



**Study Commission on the Future of Gaming in Ohio
Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
March 19, 2024**

Co-Chair Edwards, Co-Chair Manning, and members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the responsibilities of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) related to prevention and treatment for problem gambling. Our agency provides statewide leadership of a high-quality mental health and addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery system that is effective and valued by all Ohioans. OhioMHAS' vision is to end suffering from mental illness, substance use disorders, and problem gambling.

My name is Stacey Frohnepfel-Hasson, and I serve as chief of the Office of Prevention and Problem Gambling for the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. I've overseen a team that has focused on building and expanding Ohio's problem gambling services system for youth and adults for 15 years.

Governor DeWine leads this commitment to care. And for that reason, he has proclaimed March as Ohio Problem Gambling Awareness Month. On behalf of the Governor and OhioMHAS Director LeeAnne Cornyn, I will share information with you related to the future of gaming, and its anticipated effect on Ohio citizens.

In the final months of 2022, the state conducted the third 5-year survey of Ohio adults regarding problem gambling behaviors and attitudes. This survey closed on December 31, 2022 – just minutes before the legalization of sports gambling on January 1, 2023.

With nearly 15,000 survey responses, the analysis provided a clear picture of the impact that growing gaming and gambling opportunities were having on Ohioans. Let's take a brief look at that data.

- It told us that 17% of Ohio adults are not gambling at all.
- But for those who are gambling, we know that 1 of 5 adults is at-risk for developing a gambling disorder, that's more than 1.8 million people.
- We know that 3 of every 100 Ohio adults is likely diagnosable with a gambling disorder and will need help overcoming this behavioral health illness.
- That 3% is about 255,000 people or the population of Toledo.
- We know that some populations are particularly vulnerable to the challenges of gambling and gaming, as in young adults, ages 18-44, having the highest rates of at-risk gambling.



- Non-white populations are also in a high-risk category for developing a problem with gambling, including people who are Black, or multi-racial, and people of Hispanic ethnicity.
- Further, the survey data tells us that problem gambling is often related to other risk factors, including a family history of gambling problems, using alcohol or drugs, gambling while intoxicated, and experiencing serious depression or stress.

And in addition to the statewide analysis, we have 50 more data reports – one for each of the county Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health, or ADAMH Board areas.

More and more, we are seeing Ohioans take notice of gambling and gaming and the many ways to play. It's vital that we match that constant access to betting with the same level of access to care – for when betting becomes a compulsive behavior.

With gambling now possible 24 hours a day, the need for services is growing. We saw a 55% increase in calls to the Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline this past year for a total of 9,500 calls.

We track the reasons *why* people call the Helpline. In past years the most often stated reasons for those calls were problems related to casino and lottery play. Sports gambling was way down the list. But as of last month, sports gambling was the number two reason why people are calling for help.

Gambling is being normalized in our society. Many of us grew up with church festivals, bingo, and cards with family and friends. But today young children are growing up with video and online games that mimic gambling activities, for those as young as 3 and 4-years old.

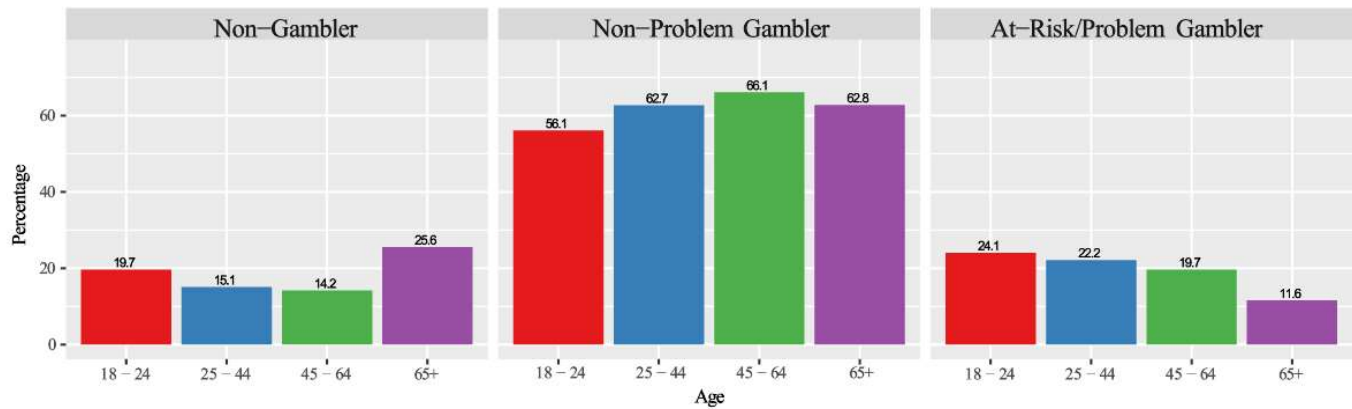
This chart shows the levels of at-risk gambling for Ohio adults: 24% of 18–24-year-olds are at-risk gamblers; 22% of 25–44-year-olds; 20% of 45–64-year-olds and about 11% of those 65 and older.

We must consider the fact that the highest rates of at-risk gambling are among the youngest players, in many cases developing a gambling problem before they reach the legal age to play. As we consider gaming for future generations, consumer protections are key to ensuring the safety of the players.

And beyond the gaming industry, funding to support behavioral health services must be in place so that anyone affected negatively by gambling has a pathway to effective care.

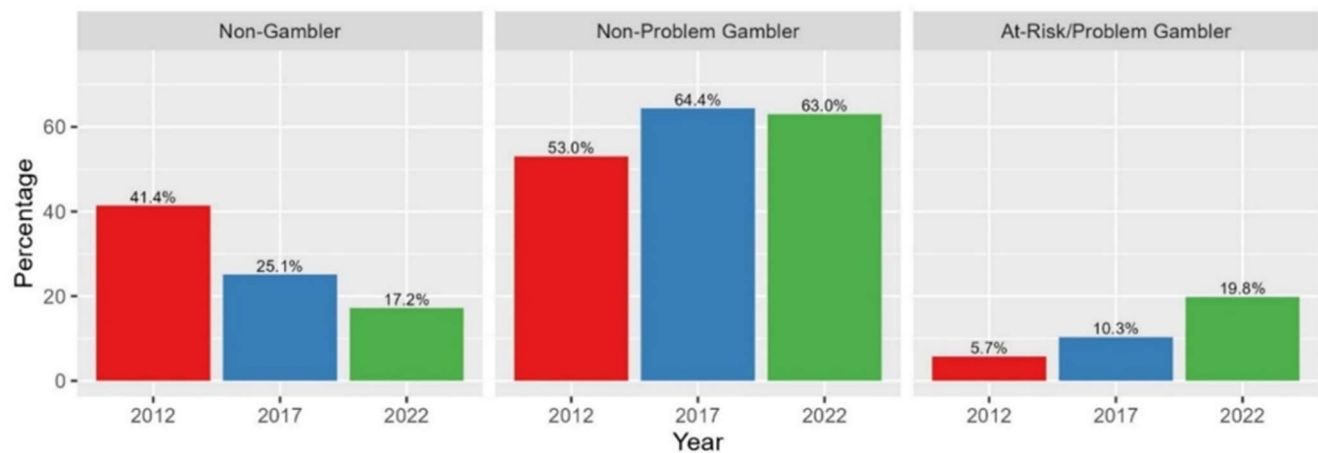


Prevalence of Gambling Behavior by Ohio Adults



Research into gaming and gambling has shown that the more options there are for play, the more likelihood that players will develop at-risk behaviors. The next graph illustrates how this has been working in Ohio since 2012.

Gambling Behavior by Survey Year



In the first group of bar graphs, notice that in the red bar, 41% of Ohio adults didn't gamble in 2012, but in the green bar, just 17% were not gambling in the 2022 survey. In the last group of graphs on the right,



you'll see that people gambling at risky levels totaled about 5% in 2012, grew to 10% in 2017, and doubled again to 20% in 2022.

More gambling options in a state lead to more gambling problems among its population. Other states have already experienced the effects of gaming and gambling expansion.

The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services has been serving this population since 2012 when the casino tax funds began to flow to support behavioral healthcare services for those in need. Last fiscal year, 67,000 Ohioans were screened for Gambling Disorder and 1,136 received clinical care for the disorder.

However, after more than a decade we still have some areas of the state without access to face-to-face counseling. For this reason, we continually provide specialized training to clinicians to build workforce capacity. In addition, last year we brought up an Ohio Gambling Telehealth Network, so that those who need care for Gambling Disorder have access to either in person or virtual services.

Telehealth services as an add-on to traditional face to face clinical care truly meets the clients where they are. Sometimes it's not possible to come into a behavioral health agency to access services. People may have a disability, have transportation challenges, or the closest place for in-person care is an hour or more away.

The Ohio Gambling Telehealth Network offers services during the business day, along with evenings and weekends to meet the clients' needs. Ohio is evolving its service continuum based on the needs of our communities. At OhioMHAS, we are excited about the new investments being made to support Ohioans as they engage in sports betting.

GamFin, for example, is a service being funded jointly by the Ohio Casino Control and Ohio Lottery Commissions with sports gaming funding. GamFin provides coaching and resources to the state's licensed gambling clinicians who are working with clients troubled by financial concerns. This service increases knowledge and skills for clinicians who may not be financial experts, so they can provide better support to help former gamblers who are working toward recovery and rebuilding a stable financial future.

As Ohio continues to build a safety net of responsible gambling education and resources, we turn to the Pause Before You Play media campaign. One of every ten adults in the state is seeing these messages multiple times throughout the year. We developed this campaign, along with one focused on youth and gaming, in partnership with the Ohio for Responsible Gambling collaborative that involves OhioMHAS, Ohio Casino Control Commission and Ohio Lottery Commission.

The shared work of Ohio for Responsible Gambling has won many national awards for its adult-focused responsible gambling messaging, along with a sub-campaign that provides gambling prevention



resources for youth and the parents and caregivers in their lives. The youth messaging is called Change the Game Ohio, and outreach is directed at youth influencers.

The statewide campaigns are built around the most current survey data, and the ADAMH Boards receive Board area-specific reports so that communities can use local funds for education and outreach campaigns designed for their populations most in need.

To support these local efforts, the 50 ADAMH Boards receive about \$4 million annually from OhioMHAS in casino gambling tax funding to help Ohioans access services for prevention of problem gambling, clinical care for Gambling Disorder, and ongoing supports for those on the path to long-term recovery.

The campaigns provide a ready-made, turnkey package for spreading the word in communities across the state. They allow communities to use national award-winning creative resources to reach local audiences with messages that are clear, entertaining and impactful.

The launch of sports gambling has been seen as a catalyst for drawing attention to gaming and gambling and how accessible they are. With gambling now possible 24 hours a day, the need for services is growing.

Ohio's clinicians with expertise in treating Gambling Disorder are seeing people come into care much sooner than they did for older, slower versions of game play. They report clients coming in for help after sports gambling for as short a period as 1-3 months – compared to the 1-7 years of gambling that used to be seen as a normal gestation time for developing a Gambling Disorder. On the positive side, people *are* coming in for help, and as always, we have clinical care for Gambling Disorder at no cost to Ohioans who need it.

In addition to the \$4 million in ADAMH Board allocations, about \$3 million more dollars provide these services and supports:

- The Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline (1-800-589-9966) information and referral service;
- Live clinicians for those callers who want to talk to someone with expertise in care for Gambling Disorder;
- Prevention workforce, model program development, and training in Gambling Disorder care for clinicians;
- Specialized services for focus populations like the Arabic community, African American population, and Asian American/Pacific Islanders;
- Technical assistance to help ADAMH Boards build and sustain local problem gambling services systems;



- And, for when a Board or community agency runs short of funds for providing clinical care for Gambling Disorder, the department maintains a Treatment Shortfall Fund to further ensure that every Ohioan who needs treatment for a Gambling Disorder, including affected family members, can receive that care at no out-of-pocket cost.

We are fortunate to be able to utilize more than \$2.3 million in funding from the Ohio Lottery Commission that supports the Pause Before You Play responsible gambling campaign, the Change the Game Ohio youth gambling prevention campaign, and workforce education opportunities for clinicians and professionals across the service continuum.

With the Ohio Gambling Surveys at five-year intervals, the state needed a more consistent method of tapping into communities to gather information about challenges caused by gambling. To lead this work, OhioMHAS formed the Ohio Problem Gambling Advisory Board, usually referred to as “PGAB.”

PGAB is made up of representatives from ADAMH Boards, behavioral health providers, community coalitions, clinicians, prevention specialists, people with lived experience, a college of social work representative, researchers, and members from the Ohio for Responsible Gambling organizations.

The survey data and regular PGAB meetings help OhioMHAS and Ohio for Responsible Gambling partners determine what’s working in communities related to problem gambling and what is still needed. We have recently updated the Strategic Plan for Ohio’s Problem Gambling Services to serve as a short- and long-term map for the state’s service structure.

We are adjusting to changes in the gaming environment and in Ohioans’ behavior and attitudes as needed. This ensures a nimble service structure with a path to recovery and tools to remain healthy.

We ask that this Commission consider the overall impact of gaming and gambling growth on the state’s individuals, families, and communities. With older teens and young adults affected negatively by gambling activities, we must take consumer protections into account with each new expansion.

Are we ensuring safety measures for the players? How will college students be affected? What about the workplace? And are we taking the steps necessary so that if gaming continues to grow, there will be more funds available to support those people most in need of care?

I am available to answer any questions you have.