

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Gambling: The High Stakes of Mental Health & Suicide Risk

Gambling is becoming more common in Ohio due to increased access to casinos, online betting, and sports wagering. While many view it as a leisure activity, it can pose serious mental health risks. Problem gambling can lead to financial issues, relationship troubles, and mental health disorders like anxiety and depression.

Problem Gambling

Problem gambling, or gambling disorder, is defined by ongoing problematic gambling that causes significant distress.¹ People may be preoccupied with gambling, have difficulty stopping, and use it to cope with negative emotions. It often coincides with mental health issues, increasing the risk of suicidal thoughts.

Mental Health Consequences

National studies highlight the severe mental health consequences of gambling. According to the National Council on Problem Gambling, individuals with gambling disorders are up to 15 times more likely to attempt suicide than the general population.² A study published in the journal *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* found that nearly 50% of individuals with gambling problems have considered suicide, and approximately 17% have attempted it.³

Gambling losses can lead to financial strain, heightening feelings of hopelessness and despair, which contribute to suicidal thoughts. The stigma surrounding problem gambling may prevent individuals from seeking help, worsening their mental health challenges.

The rapid expansion of online gambling platforms has intensified mental health risks. Gambling websites and apps offer constant accessibility, anonymity, and rapid betting cycles. Online gamblers are more likely to engage in higher-risk behaviors due to the ease of access and lack of physical barriers.⁴

Resources

Ohio's Problem Gambling Helpline: 1-800-589-9966

Ohio Problem Gambling Online Resource Directory
<http://www.gamblinghelpohio.org/>

Ohio for Responsible Gambling
<https://www.org.ohio.gov/>

Ohio Gambling Telehealth Network
<https://www.ohiogtn.org>

Problem Gambling Network of Ohio
<http://www.pgnohio.org/>

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At-Risk Populations

Young adults are particularly vulnerable to gambling's mental health impacts. In Ohio, males ages 18-44 of any race or ethnicity are the largest at-risk population of developing a gambling problem, and 15% of Ohio youth ages 12-17 are gambling with 3% experiencing negative consequences from gambling.⁵ This demographic is also more susceptible to mental health disorders, compounding their risk of suicidal ideation.

Support for Those Struggling

If someone is struggling with gambling, there are steps they can take to start regaining control. Acknowledging the problem is the first critical step toward recovery.

- Recognize how gambling negatively impacts finances, relationships, and overall well-being. To regain control, set firm financial boundaries by limiting access to money, giving control of finances to a trusted person, deleting gambling accounts, and using banking tools to block gambling transactions.
- Enroll in self-exclusion programs to prevent access to casinos and gambling websites. Ohio's self-exclusion program, Time Out Ohio, is available at <https://timeoutohio.com>.
- Seeking professional help through therapy, especially Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and joining support groups like Gamblers Anonymous can provide valuable guidance and accountability.
- Identifying triggers and replacing gambling with healthy activities such as exercise, reading, or volunteering can help break the cycle. Building a strong support network of family, friends, and peer groups ensures encouragement along the way.
- Setting realistic short- and long-term goals, learning about gambling addiction, and understanding how gambling odds work be empowering to make better choices.

References

- 1 American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. 5th ed. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing; 2013.
- 2 National Council on Problem Gambling. National Survey on Gambling Behavior. 2021. <https://www.ncpgsurvey.org/ngage-2021/>
- 3 Moghaddam JF, Yoon G, Dickerson DL, Kim SW, Westermeyer J. Suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in five groups with different severities of gambling: findings from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions. *Suicide Life Threat Behav.* 2015;45(6):689-706.
- 4 Gainsbury SM, Russell A, Hing N, Wood R, Lubman D, Blaszczynski A. The prevalence and determinants of problem gambling in Australia: assessing the impact of interactive gambling and new technologies. *J Gamb Stud.* 2014;30(2):347-359.
- 5 Ohio Lottery Commission <https://keepitfunohio.com/get-the-facts>. Accessed January 21, 2025.

ABOUT

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.



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