investigation that would lead to charges of mail fraud.

The criminal charges along with his gambling and drug use reached a crisis point in 2018. So severe was his addiction to Xanax that he was using other prescription drugs as well as what he could find on the streets.

He reached the point that he knew he needed treatment for his substance use, but no facility would admit him because he would need to be weaned from Xanax, since most treatment facilities would not admit someone still on the drug. Eventually, an Intensive Outpatient Program in Montclair agreed to admit him. He found a Narcotics Anonymous sponsor, but sadly, that individual turned out to have a gambling problem of his own and enticed Jon to play cards.

Although he was now attending four or five GA meetings a week, he was not any closer to finding peace. The summer of 2019 brought Jon to his breaking point. With criminal issues and the IRS investigating him, Jon considered ending his life. His sponsor died of an overdose in mid-September. Not long after, he began questioning his participation in GA, rationalizing that he would wait until he got to prison to deal with his addiction.

In fall of 2019, he stopped going to meetings, and he got a call from a regular member asking where he'd been. This call may have helped to start opening his eyes and he subsequently abstained from gambling.

As the year neared its end, he had an epiphany about the true meaning of recovery: It was not simply to abstain from gambling but also to be of service to others. Jon notes the timing of this as providential in that it took place in December, the twelfth month, and his embrace of service to others is the central message of the 12<sup>th</sup> step of the GA fellowship.

This revelation completely changed his life and his relationship with his wife, children and, for that matter, himself. Jon now describes himself as present with all the people he loves. He is "the best father, the best husband, the best brother." Even with the pending mail fraud charges pending against him, he said he is without question the happiest he has ever been. Recovery allows him to maintain hope and faith. His service to others is not confined to problem gambling, as he also speaks to veterans about mental health issues.

Jon's transformation deeply touched two women, one elderly, one an adolescent, both of whom mean the world to him. His mother, who passed away in spring of 2022, lived to see her son's renewal through recovery. And his daughter, who had been terrified of him throughout his long gambling run, now expresses her deep love and pride in notes she writes him and what she says to him. His daughter is not alone in appreciating who her dad has become: Jon - with humility - takes pride in having discovered his best self through service to others.

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## CCGNJ Offering Affiliate Memberships

The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) is inviting individuals and organizations across the state to become affiliate members and join in the Council's mission to educate the public about problem gambling and promote understanding that problem and disordered gambling is a treatable condition. Affiliate members will help the Council confront New Jersey's growing gambling problem by supporting the 1-800-GAMBLER® Helpline and website [www.800gambler.org](http://www.800gambler.org), which have been resources for thousands of people who are problem gamblers and those recovering from problem and disordered gambling, as well as for their friends and families.

Whatever level is chosen, your membership will help further CCGNJ's work as more and more New Jersey residents are seeing their savings, their families and their lives threatened by a gambling problem. With the advent of online gambling and sports books, New Jersey has seen a significant surge in problem gambling, making CCGNJ's mission all the more critical. Members' tax deductible donations will assist the Council as it confronts this growing problem.

The CCGNJ serves members by communicating the importance of responsible gambling

and the warning signs that may indicate the development of a gambling problem. Speakers and trainers on gambling addiction and responsible play are available upon request.

To access a member application or to learn more about membership and member benefits, please go to following link: [Affiliate Membership | 800-Gambler | 800gambler.org](#)

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## Book a Presentation for Your Group or Workplace

Would you like for the CCGNJ to visit your facility or group to discuss gambling and related disorders? Presentations can be provided in person or via Zoom. Please contact Luis Del Orbe, Prevention & Treatment Administrator, at 609-588-5515 (ext 110) or [luis@800gambler.org](mailto:luis@800gambler.org) to schedule a date.



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