

FINDING ANSWERS



National Council on Problem Gambling Offers Free Motivational Message Program

The National Council on Problem Gambling is testing a program for gamblers in recovery who would like to receive a free daily motivational message. Those interested in receiving the messages can sign up for the program at <http://motivationalmsg.questionpro.com>.

Participants will first be asked to take a short survey (as this is a trial) and then will receive a message each day for one month, after which they'll be given another short survey.

Please contact the Council at (202) 547-9204 or e-mail at ncpg@ncpgambling.org if you have any questions.

State, Providers Working Together to Create STANDARDS OF CARE FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING TREATMENT



Compared to treatment for alcohol and drug addictions and various mental health disorders, the evolution of problem gambling treatment is in its relative infancy. However, as more information is learned about the biological, social, physical and psychological aspects of problem gambling, the therapies and techniques employed by treatment professionals are being continually refined.

In Minnesota, problem gambling treatment is provided by private practice clinicians and in outpatient and residential treatment programs. The services are paid through funding from the Minnesota Lottery. The payment process is currently being upgraded from a manual billing system to an automated one. As part of that process, the state has begun to review existing standards and found considerable variation in the core methods of problem gambling treatment.

To better define the treatment processes that are most effective and to create a logical basis for reimbursement of services, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) is working closely with problem gambling treatment providers to develop treatment standards. "Our goal is to create consistent minimum treatment standards from the input we receive," says John Anderson, acting co-director of the

adult mental health division for the State of Minnesota. "The new standards will provide the basis for claims the state will reimburse through its provider network."

In addition to creating standards for claim processing purposes, the effort is also aimed at identifying evidence-based, best practices associated with the most effective outcomes. "We've engaged providers and other stakeholders to look at standards and how they should be modified or revised to reflect contemporary effective practices," says John. "We're also looking at what's been happening elsewhere in the country to learn from states who've already gone down this road."

John praised the efforts of providers who have been engaged in the process. "We're in a position to be informed and interested about their issues and concerns. Providers are closest to the action and their knowledge is invaluable, and we'll continue to gather their input as we move along in the process."

To date, DHS staff have met with a number of providers to begin the rather in-depth process. "This will take some time," says John. "It's better that we do this thoughtfully, rather than quickly." Although there is no formal timetable for the process, treatment standards are expected to be developed within a year. By later this summer, DHS staff will be training providers on how to file claims on the new automated billing system.



Cathie Perrault
Executive Director
NPGA

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We thank all our members, donors, volunteers and affiliates who have contributed to our mission.

Become a member today. Visit www.northstarproblemgambling.org to join us.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Moving Forward

As of this writing, the Minnesota Legislature and the Governor's office continue to deliberate over how to solve the state budget crisis – while concerned citizens and interest groups work hard to make sure their preferences are reflected in the final budget. In the coming weeks, we will learn whether Minnesota is on the road to gambling expansion, and whether the state will continue or expand its support of prevention, education and treatment efforts to reduce problem gambling.

As these important discussions take place, the Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance and its constituents continue to focus on helping those who are negatively impacted by gambling. While the vast majority of Minnesotans enjoy gambling in moderation as a recreational outlet, it is estimated that two to five percent of adults are vulnerable to the addictive side of gambling. Problem gambling can affect you, a family member, your neighbor or a co-worker. It's a behavior that crosses racial, social and economic groups.

During the month of March, the Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance participated in National Problem Gambling Awareness Week (NPGAW), an annual educational and outreach campaign sponsored by the National Council on Problem Gambling. The goals of NPGAW are to educate the general public and health care professionals about the warning signs of problem gambling and raise awareness about the help that is available both locally and nationally.

Working in partnership with the Minnesota State Lottery and the Olson advertising agency in Minneapolis, Northstar was able to significantly expand the visibility of the state's problem gambling helpline (800-333-HELP) via billboards and media news releases. The message of NPGAW was covered by radio, print and television news media throughout the state. Our grateful thanks go to the Lottery, Olson, Clear Channel Communications, and CBS for their reduced fees and donated services that allowed us to broadcast the message far and wide. With their help, the message of addiction, treatment, and recovery for problem gamblers and their families was heard by many.

Our next major event is hosting the eighth annual Minnesota Conference on Problem Gambling on May 3 at the Earle Brown Heritage Center in Brooklyn Center, MN. The conference brochure and registration have already been mailed; copies are available at www.NorthstarProblemGambling.org. The conference is open to all, and is especially appropriate for professionals in the areas of health, social work, psychology, marriage and family therapy, and any discipline that interacts with problem gambling. Professionals will receive 6.5 CEUs for participating.

As always, we invite your questions, comments and involvement. Please feel free to share your thoughts by phone (612-424-8595) or email (cp@northstarproblemgambling.org). Thank you for your support.

Cathie Perrault

Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance is a nonprofit agency whose mission is to help those affected by problem gambling in Minnesota. We do this by promoting awareness and understanding of the issue via our website, newsletter, community education programs, sponsorship of the Minnesota State Conference on Problem Gambling, and training of professionals in preventing and treating problem gambling.

This newsletter is funded by a grant from the state of Minnesota

DIGITAL RESOURCES EXIST

for Minnesota's Problem Gamblers



From workplace to home, the digital, online world has had a profound impact on life today. Virtually anything is a click away, including the ability to feed a gambling addiction. Just as accessible as online poker, however, are the resources to treat the obsessive behavior that can occur. In fact, the Internet, presumably due to its often-anonymous nature, is sometimes preferred as a destination for seeking information and help.

Recognizing that one way to reach the state of Minnesota's problem gamblers may be through the online world, the State of Minnesota Problem Gambling Program has created two websites that can help both gamblers and those close to them. **Nojudgment.com** provides referral services and a list of state-approved problem gambling treatment providers. **Treatmentdoeswork.com** offers resources to those who are affected by someone with a gambling problem and emphasizes the effectiveness of treatment.

The program also employs social media to help communicate important information about program gambling. Separate

Facebook pages have been created for young adults (www.facebook.com/beatthebet) and adults (www.facebook.com/nojudgment). Each page provides videos, news, opinion sharing and professional help resources related to problem gambling. All online resources also include mention of the more traditional and confidential 24-hour helpline (800-333-HOPE) that provides information and referral services.

The Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance website – northstarproblemgambling.org – also provides a wealth of resources and links about problem gambling, including a two-minute, 20-question risk test to help determine if you or somebody you know is at risk for problem gambling.

The online resources are considered one more way of achieving the goal of creating and raising awareness about problem gambling. The ability to reach an ever-growing online audience ensures the message is cast to a wider audience, and ultimately increases the chance to reach more people suffering from gambling addiction.

30*

The average number of days a problem gambler spends at an inpatient residential facility

92*

Percentage of compulsive gamblers who have depleted their living expenses

2

The approximate number of required hours in a professional helper's curriculum that deal with addiction

45

Percent of respondents in a 2009 survey who said they'd be ashamed or embarrassed if a family member had a gambling addiction

20

Number of questions on the NPGA website that will help determine if you or someone you know is at risk for problem gambling

1-800-333-HOPE

The phone number for the problem gambling helpline

* Source: Vanguard Patient Profile



The Evolution of PROBLEM GAMBLING TREATMENT



Addictive gambling is often hidden and invisible.

While there's been an increase in the availability of specialty training in addiction as it relates to alcohol and drugs, attention to pathological gambling has not been at the same level.

One of the considerable challenges in effectively treating those with any kind of addiction, whether alcohol, drugs or gambling, is the degree to which professional helpers receive adequate training in addictive illness. At present, only a small amount of the curriculum for psychologists, social workers, physicians, psychiatrists, chaplains and nurses includes addiction.

While there's been an increase in the availability of specialty training in addiction as it relates to alcohol and drugs, attention to pathological gambling has not been at the same level. Part of this is related to the general lack of public awareness about problem gambling, and part relates to the stigma that affects individuals' and family members' willingness to come forward and seek help.

Gambling activity, like the use of alcohol and chemical substances, comes in several forms. On one end of the spectrum, there is the occasional participant whose "use" may be more experimental or social in nature. In other cases, the activity may be more episodic and a function of opportunity or the response to a particular time or event in a person's life. Beyond that, the activity may cross into addictive illness and essentially consume a person's existence, creating considerable limitations in other aspects of life.

For individuals considered to be addicted to gambling, the goal of therapy is to have them abstain from all gambling activities. That is often a difficult message to swallow in a society bombarded by media messages communicating gambling as harmless entertainment.

Not surprisingly, current treatment approaches for gambling addiction essentially mirror those employed for chemical and alcohol abuse. “Effective treatment for problem gambling has a lot to do with matching the individual with the appropriate level of care,” says Mike Schiks, executive director of Project Turnabout/Vanguard, an organization that offers residential treatment programs for those with addictions to alcohol, drugs and gambling.

Depending on the severity of a person’s gambling problem, different approaches are appropriate or practical at each stage. As with the treatment of other addictions, treatment approaches include prevention, counseling, outpatient programs and inpatient programs, as well as aftercare programs.

PREVENTION

Providers who counsel prevention are limited. Their efforts deal predominantly with decisions related to experimentation and infrequent use. Prevention messages tend to be part of the alcohol and drug prevention curriculum.

“Effective treatment for problem gambling has a lot to do with matching the individual with the appropriate level of care”

*-Mike Schiks, Executive Director
Project Turnabout/Vanguard*

COUNSELING

Discussion about gambling behavior may take place in a counseling session under several scenarios. The first is when gambling is discussed in the context of counseling for another purpose, such as relationship, marriage and family therapy, or avocation counseling. The second is when the focus is more directly on the gambling behavior.

Private counselors and therapists often address periodic gambling “abusers” in conjunction with other life problems. Therapy may or may not focus on gambling, and it may be accompanied by the suggestion that an individual curtail or possibly discontinue gambling, particularly as it relates to other problems or mental health issues a person may be experiencing (i.e., depression, anxiety, family and marital issues, etc.). Treatment providers at this level may include a physician, psychologist, psychiatrist or licensed counselor. Compulsive gamblers may be counseled by generalist private practitioners either individually, in couple or family settings, or in group therapy when there are enough clients.

While this type of counseling is often referred to as “outpatient,” it lacks the educational process and support dimensions of an actual outpatient program. Although one-to-one counseling can be effective for various kinds of issues, without a group component it may not be as effective for gamblers who are further along in their addiction.

Outpatient programs. There are outpatient programs that specialize in problem gambling. Such programs employ a treatment plan that is based on a comprehensive assessment, and typically include group therapy (exclusively for problem gamblers), an educational aspect, and a continuing care plan.

Intensive outpatient treatment typically consists of two-to-four days of treatment per week in a program attended by a relatively homogeneous group of fellow compulsive gamblers at various stages of treatment. Treatment consists of a combination of education, therapy and practice with peer support. The length and duration of the program varies depending on the individual’s progress.

The goals of this treatment are to

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Northstar funds its educational outreach and programming through a grant from the State of Minnesota combined with corporate donations, individual contributions (memberships), and modest program fees. During these challenging times for the state budget, it’s more important than ever to gain financial support from professionals and members of the community through private contributions. It’s easy to make a contribution to the Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance online at www.northstarproblemgambling.org/donate. Thank you for your support.





personalize the addiction and the consequences in a manner so that participants understand the stakes of recovery. “It is hard for many compulsive gamblers to accept that they cannot go back to any kind of social or recreational gambling,” says Mike.

Another goal is to instill a sense of hope. “Often, problem gamblers have suffered serious emotional pain and anguish, had difficulties with their family, and sustained extreme financial hardship,” says Mike. “They can feel a sort of “morning after” franticness once they’re honest with themselves, and they need support.”

Beyond that, the process follows the Prochaska and DiClemente’s *Stages of Change Model*, a model of behavior change that assesses an individual’s readiness to act on a new healthier behavior, and provides strategies or processes to guide the individual through the stages of change to action and maintenance. The treatment focus moves on to help problem gamblers understand the need to commit to the recovery process, to learn about themselves, to identify coping skills and develop a sense of ongoing responsible behavior through monitoring their progress. They are also encouraged to commit to the ongoing use of support around them and, ultimately, to create a sense of self worth in knowing that their experience and recovery can benefit others.

“The model of treatment is comprehensive and in many ways more complex than most people understand,” says Mike. “It’s

about engaging people to change their lives.”

Inpatient programs. The most intense program treatment takes place at residential facilities geared for compulsive gamblers. In Minnesota, the Vanguard Compulsive Gambling Treatment Center in Granite Falls is the only residential program in Minnesota and one of only a few in the nation.

Such programs are designed and built exclusively for individuals and families experiencing problems due to gambling. The program includes a full array of services from psychological evaluation to a medical physical.

By the time gamblers require inpatient treatment at a residential facility, they’re at an acute stage and their problems are severe. Some statistics gathered by Vanguard suggest the dire circumstances of gamblers who reach this stage: 99 percent have depleted savings; 77 percent are without health insurance; 88 percent have stopped taking prescribed medications; 84 percent are in mortgage default; and 82 percent have had suicidal thoughts related to their gambling behavior.

One of the first priorities upon patient admission is addressing the overall health of the patient. “When people reach the addiction stage of problem gambling, they often neglect their health,” says Mike. Therefore, the inpatient treatment process begins with a medical physical and a psychological assessment. The assessment is important because many people come in with varying degrees of emotional distress, including some who have received a mental health diagnosis and have stopped taking medication.

“From this process we develop a treatment plan designed to educate the patient about the impact that gambling has had on their life and the lives of others. We then work with them in finding real-time

approaches and solutions to deal with their compulsive gambling. There is also an inpatient/residential peer group that provides a training ground for patients to learn how to reach out to other compulsive/problem gamblers.

CONTINUING CARE

Continuing care programs and services, sometimes called aftercare, generally begin immediately following an inpatient/residential and or intensive outpatient treatment. They often include an array of services based on the individual’s needs. Some services focus directly on helping the problem gambler refrain from gambling. These services often include group therapy meetings led by specialized gambling counselors or individual sessions to help them transition into a “gambling-free lifestyle.” Self-help groups such as Gambler’s Anonymous, which are independent of all treatment and counseling agencies, are available to provide lifetime support at minimal to no cost.

Addictive gambling often impacts all areas of an individual life. Continuing care programs may also include recommendations for counseling on a myriad of issues including marriage, family, emotional, financial, vocational and/or medical care for co-occurring disorders.

SUCCESS OF GAMBLING TREATMENT

Addictive gambling is often hidden and invisible. It can be equally hard to find individuals who have received treatment, and who have gone back to the business of being productive citizens and family members. Anonymity, in fact, is a tradition that’s espoused in most support groups. Yet, one of the most important factors in raising the visibility and effectiveness of problem gambling therapy is to highlight those who have benefited from treatment. Problem gambling is very real, yet so is successful recovery.

Gambling Addiction Still HIGHLY STIGMATIZED

Although the medical model of addiction has made considerable headway with the general public over the years, national and international surveys indicate that the understanding and acceptance of problem gambling addiction lags well behind other addictions. It remains heavily stigmatized and often misunderstood, factors that present obstacles to effectively treating problem gambling on a wide scale.

“In national surveys, people said they would be much more likely to be ashamed of a family member who had a gambling addiction than a mental illness,” says Don Feeney, director of research and planning for the Minnesota State Lottery. “And we think of mental illness as something that is very heavily stigmatized.”

“In national surveys, people said they would be much more likely to be ashamed of a family member who had a gambling addiction than a mental illness”

Nearly half of adults (45%) surveyed in a 2009 Voice of America survey said they would feel ashamed or embarrassed if a family member had a gambling addiction, compared to only 16% who would be ashamed or embarrassed if a family member had a mental illness. Two-thirds of respondents in a June 2008 Ipsos Reid survey answered either “strongly agree” or “agree somewhat” to the statement, “Controlling compulsive gambling is mostly a matter of willpower.” Attitudes and perceptions about problem gambling are relatively consistent across sex, age groups and income brackets.

Awareness about problem gambling services and doubts about their effectiveness were also noted in the surveys.

Only approximately half of adults were aware that compulsive gambling treatment services were available in their community while four in ten disagreed with the statement, “The majority of people who receive treatment for compulsive gambling achieve life-long recovery.”

The implications of these attitudes and perceptions are significant. “If it’s a problem that you’re ashamed of ... that you think can be controlled by just sucking it up and getting over it ... and that if you sent someone to a professional it’s not going to do them any good anyway, you’re not going to encourage someone you know with a gambling problem to seek treatment,” says Don.

The findings provide implications for prevention and awareness. Key messages that need to be communicated include:

- Problem gambling can affect anyone, regardless of age or social/ethnic class
- Problem gamblers aren’t bad people – they are good people with a bad problem
- Problem gambling is preventable
- Treatment is available
- Treatment works

Somewhat surprisingly, public perceptions and the general awareness levels about problem gambling are not much different in Minnesota than they are in the rest of the country (based on national surveys). “One might think that Minnesotans might be a little more aware of issues regarding problem gambling and place less of a stigma on it than other parts of the country simply because we’ve had more and better services available longer than many other states,” says Don. “But that doesn’t seem to be the case. It’s clear we still have a lot of education to do among the Minnesota public.”



8th Annual Minnesota Problem Gambling Conference

May 3, 2011

Earle Brown Heritage Center
Brooklyn Center, MN, 55430

Open to everyone, this conference will provide an overview of issues in the treatment of problem gambling and cover specific therapy techniques. The complete agenda and registration form is available on our website at www.northstarproblemgambling.org. 6.5 CEUs.

The 25th National Conference on Problem Gambling

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

Revolutionary Changes and
Emerging Innovations
Boston, Massachusetts
June 30, 2011 - July 2, 2011

Complete details at
www.ncpgambling.org

Northstar Has Speakers for Civic or Community Groups

Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance can provide a free speaker to your community or civic group on the topic of problem gambling. Customized presentations range from 20 minutes to more than an hour, and will include general information on gambling addiction, resources and how to get help or help someone else. Contact Roger Svendsen for more information at rsvendsen@yahoo.com or 612-247-3006.



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Save These Dates

- Minnesota Problem Gambling Conference
Twin Cities
May 3, 2011
- National Conference on Problem Gambling
Boston, MA
June 30-July 2, 2011



NORTHSTAR PROBLEM GAMBLING ALLIANCE
Spring 2011 • Volume Two

Changing Problem
Gambling Behavior
through:

AWARENESS

EDUCATION

RESEARCH

ADVOCACY



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