

September 2023



Gaming and Gambling

Impacts on Virginia Youth and Young Adults

Introduction

For many, gaming and gambling is a form of entertainment, but for some people, it can become an addiction. It is important to understand the potential impacts of gaming and gambling on Virginia residents and what preventative measures exist to reduce negative outcomes. As technology has changed, people can now access gaming and gambling activities in new and more easily accessible ways. This report looks at how gaming and gambling affect youth and young adults and how gaming and gambling can affect other aspects of public health, including substance use and mental health.

What is Gaming and Gambling?

Gaming is the action or practice of playing gambling games, typically through the internet or video games.

Gambling is the act of risking something of value, usually money, on the outcome of an event decided at least partially by chance."¹

Recent research shows a convergence or cross-over between gaming and gambling products, platforms, and networks. These games simulate features and opportunities within gambling activities (i.e., card games, electric gaming machines) that allow players to spend money to play. Examples of gaming/gambling convergences included the 'gamification' of non-gambling games, in which customers can win items of value, or the introduction of gambling elements to games on social media.²

How Gaming and Gambling Lead to Addiction

*Not everyone who participates in gaming and gambling will develop an addiction. But anyone who gambles can develop a problem.*³

Gaming Addiction: Individuals who exhibit addictive behaviors related to gaming can meet the criteria for an internet gaming disorder, which causes "significant impairment or distress" in several aspects of a person's life. This condition is limited to gaming and does not include problems with general internet use, online gambling, social media, or smartphones.⁴

Examples of gambling include¹:



Lottery tickets



An office sports pool



Bingo games



Gambling websites



Blackjack at a casino



Horse races



Social poker games



Slot machines

Symptoms of internet gaming disorder include¹:

- > Preoccupation with gaming
- > Withdrawal symptoms when gaming is taken away or not possible (sadness, anxiety, irritability)
- > Tolerance — the need to spend more time gaming to satisfy the urge
- > Inability to reduce playing, unsuccessful attempts to quit gaming
- > Giving up other activities, loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities due to gaming
- > Continuing to game despite problems
- > Deceiving family members or others about the amount of time spent on gaming
- > The use of gaming to relieve negative moods, such as guilt or hopelessness
- > Risking or losing a close relationship, a job, or a school opportunity because of gaming

¹ <https://www.ncpgambling.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Gambling-Addiction-An-Introduction-for-Behavioral-Health-Providers-SAMHSA-2014.pdf>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4712754/>

³ <https://vcpg.net/events-education/#faqs>

⁴ <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/internet-gaming>

Gambling Addiction: Known as pathological gambling, compulsive gambling, or gambling disorder, gambling addiction is related to impulse control.⁵ People who gamble compulsively have difficulty controlling their impulse, regardless of the consequences for them or their loved ones. In extreme cases, problem gambling can result in financial struggles, legal problems, loss of career and family, or even suicide.⁶ Several risk factors can increase the likelihood of developing this addiction, such as accessibility, social acceptance, norms, and being an adolescent.⁷

There are a lot of misconceptions about problematic gambling. The following statements are not true⁸:

- ✗ You have to gamble every day to be a problem gambler.
- ✗ Problem gambling is not a problem if the gambler can afford it.
- ✗ A gambling problem is just a case of being weak-willed, irresponsible, or unintelligent.
- ✗ Partners of problem gamblers often drive their loved ones to gamble.
- ✗ If a problem gambler builds up a debt, you should help them take care of it.

How Youth Become Involved

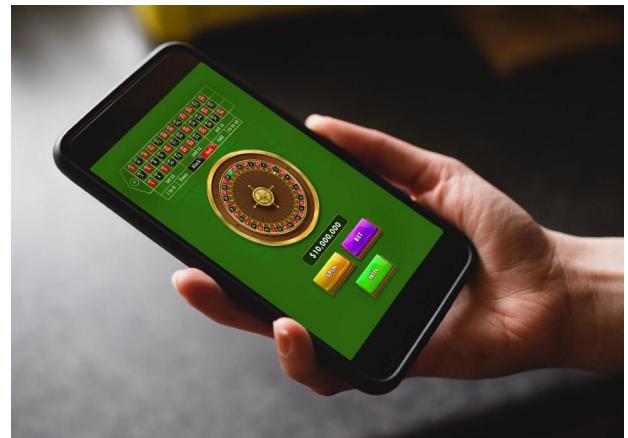
Understanding why youth become involved with gaming and gambling can help guide prevention efforts.

Gaming can be a social outlet for kids, with many games offering educational lessons or opportunities to encourage teamwork and develop various skills. It is through these experiences that they gain access to and interest in gaming. As with many hobbies, those who enjoy participating in gaming will start to want to play for longer and more frequently.¹⁰

Research on university students found that youth and young adults play digital games for entertainment and other benefits, including stress reduction, challenge, and social interactions. Young adults at moderate risk for gambling problems indicated engaging in gambling activities helps to cheer them up when they are depressed, or they use it to ease their financial situation.¹¹ Additionally, easy access to gaming through the internet and digital devices has increased youth and young adult engagement.

Symptoms of gambling disorder include⁸:

- > Need to gamble with increasing amounts to achieve the desired excitement
- > Restlessness or irritability when trying to cut down or stop gambling
- > Repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back on, or stop gambling
- > Frequent thoughts about gambling (such as reliving past gambling or planning future gambling)
- > Often gambling when feeling distressed
- > After losing money gambling, returning to get even ("chasing" one's losses)
- > Lying to hide gambling activity
- > Risking or losing a close relationship, a job, or a school opportunity because of gambling
- > Relying on others to help with money problems caused by gambling



⁵ <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/gambling-addiction-and-problem-gambling.htm>

⁶ <https://vcpg.net/events-education/#faqs>

⁷ <https://www.virginiapreventionworks.org/our-initiatives/gaming-and-gambling/>

⁸ <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gambling-disorder/what-is-gambling-disorder>

⁹ <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/gambling-addiction-and-problem-gambling.htm>

¹⁰ <https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/online-gaming-advice/online-gaming-the-risks/>

¹¹ https://www.ygam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FINAL-research_full_report-PRINT-READY-5.pdf

Connections between Gambling and Substance Use and Other Mental Health Disorders

Gambling disorders often co-occur with substance use and other behavioral health problems.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), gambling and substance use disorders (SUD) are similar in that they are characterized by a loss of control, cravings, withdrawal, and tolerance. Research shows that children with high impulsivity are more likely to develop gambling and substance use disorders later in life.¹² These gambling disorders are also associated with mood disorders, ADHD, stress, depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder. When identifying proper prevention and treatments for gaming or gambling disorders, it is important to consider the connections between gambling and other disorders, as co-occurring disorders and underlying conditions can impact behaviors.¹³



¹² <https://www.ncpgambling.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Gambling-Addiction-An-Introduction-for-Behavioral-Health-Providers-SAMHSA-2014.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/gambling-addiction-and-problem-gambling.htm>

Gaming and Gambling Trends

Virginia Trends

Gambling was prohibited in Virginia, with some exceptions (i.e. lottery, charitable gaming, wagering on horse races), until 2019 when the General Assembly passed a bill to authorize the development of casinos in five Virginia localities (Bristol, Danville, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Richmond).¹⁴ The five localities voted via a referendum as to whether to allow casinos. Bristol, Danville, Norfolk, and Portsmouth approved the development of casinos; Richmond did not. The final decision was contingent on a review by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) and approval by the 2020 General Assembly.¹⁵

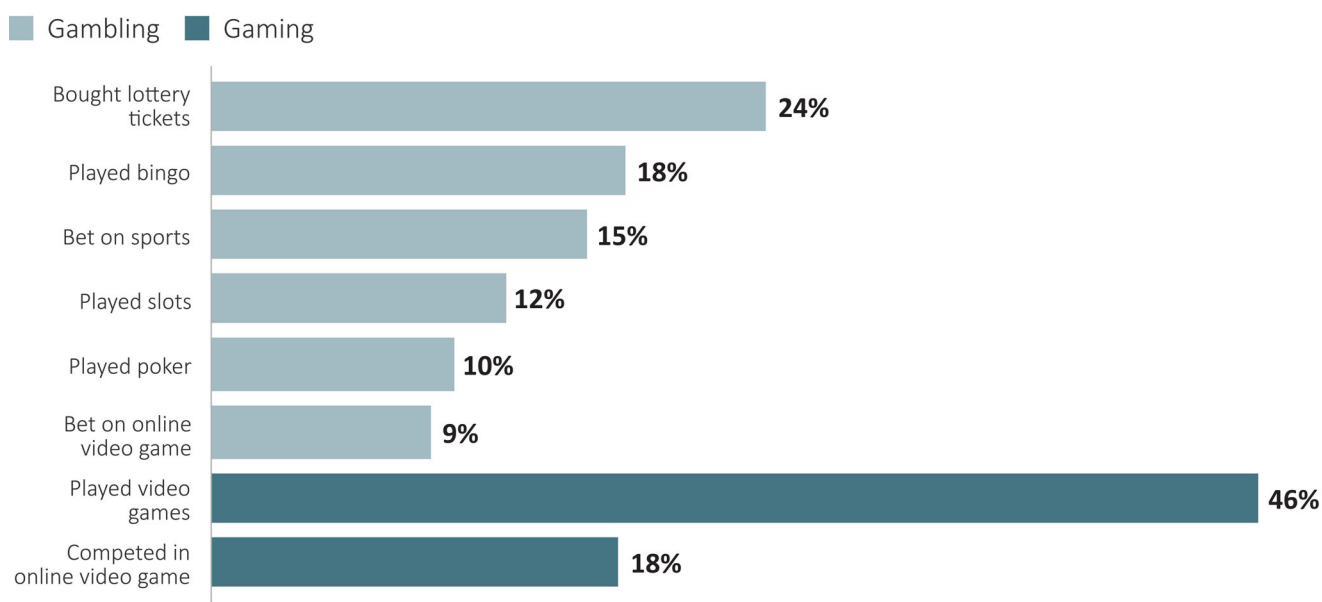
Virginia Young Adult Survey

This section outlines recent youth and young adult gambling and gaming trends across Virginia. Data in this section comes from the 2022 Virginia Young Adult Survey (YAS), a comprehensive survey of 18 to 25-year-olds. OMNI Institute developed the YAS in conjunction with the Virginia State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW) in 2016. In the spring of 2022, the Virginia Young Adult Survey collected responses from **5,327 young adults across the Commonwealth**.¹⁶

Over 60% of survey respondents said they had gamed or gambled in the last 30 days.



Overall, gaming is much more common among young adults. Almost half of all survey participants have played video games recreationally (the most common gaming activity), while 1 in 4 had bought lottery tickets, which was the most common gambling activity.

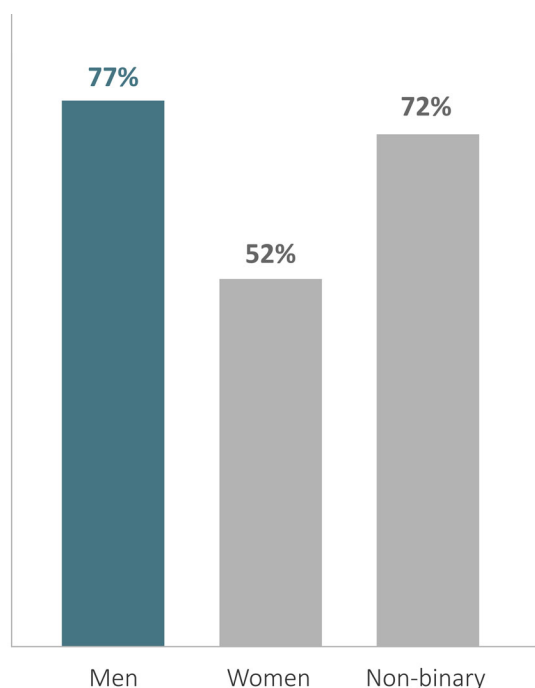


¹⁴ <http://jlarc.virginia.gov/landing-2019-gaming.asp>

¹⁵ <https://www.theiaga.org/virginia-legislature-passes-casino-gaming-and-sports-betting-bills>

¹⁶ <https://www.vasis.org/yas>

More than half of respondents of all genders reported gaming or gambling in the last 30 days, but **men were most likely to have gamed or gambled, followed closely by non-binary respondents.**



National Data: The Gender Gap

In addition to the Virginia YAS, national and other statewide studies show that men participate in gaming and gambling more than women. Men also have higher rates of problem gambling than women. One explanation for this difference is that "men were likelier to perceive positive outcomes for gambling than women. Sensation seeking and risk-taking can explain gender differences in reckless and addictive behaviors."¹⁷ Research around non-binary gaming and gambling behaviors is less prevalent, but a similar youth survey out of Minnesota showed transgender and gender diverse youth reported "greater involvement in most gambling behaviors and problem gambling compared to cisgender youth."¹⁸

Impacts

Research continues to show the effects of gaming and gambling. Below are YAS data showing how gaming and gambling have impacted respondents and their relationship to other research studies.

- Many participants find gaming and gambling to be an important part of socializing. Nearly one out of five YAS respondents said **gaming/gambling helps them build or maintain social connections and friendships.**
- Gaming and gambling can affect people's thoughts and actions. More than 11% of YAS respondents said they spend a lot of time **thinking about gaming or gambling** during the day, and over 10% said gaming or gambling often **interferes with their regular activities.**
- A study by the National Council on Problem Gambling found that 16% of adults incorrectly believe gambling is a good way to make money. About eight percent of YAS respondents noted that gaming or gambling has **negatively affected their finances.**¹⁹
- Research shows there are "numerous" links between gambling disorder and alcohol and drug use disorders. There are high co-morbidity rates, and these disorders often require common treatment approaches. About seven percent of YAS respondents said that they **drink more** and six percent responded that they **use more tobacco/nicotine products** when they game or gamble.²⁰

¹⁷ Wong G, Zane N, Saw A, Chan AK. Examining gender differences for gambling engagement and gambling problems among emerging adults. J Gambli Stud. 2013 Jun;29(2):171-89. doi: 10.1007/s10899-012-9305-1. PMID: 22585283; PMCID: PMC4736715. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4736715/>

¹⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6475469/>

¹⁹ https://www.ncpgsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NCPG_NGAGE-Natl_Detailed_Report-Public.pdf

²⁰ Rash CJ, Weinstock J, Van Patten R. A review of gambling disorder and substance use disorders. Subst Abuse Rehabil. 2016 Mar 17;7:3-13. doi: 10.2147/SAR.S83460. PMID: 27051333; PMCID: PMC4803266. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4803266/>

These impacts are more pronounced in men and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) respondents. Below are data from the YAS showing differences within gender and race for different types of impact.



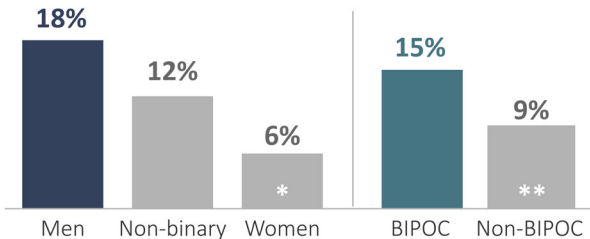
National Data: Race

Because gambling is a social activity for many, and race often plays a major role in forming social groups, gambling does not affect all races equally—in Virginia and other states. In the Virginia YAS, BIPOC individuals were more likely to game and gamble than non-BIPOC individuals. Higher frequencies of gaming and gambling for the BIPOC population align with other data around race and gambling. According to the Gateway Foundation:

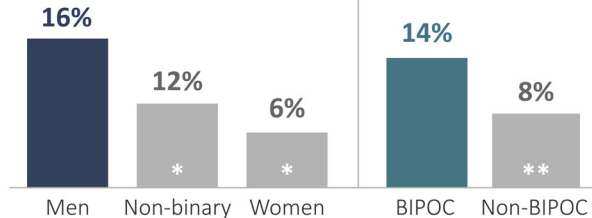
"Overall, young Black males are associated with the highest rates of gambling disorders in the United States. Studies have shown that Black people with lower general health measures living in disadvantaged neighborhoods with the lowest income brackets are the most likely to be affected by gambling. Additionally, Black people with gambling disorders are more likely to develop higher rates of anxiety and personality disorders."²¹



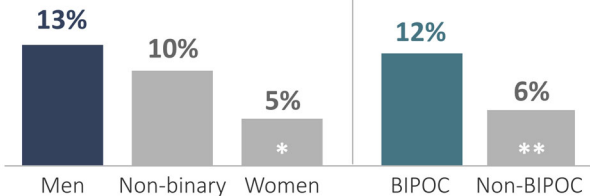
I spend a lot of time during the day **thinking about gaming or gambling.**



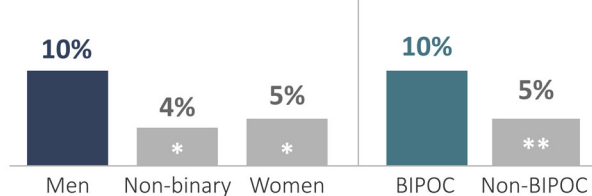
My gaming or gambling time **often interferes with my regular activities** (e.g. school, work, socializing with friends or family, regular exercise).



My gaming or gambling has **negatively affected my finances.**



I find I **drink more alcohol** when I game or gamble.



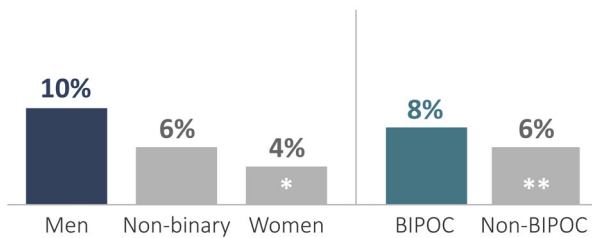
*Statistically significant difference (p-values less than 0.05) compared to men

**Statistically significant difference (p-values less than 0.05) compared to BIPOC

²¹ <https://www.gatewayfoundation.org/addiction-blog/gambling-addiction-race/>



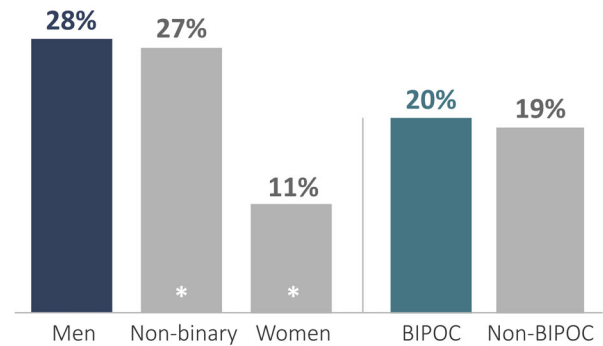
I find that I **use more tobacco/nicotine products** when I game or gamble (e.g. smoke tobacco, vape, or chew)



*Statistically significant difference (p-values less than 0.05) compared to men
 **Statistically significant difference (p-values less than 0.05) compared to BIPOC



I find gaming/gambling helps me **build or maintain my social connections and friendships**



The Connection between Gaming and Gambling, and Mental Health and Suicide

The YAS asked respondents if they had ever harmed themselves on purpose or if they had ever seriously considered suicide. Of all respondents who reported participating in a gambling activity daily, **37% responded 'yes' to one or both of the self-harm and suicide questions.**

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are all types of abuse, neglect, and other potentially traumatic experiences in childhood (under age 18), including household challenges, in which a child observes violence or instability in the home. ACEs can impact risk behaviors, mental health, and health status. **Of all respondents who reported participating in a gambling activity daily, 68% noted having one or more adverse childhood experiences, which is higher than the prevalence among the general Virginia adult population (61%).²²**



National Data: Mental Health

The connection between gambling and mental health is well-established. Nearly two in three attendees of Gamblers Anonymous reported considering suicide.²³ Depression may drive individuals to gamble in the first place, as it can be a form of self-medication—releasing brain chemicals that create feelings of pleasure and excitement.²⁴ Additionally, regardless of whether individuals struggle with their mental health before developing problem gambling habits, most problem gamblers will express exacerbated feelings of hopelessness, shame, desperation, and depression.

Using the VASIS Dashboard for Community Efforts

Are you interested in learning more about the Virginia Young Adult survey? Visit the Virginia Social Indicator (VASIS) dashboard at vasis.org/YAS. The VASIS Dashboard is a compilation of behavioral health data from agencies and organizations throughout the state. The goal of the dashboard is to centralize key indicators of behavioral health and wellness to use as a resource for needs assessment, epidemiological monitoring, and planning. OMNI Institute hosts the VASIS Dashboard with the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.

²² https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e790dd6d4b70c69a59c0236/t/5f0390585b6cfa0aa7a7de19/1594069082473/SEOW_ACEs+Report.pdf

²³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3004711/#:~:text=Pathological%20gambling%20can%20directly%20trigger,30%20percent%20for%20bipolar%20disorder>

²⁴ <https://www.algamus.org/blog/depression-and-gambling-addiction>

Strategies to Address Problem Gaming and Gambling

Virginia is addressing the risks of gaming and gambling to help communities take action to prevent and address the impacts of harmful behaviors. This work is being done through prevention strategies, treatment, and recovery opportunities.

Prevention Strategies

In 2022, the Virginia department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), in partnership with OMNI, leveraged funds to support Community Services Boards (CSBs) across the Commonwealth in conducting needs assessment efforts that would allow for a greater understanding of community behaviors, knowledge, attitudes, and environments related to gaming and gambling. Following the needs assessment, DBHDS built a comprehensive plan based on OMNI's recommended strategies.²⁵ Below are descriptions of some selected strategies.

Public Awareness and Education

Implementing problem gaming and gambling prevention education efforts targeting youth can mitigate the impacts of gaming and gambling advertising on youth behaviors. One strategy to prevent gaming and gambling in youth and young adults is raising community awareness of what constitutes gaming and gambling, how it can pose a risk to youth, and available prevention programs and services.

Strategies to raise awareness can vary in scope and scale and can include state-wide campaigns to agency-level outreach.²⁶ Examples include:



Social media campaigns



School-based curricula



Hosting booths at health fairs



Merchant education



Public service announcements



Fact sheets, brochures, and speaking engagements

Environmental Changes

Environmental strategies establish or change written and unwritten community standards, practices, policies, regulations, and codes that influence the incidence and prevalence of problem gambling in the general population.²⁷ These strategies focus on large populations versus individuals.

²⁵ https://dbhds.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/PGP_CSAP-Strategies.pdf

²⁶ https://dbhds.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/PGP_CSAP-Strategies.pdf

²⁷ https://dbhds.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/PGP_CSAP-Strategies.pdf

Examples of environmental strategies include:

- 1 Establishing gambling-related worksite, community and school policies
- 2 Technical assistance to communities on policy change efforts
- 3 Modifying gambling/gaming advertising practices and policies at the community level
- 4 Social marketing campaigns such as *Gift Responsibly*²⁸
- 5 Limiting access to slot and lottery machines
- 6 Compliance checks²⁹

In 2022, CSBs conducted an environmental scan to understand the current gaming and gambling landscape and note where CSBs and DBHDS may want to focus prevention efforts. The scan included visiting brick-and-mortar gambling establishments and charitable gaming hosts, documentation of gaming and gambling advertising in electronic media/social media, and community walks to capture what kinds of gambling inducements people encounter in the community.

The environmental scan found that gambling displays were most often located next to snacks and candy, followed by ATMs and tobacco. **These placements may enable impulse purchases, foster associations with products marketed to children, and reinforce tobacco use.** Additionally, it was found that 46% of locations had gambling ads containing no information about problem gambling support.³⁰

Community-Based Processes

Interested in ways to address problem gaming and gambling in your community? A successful community-based process taps into existing collaborations and builds new coalitions to design and implement plans that address the specific needs of the community.³¹

Examples of community-based strategies include:

-  Assessing community gambling and community needs
-  Developing a strategic plan with community input
-  Multi-organization collaborations
-  Providing gambling prevention training or technical assistance services³²

²⁸ <https://www.ncpgambling.org/lottery-tickets-arent-childs-play-3/>

²⁹ https://dbhds.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/PGP_CSAP-Strategies.pdf

³⁰ https://dbhds.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Environmental-Scan-Report_FINAL.pdf

³¹ https://dbhds.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/PGP_CSAP-Strategies.pdf

³² https://dbhds.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/PGP_CSAP-Strategies.pdf

Treatment

Like with other behavioral health disorders, there are specialized treatment options for those with problem gambling. Providers offer nonjudgmental feedback to their clients regarding gambling behaviors and assess their client's motivation and readiness to address gambling behaviors through treatment strategies.

“ They should make it known that gambling help is provided because most people don't realize that they can ask for help about this.”³³

– Individual receiving treatment

The Virginia Council on Problem Gambling announced the formation of the Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health, a consortium of stakeholders committed to strengthening treatment services for individuals who need support for problem gambling.³⁴

The Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health centralizes treatment services for individuals and families needing therapeutic support. Individuals needing more intensive therapeutic services are referred to one of the partnership's contracted treatment providers for assessment, which could follow outpatient counseling sessions.³⁵

Some treatment strategies offered to individuals include:

1

Behavioral Therapy: Altering behaviors by reinforcing desired behaviors, modifying attitudes and behaviors related to gambling, and increasing clients' coping skills with environmental cues that may trigger gambling cravings.³⁶

2

Cognitive Therapy: Educating clients about the randomness of gambling, increasing clients' awareness of their distorted thinking, helping clients doubt their irrational cognitions, and helping them restructure their thoughts.³⁷

3

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: Identifying and changing cognitive distortions about gambling, reinforcing non-gambling behaviors, and recognizing positive and negative consequences.³⁸

To learn more about Virginia treatment centers and programs offered to individuals with gambling addictions, visit <https://www.alltreatment.com/va/gambling-addiction-treatment/>.

³³ <https://rehab.chp.vcu.edu/about-us/research/vpgh/>

³⁴ <https://rehab.chp.vcu.edu/about-us/research/vpgh/#:~:text=The%20Virginia%20Partnership%20for%20Gaming,need%20support%20for%20problem%20gambling.>

³⁵ <https://rehab.chp.vcu.edu/about-us/research/vpgh/>

³⁶ <https://www.ncpgambling.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Gambling-Addiction-An-Introduction-for-Behavioral-Health-Providers-SAMHSA-2014.pdf>

³⁷ <https://www.ncpgambling.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Gambling-Addiction-An-Introduction-for-Behavioral-Health-Providers-SAMHSA-2014.pdf>

³⁸ <https://www.ncpgambling.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Gambling-Addiction-An-Introduction-for-Behavioral-Health-Providers-SAMHSA-2014.pdf>

Recovery

Peer Recovery Support Specialists

Peer Recovery Support Specialists (PRS) have living experience with mental health and substance use challenges and are trained to offer support and assistance to individuals in their recovery journeys. The Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health (VPGH) is a consortium of stakeholders committed to strengthen treatment and recovery services for individuals who need support for problem gambling. VPGH connects individuals with problem gambling to work with a PRS or treatment provider in their health region.³⁹

To join the Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health network, become a provider, use the Partnerships materials in class, or suggest researchers who the Partnership should be aware of, visit <https://vcpg.net/contact-us/>.

Helplines

- > **Virginia 24 Hour Problem Gambling Help Line**
1 (888) 532-3500
- > **Gamblers Anonymous**
(www.gamblersanonymous.org)
A 12-step program for Problem Gambling
- > **Gam-Anon** (www.gam-anon.org)
A self-help organization for the spouse, family, or close friends of a problem gambler
- > **GamTalk** (www.gamtalk.org)
A 24/7 moderated online peer support forum

Self-Help Meetings

At Gamblers Anonymous meetings individuals share their experiences, strengths, and hopes with each other to solve their common problems and help others recover from gambling problems.

Gamblers Anonymous offers three meeting options:

- 1 Closed Meeting:** Only those with a gambling problem, or those who think they may have a gambling problem with a desire to stop gambling, are eligible to attend and participate.
- 2 Modified Closed Meeting:** This type of meeting would be the same as a "Closed Meeting," but the members would vote to include certain groups such as health professionals, guests attending with first-time members, and persons with other addictions needing a meeting.
- 3 Open Meeting:** Spouses, family, and friends of the gambler are welcome to attend and observe the meeting.

For individuals interested in attending a Gamblers Anonymous meeting in their state, visit <http://gamblersanonymous.org/ga/locations/>.

³⁹ <https://rehab.chp.vcu.edu/about-us/research/vpgh/>

Key Takeaways



Not everyone who participates in gaming and gambling will develop an addiction. But anyone who gambles can develop a problem.



Gambling disorders typically co-occur with substance use and other behavioral health problems. Gambling disorders are associated with mood disorders, ADHD, stress, depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder.



Gaming and gambling addictive behaviors can begin during youth. As with many hobbies, those who enjoy participating in gaming will start to want to play for longer and more frequently. Additionally, easier access to gambling through the internet and digital devices has increased youth and young adult engagement.



The data shows significant differences in gaming and gambling activities and impacts between genders and races. Men and non-binary individuals participate in gaming and gambling more than women and have higher rates of problem gambling than women. Sixteen percent of men reported that gaming and gambling often interfere with their regular activities. Virginia YAS data showed that BIPOC individuals were more likely to game and gamble than non-BIPOC respondents.



Virginia is addressing the risks of gaming and gambling to help communities take action to prevent and address the impacts of harmful behaviors. A successful community-based process taps into existing collaborations and builds new coalitions to design and implement plans that address the specific needs of the community.



Gaming and gambling-specific treatment and recovery resources exist. The Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health centralizes treatment services for individuals and families needing therapeutic support. The Virginia Problem Gambling helpline is available at **1 (888)532-3500**.

This document was produced in 2023 by OMNI Institute in collaboration with the Virginia State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW). OMNI and the SEOW compiled this document as a starting point to share a common definition of gaming and gambling, demonstrate examples of impacts on youth and young adults in Virginia, and highlight how these impacts are being addressed. For more extensive resources and further learning on this topic, please see the references. For more information on the SEOW, please visit VirginiaSEOW.org.