



# Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling

*We understand the problem. We can help.*

## **Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling Prevention of Problem Gambling Plan**

### **Rationale**

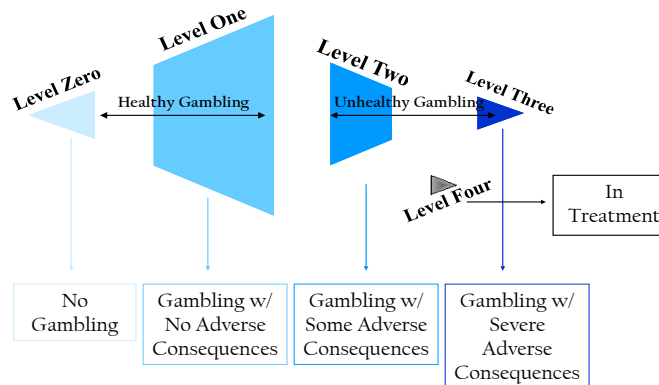
The Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling is a private, non-profit health agency dedicated to reducing the social, financial and emotional costs of problem gambling. The Council provides information, prevention, education, advocacy and referral services for problem gamblers, their loved ones and the greater community.

Virtually anyone can be at risk for developing a gambling problem, including men and women, young and old, from every religious, racial, and socio-economic background. Research indicates that approximately 6% of the adult general population has had some significant, adverse effect from gambling in their lifetime. About 4% of the adult general population— or nearly 250,000 Massachusetts residents – has had a gambling problem within the past year.

- While the stereotypical problem gambler has always been a man, in 2002, it was estimated that 40% of compulsive gamblers are women
- Between 10 and 17% of all Massachusetts youths (57,000 to 97,000 teenagers) have experienced a gambling problem, most commonly through card playing, lottery games and sports betting
- According to a 2000 study, 9-14% of youth are classified as “at-risk” for a gambling problem and 4-7% exhibit criteria of pathological gambling
- Roughly 8 to 20% of college students have experienced a gambling problem and about 4.7% have gambled compulsively
- It is estimated that about half (35-50%) of all compulsive gamblers have been dependent on alcohol or other drugs.

# LEVELS OF GAMBLING

## CONTINUUM OF PROBLEMS



As is demonstrated in the previous graphic, most people have gambled with no pattern of negative consequence (Level Zero and Level One). Yet a smaller percentage does experience negative consequences from their gambling and some progress to the point of having a diagnosable gambling disorder (Levels Two, Three and Four). A key point to remember is that gambling is not a risk free activity. Although some people make the choice to never gamble, which needs to be acknowledged as a legitimate choice, most will gamble and would benefit from knowing how best to manage and lower their risk of ever having any negative consequences associated with gambling. Prevention efforts need to be geared toward helping to create environments and supporting personal attributes that maintain people in Levels Zero and One and helping those in Level Two to move in the direction of no problems rather than more severe consequences.

It has been said that no progress has ever been made against any epidemic by treating only the casualties (anonymous). They are simply replaced by additional casualties. What is needed is a comprehensive continuum of services across prevention, intervention, treatment and relapse prevention. This document outlines the prevention part of the needed full array of services. Prevention is an active process that encompasses fostering personal attributes as well creating a supportive environment which is conducive to healthy choices and living. The Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling is committed to developing and actualizing a plan that succeeds in offering prevention of problem gambling for all Massachusetts residents.

### **Guiding Principles**

There are several guiding principles that will guide the work of this plan:

- Programs and efforts will use multiple strategies (information dissemination, prevention education, alternative activities, community processes, environmental approaches and problem identification and referral) across several domains (individual, peer, family, school/work, community and environment/society). The more strategies woven among as many domains as possible create the most successful prevention net.

- As much of the work as possible will be done at the local/community level. Community empowerment is a mainstay of good prevention efforts.
- There is no need to create a new service infrastructure. Every effort will be made to develop the capacity of existing service structures, community organizations and interested parties to add prevention of problem gambling to their own capacity to help others in healthy choices and living.
- Finding and developing new partnerships as well as cultivating existing ones is a critical component which will be placed as a high priority.
- Best practices in prevention, including but not limited to: proven conceptual framework, research and data driven strategies, needs assessment, measurable goals and objectives, outcome and process evaluation, long-term commitment and replicability, will guide all of the work.
- Cultural and linguistic competency will be the expectation and the rule.
- Prevention programs should enhance protective factors and reverse or reduce risk factors and shall be aimed at general populations at key transition points.
- Individuals and communities at high risk will be a priority.
- Environmental strategies will be employed focusing primarily on policies and systems change such as restricting underage access

## **Goals and Objectives**

A comprehensive prevention initiative primarily targets those who do not presently exhibit symptoms related to problem gambling with a goal of preventing gambling-related problems from developing as well as targeting those who have exhibited some problems related to their gambling but are not yet experiencing pathological gambling. An ideal comprehensive prevention initiative includes multiple strategies with multiple domains with a special focus on high risk groups (e.g. adolescents, young adults, older adults, economically disadvantaged). In this plan, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) strategies are used in the absence of evidence-based programs or practices in problem gambling prevention at present.

In this section, short term (1-2 years) and long term (2-5 years) objectives will be given for goals built upon all six of CSAP's prevention strategies.

## Prevention Strategy: Information Dissemination

Goal: To provide access to information regarding gambling and prevention of problem gambling to all residents of Massachusetts.

### Short-Term Objectives:

- Distribute Council prevention of problem gambling pamphlets, brochures, videos and posters throughout the Commonwealth with a focus on youth, colleges, older adults and the pre-release corrections population.
- Distribute Council prevention radio and print PSAs wherever appropriate.
- Translate present Council prevention materials into Spanish and Chinese.
- Develop new prevention awareness materials that address gambling information, risk reduction and additional populations.
- Participate in health fairs and community events.
- Develop and distribute electronic and print prevention newsletters
- Write and distribute op-ed pieces and informational articles regarding prevention of problem gambling to newspapers and agency and community newsletters.
- Research the availability of prevention of problem gambling materials from other states and nations and make this information available through the web.
- Develop and distribute appropriate prevention research summaries to inform the work of those working in the prevention of problem gambling.
- Develop an expanded prevention presence on the Council website.
- Incorporate an evaluation tool into awareness efforts.

### Long-Term Objectives

- Evaluate and modify and continue where appropriate present awareness strategies.
- Place prevention of problem gambling materials at gambling venues.
- Develop and conduct a mass multi-media campaign to raise awareness on gambling issues focusing on risk and risk management.
- Develop and conduct a social marketing campaign, utilizing systematic application of marketing along with other concepts and techniques to achieve reduced risk gambling behaviors.
- Develop new awareness materials in additional languages and for additional underserved populations.

## Prevention Strategy: Prevention Education

Goal: To provide training to multiple agencies, groups and communities with the primary task of raising the capacity of others to address the prevention of problem gambling.

### Short-Term Objectives

- Provide training to the substance abuse prevention infrastructure focusing on the Regional Centers for Healthy Communities, CHNAs and other DPH BSAS prevention programs to build the capacity of these groups to add the prevention of problem gambling to their services.
- Develop a general audience prevention of problem gambling curriculum.
- Train middle-school teachers to use the Facing the Odds curriculum.
- Train teams from faith communities to be educators and early referral agents in their communities.
- Develop and distribute a training manual for college resident assistant staffs.
- Develop a Spanish prevention of problem gambling curriculum and provide training in the Latino community.
- Provide training at other organizations' prevention-focused conferences.
- Develop a prevention of problem gambling training specific to the needs of older adults.
- Develop online prevention trainings.

### Long-Term Objectives

- Evaluate and modify and continue where appropriate present prevention education strategies.
- Develop prevention curricula and supporting materials focused on other underserved and/or cultural and linguistic minority populations.
- Develop and offer web-based training opportunities in prevention.
- Develop and deliver educational opportunities to other health care providers including but not limited to primary and mental health providers in the prevention of problem gambling.

### Prevention Strategy: Alternative Activities

Goal: To advocate for and provide suggestions for activities other than gambling.

### Short-Term Objectives

- Convene a think-tank group to develop and evaluate a list of alternative activities.
- Educate appropriate groups and service providers as to the value of alternative activities.
- Advocate for the inclusion of an alternative activity strategy into existing prevention programs.
- To distribute and advocate the use of alternative activities.

### Long-Term Objectives

- Evaluate and modify and continue where appropriate present alternative activity strategies.
- Expand the short-term objectives to additional populations.

### Prevention Strategy: Community-Based Processes

Goal: To involve, empower and support all appropriate communities and collaboratives to address the prevention of problem gambling.

### Short-Term Objectives

- Promote, support and utilize multi-agency activities and interagency coordination
- Provide training, technical assistance and on-going support to colleges and universities in developing comprehensive prevention problem gambling programs.
- Provide training, technical assistance, on-going support and mini-grants to appropriate high school clubs and organizations to address problem gambling issues.
- Develop and pilot a peer-to-peer education and referral model for Councils on Aging.
- Actively participate in the statewide Partners in Prevention group.
- Develop and incorporate and on-going technical assistance and support mechanism designed to isolated efforts into community-based initiatives.
- Seek to find new prevention partners beyond the substance abuse prevention community.

### Long-Term Objectives

- Evaluate and modify and continue where appropriate present community-based process
- Seek to create additional collaborative efforts with non-traditional prevention groups and providers including, but not limited to, corrections, youth serving agencies, Councils on Aging, etc.
- Provide mini-grant opportunities as seed money to encourage the development of prevention of problem gambling activities focusing on agencies who serve problem gambling high risk populations.
- Outreach specifically to underserved and/or cultural and linguistic minorities

### Prevention Strategy: Environmental Approaches

Goal: To develop and advocate for policies that support the prevention of problem gambling by enhancing protective factors and deterring risk factors in the environment.

### Short-Term Objectives

- Work with colleges and universities to develop gambling policies and supportive protocols.
- Research existing high school and middle school gambling policies and create tools for use in developing policies.
- Develop a guide for addressing gambling activities within Councils on Aging.

### Long-Term Objectives

- Evaluate and modify and continue where appropriate present environmental approaches.
- Advocate for responsible public policy on but not limited to minimum purchase-age enforcement, deterrence, location and density issues.
- Develop and distribute counter ads and messages.
- Expand policy development efforts to additional constituencies.

### Prevention Strategy: Problem Identification and Referral

Goal: To work specifically with groups identified as high risk for gambling problems and advocate for a full array of intervention and treatment services.

### Short-Term Objectives

- Develop a list of existing intervention and referral services available to residents of Massachusetts.
- Include a section on intervention and treatment options in all appropriate prevention activities.
- Develop questions for inclusion in existing surveys measuring risk behaviors.
- Advocate for the inclusion of gambling questions in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.
- Use data gathered from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey to help identify high-risk youth sub-populations and plan appropriate interventions.
- Advocate for the inclusion of gambling questions in other appropriate surveys.
- Advocate for intervention and referral protocols as part of any comprehensive prevention of problem gambling effort.

### Long-Term Objectives

- Evaluate and modify and continue where appropriate present problem identification and referral strategies.
- Identify the corollaries between risky gambling behavior and other risk-related behaviors and conditions.
- Build collaborative relationships and programs to reduce risk and advocate for referral and treatment within co-occurring disorders
- Advocate for adequate intervention and treatment services.