



## Gambling: The Silent Addiction Impacting All Ages

By Jennifer Faringer

Problem Gambling Awareness Month in March is a time to ensure our communities understand the risks and impact of this concerning behavior on youth, young adults, older adults and families.

Consider these statistics:

- Approximately 85% of adults in the United States have gambled at least once in their lives and 60% have in the past year. About a third may not gamble at all and many gamble infrequently.

- Approximately 1% or two million adults meet the criteria for a problem gambling disorder, while another 2% to 3% or four to six million would be considered problem gamblers.

- Ten percent of gamblers account for 65% to 80% of all wagers.

Wider access and availability play a significant role in the likelihood of developing an addiction.

For example, in 2022 when mobile sports betting was legalized,

an individual could gamble at any time without leaving home by simply using their mobile device. New York now ranks third in the total amount of dollars wagered in the U.S. with \$1.55 billion collected in taxes.

This comes with a price. Consider the cost:

- Crime (robbery, embezzlement, fraud)
- Business (loss of productivity, unemployment-related employer costs)
- Bankruptcy
- Illness (stress, anxiety, depression)
- Treatment
- Family (divorce, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence)
- Social connection (loss of social capital—employer, family, friends)

While teens and young adults are impacted by problem gambling, so are older adults, a segment of the population that is often overlooked.

The environmental factors for older adults differ from those experienced by youth and young adults. Older adults may be retired, have more time on their hands and may be seeking social interaction. Like so many addictions, gambling starts as a social connector and all too often ends in social isolation with the gambler betting alone.

Seniors may believe gambling is a way to foster a sense of independence. Their gambling activity may be a form of emotional escape. Senior centers and churches sponsor regular trips to casinos, normalizing and celebrating it as an activity without warning the seniors of the potential risks.

### Know the warning signs

- Do you experience mood swings based on winnings and losses?
- Do you neglect other responsibilities to concentrate on gambling activities?
- Do you experience impatience with loved ones because they are interrupting your gambling activities?
- Are you willing to eat less or go without food so that you can gamble?
- Do you gamble with money needed for necessary expenses such as household supplies, groceries, medication, electricity and rent or mortgage?
- Are you spending your retirement funds or thinking about cashing in a life insurance policy for gambling money?
- Do you fantasize about big winnings and believe you will win back all your losses?

If you answered “yes” to any of these warning signs know that help is available.

For more information on problem gambling, visit NCADD-RA’s website at [www.ncadd-ra.org/services/finger-lakes-addiction-resource-center/](http://www.ncadd-ra.org/services/finger-lakes-addiction-resource-center/) to find resources, including the Problem Gambling Services Directory and a flyer with the active Gambler’s Anonymous (GA) Meetings in Monroe County.

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