

# The Council Connection

Council on Compulsive Gambling of NJ  
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May 2023

## *A Message from the Executive Director*

### **CCGNJ Celebrates 40th Anniversary and Readies for Emerging Challenges**

2023 is proving to be both a banner year as well as a period of growing challenges for the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ). In March, we observed a very successful Problem Gambling Awareness Month (PGAM) and now turn our attention to our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala, set for Friday, June 9. This special evening will honor Arnie Wexler, a guiding light who has helped countless people find their way into recovery from gambling addiction and served as CCGNJ's executive director for eight years. Come fall, the Council will hold its annual Statewide Conference on Disordered Gambling entitled "Four Decades of Gambling Expansion: Why Our Help is Needed Now More than Ever."

The gambling culture that has taken root in our state over the last decade has resulted in more New Jersey residents needing help since our founding 40 years ago. 24/7 access to gambling via online and sports betting apps entice people with a variety of promotions which has resulted in a trend of worsening problem gambling. Our four decades dedicated to providing information, education and referral services for people affected by a gambling problem make us uniquely qualified to meet this growing challenge. Since our inception, our primary purpose has been to represent the best interest of problem and disordered gamblers and their families, recognizing that problem gambling is a treatable condition.

During the PGAM observance, CCGNJ staff blanketed the state with presentations, before high school students, senior citizens, faith-based organizations, people of color, LGBTQ groups and more. CCGNJ also presented webinars each Friday during March, featuring the science of addiction, personal stories of recovery, and a history of gambling in New Jersey, among other topics. We had the opportunity to meet with legislators at the State House to urge a balance between gambling tax revenue generated and the harms gambling causes to more and more of our neighbors. Among the issues discussed with lawmakers were the volume of gambling ads and the need for both online and brick-and-mortar betting sites to post warning labels about the potential for gambling addiction.

An area of growing concern is the threat of youth gambling, since they are exposed to gambling through an array of advertising. Gaming that is accessible on teenagers' devices is a stepping stone to gambling and there are apps that allow those under the legal age of 21 to access betting sites. To address this issue, CCGNJ developed the Cognitive Perspective Restructuring Program to help teenagers avoid gambling and other at-risk



behavior and build resilience and self-respect (see related story in this edition). To measure the degree of youth betting, we partnered with Seton Hall's Market Research Center this spring to survey youth and young adults ages 16-25 on their betting experiences, which revealed alarmingly high numbers of underage gambling.

The Legislature has also responded to the growing youth gambling problem with a bill (A-5308) that would mandate that gambling awareness be included in the New Jersey Student Learning Standards in Comprehensive Health & Physical Education. We applaud the lawmakers who introduced this measure and hope to see it enacted. Another bill, (A-420) which would establish a gambling diversion court, was also introduced and passed a committee vote. Additionally, the CCGNJ commends the new standards, announced on April 21<sup>st</sup> by Attorney General Matthew Platkin, to promote Responsible Gaming (RG). This initiative includes a host of new RG standards, the creation of an RG Coordinator position and making resources readily available to those with a gambling problem (see related story in this edition).

As we eagerly anticipate our Gala\* on June 9<sup>th</sup>, we will continue to build on the expertise acquired over our first four decades to meet the emerging issues and challenges arising with gambling's expanded presence in our state.

\*Tickets for the Gala are still available and may be purchased at [CCGNJ Gala Tickets](#)

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## Assembly Committee Session Responds to Increased Potential for Gambling Addiction

The Assembly Tourism, Gaming, and the Arts Committee (ATGAC), which oversees gambling in the state, had a wide-ranging agenda of gambling issues to consider at its March 20 session. The four measures – three bills and a resolution – included proposals to create a gambling diversion court pilot, ban or limit excessive advertising, introduce gambling awareness in New Jersey public schools, and impose a ban on partnerships between gambling companies and the state's public



universities. The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) weighed in on all four measures, all of which advanced.

Committee Chairman Ralph Caputo (pictured above with CCGNJ Executive Director and Dan Trolaro of Epic Risk Management) encapsulated the four gambling measures as a collective response to increased risk of gambling addiction. While acknowledging the influx of revenue to state coffers in recent years, the Assemblyman said the state needs to strike a balance to limit the harm that befalls individuals and families when someone develops a gambling disorder.

### Gambling Diversion Court

The first bill before the committee was A-420, which would establish a Gambling Diversion Court. This proposal would refer people who commit crimes stemming from problem gambling to treatment rather than take a strictly punitive approach of imprisonment. CCGNJ Executive Director Felicia Grondin argued in favor of the pilot, saying, "By establishing a treatment diversion court program ... the disordered gambler will have a greater chance to address their disease and recover." She noted the success that the state's Recovery Courts (formerly known as drug courts) have had in getting people with a

drug addiction into treatment, resulting in reuniting them with their families and returning them to gainful employment.

The Honorable Judge Cheryl Moss of Nevada, who created the nation's first gambling court, virtually testified before the committee and expressed that given the size of New Jersey's population and widespread access to gambling, the proposed court could expect between 30-40 cases per year. She stressed that those suffering from gambling-related disorders are "human beings" who deserve compassion.

"These types of people don't belong in incarceration," Moss said. "What they do need is treatment, they need help to rehabilitate so they don't go back to a life of crime. If they go to prison, they don't get help for their gambling problem. Moss cited the cost of imprisoning nonviolent offenders in New Jersey, which can be as much as \$61,000 per inmate per year.

Dan Trolaro, of EPIC Risk Management, recounted his descent into gambling addiction, which ended in his being arrested for embezzlement. That arrest transformed his life. After his release from prison, he began telling his story. As a person in recovery from gambling addiction, he spoke with first-hand knowledge of the issues and what would be a better course for both the individual and society. He noted that in prison, inmates gamble every day.

"Perhaps there's a better way instead of warehousing addiction to help work with a person who's gone through traumatic events and experiences to say, 'Hey, listen, let's take a look at this. Let's do a full analysis. Let's get the treatment you deserve. Let's put you on a program and stay the course.'"

Andrea Johnson, the Legislative Liaison for the Administrative Office of the Courts, said the AOC is not opposed to the goal of the bill but said the Judiciary lacks data on the link between criminal behavior and gambling.

### **Gambling and Education**

A prevention proposal, A-5308, would require the New Jersey Student Learning Standards in Comprehensive Health & Physical Education to incorporate awareness about the risks gambling poses to youth. The measure would add gambling awareness education to other at-risk behaviors such as substance use and bullying.

Youth gambling and gaming is a growing concern. CCGNJ's testimony on the bill noted that the combination of voluminous advertising, with gambling being portrayed as glamorous, access to gambling sites and teenagers' comfort with technology create a perfect storm for youth to develop a gambling problem. In its support of the legislation, the CCGNJ invoked the adage that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure", a truism that certainly applies to youth gambling.

The Council has developed a prevention program of its own to address adolescent at-risk behavior, including youth gambling. The Cognitive Perspective Restructuring Program (CPR) instills confidence and guides adolescents in how to map out a life plan. The program was launched to a group of at-risk students in West Orange High School and will also begin sessions at schools in Trenton. (see related story on CPR in this edition).

Higher education is also facing a threat from the mounting influence of gambling. The Legislature introduced A-5225, to prevent the state's public universities and colleges from forming partnerships with gambling companies, which has occurred at a number of colleges outside New Jersey. These schools, which include Michigan State, Louisiana State and Syracuse, partnered with sports betting companies that give companies a presence on campus and the opportunity to entice students, many below the legal age, to bet.

CCGNJ's testimony labeled these partnerships Faustian bargains in which the colleges accept money from sports betting companies in exchange for exposing their undergraduates to increased betting risks. Overall, betting at colleges has been increasing, with practices that include fraternities commonly having bookies available to take bets from students.

## Curbing gambling advertising

The March 20th ATGAC session also received testimony from CCGNJ on a resolution, AR-168, which would restrict the amount of gambling advertising. Assemblyman Caputo, a prime sponsor of the resolution, said the barrage of betting advertising is “way over the top” as gambling companies “thirst for revenue and market share.”

CCGNJ has consistently called for curbing the volume of advertising and castigated misleading promotions about risk-free betting.



New Jersey Casino Control Commission’s (CCC) Resolution acknowledging March as Problem Gambling Awareness Month, was presented to CCGNJ on March 8, 2023. Pictured are (from left) CCC Commissioner Joyce Mollineaux, CCC Chairman James Plousis, Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey Executive Director Felicia Grondin, CCC Vice Chair Alisa Cooper, Casino Association of New Jersey President Mark Giannantonio.

## CCGNJ Observes PGAM with Statewide Presentations, Webinar Series

The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey’s (CCGNJ) March calendar teemed with events and presentations throughout the observance of Problem Gambling Awareness Month (PGAM). During the month-long observance, CCGNJ met with legislators, made presentations at schools and colleges, senior centers, and health fairs and more, conducted trainings for gambling industry staff, and presented a series of five webinars. Official recognition of the March observance of PGAM came in two forms: a Proclamation from the Governor and a resolution adopted by the New Jersey Casino Control Commission, both of which were presented to CCGNJ Executive Director Felicia Grondin.

PGAM events opened with Ms. Grondin and CCGNJ Prevention & Communications Specialist, Daniel Meara, representing the Council with a week-long presence at the State House in Trenton. The residency at the Capital building provided an opportunity for CCGNJ to discuss the growing impact of gambling on the state with Legislative members. In recent years the State House presence has become a PGAM tradition for the Council and is critical in view of the gambling culture in the state.

Five consecutive Fridays in March featured CCGNJ webinars, each exploring a different aspect of gambling. The webinars covered issues including personality and addiction, gambling addiction and the brain, a voices of recovery panel, the history and growth of gambling in the state, and a moving personal story. Pre- and post-webinar quizzes were given to attendees to assess the effectiveness of the presentations. All five videos can be viewed at the CCGNJ's website via the following link: [PGAM Webinars](#).

During PGAM, CCGNJ staff redoubled the public awareness effort it performs year-round with presentations tailored to specific demographic groups. For people employed in the gambling field, CCGNJ staff gave trainings covering responsible gaming practices and related information.

The legislation heard at the Assembly Committee session gave this year's PGAM impetus that could carry beyond March. The fact that the committee charged with gambling oversight passed four gambling measures in a single session may be an indication that the state has begun to recognize that problem gambling now requires year-round awareness.



Attorney General Mathew Platkin (center) is joined by Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey Executive Director Felicia Grondin and attorney Lloyd Levenson at the East Coast Gaming Congress in Atlantic City, where the state's new responsible gaming initiative was announced.

## **AG introduces robust RG standards, establishes RG Coordinator Post**

Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin and Division of Gaming Enforcement (DGE) Director David Rebeck announced several new initiatives to bolster the office's existing responsible gaming efforts: establishing a new position dedicated to responsible gaming, setting new advertising standards for operators, and simplifying access to self-exclusion for players struggling with a gambling disorder.

Attorney General Platkin made the announcement on April 21 as he delivered the keynote speech before regulators and industry representatives at the East Coast Gaming Congress held in Atlantic City.

These latest efforts build on DGE's groundbreaking Responsible Gaming Initiative announced in early February, which utilizes data on players' gaming activity to determine if they might be suffering from a gambling disorder and offers them help.

“As New Jersey’s gaming and sports wagering industries continue to grow and mature, so do our obligations to assist patrons who are at risk for problem gambling,” said Attorney General Platkin. “By establishing a dedicated, senior level position within the Division of Gaming Enforcement to focus on responsible gaming, we are sending a clear message that we take this work seriously – and so should the industry. Our other initiatives announced today will help protect consumers and make it easier for individuals to access the help they need when their gaming behavior becomes problematic.”

“We have seen tremendous growth in sports wagering and online gaming in New Jersey,” said DGE Director David Rebeck. “In the face of that boom, we have a duty to protect the public from advertising that could be misleading or harmful. And for those in the grip of gambling addiction, we need to offer as many exit ramps from their condition as possible.”

DGE will also establish a new position, the Responsible Gaming Coordinator, who will handle all issues impacting responsible gaming and ensure progress on existing initiatives. The Coordinator, which is to be filled by an experienced attorney, will report directly to the DGE Director and identify gaps and problems before engaging with stakeholders to develop recommendations to advance the state’s responsible gaming work.

The announcement comes as online and sports gambling continue to gain popularity in New Jersey. DGE’s March 2023 gaming revenue results showed that for that month, online gaming win reported by casinos and their partners was \$165.7 million, a rise of 17.8 percent compared to \$140.7 million for March 2022. Sports wagering gross revenue reported by casinos, racetracks, and their partners was \$93 million for March 2023, a 40.1 percent increase compared to last March.

In addition, the initiatives announced include new online and sports gambling advertising standards, which make it clear that operators must make responsible gaming a priority through the following:

- displaying prominently New Jersey’s 1-800-GAMBLER Helpline in their ads;
- ending dubious promises of “guaranteed wins” or “risk-free” bets if the patron will not be fully compensated for the loss of their funds;
- making wagering requirements clear in their terms and conditions;
- limiting advertising in locations where it would entice those under 21 years of age to play; and
- providing the public with the ability to swiftly opt out of direct advertising.

Felicia Grondin, executive director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, expressed the Council’s appreciation for the new initiative. “The increase of online gambling opportunities, access and the amount of advertising has put many more people in New Jersey at risk for problem gambling. These measures will help enforce and expand responsible gaming, and will be reinforced with the establishment of a Responsible Gaming Coordinator. The standards outlined today reflect the Attorney General and DGE’s resolve to promote responsible play and make help available to those faced with a gambling addiction. We are grateful for the State of New Jersey’s efforts to focus on problem gambling and promote responsible gambling practices; they are needed now more than ever.”

New Jersey’s existing voluntary self-exclusion program allows players to voluntarily prohibit themselves from accessing casinos’ gaming floors through in person appointments with specially trained DGE staff, or from n gaming through DGE’s online application. Now DGE will be making access to self-exclusion much easier. Attorney General Platkin announced that DGE will create a video-conference option to make it easier for players to escape from problem gambling without having to leave their homes.

Also, ahead of the busy summer season, DGE will establish a 24/7 hotline dedicated to assisting people with questions about the self-exclusion program and the process for signing up.

The recent announcements follow the introduction, at the beginning of this year, of DGE’s Responsible Gaming Initiative to monitor player behavior for red flags indicative of a gambling disorder. Player data already captured by operators began being used to

uncover potential problem gambling patterns, such as an individual's gambling time increasing from week to week or a player wagering until they have less than one dollar in their accounts.

Gamblers exhibiting warning signs are now approached using various circumstance-dependent interventions, including progressive responses if the indications of a potential disorder keep recurring after attempts are made to assist. At level one, a patron receives automated outreach regarding responsible gaming resources. If the warning signals continue, the patron is shown a video tutorial explaining responsible gaming and available resources before being allowed to continue gambling. At the third level, the operator's responsible gaming lead or team will directly contact and address the issue with the patron.

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## CCGNJ Launches CPR Program to Address Youth At-risk Behavior



The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) anticipated the New Jersey Legislature's focus on educating kids about youth gambling with the creation of a new program to educate students about gambling risks, as well as other at-risk behaviors. Approximately a month after CCGNJ launched its Cognitive Perspective Restructuring Program, state lawmakers responded to a spike in underage betting with the introduction of A-5308, which would require that gambling awareness be incorporated into the New Jersey Student Learning Standards in Comprehensive Health & Physical Education.

CCGNJ Executive Director Felicia Grondin said the CPR Program is in keeping with education and awareness efforts the Council has delivered to schools throughout the State over the last 40 years. "The CPR Program continues CCGNJ's commitment to prevent at-risk behaviors that can threaten the future of New Jersey youth, since it fosters self-awareness in students to assist in making positive choices that can be the foundation of a fulfilling life," she said. She noted that the CPR Program also fits very well with May's observance of Mental Health Awareness Month.

The CPR Program's inaugural class was presented by CCGNJ Prevention and Treatment Administrator Luis Del Orbe (**pictured**) on March 10 at West Orange High School and will continue for the next nine weeks. Classes have also begun in the Trenton school system. While the setting for the CPR Program is schools, it is also designed to help students beyond the classroom in an effort to set them on a life-long path of self-discovery and success. In addition to benefiting students, the program will help parents, teachers and community stakeholders develop protective factors and reverse/reduce risk factors that can lead adolescents into addiction and related harmful actions. The CPR Program recognizes that parental/guardian involvement is vital to a child's upbringing and therefore requires their participation.

Indications of increased youth betting are mounting. CCGNJ is documenting this trend with a project CCGNJ has undertaken with Seton Hall University's Market Research Center. Students at Seton have surveyed people ages 16-25 and preliminary findings show 79 percent of respondents say they began gambling before they were 21.

Anyone interested in learned more about the CPR program should contact Luis Del Orbe at 973-336-7075 or [luis@800gambler.org](mailto:luis@800gambler.org), or Miquia Del Valle at [miquia@800gambler.org](mailto:miquia@800gambler.org).

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## Book a Presentation or Responsible Gambling Training Session

Would you like for the CCGNJ to visit your facility or group to discuss gambling and related disorders? Are you an industry leader who would like your employees to receive Responsible Gambling Training? Presentations and trainings 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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