

## **Providing HelpLine Services, Programs, and Supports for Gambling Addiction in the State of Florida**

The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc. (FCCG) has a longstanding history in the state and three decades of experience in the gambling addiction field. The FCCG is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) independent corporation whose primary mission is to increase public awareness regarding the risks and consequences associated with gambling; help problem gamblers, their families, and others adversely impacted; and advocate for programs, services, funding, and other supports to address population-specific needs. The FCCG maintains a neutral stance on the issue of legalized gambling while also seeking to assist citizens in need of problem-gambling-specific supports.

The FCCG operates the statewide Problem Gambling HelpLine service 888-ADMIT-IT, providing free, confidential, and multilingual problem gambling assistance via telephone call, text message, email, social media, mobile app, and live chat available on the FCCG's website ([gamblinghelp.org](http://gamblinghelp.org)) to thousands of contacts each year, from gamblers and their loved ones to professionals and affected others, such as employers, mental health treatment providers, educators, law enforcement and judicial professionals, probation departments, bankruptcy and financial counseling organizations, gambling industry operators, state government, policymakers, and others. However, although the FCCG is recognized by most through its 888-ADMIT-IT HelpLine, this is only one of the many services and programs it provides.

Back in 1988, when the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling (FCCG) launched its 24-hour HelpLine operation, providing supportive intervention and information for callers experiencing gambling related problems, it became apparent almost immediately that the FCCG needed to become actively involved in the development of treatment services to aid callers seeking problem gambling assistance, particularly in light of the lack of public awareness of this issue or state funding for such supports. At that time, the Council set a goal of establishing "appropriate" treatment services for this population, provided by trained clinicians with specialized knowledge to assist problem gamblers and those they adversely affect. This was the impetus for the creation of the FCCG's compulsive gambling certification training for licensed mental health treatment providers.

As time went on, to better aid Floridians in need of assistance for a gambling problem, the FCCG joined forces in a new venture with the Florida Certification Board to establish a credential for compulsive gambling counselors here in Florida. An Advisory Committee convened, and the Board then conducted a Role Delineation Study to determine base competencies and requirements.

In 2008 the FCCG, in partnership with the Florida Certification Board, developed and released Florida's first ever gambling addiction certification program – *Florida's Certified Gambling Addiction Counselor (CGAC)* credential – for licensed mental health treatment providers to provide problem-gambling-specific treatment services in the state. The CGAC, which is still available today, designates competency in the domains of Addiction Theories; Foundations of Problem and Disordered Gambling; Gambling Counseling Practice and Special Issues in Gambling; and Professional Responsibilities. Applicants must hold an active license (in good standing) issued by the State of Florida under chapter 397, Florida Statutes, OR one of the following FCB credentials: MCAP or CAP.

Over the years, the FCCG has also consistently worked with state government and gambling industry operators within the State of Florida for purposes of providing increased awareness about problem and compulsive gambling and development and implementation of responsible gambling and player protection programs.

The FCCG recognizes the importance for government-operated gambling programs to implement in-house and point-of-sale training and education protocols to increase awareness among employees, licensees, and customers about problem gambling issues and support services for the constituency it serves. More specifically, between 1988-2012, the FCCG served as the sole source provider furnishing problem gambling prevention programming and related supports in the state under contract with the Florida Lottery. A "Responsible Play Program", designed by the FCCG and the Florida Lottery, furnished Lottery employees and retailers with professional training opportunities to ensure an understanding of problem gambling issues and impacts, their appropriate role in the program, knowledge about the referral protocol, and how and what to do in the event they encounter various related problem gambling situations. Through this program, the FCCG also provided problem gambling awareness trainings for personnel from the manufacturer of lottery machine equipment.

During this period of time, in addition to developing and implementing responsible gaming training programs for lottery employees, agents, and equipment manufacturers, the FCCG also provided recommendations and proposed text for collateral materials and advertising over the years. As a result of these efforts, the Florida Lottery historically increased public and employee awareness about responsible gaming and promoted the FCCG HelpLine and partnership via lottery literature (including a problem-gambling-specific brochure), play stand stickers, and by promoting the 888-ADMIT-IT number on the back of printed lottery tickets, on the Florida Lottery website, in annual reports, at exhibits, and through other means. Additional HelpLine exposure was further obtained through the Lottery's posting of the HelpLine number on its electronic starlight displays at Florida Lottery agent locations.

In 1992, and prior to implementation of the responsible gaming programming provided to slot-licensed pari-mutuel gambling facilities in South Florida, the FCCG developed programming and assisted the Seminole Tribe of Florida in devising the State of Florida and the Seminole Tribe's first-ever Responsible Gambling & Player Protection Program (RGPPP), as well as a "Train-the-Trainer" component, which has been significantly enhanced over past decades. This programming included training for designated casino employees and security staff, as well as HelpLine promotion at the Seminole Tribe's Florida casinos through various signage and outreach awareness initiatives. Moreover, the FCCG authored an Employee Assistance Program for use in Florida and has been serving as a national model to other affiliate councils of the National Council on Problem Gambling for over 30 years.

In 2001, three (3) years prior to the 2004 constitutional amendment to legalize slot machines at certain pari-mutuel facilities in Miami-Dade and Broward counties, the FCCG, in partnership with Florida's pari-mutuel industry, hosted two (2) separate "Meeting of the Minds" forums in June and September, to convene Florida gambling industry members for discussions surrounding the development and implementation of responsible gaming programming at State of Florida licensed gambling facilities. With the majority of Florida's gambling operators present at these forums, key representatives from dog tracks, horse tracks, jai-alai frontons, and floating casinos across the state participated in this groundbreaking process to discuss industry thoughts, ideas, suggestions, and concerns surrounding responsible gaming programming development and implementation with the FCCG. Other important topics and points of discussion for both review during these forums and inclusion in responsible gaming programming, included self-exclusion, underage gambling, and employee gambling policy program guidelines, as well as patron access to cash and facility credit policies and procedures.

Through the information, feedback, and recommendations provided by industry participants at the "Meeting of the Minds" forums, a few months later in 2002, the FCCG finalized development of its "Responsible Gaming Vendor Program," (RGVP), available for implementation by all State of Florida gambling facility operators. The program theme, "Gambling Is Not The Problem – Compulsive Gambling Is," highlights myths about gambling, warning signs of a problem to look for, characteristics commonly associated with compulsive gambling behavior, and how to access help through the FCCG's 24-hour HelpLine number.

In similar fashion, the FCCG provided State of Florida slot-licensed gambling industry operators with their first ever Responsible Gambling and Player Protection Program (RGPPP) services, as set forth in Chapter 551, Florida Statutes. As part of the 2004 General Election, Florida voters approved a limited constitutional amendment to legalize slot machines at certain pari-mutuel facilities in Miami-Dade and Broward counties. Broward's referendum was successful on March 8, 2005, and Miami-Dade's was successful on January 29, 2008. These referenda authorized slot operation at seven (7) facilities, and Florida law was then amended to authorize operation at an eighth facility (Hialeah Park Casino). The Florida Legislature established a "Compulsive or Addictive Gambling Prevention Program" to be subcontracted by the state for the provision of services related to the prevention of compulsive and addictive gambling.

A Request for Proposal (RFP) was issued by the state for operation of Florida's Compulsive & Addictive Gambling Prevention Program. Upon receipt of award of the first of three (3) competitive solicitations for compulsive gambling prevention programming issued through RFP by the Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) in 2007, and again in 2013 and finally in 2019, the FCCG has provided this programming for Florida citizens.

During the course of the FCCG's 2020-2024 Contract period with DBPR, on July 1, 2022, via a Type Two Transfer (allowed pursuant to s. 20.06(2), F.S.), all powers and duties, personnel, administrative rules, and funding of the Department of Business and Professional Regulation relating to the regulation of pari-mutuel wagering, slot machines, cardrooms, and the state compliance agency's oversight responsibilities for authorized gaming compacts, including oversight of the Compulsive or Addictive Gambling Prevention Program, were transferred to the newly created Florida Gaming Control Commission (FGCC).

In July of 2024, despite the Florida Legislatures' full appropriation of \$2 million in funding for this program during that most recent legislative session, the Florida Gaming Control Commission (FGCC) decided not to renew this contract, leaving Florida citizens without funding for critical problem gambling prevention supports or services, following the largest expansion of gambling in the state's history via the recent introduction of online sports betting.

**Programs and services provided by the FCCG include, but are not limited to, the following:**

- **888-ADMIT-IT Problem Gambling HelpLine Services:** The FCCG operates a confidential and multilingual Problem Gambling HelpLine service, which can be reached 24/7/365 by calling or texting 888-ADMIT-IT; opening a live chat at [gamblinghelp.org](http://gamblinghelp.org); emailing [fccg@gamblinghelp.org](mailto:fccg@gamblinghelp.org); or [reaching out on social media](#); where problem gambling help and information are provided to those in need. Available 888-ADMIT-IT HelpLine resources are all provided free of charge to Florida citizens and include programs, literature, supportive intervention, referrals and resources, as well as a breadth of additional related population-specific supports. The FCCG also has extensive print publications (many available electronically and in audio file format, as well as in multiple languages – English, Spanish, and Creole), including informational brochures, toolkits, its *A Chance for Change* Recovery Workbooks, and research, while providing specific materials and information.
- **Online Program for Problem Gamblers (OPPG):** For those seeking on-demand options, or who lack insurance or the ability to pay for in-person counseling services, the 888-ADMIT-IT HelpLine provides problem gamblers with immediate access to interactive problem gambling supports through the FCCG’s *OPPG*. The program features videos, readings, and exercises that cover topics such as understanding perspectives on problem gambling, including the neurosciences; strategies to address shame, boredom, and stress; as well as other helpful approaches for reducing problem gambling behavior. The FCCG’s *OPPG* also includes a no-cost assessment, with feedback on results provided to participants by a licensed and certified mental health treatment professional, as well as a downloadable certificate that is available for program participants upon course completion. This *OPPG* Certificate can be used by legal professionals, such as court systems or probation officers, as verification to document program completion and compliance with any court-ordered or court-referred problem gambling treatment supports a legal offender may be required to obtain.
- **Peer Connect Program:** The **FCCG’s Peer Connect Program** was established in 2008 and today continues to be a successful support service for 888-ADMIT-IT HelpLine contacts choosing their individual path of recovery from a gambling addiction. It provides gamblers and loved ones with the opportunity to speak to someone in recovery in an effort to facilitate an easier transition down the path and into recovery and/or treatment. This program’s goal is to motivate individuals to take necessary steps towards stopping gambling and rebuilding their lives, personally, professionally, and financially when necessary, through peer-to-peer supports.
- **Gambling Addiction Certification Training & Continuing Education Programs:** The FCCG currently provides the required 60-hour certification training for licensed, mental health professionals (state and nationally approved) and furnishes 16 additional continuing education online modules for mental health and addiction professionals (credentialed by the Florida Board of Clinical Social Work, Marriage & Family Therapy and Mental Health Counseling and The Florida Certification Board, respectively), and psychologists (credentialed by the Florida Board of Psychology).
- **Responsible Gambling & Player Protection Program (RGPPP) for Gambling Operators:** The FCCG’s RGPPP assists gambling operators in providing an ongoing responsible gambling organizational philosophy and culture, as well as guest and employee exposure to the FCCG HelpLine and self-exclusion resources through facility signage, including additional print and collateral items featuring the 888-ADMIT-IT number. The FCCG’s RGPPP also provides gambling operators with employee training (online and live), arming industry with important knowledge on relevant problem gambling related topics, as well as current and identified trends or updates in the problem gambling field.
- **Financial Programming and Supports:** The burden of financial problems can be overwhelming for many individuals who contact the HelpLine. The FCCG’s *A Chance for Change Recovery Workbook Series* for gamblers, loved ones, and older adult gamblers features one book within each 7-book series (Workbook #4) that addresses financial matters. In addition, the FCCG’s financial budgeting assistance program is available that provides financial guidance for problem gamblers and loved ones. The FCCG’s **Financial Debt & Budgeting Toolkit (“Budget Tool”)** provides financial guidance through assistance in the development of a budget and payment plan, as well as accountability for problem gamblers through peer supports.

- **Legal Assistance Resources and Supports – for Problem Gamblers & Loved Ones:** Whether criminal in nature (embezzlement, theft, fraud, etc.) or civil (divorce, foreclosure, etc.), the FCCG provides expert assistance and resources for individuals experiencing any type of legal consequences due to a gambling problem, completely free of charge. The FCCG’s ***A Chance for Change Recovery Workbook Series*** for gamblers, loved ones, and older adult gamblers features one book within each 7-book series (Workbook #5) that addresses legal issues and can be used independently or under guidance with a treatment professional while attending counseling, and within self-help support groups. Finally, the FCCG’s **OPPG**, which is an 8-week on-demand problem gambling self-help support program, includes a no-cost problem gambling assessment provided by a licensed gambling addiction certified mental health treatment professional, as well as a downloadable Certificate available upon program completion, which can be used by legal professionals, such as court systems or probation officers, as verification to document program completion and compliance with any court-ordered or court-referred problem gambling treatment supports a legal offender may be required to obtain.
- **Legal Programming and Supports – for Legal, Criminal Justice, & Court Professionals:** Similarly, for **Legal, Criminal Justice & Court Professionals (Legal Service Providers)**, the FCCG’s ***A Chance for Change Gambling Addiction and Crime Workbook***, which is comprised of one workbook, enables legal, criminal justice, and judicial authorities to identify and secure viable alternatives to incarceration alone and provide the opportunity for rehabilitation to persons committing crimes as the result of a gambling addiction. This program provides free supports throughout every phase of the criminal justice process for law enforcement, legal and judicial professionals, probation officers, and state and federal prison authorities. The FCCG also offers an **Online Problem Gambling Continuing Education Unit (CEU) Module** for Treatment Professionals in Legal and Criminal Justice Settings, ***“Gambling Disorder: Assessment, Awareness & Application in the Criminal Justice System”***, which grants participants with 1.5 CEUs upon successful completion. This online training course about the link between gambling addiction and crime is geared towards treatment professionals in legal environments (e.g. jails, courts, etc.) and provides education and tools to use in assessing, diagnosing, and referring clients in the legal system that may exhibit signs of a gambling disorder or who may be experiencing legal difficulties as a result of their gambling.
- **Population Specific Programs – for College Students; Military Members, Veterans, and their Families; Seniors; Adolescents/Teens and their Parents; and for Service Providers for each of these populations:** The FCCG’s Population Specific Programs, Resources, Literature, and Materials are designed specifically for identified populations who may be at-risk or already experiencing gambling-related problems – as well as for the professionals who serve these populations – preparing them to properly respond to individuals suffering from gambling addiction (or their loved ones) who may present for services. FCCG Population Specific Programs and Resources are developed to provide education and awareness about compulsive gambling and its impacts among specific segments of the population, along with targeted resources for help.

***This information is not to be viewed as a comprehensive list of programs and services provided but aims to give a broader understanding of the purpose and work of the 888-ADMIIT-IT Problem Gambling HelpLine, on behalf of citizens of the State of Florida.***