



*Confidential and Multilingual 24-Hour HelpLine: 1-888-ADMIT-IT*

## **Problem Gambling and Older Adults**

- Within the past 20 years, gambling in the United States has become a preferred pastime. Here in Florida, gambling opportunities have increased, as has the senior population, which has been growing more rapidly than any other age group. For most Florida seniors, as is true for most Americans, gambling is a form of entertainment that does not present any difficulty in their lives. However, among older adults, the consequences of a gambling disorder are often more debilitating. Therefore, before gambling, it is important to know the risks involved and the warning signs of problem gambling.
- While gambling is a recreational activity that does not present harm to the majority who participate, for those experiencing difficulties, gambling is even riskier with increasing age. A gambling disorder is often referred to as the “hidden addiction” because inflicted persons display no visual symptoms, as is typically associated with substance abuse. Also, because problem gamblers have no saturation point and cannot be assessed through traditional means, such as a blood test, the disease progresses unnoticed, even to those closest to the gambler.
- Many seniors gamble as a means of escaping everyday problems, feelings of loneliness, sadness, boredom, as well as a lack of alternative activities. They are among one of the fastest-growing groups of gamblers because they are more likely to face challenges in response to coping with major life changes or losses. The onset of social isolation resulting from retirement and family members moving away, the increased awareness of physical limitations, and the grief that accompanies the death of a loved one are among a series of overwhelming losses and difficult life transitions that make seniors especially vulnerable. Similarly, cognitive impairments are another consideration, as many elders struggle with their ability to make sound decisions. In fact, while medical experts estimate that 15% of all Americans over age 70 are suffering from some degree of dementia, in many cases it is undiagnosed. Complicating matters further is that in some cases, while rare, individuals with Parkinson’s disease, Restless Leg Syndrome, and other neurological and movement disorders have developed gambling problems as a side effect of their prescribed medications (Mirapex, Requip, Abilify, etc.).
- It is essential for health care professionals and others to know that a gambling disorder is linked to a range of serious health conditions, such as heart disease, migraines, depression, insomnia, intestinal problems, obesity, high blood pressure, and a series of other medical and stress-related conditions. It is also true that compulsive gamblers often report that the adrenaline high they experience while gambling enables them to temporarily detach and forget their emotional and physical problems, including chronic pain. These are important points, because depression and chronic pain are routinely reported by this population, yet many are reluctant to visit a therapist or a medical doctor for help with their gambling problem due to feelings of shame and social stigma.
- In some respects, gambling operators are functioning as senior centers. Today, the gambling industry sponsors daily shuttles from retirement communities to gaming facilities, offers special incentives (e.g. free coupons, complimentary meals, free wheelchairs, motorized carts or scooters, and even oxygen in some instances), and sends personalized birthday, anniversary, and holiday cards. In many cases, the gambling venue serves as a senior’s social community, and elders feel safe with around-the-clock security.

**Between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019, the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling’s 24-hour Confidential HelpLine (888-ADMIT-IT) received more than 5,700 contacts from individuals seeking help or information for a gambling problem:**

- This year, HelpLine data revealed that Floridians are, on average, introduced to gambling and developing gambling problems later in life, with 6% reporting gambling for the first time after the age of 60, and 10% reporting developing a gambling problem later in life, also after age 60. This represents a 100% increase from last year’s data, where 3% of gamblers reported starting to gamble after age 60. Further, a 40% increase was noted among those who reported developing gambling problems for the first time in their 60s or later.
- Sixty-three percent (63%) of Florida older adults identified slot machines/arcade games as their preferred form of gambling, followed by lottery games (15%) and cards (13%).
- The majority of older adult gamblers acknowledged they were struggling with emotional difficulties as a result of a gambling problem, with 71% stating that they were experiencing family conflict, 67% reporting depression, and 67% reporting anxiety. Alarming, more than one in five (22%) older adult gamblers reaching out for help last year experienced suicidal ideations as a result of their gambling.
- The older adult gamblers contacting the FCCG’s 888-ADMIT-IT HelpLine last year, on average, reported lifetime losses of just under \$225,000. Given the age of callers in this reporting group, these losses are often difficult, if not impossible, to recoup at this stage of life.
- Of older adults seeking help for a gambling problem last year, 38% were retired and 23% were disabled, unemployed, or collecting workers compensation. Of those working full time, 39% reported problems at work due to their gambling.
- The average income for older adult problem gamblers this past year was reported at \$36,068, while gambling related debts amongst older adults averaged \$28,054.
- Financial impacts due to gambling were widespread amongst older adult contacts, with 67% reporting difficulty paying household bills, 74% acknowledging they had exhausted savings, equity, or retirement monies due to their gambling, and 22% admitting to filing bankruptcy at least once.
- Almost one-third (30%) of older adult problem gamblers admitted to committing illegal acts due to their gambling. The most frequently cited illegal acts by this age group were fraud (71%), larceny/theft (25%), and embezzlement (10%).

| LOW-RISK (SOCIAL) GAMBLING GUIDELINES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | HIGH-RISK GAMBLING WARNING SIGNS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Set a time/dollar limit and stick to it</li><li>✓ Treat winning as a bonus/resist chasing losses</li><li>✓ Don’t gamble with credit/cash advance money</li><li>✓ Take a “buddy” when gambling</li><li>✓ Don’t substitute gambling for other activities</li><li>✓ Take breaks when gambling</li><li>✓ Know the 24-hour Problem Gambling HelpLine (888-ADMIT-IT)</li></ul>                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Loss of interest in normal activities</li><li>✓ Blocks of time unaccounted for</li><li>✓ Increase in gambling or gambling-related activities</li><li>✓ Missing possessions or assets</li><li>✓ Changes in attitude and personality</li><li>✓ Neglecting personal needs (food, utilities, medications)</li><li>✓ Declining health</li><li>✓ Withdrawal and depression</li></ul> |
| <p><b>If you, or someone you know, is experiencing one or more of these warning signs, gambling could be a problem.</b></p> <p><b><u><a href="#">Help Starts Here</a></u></b></p> <p>Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling</p> <p><b>24-Hour HelpLine: 1-888-ADMIT-IT</b></p> <p>(1-888-236-4848)</p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:fccg@gamblinghelp.org">fccg@gamblinghelp.org</a></p> <p>Text: 321-978-0555</p> <p><u><a href="#">LiveChat</a></u>: <a href="http://gamblinghelp.org">gamblinghelp.org</a></p> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

*Established in 1988, the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling (FCCG) is a not-for-profit corporation that operates the 24-hour Confidential and Multilingual Problem Gambling HelpLine (888-ADMIT-IT). The Agency advocates on behalf of the public on issues relating to problem gambling, provides programs and resources to individuals in need of help for a gambling problem, provides responsible gaming training for casino employees, and trains health care professionals to assess and treat this population. The FCCG is one of 35 affiliates of the National Council on Problem Gambling, all of whom maintain a neutral stance on legalized gambling.*