

SUMMARY

The impetus of this evaluation and the funding support received was in response to the FLORIDA Council on Compulsive Gambling's (FCCG) concern that persons suffering from gambling related difficulties within the State of Florida have few to no professional treatment options available statewide. This observation was made by the FCCG following nearly a decade of providing prevention, education and outreach referral activities throughout Florida and operating the State's 24-hour Problem Gambling Helpline, a supportive intervention, information and resource referral crisis service. Since the date of the HelpLine's inception, June 1992, the FCCG crisis service has responded to more than 50,000 calls (For additional information pertaining to FCCG roles and responsibilities under contract with State government, please see the *Introduction* section within the preceding prevalence study report.)

This report presents the results of the first statewide survey in Florida to examine the availability of gambling specific treatment in the State. The main purpose of this study is to determine the presence and scope of gambling treatment supports available to Florida residents and to establish the willingness of providers to furnish such specialized assistance.

In an effort to identify the largest number of treatment providers in the State of Florida, 740 surveys were forwarded to psychiatrists, psychologists, other health care providers, mental health and behavioral health centers, substance abuse facilities, and rehabilitation and correction centers, between November 30 through December 10, 2001. Survey respondents were questioned about primary services offered; substance abuse, alcohol, gambling and other mental health related supports; licensure status; staff qualifications; client base served; specialized counseling programs for women, adolescents, older adults, minorities and others; insurance and cost options; referrals to Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon; and interest in providing gambling-specific treatment in the future.

The FCCG received funding from the Florida State Lottery to conduct a prevalence study among the adult population, 18 years of age and older. Part of the funding requirement was to include an overview of the existence and types of programs and services available for problem gambling in Florida and to propose recommendations based upon the findings.

The Council contracted with the University of Florida (UF) to conduct the research and report preparation of the statewide gambling prevalence study among adults. As part of the contractual requirement, UF assisted the FCCG in the design and reporting of the treatment provider survey. Moreover, UF graciously extended its support by partnering with the FCCG. In effect, UF co-signed the introductory letter to treatment providers, disseminated the survey tool statewide and prepared the computerized data collection protocol. The survey instrument, data analysis and written report were prepared by the FCCG's Program/Grant Consultant, Laura Letson, Owner of Integrity 1st.

The findings of this study are intended to serve as a practical guideline for policymakers, regulators and others in ensuring that Florida residents in need of professional treatment supports for a gambling problem are ultimately able to access such services statewide at an affordable cost.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The FCCG HelpLine provides referral supports to persons in need of assistance for a gambling problem. Currently, state supports are not available and treatment provider options are few. The FCCG, in cooperation with state government must formalize a gambling counselor certification program to expand the number of treatment professionals equipped to assist individuals inflicted or

adversely affected. Upon securing certification and state funding for treatment, provisions for outcome reporting must be established to best determine effective and innovative treatment modalities, including psychopharmacologic options. Government may wish to consider implementing a requirement that a percentage of revenues from legalized gambling establishments be set aside in a dedicated fund for problem gambling treatment, prevention and education programs. In addition, a percentage of revenues derived by the state or federal governments from the forfeiture and/or seizure of property from illegal gambling establishments can also be committed to such dedicated fund.

- Obtain support of health, managed care and insurance providers to assure appropriate, consistent and comprehensive coverage for pathological diagnoses in problem gamblers, as well as for persons adversely affected by gambling. Also, facilitate treatment for problem gambling for persons presenting with co-morbid psychiatric illnesses. Such advocacy should also include education regarding the need to recognize substantial tangible benefits to persons in long-term treatment for problem gambling disorders.
- Require screening tools be utilized by addiction professionals, law enforcement and criminal justice authorities, as well as mental health/human service organizations to ensure that clients of all ages are being assessed for gambling problems and provided with necessary treatment regardless of location or ability to pay.
- Expand existing training opportunities to heighten awareness about problem gambling and provide preliminary screening techniques for professionals within the medical, mental health and addictions fields. Such training should be incorporated into the medical and nursing education programs of future primary care providers, including physician assistants and nurse practitioners, as well as students in various health professions. Development of continuing education courses for current and potential providers is imperative to ensure an ongoing level of expertise and awareness among professionals servicing the problem and compulsive gambling population.
- Increase capacity of providers to meet the demands associated with culturally competent treatment for adults, adolescents and their families.
- Undertake additional research in the areas of risk and protective factors for gambling prevention and effective prevention and treatment modalities.
- Initiate training programs for community leaders, clergy and others who serve as gatekeepers and/or primary contacts for assistance and guidance to neighborhood residents. Community-based training may also be considered in areas where nontraditional professionals often require the skills necessary to assess individuals and recommend appropriate treatment approaches.
- Implement the FCCG's "*Problem Gambling Prevention Curriculum*" within the middle and high school systems to ensure that children and young adults are receiving health and safety related information in regard to another high-risk behavior. Such information should be incorporated into existing dialogue about alcohol and substance abuse prevention, education and treatment.