



NCPG Calls on Arkansas Leaders to Take Responsibility for Gambling Addiction

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Washington, DC The National Council on Problem Gambling calls on Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson and legislative leaders to restore funds to prevent and treat gambling addiction. NCPG Executive Director Keith Whyte stated "The refusal of Arkansas leaders to dedicate even one cent of their lottery revenue to help individuals and families devastated by addiction to the lottery is unconscionable. A state that reaps windfall profits from its lottery monopoly has an ethical and economic obligation to minimize the social costs of gambling addiction".

The legislation that created the state's lottery in 2009 included a provision dedicating \$200,000 in unclaimed lottery prizes to the Department of Health for problem gambling programs. In 2015 the Legislature passed and the Governor signed a bill to eradicate this program and its funding. NCPG and local advocates have spent the past two years urging these vital services be restored to no avail.

According to NCPG's 2015 report on the Arkansas Helpline: "The elimination of funds for problem gambling treatment and education has significant negative impacts. Clients in counseling for gambling problems were not able to continue their therapy and the enrollment of new clients was halted. The state's contract with a call center to handle Helpline calls from Arkansas was terminated early. And what few public awareness and prevention efforts, such as billboard and PSA campaigns to promote the Helpline, were cancelled."

Cutting helpline funding was particularly harmful. Since the onset of the lottery in 2009 the helpline (800.522.4700) has received more than 69,000 calls from Arkansas. Our December 2015 research report reviewed ten years of Arkansas helpline data. Among the highlights:

- Over a decade both total helpline calls and actual intakes for help have risen
- African-Americans are overrepresented among helpline callers
- Over one-fifth of helpline callers are 55 years old or older

Copies of the report are available at: <http://www.ncpgambling.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Arkansas-Helpline-Data-Report-2005-to-2015-final.pdf>

In a 2016 letter to State Senator Alan Clark supporting his bill to restore funding NCPG estimated there were 48,000 problem gamblers in Arkansas. They often have other health problems. According to the National Epidemiologic

Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions, of people diagnosed with pathological gambling, 73.2 percent had an alcohol use disorder, 38.1 percent had a drug use disorder, 60.4 percent had nicotine dependence, 49.6 percent had a mood disorder, 41.3 percent had an anxiety disorder, and 60.8 percent had a personality disorder. In addition, NCPG estimates 20% of problem gamblers report serious suicidal ideation. According to SAMHSA Behavioral Health Barometer in Arkansas last year approximately 128,000 adults (5.8%) were alcohol dependent or abusers and 72,000 (3%) were drug dependent or abusers. SAMHSA estimates 10 to 15% of adults with substance abuse disorders meet criteria for gambling addiction. The research clearly shows that gambling problems co-occur with other disorders, that co-occurring disorder are harder and most expensive to treat, and thus gambling addiction increases the overall healthcare and criminal justice costs borne by individuals, families, communities and ultimately state government.

Those who are most at risk for gambling addiction and hit hardest by it are poorer, less educated and older Arkansans as well as those who have physical or mental health problems, are depressed or who served in the military. Programs to prevent and treat gambling addiction save lives and reduce the damage for gambling addiction that falls most heavily on the most vulnerable citizens of Arkansas. The demand for such services is clear from the 69,000 calls to the helpline since 2009.

Whyte noted: "I want to be clear that we are not an anti-gambling or anti-lottery group. NCPG is neutral on legalized gambling. In fact, numerous state lotteries, gaming vendors, commercial and tribal casinos, tracks and state regulatory and health agencies are members of NCPG. What they have in common is the willingness to take responsibility for problems caused by legalized gambling. A state government that knowingly and deliberately eliminates all problem gambling funding while at the same time seeking to increase lottery revenues is acting extremely unethically and irresponsibly."

NCPG is neutral on legalized gambling and leads state and national stakeholders in the development of comprehensive policy and programs for all those affected by problem gambling. Our vision is to improve health and wellness by reducing the personal, social and economic costs of problem gambling.

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