

Cambridge Health Alliance Readiness for Gambling Expansion (CHARGE)



What is Gambling Disorder?

Gambling is betting something valuable on an event that is determined by chance. The gambler hopes that he or she will ‘win,’ and gain something of value. Once placed, a bet cannot be taken back. When most people think of gambling, they think of slots machines and casinos. But, it’s important to understand that playing bingo, buying lottery tickets, even betting on office pools—all of these, and many other activities, are forms of gambling.

Mental health professionals have developed criteria that help to identify when someone has a problem. For example, many professionals use the DSM criteria. The DSM is a handbook published by the American Psychiatric Association. Professionals use the DSM to diagnose psychological problems. The newest version of the DSM lists Gambling Disorder alongside other addictive behaviors.

The DSM-5 provides a series of symptoms commonly found among people with gambling problems. The symptoms include:

- A. Persistent and recurrent problematic gambling behavior leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as indicated by the individual exhibiting four (or more) of the following in a 12-month period:
 1. Needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement.
 2. Is restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling.
 3. Has made repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling.
 4. Is often preoccupied with gambling (e.g., having persistent thoughts of reliving past gambling experiences, handicapping or planning the next venture, thinking of ways to get money with which to gamble).
 5. Often gambles when feeling distressed (e.g., helpless, guilty, anxious, depressed).
 6. After losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even (“chasing” one’s losses).
 7. Lies to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling.
 8. Has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of gambling.
 9. Relies on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situations caused by gambling.
- B. The gambling behavior is not better explained by a manic episode.

People meet the DSM standard for gambling disorder when they satisfy 4 of these criteria. Gambling problems exist with every form of gambling activity. It’s not just associated with casinos or Internet gambling. Bingo players, lottery players, casino players, and friends playing poker all can develop gambling disorders.

People with Gambling Disorder continue gambling despite bad consequences. For example, they might not fulfill work or home duties, or have legal problems. They also might have repeated social problems, like getting into fights and conflicts with other people. People with Gambling Disorder are preoccupied with gambling. They may try to quit unsuccessfully or hide their behavior. They might also commit crimes to pay for their gambling.