

# 2022 Epidemiological Profile: Problem Gambling



*A product of the State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW)*

## Prevalence

Problem gambling and Gambling Disorder include gambling behaviors that disrupt, compromise or damage personal, family, or vocational pursuits.<sup>1</sup> Gambling behaviors include online and in-person casinos, sports betting, private wagering, charitable gaming (i.e. bingo, raffles, etc.), lottery, and pari-mutuel (i.e. greyhound racing, off-track betting, etc.). In Connecticut, buying a lottery ticket is the most common form of gambling and football is the most popular sport that sports bettors bet on.<sup>2</sup>

Symptoms of problem gambling include increasing preoccupation with gambling, needing to bet more money more frequently, irritability when attempting to stop, and continuation of the gambling behavior despite serious negative consequences.<sup>1</sup>

According to the American Psychiatric Association, for some people gambling becomes an addiction and individuals may crave gambling the way someone craves alcohol or other substances, thus the move from being classified as an impulse-control disorder in the DSM-III and IV to substance-related and addictive disorders in the DSM-V.<sup>3</sup>

Every year in the United States, 2 million people are expected to have severe gambling problems and 4-6 million are expected to have mild or moderate gambling problems.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, Connecticut's 2020 Young Adults Statewide Survey showed that 35.2% of young adults ages 18-25 reported gambling in the past year.<sup>4</sup> Of these, about 9% felt the need to bet more and more money, and 3% lied about how much they gamble, indicators of problem gambling.

According to the 2021 Connecticut School Health Survey, 18.4% of high school students reported gambling on a sports team, playing cards or dice games, state lottery games, gambling on the internet, or betting on a game of personal skill.<sup>5</sup>

The 2021 Connecticut School Health Survey also showed that 24.7% of high school males reported gambling, compared with 11.7% of females. The prevalence among 12<sup>th</sup> graders (20.9%) was marginally higher than in any other grade but this difference was not statistically significant, nor were differences among race/ethnicity.<sup>5</sup>

## Risk Factors and At-Risk Populations

Studies show that at-risk and problem gambling is unstable, meaning that people typically move into and out of at-risk or problem gambling status over time.<sup>6</sup>

The prevalence of at-risk gambling and problem gambling is significantly higher among:<sup>7</sup>

- Men compared with women
- People who are Black compared with people who are White
- People with high school educations or less compared with college degrees or higher
- People with an annual household income under \$15,000

Risk factors for at-risk gambling and problem gambling include:<sup>8</sup>

- Having an early big win
- Having easy access to preferred form of gambling
- Holding mistaken beliefs about odds of winning
- Having a recent loss or change, such as divorce, job loss, retirement, death of a loved one

<sup>1</sup> National Council on Problem Gambling

<sup>2</sup> National Survey of Gambling Attitudes and Gambling Experiences (NGAGE), 2018

<sup>3</sup> American Psychiatric Association, What is Gambling Disorder, 2021

<sup>4</sup> Young Adults Statewide Survey, 2020

<sup>5</sup> Connecticut School Health Survey, 2021

<sup>6</sup> A Six-Year Longitudinal Study of Gambling and Problem Gambling in Massachusetts, 2021

<sup>7</sup> Gambling and Problem Gambling in Massachusetts: Results of a Baseline Population Survey, 2017

<sup>8</sup> Risk Factors for Developing a Gambling Problem, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

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- Having financial problems
- Having a history of risk-taking or impulsive behavior
- Having depression and anxiety
- Having a problem with alcohol or other drugs
- Having a family history of problem gambling
- Living within 50 miles of a casino
- Gambling on games with fast speeds of play<sup>9</sup>

## Video Games and Gambling:

Playing video games may also be a risk factor for gambling as problem gambling has been found to have a statistically significant association with loot box spending.<sup>10</sup> Loot boxes are features in video games that contain a randomized prize and can be bought using real-life money. Moreover, 60.3% of video gamers reported that they endorse spending money on loot boxes.<sup>11</sup> In addition to loot boxes, betting on E-sports and token wagering are other forms of video-game-related gambling or gambling-like behaviors.

## Consequences

- The National Council on Problem Gambling estimates the national societal cost of problem gambling to be about \$7 billion, including gambling-related criminal justice and healthcare spending, job loss, and bankruptcy among other consequences.<sup>1</sup>
- 439 phone calls were made to the Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling Help Line in 2021.
- Male and female individuals who experience problems with gambling are two times more likely

to have a psychiatric condition in their lifetime than those who do not experience problems with gambling.<sup>12</sup>

- Of gamblers with histories of psychiatric conditions, female gamblers tend to start problem gambling after the onset of their psychiatric condition. Meanwhile, their male counterparts are more likely to have the onset of their psychiatric conditions (depression and suicidal events) emerge after they began participating in problem gambling.<sup>12</sup>
- Individuals experiencing problems with gambling are also at increased risk for suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. This risk is especially high for individuals who have a co-occurring psychiatric disorder or/and a substance use disorder.<sup>13</sup>
- Individuals experiencing problems with gambling are 4 to 7 times more likely to have alcohol and other drug problems (including nicotine dependence) than individuals who do not gamble or who gamble recreationally.<sup>14</sup>
- Individuals who participate in high-risk gambling report significantly lower levels of life satisfaction than individuals who do not participate in problem gambling.<sup>15</sup>
- Qualitative interviews show that individuals who experience problems with gambling commonly report that their problem gambling contributes to some form of negative financial and relationship consequences.<sup>16</sup> For example, individuals who participate in high-risk problem gambling report having overdue household bills 3 times more frequently than individuals who do not participate in problem gambling.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Harris, & Griffiths, M. D. (2017). The Impact of Speed of Play in Gambling on Psychological and Behavioural Factors: A Critical Review. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 34(2), 393–412.

<sup>10</sup> Zendle, & Cairns, P. (2018). Video game loot boxes are linked to problem gambling: Results of a large-scale survey. *PLoS One*, 13(11), e0206767–e0206767.

<sup>11</sup> Brooks, & Clark, L. (2019). Associations between loot box use, problematic gaming and gambling, and gambling-related cognitions. *Addictive Behaviors*, 96, 26–34.

<sup>12</sup> Sundqvist, & Rosendahl, I. (2019). Problem Gambling and Psychiatric Comorbidity—Risk and Temporal Sequencing Among Women and Men: Results from the Swelogs Case–Control Study. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 35(3), 757–771.

<sup>13</sup> Håkansson, & Karlsson, A. (2020). Suicide Attempt in Patients With Gambling Disorder—Associations With Comorbidity Including Substance Use Disorders. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, 593533–593533.

<sup>14</sup> Grant, & Chamberlain, S. R. (2020). Gambling and substance use: Comorbidity and treatment implications. *Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology & Biological Psychiatry*, 99, 109852.

<sup>15</sup> Paterson, M., Taylor, M. & Gray, M. (2020) Trajectories of Social and Economic Outcomes and Problem Gambling Risk in Australia. *Soc Indic Res* 148, 297–321.

<sup>16</sup> Langham, E., Thorne, H., Browne, M., Donaldson, P., Rose, J., & Rockloff, M. (2016). Understanding gambling related harm: a proposed definition, conceptual framework, and taxonomy of harms. *BMC Public Health*, 16(79), 80–80.

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## Covid-19 Data:

- Studies show that gambling generally decreased or remained the same during the beginning of the COVID-19 epidemic.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the amount of money wagered by European sports bettors also decreased during this period, and these sport bettors did not transition to playing games in online casinos during this time.<sup>18</sup>
- In Massachusetts, 44.6% of gamblers reported saving money and 66.4% reported spending more time with friends and family during the COVID-19 epidemic period when casinos were closed.<sup>19</sup>

## Readiness

According to the 2022 Connecticut Community Readiness Survey (CRS) results, nearly 37% of key informants reported that Connecticut residents believed that preventing problem gambling/gaming addiction in their community is very important, up from 22.5% in 2020.

CRS 2022 results also showed that about 69% of key informants reported that community residents are not at all or only little aware that gambling activities can become an addiction for some people.<sup>20</sup> This points to the need for awareness building about gambling risk.

- In the 2020 results there were differences in perception of importance by community type. For example, 31.8% of key informants in rural communities reported that residents believed that preventing problem gambling/gaming addiction in their community is very important, versus 9.6% in wealthy communities.<sup>20</sup>

## State Context

- In 2021, Governor Ned Lamont signed into law House Bill 6451, legalizing online gaming and sports wagering in Connecticut and increased the annual funding into the Chronic Gamblers Treatment Rehabilitation Account for problem gambling prevention, treatment, and recovery support to 3.3 million dollars.<sup>21</sup>
- Since 2010, gross sales for lottery, pari-mutuel and charitable gaming have increased by over \$187 million.

## Resources

- Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling (CCPG)
- Dept. Mental Health Services/Problem Gambling Services
- National Council on Problem Gambling
- Bettor Choice Programs: gambling-specific treatment programs funded by the State of Connecticut. Services are offered through community agencies in over 16 Connecticut locations.
- 24/7 Problem Gambling Helpline (888) 789-7777 or Text "CTGAMB" to 53342.
- To speak with a gambling counselor or find the nearest Bettor Choice Program, dial 860.344.2244

## Connecticut SEOW Prevention Data Portal

For more data and information on gambling in Connecticut, visit the Connecticut SEOW Prevention Data Portal <http://preventionportal.ctdata.org/>

<sup>17</sup> Brodeur, Audette-Chapdelaine, S., Savard, A.-C., & Kairouz, S. (2021). Gambling and the COVID-19 pandemic: A scoping review. *Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology & Biological Psychiatry*, 111, 110389–110389.

<sup>18</sup> Auer, M., Malischnig, D., & Griffiths, M. D. (2020). Gambling Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic Among European Regular Sports Bettors: An Empirical Study Using Behavioral Tracking Data.

International journal of mental health and addiction, 1–8. Advance online publication

<sup>19</sup> Wood and Tabri (2020), Measuring responsible gambling in Massachusetts.

<sup>20</sup> Connecticut Community Readiness Survey, 2020 and 2022

<sup>21</sup> CT Gen Stat § 17a-713. (Formerly Sec. 19a-4h) (2020)