



## Alcohol, Drug Addiction & Mental Health Services Board of Erie County

# March is Problem Gambling Awareness Month

As gambling has been legalized and expanded across the country in recent years, there's been an increasing focus on the difference between responsible gambling and problem gambling. Problem Gambling Awareness Month is a time to raise awareness about the importance of responsible gambling, educate individuals regarding the risks of gambling, and showcase resources available to those with problem gambling. Problem gambling is gambling behavior that is damaging to a person or their family, which often disrupts their daily life and career. There are many warning signs of problem gambling which include:

- thinking about gambling all the time;
- feeling the need to bet more money and more often;
- going back to try to win your money back ("chasing losses")
- feeling restless or irritable when trying to cut down;

- feeling like you can't control yourself;
- gambling despite negative consequences.

It's important to understand that problem gambling can affect anyone who gambles regardless of economic, social, and demographic factors. The amount of money lost does not determine when gambling becomes problematic. When gambling is interfering with an individual's relationships, job, mental or physical health, financial health, or any other area of life it is a problematic behavior.

There are significant links between compulsive gambling and depression/anxiety. Gambling activates the brain's reward system much like a drug does. Over time, the person gambling develops a tolerance to gambling and it becomes less rewarding. This can negatively impact one's mood. There are other similarities and some differences between problem gambling and substance abuse/

addiction. Both create major consequences that affect the person engaging in the behavior as well as those around him/her. However, problem gambling is seen as more behaviorally and cognitively based behavior than substance abuse. The treatment for these disorders is also very different, especially when considers the physical withdrawal symptoms from substances.

It's important to address problem gambling as soon as it's noticed. If you or a loved one are struggling with problem gambling, there is help available. You can call 1-800-GAMBLER or visit <https://www.ncpgambling.org/help-treatment/> to be connected to a helpline providing confidential and nonjudgmental support. Locally, resources are available at Bayshore Counseling Services in Sandusky; you can reach out to their professional counselor Melissa Fowler M.Ed., LPC-S at 419-626-9156.