

## GAMBLING DISORDERS AND OLDER ADULTS

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### KEY FACTS

- Adults aged 65 and over are the fastest growing segment of the population and often have more time and money to spend on leisure activities, such as gambling.<sup>1</sup>
- Older adults, especially those in retirement, could be vulnerable to gambling problems because of loneliness, limited financial resources and decreased cognitive functioning that could lead to poor decision-making.<sup>1</sup>
- However, while some researchers have identified gambling as a significant health threat to seniors, others suggest that gambling might provide the benefit of socialization for older adults.<sup>1</sup>
- Researchers found that, for most respondents, the social benefits were the most salient parts of this activity, and seniors are “well aware of the danger signs of problem behaviors.”<sup>2</sup>
  - Those who participated in the study were almost unanimous in their view of gambling as entertainment and viewed this activity in the same way as other voluntary activities in which they deliberately chose to engage. As the study reports, “The greatest advantages of casinos to these older people were the social aspects.”
  - According to this study, “[T]here is no systematic data demonstrating that older people gamble at a higher rate or are more vulnerable to gambling addictions than other age groups.”
- In 2004, researchers from Yale University first conducted a study specifically designed to identify health and well-being correlates of past-year recreational gambling in adults age 65 years and older, compared to adults age 18 to 64 years. The study found that, of the older adult group (of gamblers), 0.5 percent were classified as ever having experienced problem or pathological gambling. Further, researchers stated that “recreational gambling in older adults does not appear to be associated with adverse health measures...and may even possibly provide some beneficial effect.”<sup>1</sup>
  - These findings were corroborated in a 2007 study that found older recreational gamblers reported better physical and mental health functioning than older non-gamblers, despite similar levels of chronic illness.<sup>3</sup>
- An Ontario study conducted in 2012 found low rates of problem gambling among seniors. Of people aged 60 and over, only 0.1 percent were described as having a severe problem.<sup>4</sup>
- A study of the lottery from the Research Institute on Addictions found that gambling on the lottery decreased among those 70 years and older.<sup>5</sup>

## REFERENCES

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