



SENIOR FOCUS

Concerning Seniors with Gambling Problems

VOLUME 2

888-ADMIT-IT

About the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling

Hundreds of thousands of Floridians suffer from problem and compulsive gambling difficulties. Helping those individuals is the mission of the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling as a not-for-profit educational and advocacy organization under contract with Florida state government. For information call (407) 865-6200.

If you or someone you know has a gambling problem, call the FCCG 24-hour confidential HelpLine **888-ADMIT-IT (888-236-4848)**

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Older Adults At-Risk!

“It is clear,” says Florida Secretary of Elder Affairs, Terry White, “that compulsive gambling is a very real problem for older adults. Even though you see happy older adults going on casino trips, for example, we know that some of them will be gambling away everything they have. This is a major concern and is a high priority in my department. We are working closely with the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling in hopes of preventing seniors from becoming out-of-control gamblers, and getting help for those who are.”

“... compulsive gambling is a very real problem for older adults.”

In recognizing that one in 20 older Floridians are at-risk for having gambling problems, Secretary White is showing his commitment to finding solutions by mobilizing the professionals who deal with senior citizens within the state to get involved. “It is crucial,” he says, “that those of us who deal with older adults help them, their families and their caregivers become aware of this problem. Then and only then can we really begin to make a difference.”



Secretary Terry White,
Florida Department of Elder Affairs.

But making a difference isn't always easy when dealing with older adults and mental health issues like compulsive gambling. “Unfortunately,” Secretary White laments, “many senior citizens are either too embarrassed to reach out for help on such concerns or think that doing so is a sign of weakness. We absolutely have to overcome that way of thinking if we are ever going to really help those individuals who are already struggling with this issue. One solution might well be to encourage our Florida senior centers to help make counseling more acceptable and easier to access. It is definitely time to find some answers.”

Nose Dive into Nickel Slots

Don't ever let anybody tell you that nickel slot machines can't ruin you just as surely as high stakes poker or roulette can. I'm living proof that it happens.

You would think that being a senior citizen, a grandmother and a casino employee might have immunized me against becoming a compulsive gambler. But let me tell you that no matter how old or how smart you think you are, you can get hooked just like anybody else. Whatever intelligence, reason or logic I had went with the wind.



By the way, my name is Betty and I'm telling you all this because I want everyone to know the danger out-of-control gambling poses for Florida's older adults. If my story helps prevent just one senior citizen from enduring what I went through then I can rest easy.

At first I just gambled occasionally and with friends. Then later on as I went to the casinos more and more, I told myself that I was doing it to balance out my life. For so long I had been working very hard to take care of my family and build my career that I hadn't taken the time to relax and socialize. My reasoning was sound but now looking back, I can see how twisted it became. Oh sure, I would say hello to everyone when I came into the casino but after that, I really didn't want to talk to anyone.

“. . . you can get hooked just like anybody else.”

Believe me when I say that for quite a while I was a hopeless, directionless person. Maybe it was the divorce after many years of marriage or the sadness caused by a family dispute among my children that started me gambling heavily, I don't know. In those days, I would say things to myself like, "Nobody really cares what I do so what the heck. It's my life and my money and I'll do what I want for a change." But whatever it was that caused me to gamble more, I developed an addiction to slot machines that got so bad I lost my money, my credit rating, my health and above all my self respect.

Finally, when I realized I could not continue like that, and thought there was no way out, I seriously considered taking my own life. But somehow I had the strength to pull back from that darkness, found Gamblers Anonymous and connected with certified gambling treatment professionals. That was almost three years ago. Today I am living a new life without gambling and taking it one day at a time.

Self-Help Workbooks for Senior Gamblers

A new self-help program for older adults who are experiencing problems with gambling is now available. A series of seven workbooks titled, "A Chance for Change," has been developed for adults 55 and older to use in the privacy of their own homes or with a counselor. These easy to follow guides developed by the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling (FCCG) will aid senior gamblers in learning more about problem gambling, why it happens, how it happens, how it affects them and what they can do about it.

For seniors seeking help for a gambling problem, this is the time to order "A Chance for Change" workbooks. The workbooks are free for gamblers and \$25 for treatment and other health care professionals. To order this program:

**Call the (FCCG) HelpLine
at 888-ADMIT-IT**

**Email the order to
fccg@gamblinghelp.org**

**Mail to FCCG, 237
Lookout Place, Suite 100,
Maitland, Florida 32751**

**When using U.S. mail or
Email, make sure to include
your return address.**



Broward Leads the Way

In collaboration with the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling (FCCG), Broward County's Elderly and Veterans Services Division, led by Stephen Ferrante, is implementing an older adult compulsive gambling pilot program. The main thrusts of that effort are to:

- Educate Broward County older adults and their caregivers about the dangers posed by gambling
- Train the Broward County Elder and Veterans Services Division staff on compulsive gambling issues and impacts.
- Develop a method to identify which older adults might be at-risk for compulsive gambling
- Work with older adults and service providers in Broward County to determine who may already be suffering from compulsive gambling
- Assist Broward older adults who call the FCCG HelpLine with gambling problems
- Identify activities in addition to gambling that would attract older adults



Study Finds Older Adults At-Risk

A report to the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling (FCCG) by the nationally known researcher Dr. Rachel Volberg shows that a sizeable portion of Florida's senior citizen population of 4.4 million is in danger because of gambling. While most Sunshine State older adults can wager without concern, 25% gamble on a weekly basis and gambling for more than 750,000 has either proved to be a major problem in their lives or might well become one in the future. The primary reasons older adults gamble so much seems to be:

- Entertainment or fun
- To win money
- Excitement or challenge
- Support good causes
- Inexpensive entertainment
- Convenience
- As a distraction
- To be with people
- Escape feelings

For those seniors who were identified as already having a gambling problem, a disturbing finding was that this group has much higher rates of depression, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide. When this information is coupled with the clear-cut fact that older adults who lose large amounts of money at gambling have less opportunity than younger gamblers to make up for their losses, the danger beneath the fun and excitement becomes more than obvious.

In conclusion, the report strongly suggests that immediate steps be taken in Florida to:

- Prevent more older adults from becoming compulsive gamblers
- Train more people to be able to help seniors already having difficulty
- Get government agencies involved in the problem
- Develop alternative activities for older adults

In response, the FCCG has already begun to implement some of these recommendations. *(See related articles on this page and page 1)*



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WHEN GAMBLING BECOMES A PROBLEM

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Warning Signs of Older Adult Problem Gambling



- Preoccupation with gambling
- Gambling to calm nerves, forget worries or reduce depression
- Needing to gamble larger and larger amounts of money to experience the thrill
- Withdrawal from family, friends or regular activities
- Unaccounted blocks of time
- Mood swings based upon winnings and losses
- Neglecting personal needs or health
- Withdrawal anxiety experienced after gambling excursions
- Secrecy, avoidance or lying when questioned about gambling habits
- Using retirement funds or cashing in an insurance policy to fund gambling
- Missing possessions or assets, including pawning or sale of personal items
- Sudden need for money or loans
- Depression or self-destructive thoughts