

THE NEBRASKA COMMISSION ON PROBLEM GAMBLING

**REPORT TO THE GENERAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
OF THE NEBRASKA UNICAMERAL LEGISLATURE**

MARCH, 2021

INTRODUCTION

The Nebraska Commission on Problem Gambling directs the operation of the Gamblers Assistance Program. This annual report summarizes the finances of the program and describes the Commission's activities. The program's staff does the following:

- Contracts with counselors who provide counseling and treatment services for problem gamblers and their families who are residents of Nebraska;
- Develops a process for evaluation and approval of contracts with treatment providers and other services vendors;
- Develops standards for training and certification of counselors;
- Gathers, reviews and uses evaluation data on which to base program initiatives;
- Informs the public about problem gambling and prevention of problem gambling;
- Creates and implements outreach and education programs;
- Develops and implements methods to assess outcomes of program activities;
- Investigates and implements evidence-based best practices in the field of gambling addiction education, prevention and treatment.

The Gamblers Assistance Program faces significant changes in gambling by Nebraskans. Voter approval of casino gambling combines with expanding sports betting to create new challenges.

I. GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FINANCES

The Gamblers Assistance Program receives funding from two cash funds: the Gamblers Assistance Fund and the Health Care Cash Fund. Revenue into the Gamblers Assistance Fund comes from the state lottery and the state-level charitable gaming tax. *The Program does not receive a general fund appropriation.* The financial outlines that follow give a breakdown of the program's revenues and expenditures.

GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE FUND PERFORMANCE: 03/01/2020-02/28/2021

REVENUE

1. Constitution, Article III, Section 24, formula: \$500,000 + 1% of remaining lottery profit	
Transfer, March 2020	106,539
Transfer, June 2020	125,561
Transfer, September 2020 (\$500,000 + 1%)	599,369
Transfer, December 2020	<u>104,644</u>
TOTAL	936,113
2. Statute section 9-831: 5% of Lottery advertising expenditures	252,461
3. Statute section 9-1,101: from Charitable Gaming Operations Fund	400,000
4. Investment income	10,109
5. Net of registration refunds, sale of misc. asset	<u>(648)</u>
TOTAL REVENUE TO GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE FUND	1,598,035

CASH EXPENDITURES

Salaries and benefits	152,160
Problem Gambling Messages	350,731
Other operations	73,620
Government aid	<u>846,836</u>
TOTAL EXPENDITURES OUT OF GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE FUND	1,423,347

RECAP

Gamblers Assistance Fund revenues	1,598,035
Gamblers Assistance Fund expenditures	<u>-1,423,347</u>
Gamblers Assistance Fund net	174,688

GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE FUND BALANCE (NET OF LIABILITIES)

Gamblers Assistance Fund balance 03/01/2020	629,932
Gamblers Assistance Fund balance 02/28/2021	<u>804,620</u>
Gamblers Assistance Fund balance increase 03/01/20-02/28/21	174,688

HEALTH CARE CASH FUND

Appropriation	250,000
Expenditure: Government Aid Programs	<u>-250,000</u>
Net	0

GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM TOTAL

REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES 03/01/2020-02/28/2021

Total program revenue from two cash funds	1,848,035
Total program expenditures	<u>- 1,673,347</u>
Net	174,688

II. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD

MARCH 1, 2020-FEBRUARY 28, 2021

1. Commission Meetings

The Commission met three times during the period to consider issues regarding the operations of the program. The fourth meeting, scheduled for November, 2020, was canceled due to the pandemic. These meetings included reviews of the financial status of the program; 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.

2. Counselor Contracts

The Commission has made contracts with fifteen 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 11,000 hours per year of counseling to Nebraskans diagnosed with a gambling disorder.

The Louisiana Association on Problem Gambling operates a call center, answering calls for help from Nebraskans. This helpline, operated 24 hours per day every day of the year. Callers in significant crisis were immediately referred to qualified counselors.

3. New therapist training and certification

The Commission continued to provide tuition support to Nebraskans taking courses offered online by Bellevue University in their Certificate of Gambling Specialty program. This is a course developed by the Nebraska Council on Compulsive Gambling with underwriting from the Commission. Courses are offered in segments over a period of 19 weeks, for a total of 72 credit hours. Upon completion the candidate is eligible to receive provisional certification to provide counseling therapy through the Nebraska program. 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.

In 2020, the Commission authorized an offering of a three-part course with lower tuition and reduced hours of study that is available for counselors who are already licensed in Nebraska

to practice in addiction and behavioral health. This is one element of the Commission's plan to prepare for the influx of clients that will result from the opening of new casinos during the next year.

4. Public education and information

The Commission is required by statute to devote an allocation of 5% of the State Lottery advertising budget to the dissemination of problem gambling messages. As the budget allows, this is supplemented with other program funds. During the twelve months covered by this report, the Commission used these funds to implement a digital media campaign. This campaign blankets the state with messages directed at individuals exhibiting behavior that indicates their interest in gambling. The messages are intended both to inform about the risks of gambling harm and the availability of help through the Nebraska Gamblers Assistance Program. Over three thousand unique individuals visit the Program's website after being prompted by the messages.

5. Data gathering and analysis

The Commission continued its contract with a local statistician who accumulates and analyzes data that the counselors gather from their clients. The program's database includes demographic, financial, social, economic and gambling background information from persons diagnosed with gambling disorder and admitted into counseling. This data, some of which goes back at least 10 years, represents the best available evidence about problem gambling issues in our state.

III. PROGRAM DATA

The graph attached to this report shows data gathered from Nebraskans by counselors covering the period from July 1, 2017 to December 31, 2020. Among topics of concern to the Commission:

- 68% of Nebraskans addicted to gambling first gambled by age 20, and about 38% of them by age 15.
- Gambling debt is a significant issue in this population.
- 30% of these Nebraskans addicted to gambling have considered suicide, and another 6% have attempted suicide, as their financial and other personal problems mounted.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Nebraska Commission on Problem Gambling continues to perform its obligations to expand therapy services throughout the state and develop methods to inform the public about gambling disorder and the facts about gambling in Nebraska.

David Geier, Director

Gamblers Assistance Program

