

The Council Connection

Council on Compulsive Gambling of NJ
800-GAMBLER®

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A Message from the Executive Director

Problem Gambling: Who is Responsible and What is the Vital Missing Message?



Over the last four decades, many changes have taken place in the world of gambling. When I grew up, Nevada was the place to go to gamble, followed by Atlantic City. Throngs of visitors would pay a visit to those select casinos to place a wager, see famous performers, eat delicious and inexpensive food, and hope that they might get lucky with the pull of a slot handle or roll of the dice. In the years to follow, other states recognized the revenue generating benefits of gambling and today most states have made it legal.

In 2013 New Jersey legalized online gambling, followed by sports betting in 2018; and, like casino gambling, many other states followed suit. People were now able to place wagers from their computers in the comfort of their home or via mobile phones. State legislatures and governments supported legalization, drawn by the prospect of additional tax revenue.

Gambling companies took advantage of this new market and created an array of new

gambling platforms promoted through aggressive advertising campaigns, and millions of people responded hoping for a big win. A Barrons Magazine report illustrated the tremendous volume of advertising: in 2020 gambling television ads totaled \$292 million. In 2021, the amount totaled \$725 million, nearly 2 ½ times more than the prior year. Unfortunately, these repetitive messages increase the likelihood of viewers to potentially develop a gambling problem and can be an accelerator for individuals to relapse and break their gambling sobriety.

Given the explosion of gambling opportunities and excessive advertising, more and more individuals are struggling with gambling problems, affecting occupations, families, and lives. According to the National Council on Problem Gambling, 1 percent of the general US adult (18+) population, over 2 million people, experience a gambling disorder every year; another 4-6 million (2-3 percent) are considered to have mild or moderate gambling problems. A study performed by New Jersey's Rutgers University identified that, in New Jersey, 6.3 percent are dealing with this addiction. No doubt the higher percentage in New Jersey correlates to the abundance of gambling opportunities and advertising. While this

information is helpful, it is challenging to specifically identify just how many people are affected by problem gambling, since most victims are too ashamed to seek help and since, unlike drugs or alcohol, it is a “hidden addiction” which is only recognized when people have lost their jobs, bank accounts and relationships.

Enter “Responsible Gaming” (RG) programs created to establish and maintain a safe environment to help recreational bettors from wagering more than they can afford and to minimize the risk of developing a gambling addiction. While RG programs may provide helpful guidelines, their effectiveness is questionable as the number of problem gamblers continues to grow—helpline calls at 800-GAMBLER in New Jersey increased by over 288 percent since sports betting was legalized in 2018—and subsequent lawsuits have been filed by patrons claiming operators contributed to their gambling addiction. But who is responsible to help individuals avoid a gambling problem and what is missing from current RG efforts? That is to say, “what is the elephant in the room”?

Operators are Responsible

Operators glamorize gambling and do not mention its addictive nature, outside of including an 800 number to call if one suspects they have a gambling problem, which is a statutory requirement in New Jersey. The ads encourage people to gamble by delivering enticing offers and a “you can’t lose” message with repetition and frequency. While it is commendable that several operators established their own RG programs, “bettor beware” messages are subtle, with no reference made to the “dark side” of gambling and the profound consequences of this addiction.

It is challenging, however, to institute and enforce marketing restrictions upon operators since our current environment increasingly supports commercial free speech and since related policies may negatively affect their bottom line.

Legislators and Public Officials are Responsible

Lawmakers and government officials are responsible, but it appears that the reliance on related tax revenue supersedes public interest. According to a 2021 Survey of Publicly Funded Problem Gambling Services in the United States New Jersey ranks number three in the country for gross gaming revenue but drops to number 19 of the 42 states that allocate funds to problem gambling treatment and prevention. In 2021, New Jersey collected over \$486 million in taxes from its casinos, reflecting \$52 collected for each resident, yet a mere 34 cents, under 1 percent, has been dedicated to problem gambling. Since sports book was legalized in New Jersey in 2018, not one penny of related tax revenue has been allocated to The Council of Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, while the federal government has yet to identify any funding for treatment and prevention and continues to ignore the need.

Recently, the NJ Attorney General and Division of Gaming Enforcement established Gaming Advertising Best Practices for NJ operators, which is a step in the right direction. But there must be a greater awareness about the serious destruction problem gambling can cause and the toll it takes on our society.

Patrons are Responsible

Lastly, Patrons are responsible for the amount of time spent gambling and the wagers they elect to place. Patrons cannot rely on operators to cover their losses or governments to entirely protect them from gambling-related harm and must take responsibility for their gambling play, which is the intent of RG standards.

The Missing Message

While state problem gambling councils, like the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, are diligent to educate citizens about the addictive nature of gambling, it is a mammoth effort for non-profit organizations with extremely limited funds to attempt to compete with multi-million-dollar operator campaigns encouraging people to gamble. And while RG efforts are helpful, I have yet to see any communication focusing on the severity of gambling addiction if RG parameters are not followed. **How effective can a “bettor beware” message be without knowing what we should beware of and why we**

should avoid it?

Most don't see the elderly woman working for minimum wage because she lost her \$400,000 nest egg playing online to escape from the pain of losing her husband, the father who wagered the entirety of his son's college fund he painstakingly saved for years, or the woman who was afraid to tell her abusive husband she lost all of their savings. These are only a few scenarios out of thousands of stories that are occurring every day. If we sincerely want to prevent problem gambling it is critical to educate the public about its severity, which usually leads to devastating, life altering circumstances.

Greater Public Awareness about Gambling Harm is Long Overdue

Greater awareness can be achieved via government sponsored public service announcements (PSAs), like those for drug addiction, and by posting warning labels, similar to the Surgeon General's warning on tobacco products, at brick-and-mortar casinos and online gambling sites. It is also important to incorporate gambling prevention/addiction education in school curriculums for our young people, to establish an awareness of related harms at an early age. Efforts like these would reach more people and help to effectively address this growing addiction in our country. And for those who develop a gambling disorder, more funding is desperately needed for treatment.

Every year millions of people experience negative, life altering events because of a gambling problem, but even more alarming is that it is life threatening: approximately 20 percent of disordered gamblers contemplate suicide—the highest rate among all addictions. No doubt this statistic reflects the need to prioritize the public good and for all of us to take responsibility to prevent problem gambling beyond current RG messages. Such efforts will fall short if we don't address the “Elephant in the Room”—the severe detrimental consequences of this disorder experienced by unsuspecting bettors every year.

Felicia Grondin, MPA
Executive Director

This article was published in "Global Gaming Business Magazine" during September's recognition of Responsible Gaming Education Month.

Prevalence Study Finds State's Rate of Problem Gambling Is Three Times the National Average

New Jersey Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin recently announced the release of a gambling prevalence study finding New Jersey's rate of problem gambling is three times the national average. The report, a follow-up to a 2017 study and funded by the Division of Gaming Enforcement (DGE), was prepared by a team of researchers led by Dr. Lia Nower, from the Rutgers University School of Social Work, Center for Gambling Studies. The report is entitled “The Prevalence of Online and Land-Based Gambling in New Jersey.”

Attorney General Platkin said, “As New Jersey's gaming industry continues to grow, we have an obligation to help those suffering from problem gaming and gambling addiction issues. Through the release of this report, we are taking a comprehensive look at the pervasiveness of gambling across the state, and with it, able to better identify challenges for our most vulnerable populations and design programs and initiatives to assist them.”

The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) Executive Director, Felicia Grondin, in an interview about the study, noted what distinguishes disordered gambling from other addictions: ““It's a hidden addiction,” she said. “That's the problem. Our 800-GAMBLER Helpline has been extremely busy over the last number of years. Since 2016, we have had a 225% increase in our helpline calls. So people are struggling,”

The report, the first undertaken since the legalization of sports wagering in the state, was released during September's observance of Responsible Gaming Education Month

(RGEM). This year's RGEM focused on supporting research efforts that can help inform policies, procedures, and best practices for minimizing problem gambling risks.

"We are dedicated to helping players play responsibly," said David Rebeck, director of the DGE. "For some people, this means setting limits to keep the experience enjoyable and social. For others who are struggling with problem gambling, it may mean signing up for self-exclusion or seeking out additional resources. We encourage both players and operators to maintain a balanced perspective on gambling."

The survey questions asked about participation in activities involving consideration, chance, and a prize. Respondents were also asked about the following 15 activities: lottery, instant scratch-off tickets, high-risk stocks, gaming machines such as slots or video poker, games of skill, live casino table games, sports wagering, season fantasy sports, bingo, cryptocurrency trading, live poker or poker tournaments, daily fantasy sports, horse race track or off track, esports wagering, and keno.

Some of the findings of the report include:

- The overall rate of high-risk problem gambling decreased from 6.3% to 5.6%. Low/moderate-risk gambling also decreased from about 15% to about 13%.
- New Jersey's rate of problem gambling is about three times the national average, similar to the findings from the 2017 report.
- Participation in sports wagering increased from about 15% to a little more than 19%.
- The proportion of online-only gamblers nearly tripled from about 5% in 2017 to nearly 15%, while the proportion of individuals who gambled at mixed venues (both brick-and-mortar locations and online) nearly doubled from 19% to 36%.
- The proportion of those gambling only at brick-and-mortar casinos dropped from nearly 76% to 49%.
- About 61 percent of residents participated in one or more of the 15 activities in the prior year.
- Individuals identified as "gamblers" participated in an average of 3.5 activities, which is an increase from the 3.0 average reported in the 2017 report.

State law and DGE regulations require all online casino and sportsbooks operators in New Jersey to offer certain responsible gaming controls to patrons. Those controls include deposit limits, which can be daily, weekly, or monthly. Patrons also must have the ability to set loss limits, with the same frequency options of daily, weekly or monthly. Time limits also must be available for patrons seeking to limit the number of hours per day that they spend gambling.

In addition, patrons wanting to step away from gambling completely, for a temporary period or permanently, can sign up to self-exclude from gaming activities. Self-exclusion periods are one-year, five-years, or lifetime. Attorney General Platkin and DGE recently announced new methods for patrons to use the self-exclusion process, including video conferencing. Questions about DGE's self-exclusion process, including ways to sign up, can be directed to 1-833-788-4DGE. Patrons who are interested in self-excluding from wagering on horse racing can find information on the NJRC website.

CCGNJ's Conference on Disordered Gambling: The Council's Services Are More in Need than Ever



The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey's Board of Directors

The CCGNJ conference program included sessions on scientific advances related to brain and addiction, gambling issues affecting minority populations, and whether the excess of gambling advertising can be reined in. The closing session examined the degree to which the gambling industry should foster responsible play.

The conference keynote was delivered by Dr. Kenneth Martz (**pictured at right**), who discussed neuroscience and rewiring the brain in a presentation titled *"The Power of Plasticity: Paving New Neural Pathways for Recovery."* The keynote illustrated how brain chemistry is altered in disordered gamblers, with dopamine and serotonin levels spiking in those individuals. He called these two neurotransmitters the brain's accelerator (dopamine) and brake (serotonin). Dr. Martz illustrated their heightened levels through brain imaging, a technique often used to show such increases in people with substance addiction.



The conference's morning plenary session delved into gambling issues facing the LGBTQ and Latino communities. Two Rutgers University researchers, Jackie F. Stanmyre and Ryan DiMeglio, presented data illustrating that minority populations such as these two groups commonly have a higher incidence of mental health and addiction. Their presentation also noted that many people of Latino heritage have significant exposure to betting as part of their culture.

Fordham University Professor of Law and Ethics Mark Conrad opened the afternoon sessions with an overview of how to limit gambling advertising in an age of relaxed restrictions on commercial free speech. Professor Conrad, director of the Sports Business Initiative at Fordham's Gabelli School of Business, noted how widespread sports gambling marketing has become and how it impacts viewers. He said regulators and lawmakers can step in if sports advertising contains misleading or deceptive messaging. As for curtailing the volume of advertising, however, he said that likely rests in the hands of gambling industry.

The conference concluded with a dialogue about what gambling industry operators need to do to foster a robust responsible gambling environment, and the role of regulators in securing such an environment. Dan Trolaro, Epic Risk Management's vice president of Prevention-US, and William Pascrell, III, a partner at Princeton Public Affairs, offered different viewpoints on these issues, while both recognized the tremendous growth of gambling in the state as well as the tax revenue it has generated. They agreed that the infusion of revenue virtually assures gambling will continue to be embraced by most lawmakers.

The two discussed responsible gambling and the degree to which it can prevent and address problem gambling. New Jersey's Division of Gaming Enforcement, has adopted initiatives including the use of data to identify gamblers who may be developing a gambling problem. The division also created the position of Responsible Gaming Coordinator, naming Jamie McKelvey, Esq., to the post.

This closing session included a comment from an audience member drawing a comparison between the increase in gambling access and the opiate crisis. She noted the opiate crisis was spurred by misleading information about the addictive nature of the drug that produced a surge in access to strong pain medications. The gambling culture that has taken root stems largely from the barrage of advertising glamorizing betting and the ease of access to gambling via online and sports betting. Mr. Pascrell rejected the comparison between the opiate crisis and gambling as gambling does not claim lives anything like drug overdoses do.

Mr. Trolaro, a recovering problem gambler turned advocate, said there is a great deal of misunderstanding and judgement about gambling addiction. He recounted his experience with betting, and recalled a court officer saying that prior to learning the details of problem gambling, he did not remotely regard gambling to be an addiction. Rather, the officer had considered problem gamblers simply as people being "greedy."

The officer's attitude reflects the stigma problem gamblers face. With more people developing a gambling problem amid today's gambling culture, attitudes may begin to shift about gambling being an addiction, much as the opiate crisis helped broaden understanding about drug addiction being a brain disorder. As the range of conference presentations demonstrated, CCGNJ will continue to do everything it can to advance understanding about gambling addiction and connect problem gamblers with the help they need.

CCGNJ Welcomes Two Staff To Bolster Treatment Workforce



The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) is pleased to welcome two new staff members, Leonard Brazer and Brenda Pateman (**pictured**), who will jointly work to strengthen New Jersey's gambling addiction treatment network, ensuring treatment providers are kept abreast of developments in the field, and assisting the providers with any questions or issues related to their credentials and/or reporting.

Mr. Brazer, who has had a long counseling career treating problem gambling and other issues, is the Council's new Treatment Coordinator. He will collect contract documents for sub-contracted CCGNJ treatment providers and will provide them with New Jersey Gambling Evaluation and Reporting System (NJ GEARS) training. He will also work with treatment providers on their performance of clinical assessments, development of treatment plans, referrals for continued clinical care and/ or related treatment issues.

Like Mr. Brazer, Ms. Pateman has an extensive background addressing problem gambling, including having worked for CCGNJ in several capacities. She recently rejoined the Council as its Treatment and Network Evaluator and will make site visits to treatment providers sub-contracted with CCGNJ. Ms. Pateman will also represent CCGNJ on task forces, committees, and coalitions to advocate on CCGNJ's behalf, and provide information to these groups about CCGNJ's services and the importance of recognizing problem and disordered gambling as a treatable illness.

CCGNJ Executive Director Felicia Grondin remarked on the Council's good fortune in having Mr. Brazer and Ms. Pateman join its' team. "Their expertise and experience are certainly impressive and will be a great asset to current treatment providers and individuals who may be interested in joining our network to respond to the state's growing need for gambling treatment," she said. A new prevalence study found that the state's rate of problem gambling is significantly higher than the national average: nearly 6 percent here compared to between 1-2 percent nationally. These findings, combined with the surge in calls to the 800-GAMBLER Helpline, indicate that CCGNJ's services are needed now more than ever.

For Information about joining the CCGNJ treatment provider network, please go to [Become a CCGNJ Treatment Provider | 800-Gambler | 800gambler.org](#)

Council Fills Full-time Position to Undertake CPR Program Outreach

has promoted Miquia Delvalle to full-time Education Specialist to foster awareness about the Council's Cognitive Perspective Restructuring (CPR) Program for at-risk youth. Prior to her promotion, Ms. Del Valle had been working at the Council in a part-time capacity, assisting Luis Del Orbe, Prevention & Treatment Administrator, who created the CPR Program. CPR is a prevention program that enables youth to build self-awareness and develop good decision-making and resilience.

Ms. Delvalle (**pictured to the left of Amie Jones of the Juvenile Justice Commission**) is charged with outreach to bring the CPR Program to as many youth as possible. In her outreach, she targets non-profits, after-school programs, educational facilities, boards of education, inpatient facilities for youth, and faith-based programs.



Ms. Delvalle also presents the CPR program to classes with Mr. Del Orbe, and soon with other CCGNJ staff. The CPR program is offered in 10 sessions to youth in grades three through twelve. In those classes, the importance of each decision is stressed by sharing a personal story showing how a single misstep can result in a long and difficult path.

The CPR Program was presented earlier this year in Paterson and at Sprout University in Trenton. Sprout's Headmaster Danielle Miller-Winrow lauded the program for its tremendous benefits to the school's students: "The Council on Compulsive Gambling (of New Jersey's) CPR Program has been a standard of excellence and has had a significant impact on the lives of my students by supplying them with educational resources and comprehensive preventative measures." With Ms. Delvalle's outreach, many more New Jersey youth will derive the benefits of the CCGNJ's CPR program.

To learn more about the CPR Program, contact Ms. Delvalle at miquia@800gambler.org or 609-588-5515, ext. 110.

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 to schedule a date.



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