

# Betting Later in Life

## Understanding Gambling in Older Adults

The Massachusetts Council on  
GAMING AND HEALTH

Gambling is a popular social activity among older adults.<sup>1</sup> Many older adults in Massachusetts view gambling as an enjoyable form of entertainment and way to socialize.<sup>2 3</sup>

- 26.6% to 85.6% of U.S. adults over the age of 60 have gambled in the past year.<sup>4</sup>
- 39%–45% of all casino patrons are over age 65.<sup>5</sup>

In Massachusetts, 71% of older adults aged 65 and over in the state had gambled in the past year, but the rate of gambling problems among older age groups did not significantly differ from that of the general population.<sup>6</sup>

Over the past year, the prevalence of gambling problems among adults aged 55+ ranged from 0.4%–9.1%.<sup>7</sup>

- DSM-diagnosed gambling disorders for older adults ranged from 0.1% –2.2%.<sup>8</sup>
- Over a lifetime, the rate of problematic gambling rates among older adults is around 0.4%.<sup>9</sup>

Older adults struggling with problematic gambling behaviors are more likely to play continuous or limitless games, such as slot machines or online games. Older adults without gambling problems tend to prefer discontinuous, low-cost, and time-limited games, such as lottery tickets.<sup>10</sup>

### Why Many Older Adults Gamble

Many older adults gamble as a way to escape daily life after retirement, for example to:

- socialize on excursions and bus tours to gaming venues
- change their routine or get away for the day
- relieve feelings of boredom.<sup>11</sup>

Gambling may also be used to as a way to cope with loneliness, such as after the loss of a loved one, social isolation or living alone, or dealing with physical limitations.<sup>12</sup>

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Some older adults may gamble more often as they face financial stress, reduced income, or health-related challenges that affect their daily lives.<sup>13 14</sup>

All these factors can increase the risk of an older adult developing a gambling disorder or problematic gambling behavior.

### Co-occurring Disorders

Older adults dealing with problem gambling are significantly more likely than recreational or non-gamblers to experience:

- mental health disorders (e.g. depression and anxiety)
- substance use problems (e.g. alcohol or drug-related problems)
- physical health problems (e.g. heart conditions and diabetes)<sup>15</sup>

### Cognitive Distortions

Older adults who gamble may experience cognitive distortions, such as:

- Illusion of control (believing they can influence the outcome)
- Misjudging winning chances.



## Protective Supports

Some factors can help reduce the risk of developing gambling problems or gambling-related harm among older adults, including:

- Support from family and friends
- Education about how gambling works and common cognitive distortions
- Awareness campaigns that help people recognize early signs of gambling harm and where to find support



## Need Gambling Help?

Are you looking to stop gambling, take a break, or are curious about ways to keep your play safe and fun? We're here for you 24/7, 365. Reach out to our team of trained experts with any gambling-related questions. All calls and messages are free and confidential.

[macgh.org](http://macgh.org)  
617-426-4554

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