

*Straight Facts...
About Gambling*

Does someone you care about have gambling problems?



You can help.

Problems with Gambling

Gambling is a popular activity in Nova Scotia. In the past year, almost 600,000 adults gambled in some way or another. But did you know 50,000 of these people are at risk for developing problems? It's true – and about 15,000 of them will have very serious difficulties because of their gambling.

The majority of adults in our province play at least one game of chance each year, mostly weekly lottery draws and charity raffles. Few people have any problems with these forms of gambling.

However... with some forms of gambling, such as VLTs, casino slot machines, daily lottery draws and even instant tickets, it is easy for people to lose more time or money than they meant to.

Do you know someone who plays VLTs (or gambles at the casino) at least once a month or more? Almost half of the people who play that often are at risk of losing more than they meant to. About ***one in four*** of those regular players will end up having gambling problems.

In Nova Scotia, one in every five adults (that's around 150,000 people) knows someone who they think has a gambling problem.

So if you know someone with a problem, you are not alone.

***You can be part of the solution.
Keep reading to find out how.***

Learn more about Gambling and Gambling Problems.

Most people believe gambling problems are simply due to lack of willpower and self control. This is not true.

Because of these beliefs, many people with gambling problems feel embarrassed or ashamed, and often get little help or understanding from others. That's not fair.

The truth is, the things that cause gambling problems are very complex.

Some people gamble as a way of coping with other things that are stressful or missing in their life. Some see gambling as a possible source of income, a way to get extra money to pay off debts. It is very easy to get caught up in games of chance and very difficult to keep track of time and money lost.

For some players, once they start gambling regularly, and losing regularly, it becomes a vicious circle of trying to win back losses.

They may win just often enough to think they will get their money back. But in the long run, they just lose more money.

It is very easy to take part in gambling in Nova Scotia. But once someone gets caught in the cycle of chasing losses, it becomes very hard to stop.

Who is At Risk?

Anyone can develop gambling problems. However, people who regularly play VLTs and casino slot machines are more likely to develop problems.

In Nova Scotia, people who have gambling problems come from all walks of life. It is not just a problem for disadvantaged people or for those on social assistance. It can happen to anyone. Including you, your friends, and the people you care about.

Risk for gambling problems is higher within certain vulnerable groups.

People who are depressed, lonely, trying to win money to pay debts, trying to escape from other problems, or have other “addictions” or compulsions are at greater risk if they start gambling.

For many people, just gambling regularly or experiencing a “big win” can lead to unrealistic expectations about gambling.

It can take a long time, by trial and error, for people to figure out that there are no tricks or skills that will help them win. The outcome of the game is preset and the odds are always in the house’s favour. By the time some people figure this out, the damage is already done.

Problems with gambling can happen quickly or develop slowly. For regular VLT or casino gamblers, problems happen more quickly.

For most of the Nova Scotians who have had gambling problems, their trouble started within the first year that they began gambling regularly on VLTs or at the casino. Problems are likely to be hidden during the early stages of development, but they will just keep growing bigger over time.



Read the next page for a list of Gambling Problem Warning Signs. If someone you know has these signs, they might have a problem. But it is important that you not jump to conclusions. They could have another, completely different problem and gambling is just one part of it. Call 1-888-347-8888 with your questions and concerns.

What are some of the Problem Gambling Warning Signs?

Unexplained absences

The person...

- goes out more often without a reason why
- misses appointments, meetings, dates
- is not at home, work, or school when they should be

Money problems or shortages

The person...

- stops spending money on things like entertainment, gifts, clothes
- doesn't pay bills on time
- applies for new credit cards
- borrows money, takes out secret loans

Social or personality changes

The person...

- loses interest in family, work, friends, hobbies
- avoids some friends because of money owed
- doesn't want to talk about money or debts
- acts distracted, restless, and jittery when not busy
- has more extreme highs and lows (moody)
- brags about gambling wins, but says nothing about losses
- shows signs of stress such as headaches, stomach problems
- develops a habit of lying and deceiving

Using gambling to cope with other stresses

The person...

- gambles as a way of dealing with stress, loneliness, boredom, depression, and conflicts with others
- starts gambling more after giving up or cutting down on cigarettes, alcohol, or other substances



Unable to cut down or stop gambling

The person...

- expresses regret or guilt about lost money; promises "never again" but doesn't hold to it
- borrows money to repay debts, but loses that money, too

Is anxious/desperate to keep gambling

The person...

- is upset about losing and gambles even more in the hope of winning back losses
- lies about money lost or borrowed
- sells valuables to get money
- does things they normally would not do to get money to gamble; steals or commits other illegal acts

If you recognize some of these signs in someone you care about, read on to find what you can do.

What can you do about it? First Steps...

You can talk to the person

Choose a time and place to talk. Bring the subject up when you have privacy and enough time to talk it through.

Tell the person how you feel. Express your caring and concern without anger.

Describe what you see. Don't judge. Just say what you have seen happening. Be accurate and fair. Don't accuse or blame.

Be a good listener. The person may not agree that there is a problem. They may not want to talk about it with you, or might become angry, upset, or defensive. Or the person may be thankful for the chance to share his or her feelings and concerns. Whatever happens, try to listen without passing judgment.

Offer your support. If the person decides that a change is needed, offer whatever emotional help and understanding you can. Suggest ways that you can spend time together that don't involve gambling. Offer to help work out a plan for cutting back or quitting.



Make a Plan. If the person is willing to make a plan, offer to work on it with them. Help them come up with ideas for ways to take back control of their life. Let the person decide on the best ways to deal with the problems. Try the plan out to see how it works. Make sure everyone is prepared to start over again with other ideas if one plan doesn't work out.

Overcoming a gambling problem is not easy and it usually takes many attempts to reach success.

Next Steps

No matter how the person responds, you have now opened the door to change. Here are some other things you can do.

Talk to someone else for support, such as a friend, other family members, or a counsellor.

If you are the spouse or partner of the person with the problem, you may need to take steps to protect yourself and your household. Take stock of your financial situation and get advice on how to deal with cash control. For example:

- Check up on bank accounts and other shared money
- Set up accounts that need two signatures for changes or withdrawals
- Have the person's wages directly deposited to those accounts
- Set limits on the amount the person can withdraw from the bank machine
- Get debt counseling/management
- Don't give money for bailouts. Find other ways to deal with debt and financial responsibilities.
- Get additional information or assistance so you have a better understanding of gambling problems. Know what resources are available to help you and the person you care about.

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Getting Help Costs Nothing

If the cost of gambling is getting too high for you or someone you care about, don't wait. Call the number below any time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, toll free. Talk to a professional counsellor. Find out more about gambling problems. Your call will be kept private.

Nova Scotia Health Promotion's Problem Gambling Help Line:

1-888-347-8888

Or contact the Addiction Services office nearest you.

Addiction Services in the District Health Authorities

South Shore Health

South West Health

Annapolis Valley Health

50 Vancouver Street, Yarmouth, NS B5A 2P5

Phone: (902) 742-2406, Fax: (902) 742-0684

Colchester East Hants Health Authority

Cumberland Health Authority

Pictou County Health Authority

PO Box 359

199 Elliott Street, Pictou, NS B0K 1H0

Phone: (902) 485-4335, Fax: (902) 485-7026

Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority

Cape Breton District Health Authority

235 Townsend Street, Sydney, NS B1P 5E7

Phone: (902) 563-2590, Fax (902) 563-2059

Addiction Prevention and Treatment Services

Capital Health

PO Box 896

300 Pleasant Street, Dartmouth, NS B2Y 3Z6

Phone: (902) 424-5623, Fax: (902) 424-0627

Visit our website:

www.gov.ns.ca/ohp/gambling