



The Massachusetts Council  
ON GAMING AND HEALTH

# General Problem/ Disordered Gambling FACT SHEET

## What is gambling?

Gambling is risking something of value on the outcome of an event when the probability of winning is less than certain.<sup>7</sup>

## What is problem gambling?

Problem gambling is characterized by gambling behavior which leads to adverse consequences for the person who gambles, others, and the community.<sup>8</sup>

## What constitutes social gambling?

Social gamblers gamble for entertainment, typically will not risk more than they can afford, often gamble with friends, chase losses briefly, gamble for limited periods of time, and are not preoccupied with gambling.<sup>9</sup>

See DSM-5 for clinical definitions

## The Massachusetts Council on Gaming and Health: A Resource For Help

The Council's Helpline provides live, confidential, and compassionate support 24-hours a day, 7-days a week:

**800-426-1234.**

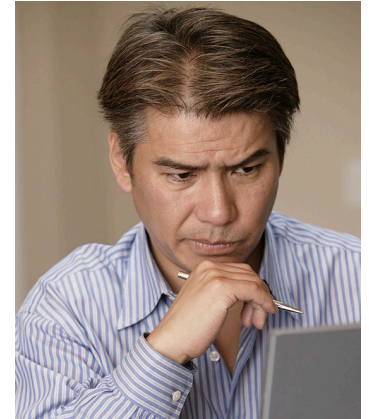
Helpline workers provide:

- Information about problem gambling
- Referrals to self-help groups, treatment providers, and other community resources.

For more information, visit [macgh.org](http://macgh.org) or contact us at [info@macgh.org](mailto:info@macgh.org) or 617-426-4554.

## Problem Gambling Prevalence Rates

- **Problem gambling rate:** research estimates that approximately 2.0% of the Massachusetts adult population are problem gamblers.<sup>1</sup>
- **At-Risk gambling rate:** research estimates that approximately 8.4% of Massachusetts adults are at-risk gamblers, demonstrating gambling behaviors that put them at risk of developing a gambling disorder.<sup>1</sup>



An estimated  
**389,700-488,500**  
or 8.4% of Mass.  
adults experience  
**AT-RISK GAMBLING<sup>1</sup>**

An estimated  
**83,200-135,100**  
or 2.0% of Mass. adults experience  
**PROBLEMATIC  
GAMBLING<sup>1</sup>**

Approximately  
**72%**  
of adult Mass. residents  
**HAVE  
GAMBLED** in the  
past year<sup>1</sup>

## Who is at Risk for a Gambling Disorder?

Anyone can develop a problem with gambling, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. Though problem gambling does not discriminate, research shows that certain groups have a greater likelihood of

### Higher Frequency of Gambling Disorder<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> experience gambling related harm

- Males
- Those who experienced parental gambling involvement
- Communities that experience the harm of racism
- College students<sup>4-6</sup>
  - People who smoke cigarettes
  - People with alcohol or drug dependence
- Communities that experience high levels of unemployment
- People with obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Communities that experience barriers to higher education
- People with higher anxiety or depression
- Those exposed to gambling environments (friends and family who gamble)
- People with higher impulsivity and antisocial personality traits
- Those who started to gamble at a younger age
- People who report gambling on electronic gambling machines (e.g. slot machines)
- Those with excitement-seeking personality traits
- Those with mental health indicators
- Those who experienced childhood maltreatment

**macgh.org**  
Helpline: 800-426-1234

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## Signs of a Gambling Disorder

A person shows signs of gambling disorder if he/she:

- Needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money to achieve the desired excitement.
- Exhibits restless or irritable behavior when attempting to cut down or stop gambling.
- Has made repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop gambling.
- Is preoccupied with thoughts about gambling.
- Gambles when feeling distress (e.g., helpless, guilty, anxious, depressed).
- Chases one's losses/returns another day to get even.
- Lies to conceal the extent of gambling.
- Jeopardizes a significant relationship, job, or opportunity because of gambling.
- Relies on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situations caused by gambling.

For more information about gambling disorder, please refer to evaluation tools provided by the DSM-5.

## Potential Consequences of Disordered Gambling

Disordered gambling is associated with a number of negative consequences.<sup>10, 11</sup>

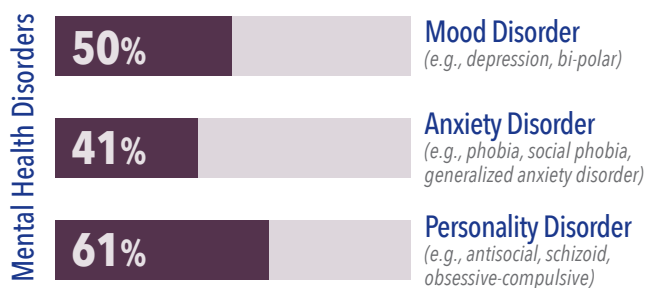
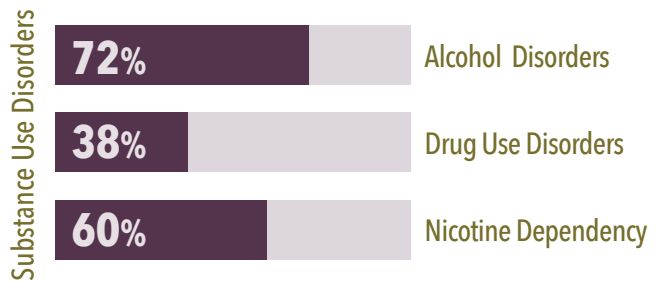
- Family dysfunction and domestic violence, including spousal/child abuse and neglect<sup>12</sup>
- High divorce rates<sup>12</sup>
- Other excessive gamblers in family<sup>12</sup>
- Suicide, suicide ideation and suicide attempts<sup>13-16</sup>
- Significant financial troubles including bankruptcy, loss of property and poverty as a direct result of wagering<sup>12</sup>
- Criminal behavior ranging from prostitution and theft to drug trafficking and homicide<sup>17-19</sup>

## Relationships Between Gambling Disorders, Substance Use Disorders, and Mental Health Disorders

People with a gambling disorder are significantly more likely to have mental health disorders and/or substance use disorders compared to those without gambling disorders.<sup>20</sup>

Research examining a large, representative sample of U.S. citizens found the following lifetime rates among those with a gambling disorder:

### People with gambling disorder who also experience: <sup>20, 33</sup>





## Other Disorders with Prevalence Rates Similar to Disordered Gambling

The following research shows estimated 12 month prevalence rates of other equally serious public health disorders with similar rate estimates of disordered gambling among adults.<sup>21-23</sup>

Major depressive disorder	6.7%
Bipolar disorder	2.6%
<b>Gambling disorder</b>	<b>1.5%</b>
Schizophrenic disorders	1.1%
Anti-social personality disorder	1.0%
Bulimia nervosa	1.0%
Obsessive-compulsive disorder	1.0%
Anorexia nervosa	0.6%

## How Does Disordered Gambling Impact Special Populations?

### Adolescents/College Age

- Research shows that those who gamble at a young age are more susceptible to gambling problems.<sup>24, 25</sup>
- Adolescents with a family history of gambling problems are more likely to experience problems with gambling.<sup>12, 19</sup>



**MALES**  
ages 14-21



**77%**  
have gambled  
in the last year<sup>17, 18</sup>



**18%**  
gambled twice  
a week or more<sup>17</sup>



**FEMALES**  
ages 14-21



**58%**  
have gambled  
in the last year<sup>17, 18</sup>



**4%**  
gambled twice  
a week or more<sup>17</sup>

- Compared to college students without a gambling disorder, college students with a gambling disorder are more likely to: <sup>24-26</sup>
  - Use tobacco
  - Use alcohol, drink heavily or binge drink, get drunk
  - Use marijuana or other illegal drugs
  - Drive under the influence
  - Be arrested for non-traffic offenses
  - Binge eat
  - Have a low GPA
  - Experience depression and str attempt suicide<sup>24-26</sup>

### Older Adults

- Among older adults, those who gamble more frequently are also more likely to have mental health disorders and/ substance use disorders.

### Corrections

- Among those in the corrections population, a metaanalysis reported that 33% of criminal offenders meet criteria for disordered gambling.<sup>27</sup> Compared to other population segments, this represents a disproportionately higher rate.
  - Of those incarcerated who have a gambling disorder, 50% say that they committed crimes to support their gambling.<sup>27</sup>

## Internet Gambling

- In adults, frequency of online gambling has been associated with gambling problems.<sup>28-30</sup>
- Internet gambling has also been associated with heavy alcohol consumption in adults.<sup>30</sup>
- Adolescent Internet gamblers are more likely to exhibit at-risk disordered gambling behavior than non-internet gamblers.<sup>30</sup>



## Endnotes

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