

FREE HELP REAL HOPE
NEBRASKA
GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

THE NEBRASKA COMMISSION ON PROBLEM GAMBLING
REPORT TO THE GENERAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
OF THE NEBRASKA UNICAMERAL LEGISLATURE
MARCH 20, 2026

INTRODUCTION

The Commission on Problem Gambling reports to the General Affairs Committee each year as required by Section 9-1005(3), Nebraska Revised Statutes.

The Commission's Gamblers Assistance Program operates in a complex and fast-changing environment. Until about ten years ago Nebraskans had only a few ways to gamble, often illegally. Today's gamblers, when asked to name their favorite, list many legal ways to lose money, some all at once. To keep gamblers interested, promoters continuously invent new temptations. The convenience store and smart phone are replacing the trip to the casino. Organized for-profit gambling does not stay the same for long.

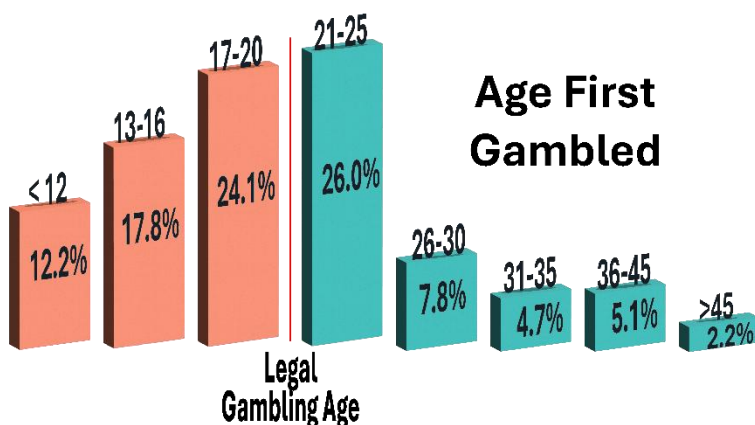
The psychology of addiction to gambling is also changing. The American Psychiatric Association now recognizes that addiction to gambling is a mental disorder similar to addictions to drugs and alcohol. Similar does not mean identical. But the addictions have a common feature – continued use even when the person knows it is harmful.

The Commission does not try to prevent people from gambling. Instead, we are available when the gambler realizes that it is time to seek help. An equally important goal is giving the public the facts about the true nature of the gambling business, how the games work, how the operators profit, and who pays.

Informed consumers make better decisions. Policy makers need facts on which to base decisions about government's role in authorizing and regulating gambling. The Commission is a source of objective information about gambling for all Nebraskans.

Useful information should start with the impact of disordered gambling on our citizens. Although legalized gambling has changed dramatically, gamblers have not.

This graph is based on thirty-three years of data about Nebraska gamblers in trouble.



Most people struggling with gambling problems today started gambling years ago – 54% began before they could do it legally at age 21. Two-thirds are men in their 30s and 40s, who have dealt with financial strain, fractured relationships and emotional distress for years.

The facts are convincing. Today's addicted gamblers started years ago, before all the new ways to gamble we have now. Today's brand new gamblers will be facing problems in some distant future. If the Commission on Problem Gambling focuses only on therapy after addiction has already set in, we will never catch up. Prevention is always cheaper than a cure; the best prevention is education.

In the coming biennium the Commission will expand its effort begun in 2024 with the Nebraska Council on Economic Education. The project produced "Beyond the Bet," a curriculum for high school economics classes that teaches facts about gambling. The classes are now offered free of charge nationwide on websites of U.S. Federal Reserve Banks. Our next steps will focus on colleges and universities.

At the same time the Commission will continue to collect, analyze and distribute facts about gambling in Nebraska to the public and policy makers.

What follows are some basic facts about the past twelve months of the Nebraska Gamblers Assistance Program.

PROGRAM FINANCES

Gamblers Assistance Program activities are paid for out of the Gamblers Assistance Fund. The Gamblers Assistance Fund receives money from:

- The state lottery profit plus 5% of the lottery advertising budget.
- The state tax on charitable gaming (ending this fiscal year).
- The state tax on casino wagering revenue.
- The state tax on mechanical amusement cash devices revenue.
- The earnings on invested cash balances credited by the State Investment Officer.

GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE FUND PERFORMANCE

03/01/2025-02/28/2026 REVENUE

1. Constitution: first \$500,000 + 1% of remaining lottery profit	1,000,127
2. Statute section 9-831: 5% of Lottery advertising expenditures	347,926
3. Statute section 9-1,101: from Charitable Gaming tax	400,000
4. Statute section 9-1204: 2.5% of Casino wagering tax	1,350,863

5. Cash Device tax	79,582
6. Investment income	<u>14,148</u>
TOTAL REVENUE TO GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE FUND	3,192,646

EXPENDITURES

Staff salaries and benefits (2FTE)	188,546
Problem Gambling Messages	602,326
Other operations	137,813
Counseling services	<u>2,200,778</u>
TOTAL EXPENDITURES OUT OF GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE FUND	3,129,463

Client counseling in the period was 70% of program spending.

RECAP

Gamblers Assistance Fund revenues	3,192,646
Gamblers Assistance Fund expenditures	<u>-3,129,463</u>
Gamblers Assistance Fund net decrease	63,183

GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE FUND BALANCE (NET OF LIABILITIES)

Gamblers Assistance Fund balance 03/01/2025	435,063
Gamblers Assistance Fund balance 02/28/2026	498,243
Gamblers Assistance Fund increase 03/01/25-02/28/26	63,180

Note: Fund balance difference due to rounding.

COMMISSION ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD

MARCH 1, 2025-FEBRUARY 28, 2026

1. Program Finances

Program revenue during the period was \$492,123 (18%) more than in the same period a year ago. Revenue from the State Lottery increased by \$96,340; Casino wagering tax increased by \$570,278; and first-time receipts from Mechanical Amusement Cash Device tax totaled \$79,582. Changes from last year that reduced program revenue included elimination of the \$250,000 appropriation from the Health Care Cash Fund, and a slight reduction in the income generated by investment of the cash fund balance.

Payment for counseling services totaled \$2.2 million, compared to \$2.4 million in the previous period.

2. Commission Meetings

The Commission met in public four times during the period to consider issues regarding the operations of the program. These meetings included reviews of the financial status of the program; counselor contract terms including hourly rates; proposed new contracts with counselors and other vendors; development of budget requests; and consideration of proposals for expansion, education and outreach. Meeting notices and agendas were posted on the state events calendar and the program website. Minutes of meetings were posted on the program website.

3. Counselor Contracts

The Commission has made contracts with agencies and individual counselors who have been trained and certified to assist Nebraskans dealing with the consequences of gambling addiction. These contracts authorize payment for counseling services at hourly rates up to an approved total. At their current pace, counselors will deliver approximately 10,000 hours per year of counseling to Nebraskans diagnosed with a gambling disorder.

4. New therapist training and certification

The American Society of Addiction Medicine, in its publication *The ASAM Criteria* recommends that a therapist providing counseling in this field should have specialized training and certification due to the unique characteristics of gambling addiction. This is the policy of the Nebraska Gamblers Assistance Program.

Bellevue University, home to counselor training, has announced it will discontinue the contract with the Commission on March 31. A search for a replacement is underway. In the meantime, inquiries about training opportunities will be referred to selected national sources.

5. Public education and information

The State Lottery Division is required by statute to devote 5% of its advertising budget to the dissemination of problem gambling messages. The Commission administers this activity, supplementing the Lottery Division allocation with other program funds. During the twelve months covered by this report, the Commission used these funds to continue its digital media campaign.

The contract for the campaign was opened for bids in the spring of 2024. The winner was Argus Communications of Boston, MA. The bid proposal offered an initial two year contract with two options to renew for two years each. Argus started work on July 1, 2024. During the first two years of the contract, creative efforts were devoted to marketing the availability of the Program's services and upgrading the website. Renewal for another two years awaits the Commission's approval. If the contract is renewed, the focus will be on outreach and information about the Program's services, and on a new initiative to educate Nebraska youth about gambling.

6. Data gathering and analysis

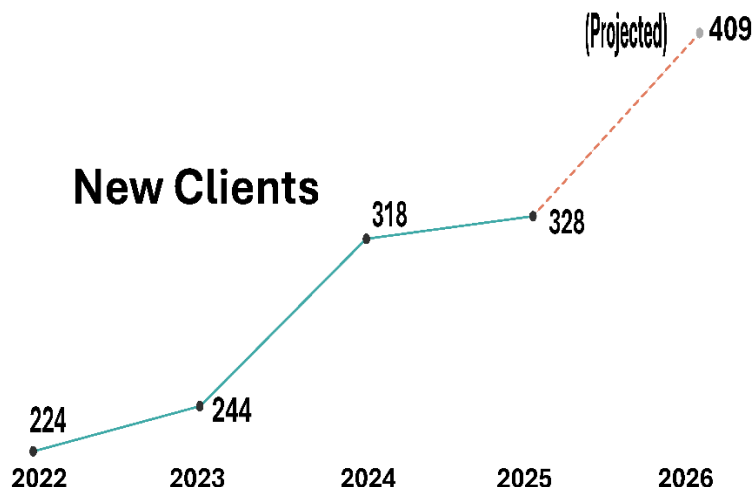
The Commission renewed the contract with GIS & Human Dimensions of Lincoln to conduct analysis and reports of data accumulated from clients. The program's database includes demographic, financial, social and gambling background information from persons diagnosed with gambling disorder and admitted into counseling. This data represents the best available evidence about problem gambling issues in our state.

PROGRAM DATA

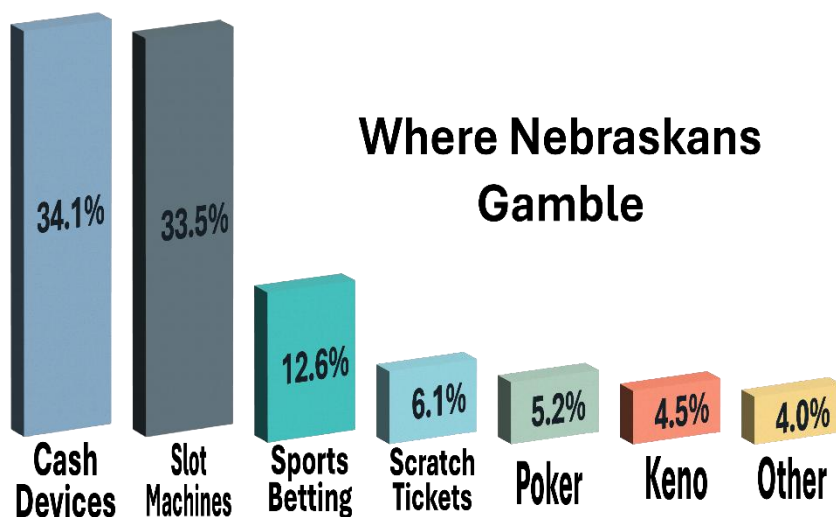
Counselors gather data about problem gambling in Nebraska using a format developed by program staff. During the period from March 1, 2025 to February 28, 2026, an average of 328 Nebraskans received counseling each month. This is a 28% increase in the number of clients in less than two years.

Analysis of data accumulated over ten years from more than one thousand clients shows the addictive nature of computer-driven devices.

Since 2020, client numbers have trended upward overall, with a projected increase of 25% occurring from 2025 to 2026.



Data shows that 68% of clients gambled at casino slot machines or Mechanical Amusement Cash Devices, the most addictive forms of gambling:



- 45% of these Nebraskans addicted to gambling have considered suicide, many times the rate in the general population.
- 5% have attempted suicide, over eight times the rate of suicide attempts in the general population.
- Over half of the program's clients who contemplate suicide do so because of financial problems.
- 60% of the clients had more than \$5,000 of gambling debt; 13% of them reported gambling debt of \$50,000 or more, all of it representing money spent on gambling with nothing to show for it but problems.

CONCLUSION

The Nebraska Commission on Problem Gambling continues to carry out its statutory responsibilities in an increasingly complex and evolving gambling environment. As access to gambling has expanded across the state, the demand for services has also grown, reflected in sustained increases in client participation, including a projected 25 percent rise from 2025 to 2026. Program data further underscore the severity and long-term nature of gambling disorder, including early exposure to gambling, significant financial hardship, and elevated risks to mental health.

The Commission has responded by maintaining a strong emphasis on counseling services, which account for the majority of program expenditures, while also investing in public education and prevention initiatives such as the “Gambling Disagrees with You” campaign and statewide awareness efforts. Continued data collection and analysis provide a critical foundation for understanding trends and informing policy decisions.

Given the documented growth in need, the changing nature of gambling access, and the significant personal and social impacts reflected in program data, the Commission’s efforts to expand treatment capacity and increase public awareness remain essential. Ongoing support for both services and prevention will be necessary to address the challenges associated with gambling in Nebraska.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Geier', with a stylized, cursive script.

David Geier, Director

Gamblers Assistance Program

March 20, 2026