



**WISCONSIN COUNCIL**  
ON PROBLEM GAMBLING



## Problem Gambling history is common among homeless people

*Homeless clients are nearly nine times more likely to have a history of problem or pathological gambling than the general population, a new study has found. "Intuitively, one might think there's a connection between problem gambling and homelessness but very few studies have explored this in any depth.," said one researcher. "By doing this kind of research, we help community organizations to better understand their clients and provide more holistic, effective treatment."*

### FULL STORY

Homeless clients using services at Toronto's Good Shepherd Ministries are nearly nine times more likely to have a history of problem or pathological gambling than the general population, a new study from St. Michael's Hospital has found.

"Intuitively, one might think there's a connection between problem gambling and homelessness but very few studies have explored this in any depth.," said Dr. Flora Matheson, a research scientist with St. Michael's Centre for Research on Inner City Health. "By doing this kind of research, we help community organizations to better understand their clients and provide more holistic, effective treatment."

The findings, published in the June issue of *Journal of Gambling Studies*, looked at the prevalence of problem gambling and pathological gambling among 254 clients at Good Shepherd.

Good Shepherd -- a community-based organization in Toronto -- provides a range of services for homeless clients. Its administrators were concerned that an organizational focus on substance addiction and mental health issues might mean that gambling was a "blind spot" for its staff.

Of the 254 interviewed at Good Shepherd, 35 per cent indicated that at some point in their lives they had been either a problem or pathological gambler. The prevalence of gambling in the general population is around 0.6 to 4 per cent.

"Toronto shelters now have a sense of how important screening for gambling history is among people who are homeless," said Dr. Matheson. "Further research is still needed to know whether similar rates exist across the country or the globe."

Dr. Matheson suggests shelters should consider implementing screening for gambling as part of intake. Organizations that identify similarly high rates of problem gambling could then improve services by:

- Training staff on the signs of gambling addiction
- Equipping staff with referral resources for gambling addiction programs
- Forming partnerships with organizations that offer gambling addiction programs
- Considering potential in-house responses to gambling addictions

Gambling was defined as betting money or something of material value on an event with an uncertain outcome -- such as horse races, dice, scratch cards, bingo or even a card game with friends. While gambling can be a harmless pastime for some, for others it can become an addiction affecting daily life.

Those who experience gambling as a harmful addiction are often classified as problem gamblers and have difficulty limiting money or time spent on gambling. There are varying degrees of problem gambling but pathological gambling is the most severe form; an example would be when money is spent gambling rather than on basic life necessities such as food or shelter.

A plain language report detailing the research collaboration between Good Shepherd and the Centre for Research on Inner Health was also launched today.

**Story Source:** [Materials](#) provided by [St. Michael's Hospital](#). *Note: Content may be edited for style and length.*

**Journal Reference:** Flora I. Matheson, Kimberly Devotta, Aklilu Wendaferew, Cheryl Pedersen. **Prevalence of Gambling Problems Among the Clients of a Toronto Homeless Shelter.** *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 2014; 30 (2): 537 DOI: [10.1007/s10899-014-9452-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-014-9452-7)

**Citation:** St. Michael's Hospital. "Gambling history is common among homeless people in Toronto, new study." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 21 May 2014. <[www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/05/140521133619.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/05/140521133619.htm)>.

**The Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling, Inc. provides resources, public awareness and education on gambling disorders while maintaining strict neutrality on the issue of legalized gambling.**

Services Provided by the WCPG:

- Promote public education and awareness of gambling disorders
- Maintain a toll-free statewide Helpline
- Provide Resources:
  - Gamblers Anonymous Meetings,
  - Treatment Providers,
  - Credit counseling referrals
- Expert training to professional counselors in the treatment of gambling disorders

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Problem Gambling



### WHAT IS PROBLEM GAMBLING?

Problem gambling or gambling addiction includes all gambling behavior patterns that compromise, disrupt or damage personal, family or vocational pursuits. The symptoms include:

- increasing preoccupation with gambling
- a need to bet more money more frequently
- “chasing” losses (betting even more to try to recoup previous losses)
- restlessness/irritability when trying to stop
- loss of control manifested by continuation of gambling despite mounting, serious, negative consequences
- in extreme cases, problem gambling can result in financial ruin, legal problems, loss of career and family, or even suicide (\$7 billion social cost in America alone!)

### ISN'T PROBLEM GAMBLING JUST A FINANCIAL PROBLEM?

No. Problem gambling is an emotional problem that has financial consequences. If you pay all the debts of a person affected by problem gambling, the person still has a gambling problem or gambling disorder. The real issue is that they have an uncontrollable obsession with gambling.

### WHO IS AT RISK FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING?

Anyone who gambles can develop problems. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the risks and to gamble in a responsible way, if you choose to gamble. When gambling behavior interferes with finances, relationships and the workplace, a serious problem already exists.

### HOW CAN A PERSON BE ADDICTED TO SOMETHING THAT ISN'T A SUBSTANCE?

Although no substance is ingested, someone with a gambling problem gets the same effect from gambling as one might get from taking a drug or drinking alcohol. But just as tolerance develops to drugs or alcohol, a person with gambling problems finds that it takes more and more of the gambling experience to achieve the same effect as before. This creates an increased urge for the activity and the person finds that they have less and less ability to resist as the craving grows in intensity and frequency.

### HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU HAVE TO LOSE BEFORE GAMBLING BECOMES AN ISSUE?

The amount of money lost or won does not determine when gambling becomes problematic. Gambling becomes an issue when it causes a negative impact on any area of the person's life.

### HOW WIDESPREAD IS PROBLEM GAMBLING IN THE U.S.?

2 million U.S. adults (1%) are estimated to meet criteria for severe gambling problems each year. Another 4-6 million (2-3%) would be considered to have mild or moderate gambling problems; that is, they do not meet the full diagnostic criteria for gambling addiction but meet one or more of the criteria and are experiencing problems due to their gambling behavior. Research also indicates that most adults who choose to gamble can do so responsibly.

### CAN CHILDREN OR TEENAGERS DEVELOP GAMBLING ISSUES?

A few states allow children under 18 to gamble, and youth also participate in illegal forms of gambling, such as gambling on the internet or betting on sports in states where it is not legal. Thus, it is not surprising that research shows that a vast majority of kids have gambled before their 18th birthdays, and that children may be more likely to develop issues related to gambling than adults. While debate continues, there appears to be several factors influencing this finding. Parental attitudes and behavior play a role. Age of exposure also plays a part – research shows that adults who seek treatment for problem gambling report having started gambling at an early age.

## Gambling Disorder Screening Day

### About the Event

The National Council on Problem Gambling is partnering with the Cambridge Health Alliance Division on Addiction, which has developed a free Gambling Disorder Screening Day Toolkit.

The Gambling Disorder Screening Day Toolkit can be accessed on our website at [www.wi-problemgamblers.org](http://www.wi-problemgamblers.org) under the events tab.

#### Date

03/9/2021

#### Start Time

6:00 am

#### End Time

11:00 pm

Materials include information on:

- What is Gambling Disorder?
- Why Screen for Gambling?
- About the Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen
- The Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen
- An electronic version of the Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen (only users see their results)
- Gambling Resources & Referrals
- Your First Step to Change (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), a self-help toolkit ...and more

Special thanks to the Cambridge Health Alliance Division on Addiction.

### Problem Gambling Warning Signs

- Increasing the frequency and amount of money gambled
- Spending an excessive amount of time gambling at the expense of job or family time.
- Being pre-occupied with gambling or with obtaining money with which to gamble.
- Gambling creates a special and intense pleasure, an aroused sense of being in “action”.
- Continuing to gamble despite negative consequences such as large losses, or work or family problems caused by gambling.
- Gambling as a means to cope with loneliness, anger, stress, depression, etc.
- “Chasing” or the urgent need to keep gambling often with larger bets – or the taking of greater risks in order to make up for a loss or series of losses.
- Borrowing money to gamble, taking out secret loans, or maximizing credit cards.
- Bragging about wins but not talking about losses.
- Frequent mood swings, higher when winning, lower when losing.
- Gambling for longer periods of time or more money than originally planned.
- Secretive behavior such as hiding lottery tickets and betting slips, having mail, bills, etc., sent to work, a P.O. Box or other address.

#### Lie-Bet: 2-Question Screening Tool

These two questions aid in identifying gambling problems. No single question is adequate in capturing the majority of those experiencing gambling problems. Answering “yes” to one or both of these questions is suggestive of a problem deserving further assessment.

1. Have you ever felt the need to bet more and more money?
2. Have you ever had to lie to people important to you about how much you gamble?