

## Groundbreaking NGAGE Survey on Gambling Sheds Light on Behaviors and Attitudes

### Gambling Behavior of Minnesotans Similar to the Nation At Large

In March, the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) released initial findings from the first national comprehensive survey of gambling attitudes and behaviors. *Northern Light* talked with Don Feeny, Northstar board president and lead researcher for NCPG on the project, to learn more about the survey's findings and implications.

**NL:** What's the significance of this survey?

**DF:** For a long time we've had assumptions about gambling behavior in the country but it's only been speculation without having supporting data. This survey gives us hard data that we can use to analyze behavior and attitudes, which will hopefully lead to the development of better programs and policies.

**NL:** What do you consider to be the most significant findings from the survey?

**DF:** First, the survey confirmed that a lot of people gamble, which was not a surprise. We found significant numbers of gamblers in every single state, including Utah and Hawaii, which don't have legalized gambling. We also learned that there are large numbers of people who bet on sports — either traditional or fantasy, and both in many cases. And this

is despite the fact that sports betting was illegal in most parts of the country when the survey was conducted. Given the large number of people betting on sports and the rush that's occurring in many states toward legalization, it reinforces the need to have appropriate safeguards in place to make sure that people participate at a low level of risk. It also points out that in states that don't legalize sports betting there's still a tremendous amount of it going on. So public health campaigns designed to combat excessive sports gambling need to recognize that fact and be aware that all of the problem gambling is not occurring just on legal betting activities, such as lotteries, casinos and race tracks.

We know that sports bettors tend to be younger than other gamblers and are somewhat more likely to be male. We also know that younger people, especially those in the 18-25-year-old range, tend to be more impetuous and prone to riskier behavior. This again suggests that there is likely greater risk involved in sports betting and that we need to have appropriate safeguards and programs in place.

**NL:** How does Minnesota's gambling behavior compare with the rest of the country?

**DF:** For the Minnesota results, what jumped out to me is how much Minnesota

is just like the rest of the country when it comes to gambling. The only real difference is that Minnesotans are more likely to bet on pull-tabs than the rest of the country. This has to do with availability and the state's long-term history of charitable gambling from before casinos and the state lottery were legal. Now, a new generation is discovering pull-tabs. While Minnesotans participate in Bingo in rates similar to the rest of the country, it's similar to pull-tabs in that it's a game experiencing growth — it's no longer a "granny" game.

When it comes to the lottery and horse racing, the participation rate among Minnesotans was identical to the rest of the country, with 56% playing the lottery and 28% playing the horses. Thirty percent of Minnesotans bet on sports compared to 31% of all Americans.

**NL:** Did the survey provide information about participation in eSports?

**DF:** The presence of eSports betting was relatively small. Of the 30% of people who bet on sports, only 11% of those individuals bet on eSports. Although this represents a small segment, it's probably growing. It also tends to attract a young audience so there are the associated risks inherent with the behavior of younger gamblers. [eSports is

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Susan Sheridan Tucker  
Executive Director  
NPGA

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### *A Time for Rejuvenation*

*After a prolonged cold and snowy winter, I'm ready for spring, a time of renewal and hope. Fortunately, there is good cause for rejuvenation at Northstar and in the field of problem gambling.*

*Our strategic plan was finalized and approved in April. This will provide a definitive road map for us to follow in the years to come as we pursue our mission. Thank you to all who provided important feedback in this process.*

*In March, I attended the New Horizons Conference on Responsible Gambling in Vancouver. I came away with a sense of optimism and appreciation for the many who are so passionate about responsible gambling and committed to making sure people receive treatment. I was also impressed by the strong infrastructure Canada has built that provides treatment, creates awareness, encourages responsible gambling and funds research. Because problem gambling is a recognized public health issue in Canada, the government provides significant funding to ensure that those afflicted with gambling disorder get help. In particular, the University of British Columbia supports a department that's dedicated to examining all aspects of problem gambling and promotes innovation and awareness of new trends in the field.*

*Unfortunately, our country's commitment to problem gambling pales in comparison to Canada's—but we're trying to change that. In April, I spent a day on Capitol Hill along with a small but mighty band of other National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) members seeking support for four federal problem gambling initiatives. While the federal government collects \$7 billion annually from gambling tax revenue, not a single penny is allocated toward prevention, treatment or research. We encouraged support of the IMPACT Gambling Act, which would enable the U.S Department of Health & Human Services to address gambling addiction and formalize research and treatment grant programs. NCPG has long advocated that dollars be added to the military budget to mitigate the harm done by 3,000 slot machines on bases off the continental U.S. A bill co-sponsored by Senators Warren and Daines, Preventing and Treating Gambling Disorder in the Military, would better address problem gambling for this population. NCPG is also advocating for assessment of the Department of Veterans Affairs' capacity and services for veterans with gambling problems.*

*We will keep you informed as things progress in Congress in Washington as well as in our own backyard in St. Paul. Ultimately, my hope is that you'll be a fellow advocate and contact your own representatives to urge support on these important initiatives.*

### WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!

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

Become a member today. Visit [www.NorthstarProblemGambling.org](http://www.NorthstarProblemGambling.org) to join us.

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.

*Northern Light is funded by a grant from the state of Minnesota. Designer: ESD Graphics. Writer: Bill Stein*



# PROBLEM GAMBLING AWARENESS MONTH

→ AWARENESS+ACTION

## 2019 PROBLEM GAMBLING AWARENESS MONTH IN REVIEW

Northstar once again actively participated in this year's national Problem Gambling Awareness Month activities in March. Northstar's efforts focused primarily on social media, and included a campaign that targeted treatment providers, the general public and frequent casino visitors.

### Communication to Treatment Providers

To capitalize on National Problem Gambling Screening Day (March 12), which promotes the importance of screening for problem gambling and seeking treatment, Northstar alerted and referred providers to a national toolkit they could use in their practices. Messaging also emphasized that people with gambling disorder often initially seek help for other addictions. The goal of this effort was to ensure that problem gambling is not ignored or overlooked when an individual is seeking treatment for an addiction.

### Ads for General Public and Others

A series of ads ran on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The most prominent ads featured various plays on the theme of "I knew I had a gambling problem when..." Another ad with the phrase "Too often we hear clients say..." was also popular.

### Messaging to Casino Visitors

A positive play message was targeted to casino visitors throughout the state. The message encouraged those to gamble responsibly and to seek help from various resources, including the state helpline, if needed.

### Final Four-Related Ads

With the Final Four taking place in Minneapolis this spring, Northstar also advertised on several different radio platforms during the month of March and the first week in April. We also partnered with the Minnesota Lottery to produce a half-page ad in the Final Four official program.



## FREE ONLINE TOOL BLOCKS ACCESS TO GAMBLING SITES FOR THOSE IN RECOVERY



Individuals recovering from a gambling addiction now have an option should they decide to restrict themselves from participating in online gambling.

**BetBlocker.org**, is a free online tool that users can install to stop themselves from accessing gambling sites. The tool is available for both desktop and mobile devices, although it's still officially in beta.

Given the remaining stigma about gambling addiction and the fact that it can be embarrassing to confront, the service is offered entirely anonymously, with no personal information collected about users. And because gambling addiction is associated with an inability to control impulses, the gambling self restriction cannot be removed once it's been activated.

Although BetBlocker was developed by a UK-based organization, there are no geographical restrictions. However, the tool is set up to recognize sites that are legally licensed, and with the legality of online gambling still a question in the U.S., not all sites may be included. BetBlocker includes a "suggest a URL to block" feature so that any site can be manually added for exclusion.



# NORTHSTAR FINALIZES STRATEGIC PLAN

Northstar’s new strategic plan was approved by the board of directors in April. The final plan details six major organizational goals and 19 key strategies. The full strategic plan can be viewed at [NorthstarProblemGambling.org](http://NorthstarProblemGambling.org) under “About Us.”

## Goals

The goals identified in the process look out 10-15 years and will require strong partnerships to achieve. These goals include:

- NPGA is the go-to source for information, resources on problem gambling, responsible gambling
- Fewer Minnesotans become problem gamblers
- Minnesotans experience fewer negative consequences from problem gambling
- Minnesotans view problem gambling as a public health issue
- There is adequate funding to prevent and reduce problem gambling
- Minnesotans can access appropriate treatment, aftercare

## Key Strategies

Key strategies to help advance goals will take 3-7 years to complete or maintain. These strategies include:

- Obtain stable state funding
- Fund priority efforts
- Ensure NPGA is fiscally stable
- Ensure plan adherence
- Align staff composition and work to key priorities
- Be source of best practices for treatment and aftercare
- Maintain reputation as content and policy expert
- Influence policy positions and efforts on problem gambling
- Educate people about problem gambling and prevention
- Facilitate access to appropriate information and services
- Be source of best practices for prevention
- Lead a strong coalition of problem gambling stakeholders

- Develop statewide problem gambling prevention plan
- Leverage coalition to close gaps in continuum of care
- Partner to ensure underrepresented communities are served
- Advocate for increased funding for research, prevention and treatment
- Facilitate training delivery to targeted audiences
- Ensure policies place problem gambling on par with other addictions
- Advocate with legislators about problem gambling as public health issue

## Next Steps

The next steps in the process are for the staff and board to create work plans that align with the newly established strategic goals.

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essentially competitive video gaming. There can be betting among game participants or betting by individuals/spectators who choose the team they think will win.]

### **NI:** What else did the survey reveal?

**DF:** The survey also looked at the concept of “positive play,” in which gambling is examined through a healthy attitude rather

than a focus on problematic behaviors. While we weren’t able to ask a lot of survey questions on that, what jumped out was that a lot of people have misconceptions about how gambling works. For example, a significant number of respondents think that chances of winning go up after you’ve lost, which is not correct. It seems that these kinds of misconceptions can ultimately lead

to problematic behavior, though we don’t know that for a fact yet. These findings suggest that part of an effective prevention program has to be educating people about the realities of gambling.

*Survey results for both Minnesota and the U.S. can be found at [www.ncpgsurvey.org](http://www.ncpgsurvey.org).*

# "POSITIVE PLAY" MESSAGING EMERGES AS EFFECTIVE APPROACH IN GAMBLING EDUCATION AND HELPLINES

Traditionally, the approach to educating people about problem gambling has been a punitive one — i.e., if you don't play responsibly you will experience problems. But new insights into the gambling education process, including those shared at the annual New Horizons Conference on Responsible Gambling, suggest a better approach involves the concept of positive play.

Positive messaging emphasizes how players can maximize positive experiences with gambling. This approach seems to resonate well with players and encourages them to adopt responsible gambling strategies.

Adopting positive play strategies could potentially act as a prevention mechanism for the majority of people who gamble without experiencing

negative consequences. This could include responsible gambling strategies such as keeping ATM cards at home, setting time and money limits, understanding the odds for each particular game, and knowing how to play the games.

Positive, educational messaging may also help young adults, who have a greater tendency to underestimate the risks of gambling. The inclusion of responsible gambling strategies early on—in teen years when gambling begins—could potentially minimize the numbers of new gamblers landing in the continuum of problem gambling.

## A Positive Approach in Helplines

Another conference presentation focused on how a positive approach to branding a helpline can help decrease the stigma often

associated with having to admit a problem or seek help. In British Columbia and other Canadian provinces, helplines have been renamed Gam Info. The helpline promotes free information and support for gambling and video gaming.

When individuals call in they are asked if they would prefer to talk to someone who is a resources representative rather than a counselor. The rep connects with the individual over the phone or at a coffee shop with the goal of beginning a conversation about the individual's gambling and what resources they might want to try.

In the two years since launching this program, British Columbia has seen a 92 percent increase in new participants accessing their support and counseling services. Available resources include online self-help, voluntary self-exclusion, social and financial services, counseling and support groups. It's reasonable to expect that a similar, positive approach could help destigmatize problem gambling in Minnesota and encourage more people to seek available resources.

## NORTHSTAR-FUNDED RESEARCH TO BE FEATURED AT NCPG ANNUAL CONFERENCE



Research into gambling behavior and attitudes in Minnesota's Lao community, funded by Northstar, will be included in a presentation at the annual conference of the National Council on Problem Gambling. The information will be presented by Serena King, Ph.D., L.P., associate professor of Psychology at Hamline University and lead researcher on the first-of-its-kind study.

The 33rd National Conference on Gambling Addiction & Responsible Gambling takes place July 17-20 in Denver. The conference features thought leaders from the areas of prevention, education, treatment, enforcement, research, responsible gaming, regulation and recovery. For more information, visit [NCPGambling.org](http://NCPGambling.org).

## SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE FOR NATIONAL PROBLEM GAMBLING CONFERENCE

Northstar is sponsoring scholarships for those interested in attending the National Conference on Gambling Addiction & Responsible Gambling. Information on how to apply for the scholarship can be found at [NorthstarProblemGambling.org](http://NorthstarProblemGambling.org).



# IN THEIR OWN *Words*

## Joe's Story



Ultimately, I don't feel the need to label myself as either an alcoholic or a gambling addict. I consider myself simply an "addict" in general. And understanding that concept has been a key in my overall recovery.

I'm that rare person whose "clean date" for drinking is the same as my clean date for gambling. The funny thing was that I never really thought that one had much to do with the other. But once I started treatment for gambling addiction—and learned more about addiction in general—I put it all together.

Earlier in my life, I never thought of myself as much of a gambler. In fact, I used to build

parts and some installations for casinos, but never had much desire to get involved. In fact, I actually snubbed my nose at the very people who were doing the kinds of things that I eventually did.

I had been a drinker for a long time. I used to hang out at the bar with friends for happy hour. Eventually, I ended up getting into the habit of buying one pull tab. It was almost always just one, and I started doing it every day.

There were \$2 pull tabs that had a top prize of \$599. One day, I hit a \$599 winner. Of course I ended up making a big deal out of this with my friends in the bar who knew me, and gave a big tip to the woman who sold me the pull tab.

I then learned that it was customary to "prime" things for the next pull tab customer by buying another pull tab. So I did. And that also turned out to be another \$599 winner.

The feeling of winning two straight pull tabs was exhilarating. It was a feeling I'd try to obtain again, but I never got close.

As with gambling, I found it hard to stop drinking. I always thought I could control my drinking, but as I look back on it, I realize that wasn't true. For me, drinking and gambling went hand in hand.

I tried going to GA to stop gambling but was never successful with it. Eventually, I went to Vanguard (a residential program in Granite Falls MN). While there, the subject of my drinking was brought up by my sister, as she thought of my drinking in much the same way as my gambling. When I sought help for gambling, I didn't have any intention of stopping drinking.

Although I didn't realize it at the time, I've come to understand that I have an addictive personality. (I also had some issues with substance use earlier in my life.) I've also come to realize that cross addiction is fairly common and that people often stop one

behavior only to replace it with another.

I was asked to compare the difficulty of overcoming gambling addiction with the difficulty of overcoming drinking. I actually think that gambling is harder. Alcohol is easier to stay away from. Gambling inundates our lives. We deal with money in so many things—raffles, stocks and bonds, investing. I am so glad that my gambling was limited to pull tabs and that I didn't get involved with fantasy sports or sports betting online.

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There's also nowhere near as much help available for gambling as there is for drinking. While I know that help for gambling is available, it just seems harder to find.

The stigma is also a bigger thing with gambling. Being an "alcoholic" is more acceptable. People just tell you to go to AA. But if you mention having a gambling problem, people are more apt to tell you that you just need to practice more willpower. People think of addiction as relating to something that you ingest versus chemicals that already exist within us.

Ultimately, I don't feel the need to label myself as either an alcoholic or a gambling addict. I consider myself simply an "addict" in general. And understanding that concept has been a key in my overall recovery.



## STATUS OF LEGALIZED SPORTS BETTING IN MINNESOTA REMAINS UNCERTAIN

**Two bills to legalize sports betting in Minnesota were introduced this year. The status and nature of each bill is detailed below. It doesn't appear that Minnesota will pass either of these bills this session.**

### **Bill: SF1984**

**Description:** The bill would establish a framework for betting through a sports pool and for taxing wagers. Betting would take place through casinos, racetracks websites and mobile apps. Wagering would be allowed on any sport permitted by the newly created Minnesota Sports Wagering Commission (pre-college competition would be excluded).

**Funding:** Similar to the charitable gambling legislation, the bill mandates that .005% (one half of one percent) of net sports wagering revenue be transferred to the special revenue fund and appropriated to the Minnesota Department of Human Service's compulsive gambling treatment program while another .005% is appropriated to the National Council on Problem Gambling state affiliate (Northstar).

**Status:** The bill was initially heard by the Senate Tax Committee, went through a first engrossment and moved to the Government Policy Committee. No

additional hearings occurred. As far as we can tell, the bill has not been included in the overall tax bill.

### **Bill: HF 1278**

**Description:** This bill would legalize sport betting and create a new sports wagering commission that would oversee the licensing of sports pool operators, designate premises, and establish mobile and electronic licensing. The bill listed local restrictions as well as participation restrictions. In lieu of a corporate tax, a sports wager's excise tax would be imposed, requiring administration and reporting of the revenue.

**Funding:** The bill does not detail that funds be set aside for problem gambling treatment, prevention, education and research.

**Status:** This bill was introduced and referred to the House Commerce Committee. There was no further action.

## THANK YOU TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS

*Northstar wishes to thank the following individuals and organizations for their generosity in supporting our mission (contributions from July 1, 2018 to April 30, 2019).*

Allied Charities of Minnesota (in kind)  
Central MN Noon Optimist Club, Inc.  
Don Feeney  
Duluth Curling Club  
Fresh Color Press (in kind)  
Jason Walter  
Joan Bibelhausen

John Rundquist  
Lisa Schultz  
Marie Hinton  
Michael Hochman  
Michael Schiks  
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe  
Minnesota Indian Gaming Association  
Minnesota State Lottery

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Osseo Lions Club  
Palisade Fire Department  
Randy Ringaman  
Treasure Island Resort & Casino



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### No-Cost Treatment Available in Minnesota

Minnesota provides treatment to problem gamblers and their families at no cost. For more information, call 800-333-4673 (HOPE) or visit [NorthstarProblemGambling.org/Find-Help](http://NorthstarProblemGambling.org/Find-Help).



NORTHSTAR PROBLEM GAMBLING ALLIANCE  
Spring 2019 • Volume Thirty

# Northern Light

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Changing Problem Gambling Behavior through:  
**AWARENESS • EDUCATION • RESEARCH • ADVOCACY**