



Pennsylvania Behavioral Health and Aging Coalition
Opening Doors for Older Pennsylvanians

Gambling and the Older Adult

Older adults are gambling in record numbers. Many seniors have disposable income in excess of that needed to meet daily requirements; they have time on their hands to engage in recreation and leisure activities. Retirement is viewed as a time to have fun after a lifetime of responsibility and work, and gambling seems an exciting form of recreation. For most, it is simply recreation – a fun activity to do with friends. But for some, it becomes a progressive disease.

Older Adult Gambling Facts

- Many senior gamblers are on fixed incomes and more vulnerable to financial devastation than younger gamblers.
- Older adult problem gamblers are less willing to seek timely help for addiction
- Surveys indicate casino outings are the most popular type of day trip for retired Americans. Bingo outings are another popular activity.
- Many older adults are gambling without being educated about the risks and resources available.
- As people reach retirement, vulnerability toward compulsive behavior intensifies.

Reasons Older Adults Gamble

- **Opportunity and Availability** – Casinos and lottery are legal in Pennsylvania; some form of gambling is accessible to the majority of older adults, regardless of where they live.
- **Boredom** – Abundance of leisure time with limited availability of social activities or finances.
- **Loneliness** – Following loss of a loved one, lack of visitors, geographic separation, etc.
- **Escape** – Gambling can provide a temporary escape from reality.
- **Excitement/Social Interaction** – Many older adults find gambling exciting at a time in life when opportunities for excitement may be limited.
- **Perception of Easy Money** – Some view gambling as a possible means of supplementing retirement income.
- **Perceived as a Safe Place** – Security guards are on duty during casino operating hours.

Some Warning Signs of Older Adult Gambling Problems

- Progressive preoccupation with gambling (gambling more often, with more money, for longer periods of time).
- Talks only about wins, not losses; hides gambling losses; chases losses.
- Lies about gambling – directly or by omission.
- Gambles as a means to cope - to escape worries, frustrations or disappointments.
- Neglect of personal needs, such as food, utilities or medical assistance - unable to meet living expenses that were previously met.
- Bored when not gambling; loss of interest/participation in normal activities with family and friends.
- Gambles alone.
- Withdrawal from friends and family.
- Changes in attitude and personality.
- Borrowing from family/friends.
- Unexplained absence of household and personal items.
- Unsuccessful attempts to cut back or stop gambling.
- Withdrawal/depression, decline in health – can be due to loss of self-esteem and elevated stress from loss of savings/security for retirement.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY SUFFER WHEN A LOVED ONE HAS A GAMBLING PROBLEM

If you or someone you know has a gambling problem, call the Council on Compulsive Gambling of Pennsylvania's helpline 1-800-GAMBLER. For more information regarding compulsive and problem gambling, please visit this page:

<http://www.pgcb.state.pa.us/?p=66>.