



Online Treatment Program Now Available At No Cost

Gambler Healing, an online gambling addiction recovery program offered through the state of North Dakota, is now available free for anyone — clients and counselors — to use.

While the program was unveiled just prior to the pandemic, it offers particular advantages in a post-pandemic world in which telehealth counseling figures to be a prominent and permanent feature.

“As we move into telehealth counseling becoming the normal, the Gambler Healing course can be a really beneficial resource for counselors who aren’t familiar with problem gambling and provide structure for individuals who live a distance from counselors,” says Lisa Vig, LAC, ICGC, program director for Gambler Healing.

Historically, there are many reasons why those with gambling addiction don’t always get the help they need. Some of these challenges include access to counselors, dealing with the burden of stigma and shame, concerns about privacy, and uncertainty about whether a problem really exists. With this online treatment program, it’s possible for more people to overcome these obstacles and access treatment.

Gambler Healing is an online course based on a 12-step recovery process that addresses the needs of gamblers with addiction. Details about the comprehensive program can be found on GamblerHealing.com. The program is the only one of its

kind according to Lisa, who helped develop the curriculum. “The idea came to us when it became apparent that there were not a lot of relevant and educational resources about gambling addiction available,” says Lisa. “The original thought was to simply create updated educational DVDs, but the advent of e-campus modules made it possible and practical to create an actual class that would have greater impact.”

Program Components The program includes a variety of components considered critical for success. One key feature includes videos of recovering gamblers discussing their experiences. “We want people to know that they’re not alone and that others feel the same things that they might be feeling,” says Lisa. The program also includes a section for journaling. “Journaling is something we encourage in our own treatment program,” says Lisa. “It provides an opportunity for self-reflection and a chance to inventory one’s own behavior and thought processes.”

Enrollees also have the chance to read testimonials from those who have benefited from treatment. This helps to instill hope and remind participants that others have overcome similar challenges. There’s also an educational aspect of the curriculum to help gamblers understand how the process of addiction works.

Advantages of An Online Program

As a program that’s administered online in the privacy of peoples’ homes, there are several advantages to Gambler Healing. Perhaps

most important is the access to treatment it provides to those living in rural areas. “It can be particularly helpful for people living in places where there may be limited counselors or access to support groups and treatment,” says Lisa. The program is also convenient for the elderly or others who may have trouble traveling to treatment.

The privacy of the program may be useful for people who feel a sense of shame due to their gambling activity and would otherwise be reluctant to reach out for help. Similarly, the online aspect of the program can be attractive for high-profile individuals who don’t want to be seen around others who might recognize and judge them.

Gambler Healing also provides a way for people who might want to simply explore their gambling behavior and consequences to determine whether they have a problem. “In this respect, it can be used as an early intervention to stop a continued progression that might result in employment, family or marital problems,” says Lisa. People who choose to work the program on their own may also share their information with a counselor should they later decide to seek outside help.

Mental health professionals may find benefit in Gambler Healing as well. It allows those who are newer to those addicted to gambling an insight into the addiction and possibly connecting to one of MN’s certified gambling counselors to coordinate a treatment plan.



Susan Sheridan Tucker
Executive Director
MNAPG

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Happy 2023!

It's possible that by the time you read this there will be some movement on the sports betting front in Minnesota. MNAPG will keep a close eye on any developments and continue to advocate for increased funding and services for those impacted by problem gambling. My hope is that Minnesota learns from other states, which have seen a barrage of ads from the legalization of sports gambling. Studies show that ads influence peoples' behavior, especially those that promote "free play," "free dollars" or "bonus play." Unfortunately, most states did not make provisions to limit the exposure of ads to young people, thus contributing to the continued normalization of gambling in our culture. Minnesota needs to learn this lesson by incorporating provisions on advertising into its legislation.

Over the last couple of months, I've had the opportunity to catch up on some research and general reading on gambling addiction. Of note is a series of articles the *New York Times* published in late November detailing the efforts of the gambling industry to get states to legalize sports betting. (Find the articles at www.mnapg.org/new-york-times-articles.) I'll let you draw your own conclusions, but there's enough questionable information that I hope our legislators will take notice. MNAPG is neutral on gambling – but will fiercely advocate for consumer protections. It would appear many states failed on behalf of their constituents without doing due diligence on the lobbyists' facts.

In November, we wrapped up our annual conference. We had a great lineup of speakers offering a range of perspectives on how we can address gambling addiction. We'll be featuring some conference highlights over the next couple issues of *Northern Light* and I invite you to check out some of the recorded sessions that are available on our YouTube channel: @Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling.

Internally, we are refreshing our strategic plan, as much has changed since we adopted our plan in 2018. There will be more on that to come in the near future.

I extend my warmest wishes to you in this new year;

Susan Sheridan Tucker

Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling 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 of Problem Gambling, and training of professionals in preventing and treating problem gambling.

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Gift Responsibly Campaign

For more than a decade MNAPG and the Minnesota Lottery have partnered with NCPG on their Gift Responsibly campaign, a long-standing effort to discourage adults from buying lottery products as gifts for minors. The messaging has remained fairly consistent, reminding adults that the younger someone is exposed to gambling, the greater likelihood they will develop an issue as an adult. It's a campaign that traditionally ran between Thanksgiving and New Year's. However, in 2021, lotteries and agencies like ours thought it was a message that deserved to be repeated throughout the year. Therefore, MNAPG typically reruns the campaign in May/June.

As a participating organization, we committed to pushing out the message through a variety of venues, including all our social media accounts, the Public News Service (a member-supported news service) and the *Star Tribune*. We also took a leap into the public service announcement (PSA) realm. Adam Prock, the executive director of the Minnesota Lottery, and MNAPG's Susan Sheridan Tucker faced the cameras at



NineNorth CommunityTV and recorded a joint message about the campaign. While no academy awards will be in the offing, it's yet another way of reaching the general public. The PSA resided on both organizations' websites and was broadcasted through community access stations. We're always trying to get the word out through a variety of methods.

The success of our efforts was reflected in considerable increases to traffic on our website and Facebook pages, as well as a high rate of engagement among those receiving our targeted email. Regrettably, some comments mocked the idea of gambling addiction, which serve as a reminder that many still don't understand the seriousness of this addiction — and that we have more work to do.



Youth gambling is a significant factor for gambling addiction later in life. Fortunately, there are signs and tips to alert parents if their child is gambling.

Learn More About
Youth Problem Gambling Here

Tips for Parents

- Keep lines of communication open
- Strive for a balanced approach
- Know that teens experiment
- Don't be afraid to ask for help



No-Cost Problem
Gambling
Treatment is
Available for Most
Minnesotans

Outreach Efforts in Full Swing

MNAPG's outreach efforts continue in full swing. Sonja Mertz, our community educator, went through training to become a certified prevention professional. This will allow for access to prevention resources and continued involvement in prevention training.

The fall season was packed with conference and training opportunities. MNAPG hosted exhibit tables at:

- The Co-Occurring Disorder Conference,
- The Addiction and Faith conference,
- Program Sharing conference (hosted by the Minnesota Prevention Resource Center),

- MARRCH (Minnesota Association of Resources for Recovery and Chemical Health) conference,
- Minnesota Corrections Association conference in Nisswa,
- Evergreen Family Services conference in Bemidji,
- Recovery seminar at Metro State University,
- National Alliance on Mental Illness conference,
- Allied Charities convention and

- The Association of Minnesota Counties conference.

Sonja also had the opportunity to provide presentations at the Evergreen Conference (family and youth services) and the Allied Charities Convention (charitable gambling managers). Both audiences seemed particularly interested in youth gambling and how gaming and sports betting are impacting the gambling behavior of young people.

If you'd like to have Sonja speak to a group about gambling addiction prevention, please call (612) 424-8595.



In Their Own Words Danny's Story

Nobody accidentally finds their way into a GA meeting. If you think you're having an issue, you more than likely do.

When you find yourself up at 2 a.m. betting on Chinese league basketball games, something you know nothing about, you have to realize that maybe you've got a gambling problem.

My relationship with gambling started when I was young. I remember playing cards with my uncle when I was nine or ten years old. At that time, poker was all over television, with ESPN broadcasting various poker tours. I found a website where I could play online for practice, and I spent many hours doing that.

By the time I was 14, I was staying up until four or five in the morning playing poker with my parent's credit cards. My gambling progressed, and when I moved out on my own, I thought that maybe I could gamble all the time.

But by the time I was 18, I ended up in Gamblers Anonymous (GA). It was at a church and there were only two people there. At the time, it didn't feel like the place for me. I had a full college scholarship for chess and figured I'd grow out of gambling. Unfortunately, I only lasted three months in college, and when I lost my scholarship, I lost some of my identity. I continued to gamble and also found substances as a way to try to keep gambling away.

There was a lot of pain and suffering between age 19 and 25. Although I visited GA again in 2013, I was very stubborn and didn't stick with it. I got sober when I was 25 but didn't give up gambling. By that time my income was substantially higher and my bets were larger. I also got involved in illegal activities to sustain my gambling.

In 2021, I had a substantial win and thought that would change everything. But, of course, it didn't. I found myself sick and tired of being sick and tired. This time, my involvement with GA feels different. I'm more committed, have sponsors, chair meetings and go every week. While treatment centers may work for some (I went to the Vanguard Center for Gambling Recovery in Granite Falls as well as to a gambling treatment center in Florida), I've found that GA works best for me.

It's now been eight months since I gambled. I'm very happy now. I have a great job and great friends. I'm back together with my girlfriend, who has been through a lot with me.

As someone who got into heroin at one point, I can honestly say that the high from gambling was greater than that of heroin. It is the hardest of the addictions. It's easier to lie

to think you can win something. With drugs and alcohol, you won't win anything, but with gambling, you can trick yourself.

To those who are struggling with gambling and wondering what to do, I would say this. Nobody accidentally finds their way into a GA meeting. If you think you're having an issue, you more than likely do. But there's help out there. There are a lot of different meetings and a lot of people are willing to help you. The environment is very welcoming and nonjudgmental. I realize now that the age factor — my being younger than many in GA — was simply a copout.

But I do think there's a need for more GA meetings focused on young people, particularly now there are likely more younger people gambling because of the easy access. It can be difficult when you look around and see that most of the other meeting attendees are older. For this reason, I've worked to create a "young persons" GA meeting. My hope is that it will help others like myself.

New Gamblers Anonymous Youth Meeting

Given that many Gamblers Anonymous (GA) meetings include people age 30 and higher, a new GA "young persons" meeting has been created for younger people. The goal is for this meeting to be a place where young people can feel comfortable discussing their gambling behavior and relating to others of a similar age. The meeting takes place every Sunday at 7 p.m. at the New Hope Alano.



In early December, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) fined Epic Games, the designer of Fortnite, for \$520 million. Fortnite is a survival game where up to 100 players fight against each other in player-versus-player combat to be the last one standing. In just five years, Fortnite became a billion-dollar success with millions of children and teens engaging in play and spending millions on in-game purchases — to the surprise of many parents when they opened their credit card bills.

The FTC accused the company of illegally collecting children's personal information and using manipulative techniques to get players to make unintentional purchases.

This is the strongest response to date from the FTC in trying to address the significant privacy breaches and addiction-grooming practices many of these unregulated games have adopted. Some state and federal lawmakers are taking notice and introducing federal legislation to expand the federal children's online privacy law. Sen. Edward J. Markey of Massachusetts filed the first bill and is urging members of Congress to take notice of "young people being targeted, tracked and traumatized, as popular platforms rake in profits every day." Sen. Markey has been working with the 20-member coalition to make the appropriate legislative changes.

Coalition Appeals to Federal Trade Commission to Protect Children from Gambling

A coalition led by Fairplay, a nonprofit children's advocacy group, the Center for Digital Democracy, a children's privacy and digital rights group, along with the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Network for Public Education, filed a **petition** in mid-November with the Federal Trade Commission to prohibit online video games and social networks, such as TikTok, from employing certain attention-grabbing practices that may hook children online.

This 20-member coalition has registered particular concern over the offering of unpredictable rewards, a well-known gambling element used to keep children online. The group is also asking the agency to prohibit online services from using social pressure techniques and limitless content that may keep children spending more time online than planned.



Gamblers Anonymous Meetings

Visit minnesotaga.com to find meetings for those with compulsive gambling problems as well as meetings for family and friends.



Lower-Risk Gambling Guidelines

A low-risk approach to gambling means choosing to gamble on a limited basis and because it's a fun recreational activity. By following these three guidelines, you can ensure you gamble responsibly (all guidelines should be observed to maximize safety).

1

HOW MUCH

Gamble no more than **1%** of household income before tax per month

and

4

HOW OFTEN

Gamble no more than **4 days** per month

and

2

HOW MANY

Avoid regularly gambling at more than **2 types** of games

Note: these limits may not be suitable for those experiencing problems from alcohol, cannabis or other drug use, problems with anxiety or depression, or have a family history of addiction or problem gambling.



iGaming: the Next Frontier of Legalized Gambling

There has been increasing national attention on the recent push to legalize sports betting. (Minnesota has yet to pass a bill but look for action this legislative session.) However, another potentially lucrative expansion may be iGaming, defined as all forms of gambling games available through online apps. We were introduced to online gaming unknowingly through social casinos and “free-to-play” games on our phones. In a relatively short period of time (the iPhone came to market in 2007), gaming designers and gambling operators have exploited the tremendous opportunities to gain new customers and revenue through these relatively new venues.

At the Fall 2022 gathering of the Global Gaming Expo (G2E) in Las Vegas, a panel of gaming industry leaders discussed the opportunities afforded by legalizing iGaming. Currently, only six states allow iGaming: Pennsylvania, Michigan, Connecticut, New Jersey, West Virginia and Delaware. Leaders throughout the industry have asserted that the U.S. could gain \$30 billion in annual revenue if iGaming were legalized in 42 states with commercial and/or tribal casinos

and mobile sports betting. Some leaders expressed that iGaming would be quite competitive with commercial brick and mortar gambling. So, why aren’t more states jumping on this potential windfall?

Four reasons were cited by the panel:

1. Most states experienced a budget windfall due to COVID federal payments, reducing the need for additional revenue.
2. Lawmakers are concerned that adding iGaming will lower land-based revenue and cost jobs.
3. The risk that iGaming could lead to more gambling addiction.
4. iGaming doesn’t appear to have the same consumer interest as sports betting.

In addition to these four reasons, the panelists discussed the need for non-industry leaders to champion the cause. The tsunami-like approval by 35 states to legalize sports betting after the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to overturn the ban in May 2018 was attributable in part to the number of consumers who were in favor of its passage. Currently, there doesn’t appear to be an equivalent level of enthusiasm for iGaming.

In hindsight, the industry is thinking it may have moved too quickly to get sports betting through, when it should have paired the two in legislation, taking advantage of the pent-up demand for sports betting. Nor did it anticipate the level of federal COVID money going to the states, which has created at least a pause in lawmakers’ thinking about the benefits of expanding gambling again. Some lawmakers are considering that the expansion of slot machines and table games on a phone 24/7 may contribute to more gambling problems than sports betting.

(While it’s still early in the cycle and not a lot of data has been collected to measure the impacts of sports betting and iGaming, there are real concerns being raised about the level of advertising for sports betting and its influence over consumers, whether adequate consumer protections are in place in states that have passed sports betting and/or iGaming, and what states’ responses will be if addiction rates rise while minimal funds were set aside to address the issues.)

MNAPG will be watching this carefully and will continue to keep you informed of changes in the field.

ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS

Why belong to the Alliance?

You can make MNAPG’s voice stronger and affirm 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 MNAPG.org/membership.

PLATINUM



Draft Kings

SILVER



Treasure Island
Casino

GOLD



Minnesota Indian
Gaming Association



Shakopee Mdewakanton
Sioux Community



Running Aces



Canterbury Park



Minnesota State
Lottery



Mille Lacs Band
of Ojibwe

Highlights from the Minnesota Conference on Problem Gambling



**Connecting.
Reflecting.
Moving Forward.**

Assessing the state of problem gambling – 2022

The Minnesota Conference on Problem Gambling, produced by MNAPG, took place on November 15. The theme was *Connecting. Reflecting. Moving Forward. Assessing the state of problem gambling.* Our conference featured counselors, researchers, an economist and individuals with lived experience.

In this issue of *Northern Light*, we're highlighting two of our most powerful presentations, both from those with lived experience. Stories of recovery are always among the most popular sessions at our conference. While each of these stories is unique in terms of games of choice, length of addiction and recovery motivation, they also share common elements, such as greater self-awareness and a much-needed sense of peace.

Women's Panel Discussion

The women's panel discussion included four women of various ages and backgrounds detailing their experiences: three were gamblers in recovery and one was an affected family member. Each of the panelists were mothers and were motivated in their recovery to do better not just for themselves but for their children as well.

Among the perspectives shared was the need for there to be safe spaces for women in recovery, particularly for women of color. Many incorrect assumptions are made about women gamblers and clinicians don't typically pursue gambling behaviors with their female clients, not realizing that it can be a part of their addiction or mental health story.

Other takeaways from the presentation include:

- Women's betting isn't any different than men, though other aspects of their stories are different.
- It's important to have women-only safe spaces for those who have experienced sexual traumas.

- Recovery is not one-size-fits-all, and finding spaces to meet their particular needs was vital to their recovery.
- In some instances, there was generational trauma/addiction, necessitating the need to have frank conversations to break the chain.

Several times throughout the presentation, the women expressed the desire for clinicians and researchers to pay more attention to women, to ask questions about gambling, and to dig deeper into the behavior. They felt that women have been long ignored and that diagnosing the gambling addiction didn't come to light until each were far along in the addiction.

It takes tremendous courage to relate one's story to an audience. MNAPG is so grateful to each of these women for agreeing to participate and sharing some of their insights and experiences.

Financial Risk Discussion

Chris Farrell of Minnesota Public Radio and Dan Trolaro of Epic Risk Management spoke about financial literacy and financial freedom and its relationship to gambling. Chris, who has a background in finance and investments, emphasized the importance of weighing risks. Dan, formerly a finance and investment trader, is a person in recovery who used gambling as a salve after experiencing first-hand trauma and tragedy from the World Trade Center attack. His gambling led him to embezzle millions and he ultimately served time for his crimes. Together, Chris and Dan offered a great dialogue about investing today, understanding the differences between risk – appropriate vs. inappropriate, and reframing the understanding of financial literacy.

The speakers emphasized that investing is not a bad thing, but stressed that if one is to do it, they need to understand the vehicles in which they are investing. Additionally, before any investing takes place, it's important to have

conversations with yourself and family as to what you want your money to do for you. Is it for retirement, college, family vacations or long-term health needs? It's important to set goals and hold yourself accountable to those goals.

Chris talked about peer groups that come together with similar investing goals and values, holding each other accountable and supporting one another as they try to obtain those goals. There's nothing wrong with putting some money into the market as long as you fully understand what you are putting at risk. Financial literacy is meant to inform you about the risks and to develop good habits; it's not a tool to determine what to invest in. Establishing goals and holding particular values about money is key.

Financial literacy is about freedom, opportunity and risk, and creating a life that incorporates these three elements. We want people to make appropriate decisions by asking, "What does financial freedom look like to you?" "What do you want your money story to be?" "What are the appropriate risks to get you there?"

The question was raised as to whether people who are early in their recovery should invest at all. Dan said it was important in his early recovery not to invest. He feels a sustainable and meaningful long-term recovery must be a total transformation. Recovery is the path that leads to a whole new life where there isn't room for gambling. It's a wholesale change to the way one lives one's life.



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