

Problem Gambling Task Force | Information Sheet

What is problem gambling?

Problem gambling can cause disruption in many areas of life: psychological, social (relationships with family and friends), financial, and vocational (school and work). Based on a clinical assessment, an individual may be diagnosed with a gambling disorder, or may be found to be ‘at-risk’ for problem gambling. As with all addictions, problem gambling is a complex issue that usually requires clinical treatment to experience recovery. Individuals with problem gambling issues are also at a higher risk for co-occurring disorders (substance use and/or mental health) and suicide than the general public. However, recovery is possible when individuals work with trained problem gambling counselors using evidence-based treatments.

What are the impacts in Washington State?

Due to the prevalence of card rooms, the State Lottery, horseracing, Tribal Casinos and other forms of gambling, Washington State residents have many opportunities to gamble. Most individuals can gamble without negative impacts. However, the most recent data in research literature suggests that 2.7% of Washington adults could be classified as at-risk gamblers, 0.7% as problem gamblers, and 0.5% as likely to be able to be diagnosed with a gambling disorder, for a total estimated prevalence rate of disordered gambling of 3.9%.¹

What problem gambling services are available through the State?

The State Problem Gambling Program resides in the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery, within the Health Care Authority. Through funding from business and occupation taxes, the program supports efforts to treat problem gambling through the following activities:

- Provides eligible adults and their family members with state-funded treatment if they are determined to qualify and are unable to afford treatment (do not have insurance coverage for problem gambling treatment)
- Contracts with 15 problem gambling treatment provider agencies statewide to increase access to quality care
- Manages problem gambling prevention and outreach activities and awareness materials within the Health Care Authority and by request from other state agencies
- Contracts with the WA State Council on Problem Gambling (dba Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling) for educational training, presentations, and awareness campaigns. as well as problem gambling treatment training for clinicians: substance use disorder professionals, licensed mental health counselors, psychologists, agency affiliated counselors, and Responsible Gaming training for industry staff and supervisors.

¹ *Problem Gambling Study and Report*, commissioned by the WA State Gambling Commission.

Titled: **2019 Treatment, Prevention, and Responsible Gambling Programs in Washington State**. Lostutter, T.W.; Philander, K.S.; et.al. University of Washington & Washington State University.

- Disseminates information online and distributes awareness materials to increase referrals to the WA State Problem Gambling Helpline (1-800-547-6133). The Helpline assists people with referrals to treatment providers and crisis stabilization.

What is the role of the Problem Gambling Task Force?

In 2019, the Washington State Legislature awarded proviso funding to the Washington State Gambling Commission (WSGC) to facilitate a joint legislative Problem Gambling Task Force (PGTF) to review existing outreach, prevention and treatment resources for problem gambling and disordered gambling, and to determine if these services need to be increased in order to reduce the number of people impacted. By agreement with WSGC, the State Problem Gambling Program located within the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery holds the lead agency role for the Problem Gambling Task Force, and coordinates with WSGC to meet the goals of the proviso. The PGTF will convene beginning in January 2020 and will complete its work by November 2021, when a final report is due to the Legislature.

To further explore and address challenges and opportunities related to problem gambling in Washington State, the PGTF will engage in reviewing:

- Findings of the WA State Gambling Commission's 2019 *Problem Gambling Study and Report* submitted to the Legislature in Spring 2019
- Existing prevention, treatment and recovery services offered by Washington state public, private and non-profit entities
- Existing programs, services and treatment offered in other states and by the Federal government

What does the Problem Gambling Task Force plan to achieve?

The PGTF is tasked with making recommendations to the Washington State Legislature. The recommendations provide the foundation for the interim and final reports due to the legislature in November 2020 and November 2021 respectively, and will address these topics:

- How to proceed with initiating a state prevalence study measuring adult participation in gambling and adult problem gambling?
- Should Washington state expand funding for prevention, treatment and recovery services?
- What steps the state should take to improve current licensing and certification of problem gambling health care providers?
- Are there additional problem gambling areas that should be considered (and if yes, any associated actions recommended)?

Where can I find more information?

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Website: www.hca.wa.gov/health-care-services-and-supports/behavioral-health-recovery/problem-gambling