

Status of the Responsible Gaming Program

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Contact Information

From:

Wendy Knight, Commissioner
Department of Liquor and Lottery

Alison Krompf, Deputy Commissioner
Agency of Human Services, Department of Mental Health

Monica Hutt, Chief Prevention Officer

**To receive this information in an alternative format or
for other accessibility requests, please contact:
Charles Martin, at Charles.Martin@Vermont.gov.**



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Executive Summary

The implementation of sports wagering in Vermont is driven by a robust collaboration between the Vermont Department of Liquor and Lottery (DLL) and the Vermont Department of Mental Health (DMH). This collaboration underscores the Administration's commitment to responsible gaming practices and addressing potential mental health implications. By integrating regulatory oversight with mental health expertise, Vermont seeks to establish a balanced and secure environment for sports wagering, emphasizing public welfare.

The partnership has led to the development of comprehensive awareness and education programs by DMH and DLL. These programs aim to inform the public about responsible gaming, recognize signs of problematic behavior, and provide resources for assistance. The collaboration extends to support systems for individuals facing gambling-related challenges, ensuring Vermont has robust mental health services for those in need.

In conclusion, Vermont's approach to sports wagering implementation, characterized by collaboration, comprehensive support systems, and responsible gaming practices, sets a positive example for other states navigating the intersection of gaming and mental health. The state is well positioned to create a socially responsible and well-regulated sports wagering environment.



Legislative Language

In accordance with [Act 63 \(2023\)](#), the Departments are submitting this single, comprehensive report to the legislature to meet the following three requirements:

(c) Problem gambling report. Annually on or before January 15, the Department [of Liquor and Lottery], in consultation with the Department of Mental Health, shall submit to the General Assembly a report on the impact of sports wagering on problem gambling in Vermont, including an analysis of demographic populations that are disproportionately impacted by problem gambling. The Department may require the operators to pay for the costs associated with preparing and submitting the report.

AND

(1) On or before January 15, 2024, the Department of Mental Health, Department of Liquor and Lottery, and Chief Prevention Officer shall report to the General Assembly on the status of the Problem Gambling Program, Program funding, and the projected use of the Program. The report shall detail how the Program funding aligns with other similar programs.

(2) The report required by this subsection shall include recommendations for allocations for problem gambling programs:

(A) for fiscal year 2025, in the form of a specific appropriation from each enterprise fund; and

(B) for fiscal year 2026 and after, in the form of a recommended minimum appropriation or percentage of revenue allocation from each enterprise fund.



Implementation

The successful implementation of sports wagering in Vermont will owe much of its success to the strong collaboration between the Vermont Department of Liquor and Lottery (DLL) and the Vermont Department of Mental Health (DMH). The partnership between departments reflects the Administration's commitment to ensuring that the introduction of sports wagering in Vermont will align with responsible gaming best practices and establish resources to address potential mental health implications.

DMH and DLL are responsible for integrating safeguards and promoting responsible gambling behavior in Vermont. DMH has focused efforts on players, while DLL has focused on operators. Both departments will engage staff to communicate the responsible gaming messaging through their respective channels. By engaging the expertise of DMH early and regularly in the process, DLL has been able to leverage insights into the potential impact of gambling on mental health and use the information to design a program that will be able to mitigate adverse effects. The collaboration is particularly crucial as sports wagering involves a significant intersection between entertainment and financial risk, with potential implications for individuals susceptible to gambling-related harm.

Through joint initiatives, DMH and DLL have begun to develop comprehensive awareness and education programs. These programs are being designed to inform the public about responsible gaming practices, help individuals and families recognize signs of problematic gambling behavior, and establish resources for individuals seeking assistance. By combining regulatory oversight with mental health expertise, Vermont aims to create a balanced and secure environment for individuals engaging in sports wagering.



Furthermore, the collaboration extends to the development of support systems for individuals facing gambling-related challenges. DMH's involvement ensures that Vermont has robust mental health services to assist those who may experience distress due to gambling-related issues. The Administration believes a proactive approach emphasizes a commitment to public welfare and aligns with Vermont's broader objectives to foster a responsible and well-regulated gaming industry.

In summary, the collaboration between the DMH and DLL in implementing sports wagering in Vermont exemplifies a model partnership that prioritizes both regulatory oversight and mental health considerations. By combining their respective strengths, the departments have worked together to create a sustainable and responsible framework for sports wagering, setting a positive example for other states seeking to navigate the intersection of gaming and mental health.

Vendor Solicitation and Selection

As the implementation of sports wagering materializes in Vermont, the Administration is soliciting the services of an experienced vendor. The services will play a pivotal role in promoting responsible gaming practices and safeguarding the well-being of individuals engaging in sports wagering activities. The vendor, ideally a comprehensive player support program, will deliver essential services that empower players with knowledge, encourage responsible decision-making, and address potential challenges associated with sports wagering. The services include:

Player Education and Awareness:

- **Information Dissemination:** The vendor will provide extensive educational resources to inform players about the rules, odds, and potential risks associated with sports wagering.



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- **Interactive Learning:** Through interactive sessions, the vendor will facilitate an understanding of responsible gaming practices, ensuring players make informed decisions.

Responsible Gaming Practices:

- **Setting Limits:** The vendor will assist players in setting financial and time limits for their sports wagering activities, promoting self-control and responsible budgeting.
- **Reality Checks:** The vendor will regularly implement reality checks that prompt players to assess their gaming behavior, fostering awareness of the time and money spent on sports wagering.

Identification of Problematic Behavior:

- **Early Intervention:** The vendor will utilize tools to identify signs of problematic gambling behavior, enabling early intervention and support for individuals who may be at risk.
- **Self-Assessment Resources:** Players will be provided with self-assessment tools to gauge their gambling habits and seek assistance if necessary.

Support Systems for Individuals at Risk:

- **Referral Services:** The vendor will facilitate access to counseling and support services for individuals facing challenges related to sports wagering.



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- Community Partnerships: Collaborating with mental health professionals and community organizations, the vendor will ensure a network of support for those in need.

Real-Time Assistance:

- In-Person Support: The vendor will offer in-person support at gaming venues, providing players with real-time assistance and guidance.
- Helpline Services: A dedicated helpline will allow players to seek immediate support, advice, and resources for addressing concerns related to sports wagering.

Continuous Monitoring and Improvement:

- Data Analysis: The vendor will employ data analysis to monitor player behavior and identify trends or patterns that may indicate potential issues.
- Adaptive Strategies: Based on ongoing assessments, the vendor will continually refine its strategies to adapt to the evolving landscape of sports wagering.

Collaboration with Regulatory Authorities:

- Reporting Mechanisms: The vendor will collaborate with regulatory authorities, providing insights and data to enhance the effectiveness of responsible gaming regulations.
- Compliance Support: By ensuring compliance with regulatory frameworks, the vendor will contribute to a well-regulated sports wagering environment.



In conclusion, the vendor will play a crucial role in ensuring the responsible implementation of sports wagering by offering a range of critical supports that prioritize player education, responsible gaming practices, early intervention, and ongoing support. Through these comprehensive efforts, the vendor will assist in the creation of a safe, informed, and socially responsible sports wagering environment in Vermont.

Vermont Counselor Network

DMH has prioritized prevention of, and support for problem and compulsive gambling. In 2017 the CARTER organization estimated 10,000 Vermonters had a problem with gambling, and we expect that with increased access to gambling this number will rise. Psychiatric comorbidity is common in individuals with gambling disorder. Up to 78% of treatment seeking individuals with gambling disorders have a comorbid mood disorder. In 86% of individuals with gambling disorder and major depressive disorder, the gambling precedes depression. Up to 40% of those with a gambling disorder have comorbid anxiety disorder.¹ Additionally, there is a clinically significant increase in suicide mortality and behaviors related to problem gambling, with studies showing suicide attempts to be double that of general population and a study from Sweden illustrating a 15-fold increase in suicide mortality.² To respond to the potential increased need for treatment within the state and the needs of those vulnerable individuals who develop a gambling disorder we are creating a network of problem gambling trained counselors throughout Vermont. DMH has partnered with

¹ Rodriguez-Monguio R, Errea M, Volberg R. Comorbid pathological gambling, mental health, and substance use disorders: Health-care services provision by clinician specialty. *J Behav Addict*. 2017 Sep 1;6(3):406-415. doi: 10.1556/2006.6.2017.054. Epub 2017 Aug 31. PMID: 28856904; PMCID: PMC5700728.

² Marionneau V, Nikkinen J. Gambling-related suicides and suicidality: A systematic review of qualitative evidence. *Front Psychiatry*. 2022 Oct 26;13:980303. doi: 10.3389/fpsy.2022.980303. PMID: 36387006; PMCID: PMC9645554.



the New York Council on Problem Gambling to offer two trainings. Given the high rate of psychiatric comorbidity there will be at minimum one problem gambling champion with dedicated training at each mental health designated agency. This network is currently being built, with problem gambling champions identified for each designated agency and a goal to complete training early 2024.

Vulnerable populations³ such as African Americans, Indigenous populations⁴, veterans⁵, adolescents, and those with substance use disorders are known to be at higher risk for developing problem gambling. The counselor network is strategically being developed within agencies that serve vulnerable populations.

Problem Gambling Helpline

A problem gambling helpline is a vital feature of Vermont's Responsible Gaming Program because it will provide accessible, confidential, and expert support services, contributing to the overall well-being of individuals and families affected by problem gambling.

Initially, Vermont will promote the National Problem Gambling Helpline. The National Problem Gambling Helpline's preexisting infrastructure and accessibility make it a pivotal resource for thoughtful implementation. It serves as a nationwide resource for individuals struggling with problem gambling. It offers essential support services and provides referral options for clinicians in many states, including Vermont. The helpline is a

³ National Research Council (US) Committee on the Social and Economic Impact of Pathological Gambling. Pathological Gambling: A Critical Review. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 1999. 3, Pathological and Problem Gamblers in the United States. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK230631/>

⁴ Whiteside, M., Heyeres, M., Maltzahn, K., Griffin, T., & MacLean, S. (2020). Intervening in Indigenous Gambling: A Systematic Review of the Literature. SAGE Open, 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020947441>

⁵ [FactSheet-Problem-Gambling-and-the-Military.pdf \(ncgwg.org\)](#)



comprehensive gateway connecting individuals to specialized assistance and resources.

For the long term, and as a result of consultation with national best practice experts, DMH intends to partner with a regionally based helpline in a bordering state, in order to ensure resources are customized to Vermont, and to engage in regional partnerships that leverage shared resources and address the practice of betting across state lines. This regional helpline provides nationally recognized best practice supports to those that gamble and their loved ones by assisting with linkage to treatment, voluntary self exclusion and reinstatements, and peer support.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Vermont's thorough and collaborative approach to the implementation of sports wagering, emphasizing responsible gaming practices and addressing potential mental health implications. The successful collaboration between the Vermont Department of Liquor and Lottery (DLL) and the Vermont Department of Mental Health (DMH) aligns regulatory oversight with mental health considerations to create a balanced and secure environment for individuals engaging in sports wagering.

The engagement of the experienced vendor further enhances Vermont's commitment to responsible gaming. A vendor's player support program, with a focus on education, responsible gaming practices, early intervention, and ongoing support, is integral to creating a safe, informed, and socially responsible sports wagering environment in the state.

To address other potential challenges associated with problem gambling, DMH is proactively establishing the Vermont Counselor Network. This network of problem gambling-trained counselors, strategically developed within agencies serving vulnerable populations, underscores Vermont's commitment to prevention and support for those at risk, especially considering the expected rise in gambling-related issues with increased access.

Finally, the incorporation of a problem gambling helpline further demonstrates Vermont's commitment to providing accessible and expert support services. The intention to partner with a regionally based helpline in



the long term showcases a forward-thinking strategy, ensuring customized resources and regional collaboration to address the practice of betting across state lines.

In summary, Vermont's proactive measures in the areas of education, support systems, and responsible gaming practices are evident and establishes the state's commitment to a socially responsible and well-regulated sports wagering environment, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive and sustainable approach to this evolving landscape.