

# Gambling in Primary Care Patients Fact Sheet

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Between 5% and 16% of patients in primary care clinics have gambling problems<sup>1-4</sup>

Compared to patients without gambling problems, patients with gambling problems have:

- Poorer general health<sup>3-5</sup>
- Greater numbers of physical conditions<sup>6</sup>
- Increased health care utilization, including:
  - More inpatient hospitalizations<sup>6</sup>
  - More Emergency Room visits<sup>5</sup>

Gambling problems are also linked with medical conditions and problems, such as:

- Heartburn<sup>4</sup>
- Migraines/frequent headaches<sup>6</sup>
- Backaches<sup>4</sup>
- Liver disease<sup>5</sup>
- Heart conditions (tachycardia, angina)<sup>5</sup>

Gambling problems in primary care patients are related to mental health conditions as well:

- Alcohol problems and binge drinking<sup>1,2,4,7</sup>
- Illicit drug use<sup>1,7</sup>
- Smoking<sup>4,7</sup>
- Depression and suicidality<sup>1,6,7</sup>

**Primary care physicians rarely assess for gambling problems,  
and few are aware of gambling treatment options.<sup>8,9</sup>**

**Fewer than 10% of people with gambling problems receive treatment.<sup>10</sup>**

Treatment for gambling is effective.

- Over half of persons treated for gambling substantially reduce their gambling.<sup>11-13</sup>
- Psychiatric distress and symptoms decrease markedly with gambling treatment.<sup>11,13</sup>

## **Suggested action steps:**

**1. Screen primary care patients for gambling problems.** Medical clinics, especially those that serve patients with low incomes, have high rates of gambling problems in their patients.<sup>3,14</sup>

**2. Provide treatment to patients with gambling problems.** Assessment and brief interventions can reduce gambling markedly, even in medical patients not seeking gambling treatment.<sup>15</sup>

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