Between 5% and 16% of patients in primary care clinics have gambling problems.

Compared to patients without gambling problems, patients with gambling problems have:
- Poorer general health
- Greater numbers of physical conditions
- Increased health care utilization, including:
  - More inpatient hospitalizations
  - More Emergency Room visits

Gambling problems are also linked with medical conditions and problems, such as:
- Heartburn
- Migraines/frequent headaches
- Backaches
- Liver disease
- Heart conditions (tachycardia, angina)

Gambling problems in primary care patients are related to mental health conditions as well:
- Alcohol problems and binge drinking
- Illicit drug use
- Smoking
- Depression and suicidality

Primary care physicians rarely assess for gambling problems, and few are aware of gambling treatment options.
Fewer than 10% of people with gambling problems receive treatment.

Treatment for gambling is effective.
- Over half of persons treated for gambling substantially reduce their gambling.
- Psychiatric distress and symptoms decrease markedly with gambling treatment.

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.

2. Provide treatment to patients with gambling problems. Assessment and brief interventions can reduce gambling markedly, even in medical patients not seeking gambling treatment.

References: