



Gamblers Anonymous Unveils New Blue Book

Gamblers Anonymous (GA) has unveiled an updated Blue Book, the first such revision in nearly 40 years. The purpose of the book is to better serve both new and current members in their search for recovery from gambling addiction.

Specifically, members wanted a book that would:

- Function as a how-to for GA
- Facilitate working with sponsees
- Help members quickly understand the process
- Be something that would help anyone understand what the program is

The existing Blue Book was dated and generally not being used by the fellowship, according to Tom S., a member of the committee charged with producing an updated book. Considerable changes have taken place in gambling since 1984, including online sports betting and the proliferation of casinos.

“Mostly gone are the days of cigar-smoking horse players and sports bettors dropping a dime in a payphone and calling a bookie,” says Tom. “The gamblers coming to our meetings today are more likely to be casino gamblers, gamblers caught up in state-sponsored gambling, female gamblers and younger gamblers. They didn’t find a connection to the Blue Book of 1984.”

The revised book reflects changes that have already occurred in most GA meetings, including an effort to be more inclusive and an emphasis that meetings be solution-based — including recovery steps — rather than “war story” based.

The book was eight years in the making (partially delayed by the pandemic) and was produced by eight active Minnesota GA members with combined sobriety of approximately 120 years. The book is comprised of all original material, with no language borrowed from other twelve-step fellowships (although twelve-step principles and philosophy are woven throughout).

The book encapsulates the vast experience of its contributors and is a storehouse of ideas for recovering gamblers, covering issues such as how to deal with gambling urges, how to go to a meeting, how to get involved in GA, how to choose a sponsor, how to grow in recovery and how to repair relationships. The book also incorporates material from the GA Combo Book.

New chapters were added that address suicide, relapse, sponsorship, and hope and persistence.

“The chapter on suicide is extremely important and, until now, was completely missing from GA literature,” says Tom.

The new book does not include declaratives, such as “you must” or “you have to” statements.

Different viewpoints are discussed and the suggestion is made for gamblers to discuss these perspectives with their sponsor or mentors.

The book is valuable for clients of counselors and therapists who choose to pursue their personal recovery journey in GA. Clients may also see themselves in the experiences depicted in the stories section of the book.

“I would encourage those who work with compulsive or problem gamblers to read this book from cover to cover, as it captures both the despair experienced by compulsive gamblers and the better way of life promised by GA,” says Jeannie B., who was also involved in producing the new book. “Professionals can also use the book to deepen their understanding of the GA program.”

To order a copy of the book, please visit gamblersanonymous.org.



Gamblers Anonymous Meetings

Visit www.minnesotaga.com to find open meetings for compulsive gamblers as well as family and friends, or closed meetings for compulsive gamblers and those who think they may have a gambling problem.



Susan Sheridan Tucker
Executive Director
MNAPG

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donors, volunteers
and affiliates who have
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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A Busy Fall

The frost is not quite on the pumpkins yet as I write this, but the squirrels have definitely been enjoying the bounty. We're as busy as the squirrels in the fall, with a heavy conference season punctuated by the state problem gambling conference we hosted in mid-September. We had a great lineup of national speakers discussing the latest trends in problem gambling, but I wish more people took advantage of this opportunity to gain important information. All but two of the presentations were recorded and can be found on our website at mnapg.org/conference.

October was also chock full of other conferences where MNAPG both exhibited and presented. There will be several November conferences as well; please stop by our table if you happen to be at one of them.

Since Sonja Mertz, our community educator, joined MNAPG we have expanded our community outreach. Sonja has been busy in the northern part of the state, sharing a series of virtual presentations to community education groups. We're particularly excited as this has been a more difficult geographic area to cover.

The silver lining of COVID has been to enable more people to turn to virtual learning. We also suspect that with stigma and shame still so prevalent, virtual presentations enable attendees to maintain their anonymity. While we would prefer in-person events, this provides greater opportunity to expand our awareness efforts.

I'd also like to extend tremendous gratitude to the MNAPG staff and our longtime consultants, Vicki Stark and Bill Stein, for the tremendous work on our website. Rebuilding from scratch is not for the faint of heart, and our efforts paid off. We were recognized at the National Council on Problem Gambling's conference as having the best state affiliate website. It was most gratifying to receive that acknowledgement from our peers. In addition to the website award, MNAPG's newsletter (this quarterly publication) was again recognized as the best state affiliate newsletter. Our team is committed to making MNAPG the best resource on problem gambling for Minnesotans and anyone else seeking information.

It continues to be a privilege to do this work.

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.

Northern Light is funded by a grant from the state of Minnesota. Designer: Evans-Stark Design. Writer: Bill Stein



An Eye to the Future of Sports Gambling in Minnesota

Although Minnesota did not pass a bill legalizing sports gambling during the last session, many think it's just a matter of time before it happens.

With an eye toward the future – and an eye on the experiences of several other states who have legalized sports gambling – we talked to problem gambling leaders in New Jersey and Michigan for their observations and warnings. (The Summer 2023 issue of *Northern Light* highlighted the sports gambling experiences of Ohio and Pennsylvania.)

New Jersey

In New Jersey, where brick-and-mortar gambling has existed since 1978, online gambling was legalized in 2013. Sportsbooks became legal in 2018, leading to a dramatic increase in sports gambling.

Among other notable changes is the increase in gambling advertising, which has “bombarded the public,” according to Felicia Grondin, executive director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ). She notes that the gambling industry’s advertising was \$292 million in 2020 and \$725 million a year later.

CCGNJ has worked with the state to regulate gambling advertising. The New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement (DGE) has begun a new responsible gambling initiative whereby operators must abide by certain requirements, including the frequency of advertising and font size (to ensure visibility of problem gambling helpline information). CCGNJ has also been advocating for a PSA-type ad that will inform the state’s residents of the potential for gambling harm.

Increase in Calls for Help

Calls to the state’s problem gambling helpline are up dramatically. Of the increase in helpline calls, 20 percent are related to sportsbooks and 27% are related to online play, a considerable portion of which is presumed to be related to sports gambling. There’s been a reduction in general calls from people asking where to find casinos,

what winning numbers are for the lottery, etc., but calls have increased from those who need help with a gambling problem. “I think the public is starting to understand more about the purpose of our 800GAMBLER helpline and how it works,” says Felicia.

Effective Communications with State Legislature

CCGNJ has also put an emphasis on communications with the state legislature, which Felicia says has proven fruitful. They engage legislators on various problem gambling topics through visits to the statehouse and bi-monthly blogs. Thanks to these efforts, the state has been more deliberate in its approach to gambling. One example is reducing a ten-year extension for online gambling to five years. “Legislators are recognizing that people are developing gambling problems and the importance of monitoring its related impact,” says Felicia.

Educating School Students

Shortly before the state assembly introduced a bill to require schools to provide instruction on the risks of gambling, as they do with other public health issues, the CCGNJ created the Cognitive Perspective Restructuring program (CPR). The program educates kids about risky behavior, including gambling, and how to make wise choices for a bright future.

As it relates to Minnesota, Felicia cites several things that our state should think about as it considers legalizing sports gambling:

- Establish parameters around advertising — frequency, the content, where it’s aired, etc.
- Post warning labels at brick-and-mortar locations as well as online.
- Ensure that students are educated about the risks of gambling at an early age.
- Produce public service announcements to create greater awareness.
- Request an increase in problem gambling funding commensurate with expected growth in gambling.

Michigan

Michigan officially legalized sports betting in December 2019. The first retail sportsbooks in the state opened in March 2020 and the online launch took place in January 2021.

The growth in sports gambling echoes the growth occurring around the nation. In September 2023, Michigan sportsbooks tallied \$457.7 million in bets for the month. This represents a 25.6% increase from September of 2022.

With the availability of online gambling, Michael Burke, executive director of the Michigan Association on Problem Gambling, says it’s as though Michigan has gone from 34 casinos to a state that has 10 million casinos in the pockets of each resident. “It used to take people five to ten years to get addicted, but with easier access now, it’s more like five to ten months,” he says. Michael also is concerned about the impact of easy access on youth gambling and says that educating kids about the risks is vital.

According to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, in the first year since the legalization of sports betting and online gambling in Michigan, more than 4,400 calls were made to the state’s problem gambling helpline in 2021. This was nearly triple the number of calls received in 2020, the year before online gambling was approved. Referrals for people to receive gambling treatment also grew significantly, from 295 referrals in 2020 to 420 referrals in 2021, a 42% increase.

As Michael looks to a state (such as Minnesota) that hasn’t yet legalized sports gambling, he has a warning. “If you’re going to bring in gambling, you have to know what the results are going to be as far as compulsive gambling is concerned,” he says. “Legislators need to take their responsibility seriously and ensure that there’s something in place for a person who suffers harm from gambling. That’s the least they can do.”

MNAPG Receives National Awards From National Council on Problem Gambling

The Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling (MNAPG) received two national awards at the recent conference of the National Council on Problem Gambling.



"We have devoted considerable time and resources into both of these important communication tools, so we're thrilled to see our work recognized at a national level," says Susan Sheridan Tucker, MNAPG executive director. "I am grateful to my team for their contributions in making these useful resources."



The 2023 Affiliate Website Award from the National Council on Problem Gambling recognizes an outstanding website that has increased awareness of problem gambling.

MNAPG's new website is the culmination of in-depth planning into MNAPG's various audiences. MNAPG strives to be the central hub for all things Minnesota problem gambling-related, offering access to treatment information, research findings, recovery stories and podcasts.



The 2023 Affiliate Newsletter Award from the National Council on Problem Gambling recognizes an outstanding problem gambling-related newsletter.

Northern Light, MNAPG's quarterly newsletter, has earned several national awards since it was created in 2010. The newsletter seeks to educate readers about the latest trends in problem gambling, treatment and prevention, as well as provide updates on the organization's outreach efforts and highlight stories of hope in recovery.



It's always good to see stories or other messages in the news that raise awareness about the risks of gambling.

Here are some recent items that came to our attention.

Problem Gambling in the News

Star Tribune article "A Beacon for Addicts." This article, which appeared on the front page of the October 23, 2023 edition, highlighted how the legalization of sports betting could result in significant increases in the number of Minnesotans seeking to access the state treatment program. The article also featured Project Turnabout's Vanguard residential gambling treatment program.



National Federation of High School (NFHS) Video Voice. NFHS CEO Karissa Niehoff says recent gambling scandals at the college and professional sports levels should serve as a wake-up call for parents, student-athletes, athletic directors and coaches at the high school level. In addition to warnings about high school students becoming involved in unhealthy gambling habits, she said there should be no betting on high school sports to maintain the integrity of these education-based activities. The link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_gSM_HZncM.

Good Morning America (GMA) story. A story appeared on GMA about a teen with a sports gambling addiction. The link: <https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/living/video/teen-opens-gambling-addiction-102923509>.

MNAPG Welcomes Two New Board Members

Two new board directors joined MNAPG this summer. We're pleased to welcome Becky Pakarinen as treasurer and Muhannah Kakish as member at large – executive committee.



Becky Pakarinen

Senior Director
of Financial and
Employment Services at
Lutheran Social Service
of Minnesota, Treasurer

Q: Tell us a little bit about your background.

A: Before coming to work at Lutheran Social Service (LSS), I was an elementary school teacher, and along with teaching the kids you get to really know them and their families. There was a lot of addiction and financial struggles going on in the home, which then carried over into the classroom through their kids. It was hard to see these great families going through such tough times and not have a lot of knowledge or resources to help them. So, when I saw the opportunity to make a career change and become a financial

counselor, it was a path that held a lot of interest for me. In my work as a financial counselor, I supported families directly, and then as a trainer and now senior director I bring in experts to ensure our counselors have the best knowledge and tools to help our clients achieve their financial goals.

Q: What do you hope you can contribute to the board and the mission?

A: Working at various levels in financial counseling has really allowed me to understand the struggles, whether large or small, that everyone has with their finances. It is important to me to normalize financial counseling so that folks reach out for help when they need it.

Q: Are there particular areas within problem gambling that are of special interest to you?

A: I am passionate about working to take the shame out of problem gambling. There are great services, tools and people out there who truly care and can help folks get back on track with their finances.

Q: What are some of your hobbies and interests?

A: I enjoy watching my kids play sports and spending time outdoors traveling, hiking and snowshoeing with family and friends.



Muhannah Kakish

Certified Peer Recovery
Support Specialist,
Member at Large

Q: Tell us a little bit about your background.

A: As a person in long-term recovery, I offer a unique perspective to the group. My understanding of recovery and specifically the continued sustainability of positive growth, is evidenced by my achievements in the field. I am a certified peer recovery support specialist, forensics peer recovery specialist, certified peer support specialist, as well as a certified wrap I facilitator. In addition to the titles I have earned, I've engaged in numerous other trainings and community endeavors. I am the host and creator of The Rise Up Hour, a weekly radio broadcast on WFNU 94.1 FM. The Rise Up Hour has given me the platform to reach the community by embracing all forms of recovery, celebrating allies to recovery, and espousing opportunities of involvement available. In addition to my

focus on recovery, I am in the process of re-launching my eyecare business, EyEs Limited. I have taken every experience I've had, as well as everything I've learned from those experiences, to enhance my success to build the entity I've always envisioned.

Q: What do you hope you can contribute to the board and the mission?

A: Given my unique perspective, I hope to bring my lived-life perspective to the board. I want problem gambling to receive the recognition and inclusion, in terms of services available for recovery, that it demands. That includes the inclusion of problem gambling in the peer support recovery coach curriculum. I intend to offer my common sense, my background as a professional in a business context and the insight I've gained through my certifications and training. One of my biggest goals in serving on this board is to help remove the stigma of problem gambling and make getting help in dealing with the situation less taxing and more common.

Q: What are some of your hobbies and interests?

A: In my spare time, I am an avid volunteer in the community for a variety of causes, including The Steve Rummier HOPE Network, Minnesota Recovery Connection, the Peer Support Alliance and others. I also enjoy a variety of hobbies, including rock collecting, bird watching, gardening and playing with my two energetic dogs. I've recently embraced journaling and have begun to explore my artistic aspirations through sketching and painting.

In Their Own Words Sam's Story



Looking back on it, my desire for gambling was sparked when I was a kid going to carnivals. I couldn't do enough to win that goldfish or that toy. Little did I know that that insatiable urge would eventually find me sleeping in a casino parking lot on my motorcycle — homeless, jobless and broke.

My dad was always a gambler and a drinker, and I guess that's just the way I was raised. It all seemed a part of life. My dad would play poker with friends at Christmas and I wanted to play. Instead, I was given a deck of cards to play by myself.

I grew up in a town in South Dakota that, in the 1980s, essentially became the third legal gambling destination in the country — after Las Vegas and Atlantic City. When I turned 16, I managed to play video poker, even though the legal age was 18. I won my first jackpot — winning \$125 on 25 cents! — and that was the beginning of the end.

When I turned 21, I was excited to gamble with my dad and brother. I was up for anything to do with gambling.

I gambled off and on for the next 20 years or so. I also had drinking and drug problems and had been in and out of several treatment centers for drug and alcohol abuse. In 2006, I was sentenced to prison for eight years for writing bad checks and fraud. I remember asking the judge if they had a gambling court as they do for drugs and alcohol, but they had no equivalent.

The way I learned about help for gambling in the form of Gamblers Anonymous (GA) was accidental. I was out on parole after four years of the eight-year sentence and was

sent to a halfway house. I remember asking if there was an alcohol or drug meeting close by that I could walk to. The response was, "Yes, but unfortunately it's only a GA meeting."

I went to that meeting and that's when I first found a certain sense of home. I remember thinking, "These people understand why I can't stop gambling."

When I first found the GA community, I thought I had my gambling woes — as well as drinking and drugs — whooped. But while I found the right people, I didn't use the tools properly. Still, I knew from then on that I had a place to go.

I had several relapses, including one after I was six years clean. There were times when I thought I could be a social gambler but my addiction would just pick up where it left off. I realized that what I was missing was not believing I was powerless.

For two weeks at the depth of my gambling addiction (along with other addictions), I hit rock bottom. I'd lost my job and relationship, was on meth and was broke. I had no place to go. I slept near the fireplace of a casino until Security kicked me out. That's how I ended up sleeping with my bike against a wall in a casino parking lot. I really didn't want to live any more.

But this time I picked myself up. From the casino parking lot, I ended up at the Union Gospel Mission homeless shelter in St. Paul. While there, I had a moment of clarity and remembered that I still had my sponsor's phone number from when I attended two GA meetings months earlier. I called

I can't explain why gambling was the one addiction that I relapsed. I've come to realize how baffling and powerful a gambling addiction can be.

him, desperate for help. He was willing to help me, but only if I helped myself. I was ultimately able to get to a regional treatment facility, which helped me get to a healthier place, though I still relapsed for a short time after that. I can't explain why gambling was the one addiction that I relapsed. I've come to realize how baffling and powerful a gambling addiction can be.

The last time I relapsed was six months ago. I've never stopped going to meetings and I have a powerful circle of recovery friends. I believe that I don't have another relapse in me.

I'm 51 and starting school at Metro State University. I haven't picked a major yet but my goal is to try to get into something where I can be a voice for the court system in compulsive gambling. I want to become a licensed alcohol and drug counselor (LADC) and help others like myself.

I definitely feel like I'm a miracle. I was institutionalized for a chunk of my life. I know I'm not perfect today and still have problems, but it's a much better life.



Connecting.
Reflecting.
Moving Forward.
Prevention + Recovery = Hope

2023

2023 MINNESOTA CONFERENCE ON PROBLEM GAMBLING



Sonja Mertz, MNAPG community educator, and volunteer Dennis Aifton prepare to welcome conference registrants.



Cara Macksoud, CEO of Money Habitudes, and Alex De Marco, founder and CEO of MoneyStack, discussed the financial challenges facing problem gamblers. This included bringing awareness of financial counseling resources and tools available to support clinical work with clients, as well as learning how to use an assessment tool to have better conversations about money with clients.



Susan Sheridan Tucker, executive director of MNAPG, welcomes Jeffrey Wasserman (left), judicial outreach and development director for the Delaware Council on Gambling Problems, and Brian Hatch, peer recovery specialist for Bettor Choice. Jeffrey and Brian, cohosts of The Addicted Gambler's Podcast, made a live recording of the podcast and touched on a wide range of problem gambling issues with an emphasis on lived experience.



Timothy Wong, MD, a professor of Psychiatry at the Jane and Terry Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA, gave two presentations. The first looked at cultural values of gambling among Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) that contribute to gambling and problem gambling. The second presentation examined how the rapid expansion of sports betting has and will impact a person's mind, body and brain functioning.



MNAPG staff gathered at the end of the conference. From left to right: Vicki Stark, contract designer, Sonja Mertz, MNAPG community educator, Bill Stein, contract writer, Susan Sheridan-Tucker, MNAPG executive director, and Eboun Wilbourn, MNAPG operations manager.

If you missed the conference or would like to take another look at a presentation, visit mnapg.org/conference, where you'll find recordings of most of the presentations.

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.

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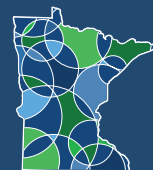
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Fall 2023
Volume 48

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