



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON PROBLEM GAMBLING

MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS: Potawatomi Casino & Hotel

Gambling Addiction Amongst US Military On The Rise

by [Zachary Pottle](#)

<https://www.addictioncenter.com/news/2024/07/gambling-addiction-us-military/>

VA Sounds The Alarm Over Gambling Addiction

Gambling addiction has been on the rise across the United States, with growing concerns in some of our more vulnerable communities, like college students or those of lower socioeconomic status. However, a recent study conducted by Rutgers University has found that even those who serve in the US military aren't immune to gambling addiction. The study found that active duty service members are nearly twice as likely to have a gambling addiction, which the VA (Veterans Affairs) says could pose a threat to the country's national security.

According to the most recent data collected by the National Council on Problem Gambling, roughly 56,000 service members meet the criteria for a gambling addiction diagnosis. The VA reported that diagnoses of gambling addictions among active duty service members and veterans are skyrocketing, with more cases diagnosed in the first half of 2024 than in all of 2022 combined.

Following the VA's finding, US lawmakers are beginning to sound the alarm. In the most recent National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), Rep. Paul Tonko, D-N.Y., filed an amendment to stop the military from operating slot machines on all bases. However, the measure did not make it into this year's final NDAA.

The Rise In Gambling Addiction In The Military

While the 2018 legalization of sports betting sparked fears of an emerging gambling addiction crisis, this long-standing institutional problem within the US military dates back decades.

"All of a sudden, we started to see a lot of people with gambling problems calling and asking for some help, usually within a year or two from the time that it expanded," said Heather Chapman, a clinical psychologist and director of the national gambling treatment program for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

As of 2017, the Department of Defense operated over 3,100 slot machines on US military installations across a dozen foreign countries, according to a Government Accountability Office report. The machines generate over \$100 million annually in revenue and are considered a "morale booster" for service members, similar to activities like golf, libraries, and other entertainment.

Domestically, slot machines are prohibited on military bases; however, many bases are located within close proximity to casinos. Joint Base Lewis-McChord, one of the country's largest military bases located in Washington state, is situated within 20 minutes of seven different casinos.

"It's not terribly surprising, because with accessibility and availability increases, we tend to see a rise in unhealthy engagement," said Dominick DePhilippis, deputy national mental health director for substance use disorders for the VA.

VA research found that service members are more vulnerable to gambling disorders than civilians and may hesitate to self-report due to fears of losing their security clearance or the stigma attached to gambling problems.

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2024 Fall Newsletter

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Gambling Addiction Isn't The Only Problem Service Members Face

While concerns over gambling addiction are a rather new phenomenon, active duty service members and veterans have long been more prone to other addictions, particularly to alcohol and other substances.

Those who serve and have served in the armed forces face challenges and situations that the general population does not. These can include traumatic experiences from combat, severe chronic pain from combat or service-related injuries, PTSD, and reintegration into civilian life. All of these can make turning to drugs or alcohol an all-too-easy choice for many.

Although not all military personnel struggle with substance abuse, heavy drinking is a common problem among active duty members. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Addiction, roughly 43% of active duty military personnel indulge in binge drinking, most of whom are between 17 and 25 years old. Additionally, nearly 70% of binge drinkers were classified as "heavy" drinkers in general.

It's not just addiction that active duty service members face. The largest study ever conducted on mental health risks among the US military, published in *JAMA Psychiatry*, found that many soldiers suffer from some form of mental illness, and rates of many of these disorders are much higher in soldiers than in civilians.

Of the 5,000 active duty members surveyed, more than 25% were diagnosed with a mental disorder, with 11% meeting the criteria for more than one illness. The study also found that nearly 15% of soldiers had thought about taking their lives, while 5.3% had planned suicide and 2.4% had actually made one or more attempts.

Recognizing The Signs Of A Gambling Addiction

Like drugs or alcohol, gambling can interact with the brain, causing the release of dopamine. This release of dopamine activates the brain's reward pathway, which, over time, can lead to the development of a gambling disorder. Those suffering from gambling addiction often describe a sense of loss of control, feeling incapable of avoiding or stopping gambling.

It can be difficult to spot the signs of a gambling addiction, especially for loved ones of active duty service members. The nature of active duty service means that many may return home, either on leave or after completion of service, with trauma associated with their service. This trauma can manifest in many ways and can make it difficult to spot symptoms of other mental health disorders, like an addiction.

While gambling addiction can look different from person-to-person, some of the more common symptoms to look out for include: Needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money, Unsuccessfully attempting to control, cut back, or stop, Feeling restless or irritable when unable to gamble, Gambling to escape problems or relieve negative emotions, Attempting to get back lost money by gambling more, Jeopardizing important relationships or opportunities because of gambling and Resorting to theft or fraud to get gambling money.

Noticing the signs of a gambling addiction is the first step in getting the help you or a loved one needs. The next is taking action. Fortunately, the VA has some of the nation's best gambling addiction treatment services.

Finding Help While Serving

For active duty military members, finding help for a gambling addiction can be an incredibly difficult task. Along with day-to-day responsibilities, the fear of losing ranks or being judged by others keeps many from getting the help they need.

Currently, the VA operates two residential treatment facilities for gambling addiction and partners with civilian facilities nationwide.

"We [VA] are sort of the mecca of gambling treatment," said Heather Chapman, a clinical psychologist and director of the national gambling treatment program for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The VA is the largest integrated healthcare system in the United States. By contacting your specific branch of the military, you can get in touch with personnel who can direct you to specific groups or resources that can help. The most important thing to remember is to be open and honest with your superiors. The more honest you are up front the better.

If you wish to take advantage of private addiction treatment options, there are many options available. From inpatient treatment services to part-time outpatient rehab, there are services that can help you overcome your gambling addiction. Get help for your gambling addiction today, and start your path to a gambling-free life.

Reprinted from: <https://www.addictioncenter.com/news/2024/07/gambling-addiction-us-military/>

Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling's 26th Annual Statewide Conference
March 20th-21st, 2025
Pre-Conference March 19th

~
Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling
Presents

"Traveling Into the Future through Awareness, Education, and Prevention"

~
Stoney Creek Hotel & Conference Center
Onalaska, WI

Online registration and payments available soon on our website



WISCONSIN COUNCIL
ON PROBLEM GAMBLING



Virtual or In Person Learning Video for Schools



WCPG offers in class presentations on gambling disorders. This interactive presentation is designed to fit your class schedule. As with other addictions, our youth are at high risk to become addicted to gambling. We believe awareness, education, and providing them with the tools to recognize gambling disorders will help prevent future problems.

A video alternative is available if an in person presentation doesn't work for you. We recognize that nothing can compare with an actual person delivering a topical message. However, we believe that this video will educate, garner discussion, and serve as a basis of information on the risks of gambling for your students.

This video is 34 minutes long but provides several breaks to allow for as much in-class discussion as each teacher feels comfortable with. We placed these breaks in the video to allow for class participation. The PowerPoint slide will either pose a question or there will be a slide that says, "Take some time to discuss." During those times, we would encourage teachers to stop the video and discuss with the class. We are not asking the teachers to be experts in this field and the subsequent slide will provide answers to those questions.

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