

Gambling and the Criminal Justice System Fact Sheet

The State of Connecticut spends over \$50,000 per year to incarcerate each inmate,¹ and gambling is common in criminal justice populations.

- Over one-third of inmates gamble while incarcerated.^{2,3}
- An estimated 33% of inmates have gambling problems,^{2,4} with rates as high as 49% in older adult inmates.⁵
- Over half of inmates with gambling disorder report that their incarceration resulted directly from gambling-related crimes.^{2,3}

Up to half of persons with severe gambling disorder commit illegal acts to support their gambling.^{2,6}

- The most common illegal acts include writing bad checks and stealing or “borrowing” money or goods from friends or relatives, often with the intent of returning it.⁷
- Embezzlement is rare, but gambling-related fraud and embezzlement cases are growing especially in regions close to casinos.⁸
- Violent non-income generating crimes are also related to gambling disorder, and nearly two-thirds of persons with gambling disorder are perpetrators or victims of violence.⁹

Gambling and substance use disorders commonly occur together.

- Substance use disorders increase the likelihood of a gambling disorder by more than 4-fold.¹⁰ Over 20% of persons with substance use disorders have gambling problems.¹¹
- Gambling and substance use significantly increase suicidality, and up to one-third of persons with gambling disorder attempt suicide.¹²

**Despite the prevalence of gambling and related problems,
almost no one in the criminal justice system receives treatment for gambling.**

Treatment for gambling can be very effective.

- Over 75% of persons treated for gambling substantially reduce their gambling.¹³⁻¹⁵
- Psychiatric distress and symptoms decrease markedly with gambling treatment.^{13,15}
- Gambling treatment clients who commit illegal acts to support their gambling respond as well to treatment as gamblers who do not commit illegal acts.⁷

Suggested action steps:

1. Screen criminal justice system clients for gambling problems using established and confidential methods.^{3,5}
2. Provide appropriate interventions to persons identified with gambling problems. Assessment and brief interventions can markedly reduce gambling, even in problem gamblers not specifically seeking gambling treatment.¹⁶