

## Gambling - do you have a problem?

Most people gamble at one time or another. It may be at the TAB, on lotto, on the pokies or in a casino. Many people have a positive attitude towards gambling and do not experience any problems. For some people, however, gambling can become a problem.

Approximately 1.12 per cent of the Victorian adult population has serious problems with their gambling. They may believe that gambling can give them a source of income that will fix their financial problems or that gambling will help them manage their personal, relationship or work problems.

There are several warning signs that may indicate that a person is developing problem gambling habits.

### **Problem gambling affects you and those around you**

Gambling becomes a problem when it causes harm to you and those close to you. For example, you may find you are starting to:

- Spend more money or time on gambling than you intend or can afford
- Feel guilt and shame about your behaviour, especially if it is out of control
- Try to hide the problem from those you care about
- Lie about where you have been or why money is missing
- Damage your relationships with friends and family
- Lose interest in other activities
- Suffer financial stress and find that other parts of your life, such as work performance, are affected
- Borrow money or sell personal or family items to pay for living expenses or to repay gambling debts.

Problem Gambling Victoria has a short questionnaire or **Self-Assessment Test** you can use to check if you have a gambling problem.

### **Risky behaviours and thinking**

People who have a problem with gambling often engage in risky behaviours and develop certain ways of thinking that support their gambling. Some of these may be familiar to you. These may include:

- Spending more money than you planned or can afford on gambling
- Gambling for longer than you intended
- Building opportunities to gamble into daily routines
- Chasing your losses
- Borrowing money to gamble or obtaining money in unethical or illegal ways
- Being attached to beliefs and superstitions related to luck and winning
- Having illusions of control
- Misunderstanding the nature of probability and randomness.

### **Why some people develop problems with gambling**

People usually start to gamble for fun, accepting that sometimes they win but more often they lose. For some people, however, gambling begins to play a major role in their life. There are different reasons that gambling may become a problem, but some attitudes and beliefs are common in people who have a gambling problem.

People may develop problems with gambling because they:

- Feel a sense of security when they gamble – they may feel they don't belong in social settings other than the gaming venue
- Hope to win large sums of money – they may have had a big win in the past that put them thousands of dollars in front. When they later get into debt, they think gambling will deliver another big win and solve their money problems
- Want to escape from reality and forget their troubles and problems
- Need something to do because they don't have interests, sports or hobbies they enjoy
- Cannot give up the dream of great wealth, even in the face of repeated financial losses
- Feel excited when they gamble and find that their feelings of nervousness, irritability, indecision and frustration disappear.

### **Help and support are available**

If you have a gambling problem, you may find it difficult to deal with the problem on your own. Talking to someone is one way to work through the problem. There are various organisations that can offer support, assistance and counselling for people who have problems with gambling.

Depending on the service, the aim is either to control the gambling or stop altogether. Some organisations also offer support to affected family and friends.

### **Where to get help**

- Gambler's Help Tel. 1800 858 858, TTY 1800 777 706 – 24-hour telephone counselling service
- Gambling Help Online - for problem gambling counselling and support (Australia-wide), 24 hours, seven days
- Gamblers Anonymous Tel. (03) 9696 6108 – support group for people with a gambling problem
- Gam-Anon Tel. (03) 9898 7526 (volunteers only) – support group for family and friends
- Crown Responsible Gaming Support Centre Tel. 1800 801 098
- Australian Hotels Association – (AHA) Self Exclusion Program Tel. (03) 9654 3491 Mon to Fri (business hours) Answer Machine Out of Hours
- Lifeline Tel. 131 114
- Suicide Helpline Victoria Tel. 1300 651 251
- Financial and Consumer Rights Council Tel. 1800 134 139 or (03) 9663 2000
- Your doctor or other health professionals

### **Things to remember**

- Only a small percentage of people who gamble will develop a problem with gambling.
- There are various warning signs that may indicate that a person is developing a problem with gambling.
- If you have a gambling problem, you may keep gambling until the last dollar is spent and not be truthful to family and friends about how much money you spend on gambling.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Department of Justice - Problem Gambling Strategy

**Copyright** © 1999/2009 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel ([www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.

- This Better Health Channel fact sheet has passed through a rigorous approval process. For the latest updates and more information visit [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au).