

# RECOVERING PROBLEM GAMBLER

## LEADS THE WAY THROUGH ADVOCACY



Jess Stewart's desire to become an advocate for problem gamblers was born while he was at Project Turnabout for residential gambling treatment in 2016. Four years later, he's proven to be a highly motivated, steadfast voice for those afflicted with gambling disorder.

After graduating from Project Turnabout, Jess returned to his native Ohio (Jess was unable to find residential treatment in Ohio). He immediately sought out organizations involved with problem gambling to determine how he might contribute as an advocate.

Jess soon forged a connection with the Problem Gambling Network of Ohio (PGNO), signaling the start of a great new journey. He subsequently attended national conferences and recovery meetings, became a PGNO board member, participated in a symposium for Recovery Resources in Cleveland, and led a session at the 2020 Ohio Problem Gambling Conference. "Everything sort of snowballed in a good way

for me as if it were meant to be," says Jess.

Jess found that he had unique value to add because of his lived experience. "I can tell a very real story to influence legislators about gambling issues. When someone shares their story in person, they have to hear it, and it changes the way they think about it. I also remind them to think about the legacy they want to leave."

Jess has reached out to legislators by email, letter and phone calls, written op-eds for newspapers and done television interviews. He's also passionate about the language of "addiction." "I think the term 'addict' creates a stigma that keeps people from coming out to the forefront and getting help."

Jess has contributed in other ways. For example, he's supported the use of "warm transfers" on the Ohio state helpline, giving individuals calling in the opportunity to speak with and be assessed by a certified gambling counselor. He's also encouraging the state to add an advocate line, which would allow a caller to talk to a peer that's

experienced challenges with gambling, rather than a counselor that they might view as less relatable.

"You have to have compassion and understanding when talking to another person and treat them as you'd want to be treated," he says. "That conversation just might save a life. That was the case for me after my initial call with Project Turnabout — I heard the voice of hope and understanding."

Where does Jess's passion come from and what motivates him to be so energetic about the cause? "I believe if you're aware of what you can do that you have a moral obligation to speak out and help others. I wasn't willing to be silent because I've read and heard so many sad stories. I respect others who decide not to share their story or to be in the forefront, but for me that just isn't an option."

### NPGA Highlights

- NPGA purchased several one-year subscriptions for Gamban, an online gambling blocking tool. This is available to you or your clients at no cost. Please email [sst@northstarp.org](mailto:ssst@northstarp.org) for the code.
- NPGA's conference has been rescheduled for December 1, 2020 at Earle Brown Heritage Center, assuming large crowd functions are advisable by that time.
- Gov. Walz has extended telehealth services for problem gambling through June 2021. This means counseling and problem gambling assessments, including Rule 82 may be provided through phone and/or video calls. This allows individuals to receive treatment from the comfort and safety of their own homes. This is great news and it is our hope that this will continue as a permanent option.
- A list of state-certified counselors can be found at [Northstarp.org](http://Northstarp.org).
- NPGA has changed its domain to [northstarp.org](http://northstarp.org). Please make note of this in your email and website bookmarks.



Susan Sheridan Tucker  
Executive Director  
NPGA

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### *COVID-19's Impact on Gambling*

*It's been seven months since COVID-19 first entered our world. Minnesotans, like so many others around the country, are still trying to find their way as we continue to wade into the unknown viral waters. One thing that's become clear is that the pandemic has lifted the veil on healthcare inequities and highlighted the impacts of long-term isolation. While it's still too early to fully assess the pandemic's impact for those with gambling disorder, we know that helpline calls have diminished and we're hearing that some individuals have adopted or worsened their dependency on alcohol and other substances. We suspect that some may have halted their gambling while the casinos were closed, but more, and perhaps new, players found opportunities to gamble online.*

*Casinos and card rooms have reopened in many states and appear to be doing a good job keeping their customers and employees out of harm's way, as they can ill afford to become virus hotspots. Two trends that seem to be gaining traction during the pandemic include the adoption of a cashless system and legalizing online iGaming, betting on the outcome of an event or game online, and/or iLottery, online lottery games that can be played using computers, tablets or mobile devices. Several states have approved online gaming and it's expected that others may follow as states struggle financially and see this as a new revenue stream.*

*While cashless systems have benefits for public health reasons — they're cleaner than cash — they also provide opportunities to better understand a player's behavior and preferences, as well as to create large amounts of data that can be used for marketing and responsible gambling purposes. It can also provide an omni channel of services for the operator's customers and a buffer if brick and mortar venues must shut down again. The downside is that recent payment innovations, such as e-wallets and the availability of on-demand access to digital payments, could increase the player's willingness to spend more or gamble beyond their means in the heat of play. Should Minnesota eventually move in this direction, it will be critically important to add specific language requiring operators to adopt responsible gambling tools, train their employees to respond to problem behavior they see on the floor, and to share the aggregate data with problem gambling advocates to strengthen prevention messaging and provide opportunities for further research and treatment options.*

*Lastly, I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the racial upheaval that's taken place in Minnesota and throughout the country. For our part, we need to continue to work to reduce the stigma of gambling disorder and to create spaces for all who seek help. One of NPGA's core values is being inclusive. We will continue to help breakdown any additional barriers faced by racial and ethnic communities. NPGA can and will do better.*

*Be well.  
Susan Sheridan Tucker*

### 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.NorthstarPG.org](http://www.NorthstarPG.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*



# IN THEIR OWN

## Words Cal's Story



**My nearly 50-year relationship with gambling started when I was six years old.** My father, an illegal sports bettor, introduced me to gambling and would take me to sporting events everywhere he placed bets. I remember that he would split his winnings with me on baseball bets because I knew the sport better than him.

This continued until about age 17 when my mother — and best friend — died suddenly. The trauma from that started a period of depression that changed my relationship with my father.

The situation with my father caused me to move out of the house at a time when I really wasn't prepared for life. I worked six days a week and went to school five days a week. To break up the monotony, I went to the local dog track. It was a great stress reliever and provided some excitement from the pain of my day-to-day life.

That started an off-and-on cycle of gambling that would last until four years ago. I went from dog racing to horse racing to the lottery (casinos wouldn't come until the mid 90s). I took my first trip to Las Vegas around that time and that changed everything for me.

My gambling became more aggressive and I started spending money from paychecks that should have gone to bills. I started borrowing on credit cards, maxed them out, and then stole from my employer to gamble. That led to charges, and I eventually ended

up spending three years in prison.

You might think that spending three years in incarceration would have changed everything for me and that I'd value the opportunity to start anew. And I did — at least for several years. But about four years after my release from prison in December 2003, I went to Las Vegas again and binge gambled for an entire week. Things continued to spiral down from there.

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**My gambling became more aggressive and I started spending money from paychecks that should have gone to bills.**

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By 2008, I knew I had a problem and sought help. That's really when my recovery should have started.

Unfortunately, the agency where I sought help did not have a certified gambling counselor. And although I poured out my heart and soul, the counselor diagnosed me with depression. At the end of my intake session, I'll never forget what she said: "You have to admit that you've brought all this upon yourself." Needless to say, I didn't feel I was provided with the support and help I needed and, despite my heartfelt intentions and desire to get help for my gambling addiction, I didn't have success.

In 2012, I went on another Vegas binge, but this was worse. I came home feeling humiliated, frustrated and broken. I'd spent all this time on counseling and had nothing to show for it.

Finally, in 2016, after my worst binge of all, I'd had enough. I told my wife I needed to gain control of myself or I'd kill myself.

I looked online for inpatient treatment options and ultimately landed on Project Turnabout. I sensed an immediate understanding on their part. I knew they could give me my life back and rebuild me from the inside out. I learned so much.

Ultimately, my experience in residential gambling treatment motivated me not just to embark on my own recovery, but also to help others as much as I can and to take a leadership role. I have since become a strong advocate for problem gamblers by sharing my experience with as many people as possible.

I sometimes think about the experience I had in 2008, when the counselor I saw was ill equipped to help me and only added to the stigma that I had failed. Had that counselor better understood problem gambling, I believe I could have started my recovery eight years earlier. But I believe that everything happens for a reason, and that that experience helped me to become the advocate I am today.

# A REVIEW OF SPORTS WAGERING & GAMBLING ADDICTION STUDIES – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



*The following is taken from the National Council on Problem Gambling:*

This report on recent research suggests that gambling problems may increase as sports gambling grows explosively at the same time that mobile and online technologies evolve to create seemingly unlimited types of wagering opportunities. Here are important highlights from a special review of more than 140 studies and reports on the connections between sports betting and gambling addiction.

## **Sports Betting and Online Gambling: A Potentially Volatile Mix**

The rate of gambling problems among sports bettors is at least twice as high as among gamblers in general. When sports gambling is conducted online, the rate of problems is even higher, with one study of online sports gamblers indicating that 16% met clinical criteria for gambling disorder and another 13% showed some signs of gambling problems.

## **Concerns About Modern Sports Gambling**

Nearly half of American adults have bet on a sporting event. More and more are betting online, with 45% of sports wagering now taking place on the internet. Today's online sports betting is particularly concerning for several reasons:

- Access: internet gambling is available virtually all the time.
  - It's more convenient and provides more privacy.
  - Early research shows that those who bet using mobile devices have higher rates of problem gambling.
- Live "In-Play" Betting: today's sports gamblers can bet on much more than just the winner of a game.

- Sports gamblers can bet — during the game — on hundreds and potentially thousands of discrete events. Any aspect of a team or player's performance or activity that can be measured is now a potential wager.
- This shortens the lag between bet and reward, increasing the speed and frequency of gambling, which increases the risk of problematic behavior.

## **Professional Athletes Frequently Gamble on Sports**

Sports gambling is widespread among professional athletes. While no study of gambling among U.S. professional athletes is publicly available, such studies have been conducted elsewhere. One recent European report showed that 57% of professional athletes surveyed gambled on sports in the previous year, with 8% exhibiting problem gambling behavior, roughly three times greater than the general population.

## **Youth Are at Higher Risk**

Data from 2018 shows that more than 75% of students gambled. This is a big concern given the risk-taking behavior that takes place in adolescence and young adulthood, along with gambling being more socially acceptable and glamorized. More than 13% of adolescents wagered money on sports teams according to a study in 2017. Students most often bet on professional football and college basketball. Youth gamblers have higher rates of gambling problems than adults. Males are far more likely than females to both gamble on sports and to experience gambling problems.

## **Popularity and Growth of Fantasy Sports Gambling**

From 2004 to 2018, participation in fantasy sports gambling quadrupled — from 14

million to 57 million. Higher fantasy game participation is associated with significant increases in problem gambling severity.

## **The Profile of a Sports Bettor**

Heavy sports bettors who meet the criteria for clinical gambling disorder are typically male, young (up to age 35), single, fully employed, and have a high level of education. They think sports gambling is more skill than luck, suggesting they're prone to distortions in thinking. They affiliate with others who favor sports betting, frequently taking advantage of different types of promotions, and are generally highly impulsive.

## **Marketing Inhibits Ability to Stop Gambling**

Aggressive promotions in all forms of marketing and advertising make it more difficult for sports bettors who are trying to curtail their gambling. Ads that emphasize 'free play,' tout the ease of placing a bet, or offer risk-free bonuses are particularly problematic.

## **Looking Ahead**

Sports gambling is growing rapidly with significant potential to create or worsen gambling problems. Twenty-three states to date have legalized sports betting. Moreover, it's clear that substantial prevention and treatment efforts need to be developed and targeted to those most vulnerable to developing an addiction through sports gambling.

The review was conducted by Jeffrey Derevensky, PhD, and Ken Winters, PhD in the autumn of 2018. The full report, *A Comprehensive Review of Sports Wagering and Gambling Addiction*, is available at [www.ncpgambling.org/sports-gambling](http://www.ncpgambling.org/sports-gambling).

# THE PROBLEM GAMBLING LANDSCAPE IN WISCONSIN

Northern Light sat down (virtually) with Rose Blozinski, executive director at the Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling, to gain some insights about the problem gambling landscape of our eastern neighbor. Here are some highlights of that conversation.

**Q: How is the Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling funded?**

**A:** We have a grant from Wisconsin's Department of Social Services for a public awareness campaign and also receive funding from casinos and private donations. Our budget is approximately \$475,000.

**Q: How does Wisconsin train gambling counselors?**

**A:** We have two types of training. The first is a 60-hour phased program that consists of four phases of 15 hours each. We also have an intro training that's six hours long. The goal is to provide people with more awareness of gambling disorder and to get them interested in continuing the four-phase program. The training is provided by three certified gambling counselors.

**Q: Does Wisconsin have licensure for problem gambling counselors?**

**A:** We do not have a state certification, though we encourage people to get the national or international certification. We have approximately 80 counselors who have gone through the four-phase program and who are listed as referral sources on our helpline. We also have an additional approximately 20 counselors who are nationally/internationally certified. And several more are in process.

**Q: Is video gaming addiction incorporated in the state's training?**

**A:** We have started doing that. One of our trainers has done some research in that area. We are adding that into our programming for teenagers in school.

**Q: Within Wisconsin masters counseling programs, how much time is dedicated to teaching about problem gambling specifically vs. addictions in general?**

**A:** This is purely a guess, but I think that any problem gambling education that takes place is through addictions training.

**Q: What types of professionals attend training — social workers, addiction counselors, psychologists, etc?**

**A:** We don't seem to have as many addiction counselors attending as we used to. We see a lot of social workers and other kinds of counselors who take the training as part of their masters programs.

**Q: Does the Wisconsin council have any kind of relationship with schools?**

**A:** We have a relationship with several schools and a few technical colleges to provide an alternative class. While one technical college has put that class on their schedule for three years, nobody has taken it because of other classes they are required to take. We are trying to get a jumpstart on that. We do a program with high school classes as requested.

**Q: What's the likelihood of sports betting becoming legal in Wisconsin?**

**A:** At the present time it is not legal, though some people are trying to work on that. I don't think it's going to go anywhere too quickly. However, I think if surrounding states legalize sports betting, Wisconsin will look at it more seriously.

**Q: How has the pandemic impacted your services?**

**A:** We at the council are working remotely, so the helpline, which we operate, has continued. We've seen less calls than we expected as we thought people would be panicking because casinos were closed. Regarding treatment, one counselor told us they weren't seeing a lot with gambling but were seeing people with other addictions. And a lot of this counseling is taking place by phone, which is different.

**Q: Is Wisconsin allowing telecounseling during the pandemic?**

**A:** It seems so. A lot of counselors are doing it, but I'm not sure if they are part of private or state agencies.

**Q: Does Wisconsin provide money for treatment?**



**A:** No. In Wisconsin, there are zero dollars set aside for treatment. As you might imagine, this is very difficult because gamblers seeking help usually have no money. We encourage them to go to GA, but there aren't many GA groups in rural areas so, unfortunately, the cycle tends to continue.

**Q: How many casinos are there in Wisconsin?**

**A:** We have 26, with one in Hudson being the closest to Minnesota. All casinos are owned and operated by 11 tribes, but several tribes have several casinos each.

**Q: Does Wisconsin have self-exclusion programs for gamblers?**

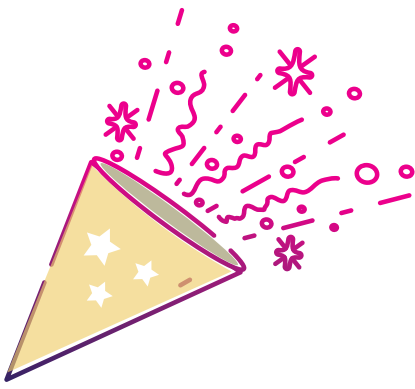
**A:** The casinos do, but each one is different in how they administer the program.

**Q: What are the challenges you see in Wisconsin?**

**A:** The biggest issue is getting people the help they need. We can refer them all over but if the financial resources aren't there it doesn't do that much good. Affordable treatment is one of the biggest issues. Another issue from our perspective is the challenge to get a public awareness effort going all over the state. It's a battle to reach people in an efficient way.

**Q: What are some exciting things as you look ahead?**

**A:** In the short term, we're hoping that our state conference that's been rescheduled to August will happen. Beyond that, we have more webinars and more trainings online. We've also talked to technical colleges that could do an intro course online. And, of course, we continue to find ways to reach out to people with gambling problems.



# A FOND FAREWELL AND A ROUSING WELCOME

*It's a time of transition at Northstar. Linda Bisdorf, who has provided administrative support for Northstar since 2011, retired at the end of July. Her replacement, Tiffany Roufs, joined Northstar in June.*

## Retirement of Linda Bisdorf



Over the last decade, Linda Bisdorf has been an enduring, ever-reliable presence at Northstar. With

her gracious and calming style, Linda has played a crucial role in keeping the office organized and efficient.

“Linda may have been behind the scenes on most days, but her attention to detail and tenacity to roll with many changes, including the many requirements imposed

on us by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, were critical to our operations,” says Susan Sheridan Tucker, executive director of NPGA. “We have benefited greatly from Linda’s cumulative life and work experiences, as well as her commitment to our small but mighty team.”

Linda joined Northstar in 2011, shortly after Cathie Perrault took over as the organization’s executive director. She recalls that one of her first tasks was to review a room full of files and make sense and order of them — learning about Northstar along the way. “I’ve always enjoyed taking things and making them into something,” says Linda.

In addition to creating a central file system, Linda helped with other efforts to launch the organization, including populating Northstar’s database of 9,000 constituents used to distribute this newsletter. “It was fun because we had a vision and we could decide what to do to get there,” says Linda. “We really built things from the ground up.”

Linda says what she’ll miss most is the team she’s worked closely with for so many years and the opportunity to meet new people at conferences. In her retirement, Linda looks forward to doing “something worthwhile,” which may well include helping kids as a tutor, protecting our environment or assisting in some other capacity.

## Tiffany Roufs Joins Northstar



Tiffany Roufs joined Northstar in June as operations manager. She will be replacing Linda Bisdorf,

who will be retiring in July.

“I’m excited to have Tiffany join our team,” says Susan Sheridan Tucker, executive director of NPGA. “Tiffany’s experience and skills will make a significant impact

supporting our organization, ultimately helping us meet our strategic goals and serve the problem gambling community.”

Tiffany has worked in the nonprofit field for the past fifteen years. Most recently, she worked at Mongabay, a global environmental news and information nonprofit, where she was instrumental in supporting the organization’s growth through the creation of cost-effective and efficient organizational systems.

“I’m excited about the opportunity to help a small organization make a big impact on the awareness of problem gambling,” says

Tiffany, who holds a master’s in nonprofit management from Hamline University. “I also closely follow the successes of other Twin Cities nonprofits and hope to learn from them and apply those to our organization.”

In her free time, Tiffany plays Dungeons and Dragons with friends and family. She is also a songwriter, plays the ukulele and enjoys the art and creative performance opportunities the Twin Cities has to offer.

Tiffany lives in St. Paul with her husband Jeremy, 9-year-old daughter Aurelia and their beloved dog Auggie.

## MINNESOTA LOTTERY CONTINUES DURING PANDEMIC

NPGA checked with the Minnesota Lottery to determine how the COVID-19 pandemic was impacting their business. The following is a statement provided to NPGA from the Lottery on June 15.

The Lottery, like all other state agencies, has continued to operate and is strictly following guidance from Minnesota Management and Budget and the governor, state law, and within the boundaries set by all the executive

orders that have been put in place. Our number one priority is the safety of our employees, customers and partners. To that end, we have implemented additional safety measures to comply with all executive orders.

While Lottery products remained available inside retail establishments that were given the ok to remain open, the Lottery paused all advertising, product promotions and social media posts for

three months. We have focused our energy on supporting our retail partners as they navigate this new landscape. We have provided all retailers with social distancing signs and there is currently no penalty for pausing lottery sales.

After the stay-at-home order went into effect, Lottery sales declined initially. They later rebounded and we are on track to meet or possibly exceed last year’s sales.



## CANTERBURY PARK REOPENS WITH HOPE AND CAUTION

After shutting down for nearly three months, the Canterbury Park Card Casino opened in mid-June — with equal amounts of caution and hope.

“We’re as well prepared as we can be,” says Michael Hochman, Vice President of Casino Operations at Canterbury Park. “Everyone is doing everything they can to make sure our gaming floor is as safe as possible for both employees and guests.”

Those safety precautions include health screenings, social distancing, frequent cleaning, acrylic barriers, sanitizer stations positioned throughout the property, and mandatory mask requirements. Even game chips are sanitized with ultraviolet light every day.

“Some casino floors are ‘strongly encouraging’ mask usage at their tables, but we’re actually requiring it,” says Michael, who was initially concerned about how guests would respond to mask requirements but found that it hasn’t been a problem.

And what are Canterbury Park’s business prospects going forward as the pandemic persists? “It’s hard to say, as we’re still getting a feel for how behaviors might change and how comfortable people are in social situations,” says Michael. “We do know that while we’re somewhat stymied through the use of plexiglass and masks, people still love the social aspects — and that’s what we do.”

Given that the highest risk of unfavorable outcomes with COVID-19 is with older adults, Canterbury Park anticipates there may be a drop in attendance from guests in that demographic.

Ultimately, however, uncertainty is the operative word. “There was never a chapter on conducting business during pandemics,” says Michael.

# OVERALL COVID MENTAL HEALTH TRENDS FROM EAP (EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM) CALLERS

*The following are some trends that have emerged from people calling in to employee assistance programs.*

- Loneliness is causing increased mental health issues. This seems to be an underlying theme if clients are far from their support systems or have spent a lot of time alone. Issues from the past, including previous trauma or unresolved mental health issues, appear to be resurfacing in a major way.
- There is considerable grief and loss, particularly around COVID-19. There have been calls for grief counseling related to the difficulty of coping with not being able to hold memorial services and funerals.
- There is significant work stress, both for essential workers going to the workplace (usually medical personnel concerned about if there is sufficient PPE or having to work forced overtime) as well as staff not deemed essential but currently working at home and feeling anxious about how things will be different as they transition back to the workplace.
- Relationship problems. EAP has seen a lot of interpersonal conflict leading to requests for couples counseling or one partner calling in wanting to explore legal services for separation/divorce. Counselors are screening for domestic violence concerns, and occasionally clients confirm domestic violence.
- Increased substance use calls. Clients have identified increased substance use, with alcohol use in particular.
- Parenting stress. Calls usually involve young children at home and discuss uncertainty of how parents can support children’s anxieties about the pandemic. There are also new obstacles, such as parents concerned about whether their older children will be able to proceed with attending college in person as planned in the fall.

## ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS FROM JULY 2019 TO JUNE 2020

*Thank you to all who have become members of NPGA in the last quarter.*

### Why belong to the Alliance?

NPGA is stronger in voice and it affirms the value of our work. Gambling disorder is a real and destructive addiction. Our work is not about prohibition, but to ensure those negatively impacted have available resources for recovery and to minimize the risks for all. Better informed consumers make better choices. More members equal greater credibility with decision makers. Visit our membership page at [Northstarp.org/membership](http://Northstarp.org/membership).

PLATINUM



Shakopee Mdwakanton Sioux Community

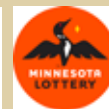


Minnesota Indian Gaming Association

GOLD



Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe



Minnesota State Lottery

SILVER



Project Turnabout

BRONZE



Crossroads Residential Aftercare



Lester Prairie Lions



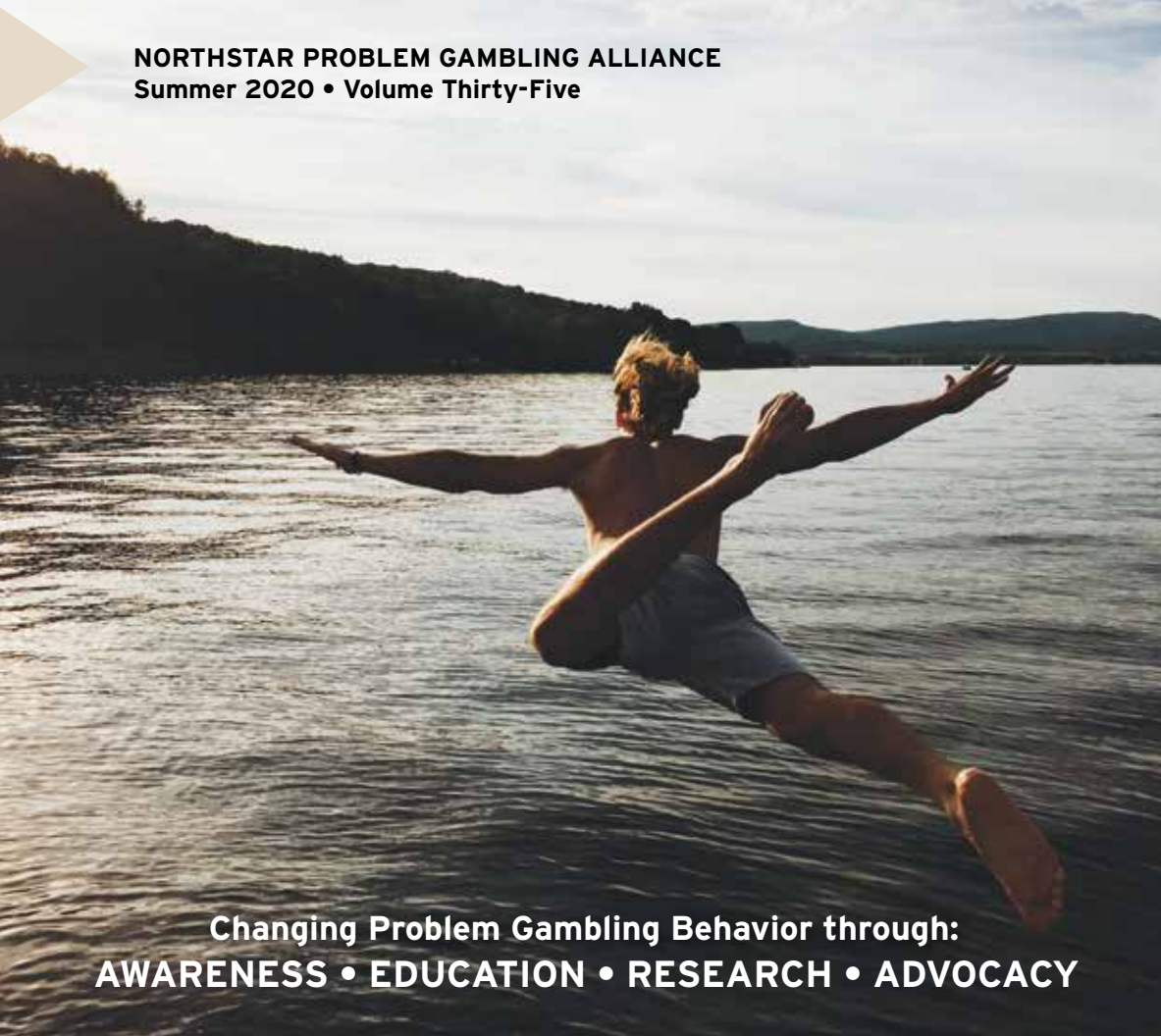
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**NORTHSTAR PROBLEM GAMBLING ALLIANCE**  
Summer 2020 • Volume Thirty-Five



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



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