

The Council Connection

THE COUNCIL ON COMPULSIVE GAMBLING OF NJ
800-GAMBLER®

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Problem Gambling in New Jersey: A Growing Public Health Concern

The upcoming NFL championship is known as the Big Game, but each year since 2018 - the year sports betting was legalized - it has increasingly become the big gamble. This year, as has been the case each of the past six years, a new betting record will be set, with wagering totals expected to reach a staggering \$25 billion. Over the past half decade, gambling's explosive growth has remade the betting landscape. While legalized sports gambling and online betting have produced a revenue bonanza for the state, it has come at a mostly overlooked cost: a surge in problem gambling with widespread fallout.



Problem gambling is an insidious and growing public health concern that affects not only individuals with a gambling disorder but their families, and communities. Problem gambling is now at epidemic levels, crossing economic boundaries and impacting all races. While the extent of this issue may be hidden, the Council's 800 GAMBLER-Helpline has recorded a dramatic 277 percent spike in calls since 2018.

The gambling tide has swept across much of the country, but New Jersey is among the worst-impacted states of this shadow epidemic; it has a problem gambling rate three times the national average, according to findings by Rutgers University. Advocates have noted elements problem gambling has in common with the opiate crisis: misleading marketing downplaying the potential harm, and ease of access.

In response to this crisis and as part of our Problem Gambling Awareness Month observance in March, the Council will present a symposium: **"The Hidden Epidemic: A Public Health Concern."** The free, in-person event will take place on March 13 from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Westminister Presbyterian Church, 1140 Greenwood Ave., Trenton, N.J. 08609. To be part of this important conversation, please register at: [Hidden Epidemic Symposium](#)

Among the disturbing trends of the gambling culture that has taken hold in New Jersey is widespread youth and young adult betting. The 800-GAMBLER Helpline for the first time

received a majority of calls from those 34 and younger. We have conducted several research projects exploring this issue, including a recent study of family influence on children's attitudes about gambling (for the Executive Summary of this study, go to: [Family Influence Study](#))

Widening concern about gambling has spurred action by lawmakers at both the state and federal level. The U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee convened a sports gambling hearing on December 17 to determine whether a federal response is warranted. One issue Congress or federal regulators might address is the avalanche of gambling ads, many of which convey deceptive messages about risk and glamorize betting. Many of these ads contain imagery designed to appeal to youth.

This crisis cries out for wide-ranging awareness efforts to counter the industry's marketing and betting inducements. The Council has advocated for public service announcements detailing gambling's potential for addiction and warning labels about gambling akin to the Surgeon General's warning about tobacco products. State Senator John McKeon, a staunch ally in efforts to rein in industry excesses, has introduced a bill that would require such warnings on all sport betting sites.

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Awareness initiatives to reduce smoking did not produce results overnight, but in the long run proved a tremendous public health success, saving countless lives. Likewise, changing minds and attitudes about gambling's dark side will be gradual. Given the surge in problem gambling, we face an urgent need to bring this long-hidden issue into the light; the health of a growing number of New Jerseyans depends on it.

As we look ahead to this Sunday's Big Game, we want to remind people to enjoy the game responsibly. With the rise of online betting, it is easier than ever to get caught up in the excitement. Therefore, it is essential to set a limit and adhere to it, know the risks, and seek help if needed. Our 800-GAMBLER Helpline is here to support those struggling with problem gambling, and we encourage everyone to prioritize responsible gambling practices.

Luis Del Orbe, MPA, CSW *(pictured above)*
Interim Executive Director

DHS Awards Contracts to Treat Individuals Suffering From Gambling Disorder Compounded by Co-occurrence

The New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) recently announced \$720,000 in state-funded contracts have been awarded to expand access to treatment and services to individuals with gambling disorders who are also experiencing mental health issues and/or substance use disorder.

The department awarded contracts of \$120,000 each to the following organizations: Legacy Treatment Services in Atlantic County, Legacy Treatment Services in Burlington County, Legacy Treatment Services in Camden County, Integrity Inc. in Essex County, Monmouth Medical Center in Monmouth County and Eva's Village, Inc. in Passaic County.

"More than 90 percent of individuals with gambling disorders have a co-occurring behavioral health need, and the impact of these challenges affects families, workplaces, and our communities," said DHS Commissioner Sarah Adelman. "Through these provider partnerships we will widen the availability of mental health and substance use disorder providers in the state who also have the expertise to identify and treat gambling disorders."

Providers will use the funds to hire at minimum one full-time gambling disorder clinician who will provide treatment and case management service to individuals with a gambling disorder.

Providers will screen, assess, educate, and treat individuals with a gambling disorder.

The aforementioned gambling disorder specific services will be provided in addition to the substance use disorder and/or mental health treatment services already offered by these providers.

“This is about working more efficiently to reach people struggling with addiction. By integrating gambling disorder services, we hope to bring co-occurring gambling disorder into the mental health and substance use disorder treatment network, so more people can get the services they need to support their recovery,” said DHS Deputy Commissioner Valerie Mielke.

The clinician will work with individuals to assist with issues that often occur concurrently with gambling disorders, such as financial challenges, broken relationships, legal issues, and need for social services. More specifically, the clinician will:

- Provide a full gambling assessment for individuals identified as at risk for a gambling disorder.
- Include gambling specific treatment in clients’ care plan when a gambling disorder has been identified.
- Provide psycho-education on problem gambling to all participants in the treatment program.
- Provide treatment of gambling disorders through individual, group therapy, and/or family therapy for those with an identified gambling disorder or individuals whose behaviors indicate that they are at risk of a gambling disorder.
- Link individuals with recovery support activities such as Gamblers Anonymous Meetings, relaxation techniques, stress reduction, finance, budgeting, SMART recovery, and peer recovery services.
- Support and resources to individuals in need of gambling disorder services, so they can rebuild their lives,” said Assistant Commissioner Renee Burawski, who oversees Human Services’ Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Anyone struggling with gambling disorder is encouraged to call or text 1-800-GAMBLER, a confidential 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week help line.

Six CCGNJ Staff Earn Gambling Recovery Certification



A cohort of Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) staff recently completed an eight-hour training to become certified as International Gambling Recovery Specialists, IGRS. This certification equips the staff to better assist those experiencing a gambling problem. The six are Miquia Delvalle, Joe Kane, Daniel Meara, Christine Paladino, Jeanne Swain and Felicia Watson

The staff took part in four two-hour training sessions supervised by Jody Bechtold (*pictured*), a widely respected clinician and CEO of the Pittsburgh-based The Better Institute. The eight hours of supervision explored harm reduction vs gambling abstinence, financial issues, and gender stereotypes related to finances, among other

topics. Ms. Bechtold presented a case study to illustrate the challenges a couple faces when a husband who had handled his family’s finances develops a gambling problem, resulting in his wife having to assume control of their money.

Christina Cook, host of 'The Broke Girl Society' podcast, assisted Ms. Bechtold as a presenter, offering first-hand reflections on problem gambling and sharing an array of resources to foster recovery from a gambling disorder. Her 'The Broke Girls Society' podcast centers on women gamblers; other podcasts with specific audiences include one on veterans gambling and another centering on recovery supports; another, Fold Em, is a clinician-led podcast.

Ms. Cook provided a list of blocking software such as Gamban, Betblocker, Freedom and Bet-breaker. She praised Gam-Fin as an excellent resource for those struggling with the financial fallout from disordered gambling.

The newly minted IGRSs were introduced to Evive, an evidence-based app that allows bettors to closely monitor their gambling to either reduce their wagering or stop altogether. It offers 24/7 assistance and provides an online support community.

The training emphasized lived experience as essential to connecting with problem gamblers; the participating staff have first-hand experience with a gambling problem or have a family member with the disorder. Most take calls on CCGNJ's 800-GAMBLER Helpline.

Ms. Bechtold urged staff to remain vigilant with self-care as they assist problem gamblers with resources. She recommended they use breathing techniques and other forms of meditation, as well as taking breaks when possible to ease the mental health toll that can come of speaking to distraught individuals for hours at a time.

McKeon Wants Partnership between DraftKings and Delta Airlines Grounded

New Jersey State Senator John McKeon issued a statement taking issue with a recently announced partnership between Delta Air Lines and DraftKings, the daily fantasy sports and sports betting company. Delta Air Lines announced the new collaboration with DraftKings at a 2025 Consumer Electronics Show (CES) presentation in Las Vegas on January 8.



"This new partnership between Delta Air Lines and DraftKings is deeply concerning and furthers the proliferation of gambling in everyday life," said Sen. McKeon (*pictured*). "Online gambling and sports betting have become so normalized and pervasive that anyone can now drain their pockets anytime, anywhere, with just a click of a button. As a result, gambling addiction is surging at an alarming rate. Partnerships like these should worry us all."

Currently, federal law prohibits gambling on any US carrier airlines and on any flights that depart from or arrive in the United States.

"While in-flight gambling is currently illegal under federal law, any collaboration between an airline and a gaming company should raise eyebrows. Gambling on planes would severely harm the well-being of passengers, and it should continue to remain out of the skies," added Senator McKeon.

The Senator has been a leading legislative voice confronting the proliferation of gambling and its intrusion into all walks of life. He has introduced a slate of bills to strengthen protections in the gaming industry for children and chronic gamblers and to raise funds from these businesses in part to support gambling addiction treatment and awareness efforts, which include:

S3062: Prohibits casino licensees from using non-wagering casino games to solicit future gaming. With the recent boom in online gambling, it has become increasingly common for casinos to conduct games on mobile applications that provide non-monetary rewards but simulate the act of betting.

S3063: Permits civil liability against casinos and simulcast facilities for reckless indifference or intentional misconduct toward persons self-excluded from gaming activities.

S3064: Increases tax on Internet casino gaming and Internet sports wagering to 30 percent.

S3283: Establishes annual fee for sports wagering licensees; directs funds from such fees to Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey and gambling addiction treatment programs.

S3284: Requires sports wagering advertisements and applications to include warning of risks of gambling.

S3344: Establishes a public awareness campaign concerning risks of gambling and resources available to compulsive gamblers; appropriates \$200,000.

CCGNJ and Rowan ProfAgency Continue Collaboration To Raise Awareness About Problem Gambling



The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) has continued its collaboration with the Rowan ProfAgency, a student-run advertising agency based out of Rowan University. ProAgency offers students the chance to handle "real world" advertising accounts for business and public-service clients. This past semester, the students created a series of video interviews highlighting the gambling experiences

of students and professors on campus.

"We really enjoyed creating the series of reel interviews as it not only allowed myself and the team to express our creativity by filming and editing the videos but contributed to the development of professional and social skills as well," stated Dasha Sapova, Rowan ProfAgency's student contact for CCGNJ. "I feel like these interviews are important to spread the message to people by hearing others' personal experiences and learning something valuable from them. Additionally, the interviews are a great tool for 1-800-GAMBLER as a company to gain some insights into its audience in order to relate to them better. This, in turn, can help to spread the messages more effectively."

With the Spring semester just underway, the Rowan ProfAgency has already begun its next initiative: a social media campaign showcasing the support services that 800-GAMBLER provides. This series of posts titled "Support Highlights", will hold examples including but not limited to Self-Assessment Tools, Youth Gambling Education, Multilingual Resources, and more.

Ms. Sapova commented, "Working on the "Support Highlights" project has been a pleasure. It mostly involves graphic design, which gives a certain freedom for art expression. The challenge here, I'd say, is to carry all of the important information while keeping it both concise and visually appealing. I personally find this series as a whole really important as it highlights the accessibility and versatility of 1-800-GAMBLER's services."

Through this ongoing partnership, CCGNJ and Rowan ProfAgency will continue to work together to reach a broader audience and raise awareness of the resources available for those affected by problem gambling.

The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey is offering a series of free Provider Presentations. The series, which began in January, will continue through May and offers CEUs for clinicians. Registration information for each of these free Zoom presentations will be sent out a week in advance.

Following is the schedule with topics:

- **02/28/2025: Paul Lavella (LPC, LCADC, ACS, ICGC-2) – ‘Adolescence and Gambling’, 11:00 AM (1 hour)**
- **03/07/2025: Salvador Reyes (LCADC, LAC, ICGC1) – ‘Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Gambling Disorders’, 11:00 AM (1 hour)**
- **03/21/2025: Steven Heim (LSW, LCADC, ICGC1) – ‘Cross section of Co-Occurring Substance Abuse Disorders and Gambling Disorders’, 12:00 PM (1 hour)**
- **05/09/2025: Kevin O’Neill (LCSW, LCADC, ICGC2CEAP, DRCC) – ‘Gambling and the Workplace’, 11:00 AM (1 hour)**
- **05/16/2025: Fran Gizzi (LCSW, ICGC2, C-CATODSW) – ‘Gambling and Violence’, 10:00 AM (2 hours)**
- **05/30/2025: Lorraine Barry (Ed.S, LMFT, LCADC, ICGC2 BACC) – ‘Gambling and Trauma’, 11:00 AM (1 hour)**

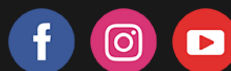
Book a Presentation or Training Session

Would you like for the CCGNJ to visit your 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, Interim Executive Director, at 609-588-5515 (ext. 110) or luis@800gambler.org to schedule a date.

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