



Help seeking by problem gamblers

Problem gambling is often not recognized as a serious problem until it impacts on finances or a relationship. In New Zealand it is estimated that only 10% of problem gamblers seek professional help. It is estimated that there are between 10,000 and 60,000 problem gamblers in New Zealand. Over 50% of problem gamblers do not think they have a problem.

Once a gambler has acknowledged that they have a problem there are a number of steps they can then take. The first is the significant step to ask for help, this could be to their partner, family member, employer, friend or to a specialist service agency, such as a telephone helpline. Family may also seek help from services to support them through an often demoralising situation. Telephone helpline services require the caller to make the first move. Telephone services enable the caller to remain in control and be anonymous. Callers can feel safe to talk freely, without being challenged about their problems.

Factors which encourage help seeking are loss of self esteem and self worth, and concerns over standards of behaviour. Also, when gambling impacts on social interactions, relationships and social responsibility. Generally help seeking is triggered by a significant event. Shame and stigma can be barriers to seeking help. Stigma is also associated with seeking help with counselling as it is seen to imply a mental illness or psychological disorder.

Barriers to help seeking ¹

- Denial of problem
- Feelings of shame
- Lack of information on help services
- Stigma of seeking counselling implies that psychological or mental problems
- Self exclusion discouraged
- Inadequacy of services on offer
- Gender specific programme
- Frustration about perceived alliance between industry and government in generating gambling revenue
- Lack of awareness of harm minimization policies or obligations of gambling programs and patron care.

Why gamblers seek help ²

- Gambling environment becomes second home
- Money disagreements
- Lies uncovered
- Dwindling circle of friends
- Losing a relationship
- Crime discovered
- Debt mountain
- Homelessness/ loneliness
- Lost control
- Employment, work related or legal issues

Enabling / access factors

Availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability (and appropriateness)

Effective interventions

- Emotional support from families and friends was a critical and positive factor.
- Building self esteem
- Group therapy—encouraging the sharing of experience
- For older gamblers where gambling is more ingrained abstinence maybe the best long term solution.
- Motivational interviewing
- Avoid transferring dependency
- Use of diaries and other visual records
- Community campaigns and enlisting social networks and community leaders
- Migrant groups need to choose suitable group interventions that suit their backgrounds

Effective services

- Helpline and information services
- Peer support –from family or whanau
- Brief and early interventions
- Short course interventions (Community setting)
- Short course interventions (residential setting)
- Community assessment and intervention services
- Community follow up support service



Statistics for those problem gamblers who sought help in New Zealand in 2008

Face to face counselling statistics³

During 2008 5168 clients received counselling. For nearly 60% of these clients treatment lasted from one week to six months. Approximately 26.5% only attended one session.

Telephone services statistics³

The Gambling Helpline had 2907 new clients in 2008. The majority of clients phoning in did so for their own gambling problems. However, there are other groups who seek help and they are significant others (wife or family) and interested others (friends and acquaintances). 29.2% of calls were from 'interested others'.

A recent New Zealand study found the following encouraged help seeking⁴

- Changing barriers, integrating health services, and promoting public and professional awareness of the barriers, and social policies can be adapted to encourage seeking and obtaining help.
- New technologies offer the potential for dealing with some of these barriers, especially with the intrinsic factors of shame and self reliance such as the use of online discussion groups and text messaging.
- Community campaigns and enlisting social networks and community leaders can also help to reduce denial, stigma and shame by providing legitimacy and support to services.
- Community groups need to be able to choose group interventions that are suitable for their respective backgrounds, and with sufficient numbers of members that they do not feel alone—empowerment.
- Information dissemination highlighting symptoms, referral sources and alternative forms of entertainment
- Establishing social networks and providing employee assisted programmes, particularly for women.

**Most problem gamblers want to handle problems on their own,
and only use treatment agencies as a last resort.**

**Denial, stigma, lack of information, embarrassment,
isolation and shame are huge barriers to help seeking**

1. Centre for Gambling Research. *Help-seeking by problem gamblers, friends and families. A focus on gender and cultural groups*. Canberra: ANU centre for Gambling Research, 2004.
2. Paul Bellringer. *Understanding problem gamblers. A practitioner's guide to effective interventions*. London: Free Association Books, 1999.
3. Ministry of Health. *Problem gambling intervention services in New Zealand—2006 national statistics*. Wellington: MOH, 2007.
4. D.Clarke et al. **An overview of helpseeking by problem gamblers and their families including barriers to and the relevance of services.** . *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* 2007, 5(4): 292-306.

**Problem Gambling Foundation Hotline
0800 664 262**