

## The Impact of Sports Betting on Mind, Body and Brain

Timothy Fong MD  
UCLA Gambling Studies Program  
21st Annual Midwest Conference on Problem Gambling and Substance Abuse  
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## Goals and Objectives

- illustrate how the expansion of sports betting has impacted state public health issues related to gambling behaviors
- Develop three techniques and strategies for screening and assessment of sports bettors who may be at risk for gambling disorder
- Name three treatment strategies that should be applied to sports bettors with gambling disorder
- Form future strategies for advocacy and community engagement around the issue of sports betting

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## Current Trends in Sports Betting



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## Case Example: Greg

- Greg is a 39 year old male who has been a patient of mine since 2018
- Alcohol Use Disorder, Anxiety Disorder (Generalized and Social)
- Responded very well to treatment and recovery story remarkable

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## Greg

- Moved to New York in 2019 for a new career, started a family, bought a home
- Continues to be seen remotely every few months for medication, brief therapy and support

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## Greg

- New York launches online sports betting in January 2022
- Greg starts "playing" during NFL Playoffs and Super Bowl
- Starts out \$40-80 per week
  - Single game bets, no "exotics"
  - Watches the games he bets on
  - Wife "kinda" aware

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## Greg

- March Madness 2022 / MLB Baseball Season
- Greg continues to “casually” bet and wins a 5-leg parlay = ~\$2,500
- Betting frequency increases, betting amounts increase, betting types become more varied
  - “Just really exciting”

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## Greg

- By August, Greg has:
  - Spent (or lost?) \$2500 + \$5000 of his own money leading him to
  - Lie
  - Chase
  - Preoccupied
  - Not able to cut down
  - More anxiety

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## Greg

- By September 2022,
  - Wife discovers expenses and relationship nearly ends
  - Emotional pain escalates to near suicidality
  - Alcohol use returns
- Tells Dr. Fong during the last 30 secs of regular appointment

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## Greg's Mindset about Gambling

- Not an escape
- Action-oriented: Increase Dopamine
  - Enhanced the entertainment experience
- Goal-oriented: To Make Money
- Liked competition: Show off "knowledge"
- Chasing losses wasn't to cover finances but to "get money back from corporations"

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## Issues Raised

- What were his vulnerabilities?
  - AUD or the environment?
- What could have been done to prevent this?
- How could have sought help sooner?
- Treatment principles
  - Will tried and true treatment strategies work?
  - What needs to be done differently?

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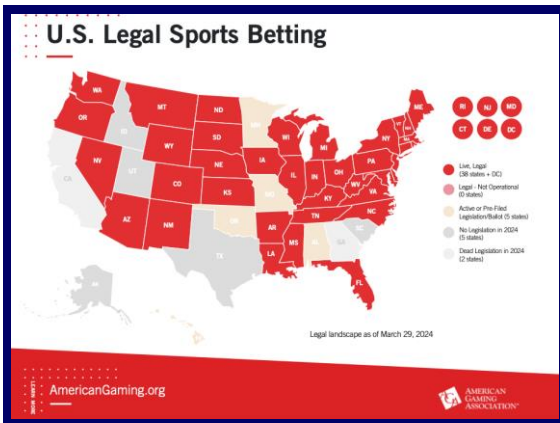
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## Sports Betting 101

- In-Person Sportsbooks
- Online Betting Apps
- Plethora of types of bets
  - Most popular: Same-Game Parlay
  - Trending: In-Game Betting
- Regulated vs. Unregulated
- Fantasy Sports Games

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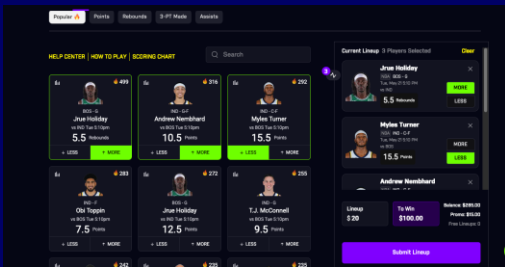
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## An example



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## The California Story

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## Currently Available Sports Betting in California

- Fantasy Sports (Regulated)
  - Daily
  - NOT Same Day Parlays
- Unregulated sports betting (online)
- Unregulated sports betting (IRL)
- Online Horse Racing Betting

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## November 2022 Elections

- Two, competing propositions on the ballot
  - mobile sports betting
  - In-person, brick and mortar sports betting
- Both propositions failed
  - Why?
- What happens next ---- come 2024?

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## The National Story

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### What have we learned since 2018?

- Increase in calls to gambling helpline
- Robust participation when sports betting introduced (especially mobile)
- New types of bets and betting options
  - Same game parlay
- Incidence and prevalence of gambling disorder
- National discourse and coverage

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### Trends to consider

- Emergence of same-game parlay as dominant, preferred type of bet
- Where does the tax money go and at what cost?
  - Zero sum game?
- Newfound partners / collaborators
  - Sports organizations + colleges + operators
- What is the impact of social media coverage?

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### Sports Betting 2024

- You do not have to have a gambling problem to experience problems from gambling
  - Betting scandals, workplace terminations
- Emergence of artificial intelligence
  - Exploit and prevent problems
- Unregulated enticements
- Rampant advertising leads to what?

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## The Gambling Addiction Recovery , Investment, and Treatment (GRIT) Act

U.S. Representative Andrea Salinas (OR-06)  
and  
U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT)

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## GRIT ACT

- 50% of the federal sports excise tax revenue for gambling addiction treatment and research,
  - 75% distributed to the states for gambling addiction prevention and treatment through the existing Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant program.
  - 25% to NIDA.
- Authorize spending for 10 years (\$125 million / year)
- Provide vital support to state health agencies and nonprofits left on their own to address gambling problems.
- Allow investment in best practices and comprehensive research, which is only possible at the national level.

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## Clinical Characteristics of Gambling Disorder

(Focus on Sports Bettors)

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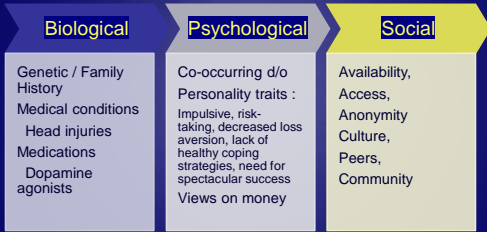
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## Biopsychosocial Risk Factors




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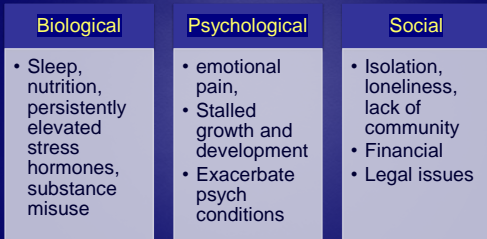
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## Biopsychosocial Consequences




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## CALGETS

- Statewide, no-cost treatment
- Helpline, Outpatient, IOP, Residential
- Group Treatment
- Telehealth or in Person
- Gambler or Affected Individual
- Annually
  - 700-1000 Gamblers
  - 300-500 Affected Individuals

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## Clinical Experience With Sports Bettors (at UCLA)

- Since start of 2020
  - Male
  - Educated
  - Ages 18-35
  - Caucasian
  - Loved watching sports or playing sports
  - Technologically very capable
  - Resistant / dismissive of GA
  - Supportive but absent families
  - Psychologically aware

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## CALGETS and Sports Betting

- Across all venues,
  - slot machines (44%),
  - blackjack (32%)
  - poker (27%)
  - **sports betting (22%)**
- were the most commonly selected gambling activities.

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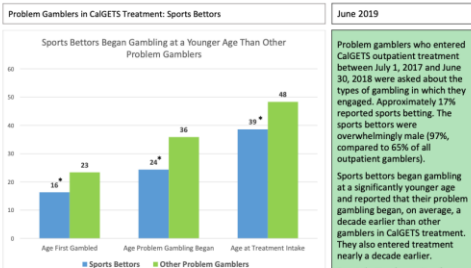
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### CalGETS Fast Facts



June 2019

Problem gamblers who entered CalGETS outpatient treatment between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018 were asked about the types of gambling in which they engaged. Approximately 17% reported sports betting. The sports bettors were overwhelmingly male (97%, compared to 65% of all outpatient gamblers).

Sports bettors began gambling at a significantly younger age and reported that their problem gambling began, on average, a decade earlier than other gamblers in CalGETS treatment. They also entered treatment nearly a decade earlier.

Sports bettors' severity of gambling disorder is similar to that of other problem gamblers.

Sources – Outpatient Problem Gamblers: CalGETS Fiscal Year 2017-18 dataset, prepared for the California Department of Public Health, Office of Problem Gambling by the University of California Los Angeles Gambling Studies Program. \* Significance at p < .001

In California, problem gamblers can receive no-cost treatment through CalGETS. If you or someone you know has a gambling problem, call 1-800-GAMBLER.

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33

# Screening Principles

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# Open-ended Screening Techniques

- Tell me about your relationship with gambling
- How often have you gambled for money?
- Is gambling part of your regular lifestyle?
- How do you spend your entertainment budget?
- How would you describe your current financial health?

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## Screening Tool For Gambling

**Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen (BBGS)** A "yes" answer to any of the questions means the person is at risk for developing a gambling problem.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. During the past 12 months, have you become restless, irritable or anxious when trying to stop/cut down on gambling?   | YES NO<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. During the past 12 months, have you tried to keep your family or friends from knowing how much you gambled?   | YES NO<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. During the past 12 months did you have such financial trouble as a result of your gambling that you had to get help with living expenses from family, friends or welfare? | YES NO<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |

[www.ncrg.org](http://www.ncrg.org)  
[www.divisiononaddiction.org](http://www.divisiononaddiction.org)

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## Screening

- Sports betting is not specifically mentioned in commonly used problem gambling instruments
- How do we reach this population?
- Tell me about your interest in sports?
- In the last 12 months, how has betting on sports impacted your life?
- What is your relationship with sports?

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37

## DSM-5 Gambling Disorder

- No changes in DSM-5-TR to GD
- In general, no distinction between forms of gambling
  - Gambling Disorder, Slots
  - Gambling Disorder, Poker
  - Gambling Disorder, Sports Betting, Live
  - Gambling Disorder, Sports Betting, Online
  - Gambling Disorder, Sports Betting, Basketball?

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38

## Biopsychosocial Treatment Planning

39

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39

## During intake session

### Sports Betting History:

Collect as specific information as possible

- Where / When / Why / How / Who
- Type of sports
  - Why not other sports?
- Type of bets
  - Straight, exotics
  - Long-shots vs favorites
- Sources of gambling capital
- Goals of sports betting – for what?

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## Evidence-Based Treatments for Gambling Disorder

- Medications (No FDA-Approved)
- Brief Interventions
  - Helplines, Self-Help Workbooks, 1-2 sessions,
- Psychotherapy
  - CBT, MI, Psychodynamic, Supportive
- Gambler's Anonymous

Petry, N. M., Ginley, M. K., & Rash, C. J. (2017). A systematic review of treatments for problem gambling. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 31*(8), 951.

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## Psychological Treatments

- No form of psychotherapy is superior to others
- Predictors of good outcome
  - Length of time in treatment
  - "Capacity for honesty"
  - Commitment to doing the recovery work
  - Involvement of others in treatment

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## Social Treatments

- Self-Exclusion
- Group Therapy (Facilitated)
- Gambler's Anonymous
  - Online vs In-person
    - Any differences in outcomes?
  - Sponsor PLUS Commitment
  - How do the different generations view 12-step?
- SMART Recovery

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## Treatment Principles With Sports Bettors

- Is there a proven form of treatment for sports bettors?
  - Medications, psychotherapy, 12-step?
- What are the desired clinical outcomes?
  - Can they resume watching sports as entertainment?
- What are unique treatment strategies?
- What are possible treatment errors?

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## Treatment Principles

- No head-to-head clinical trials between modalities
- Principles of recovery
  - Focus on starting healthy self-care
    - Home
    - Health
      - Sleep, nutrition, physical movement
    - Purpose
    - Community

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## Treatment Principles With Sports Bettors

- Time
  - Less driving around
- Urges / Cravings / Preoccupation
  - More centered around not accepting losses (persisting until winning)
- 12-step
  - Not as likely to accept or be interested in going

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## Treatment Principles

- Must address the seduction of the enticements and offers
  - No-risk, sweat-free bets
- Use digital innovations
  - Gam-Ban
  - Mobile apps
  - Chat function
- Must identify and manage sources of financial capital (online payday loans, etc)

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## Treatment Principles

- Addressing FOMO with sports bettors
  - Replacement / substitution for sports?
  - Where can healthy dopamine release be found?
  - Challenging views on finances
  - Grit / resiliency training
    - Who teaches us how to handles losses?

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## Treatment Principles

- Restoring certain aspects of sports
  - purpose,
  - Identity
  - community
  - Hope
  - "Thrill of victory and the agony of defeat"
  - Removal of sports = grief process
  - How does this get brought into therapy?

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## Issues To Consider in the Future

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## What happens to the rate of gambling disorder?

- Increase incidence and prevalence of problem gambling and gambling disorder
  - By how much?
    - For every 100 NEW bettors = # GD?
    - What would a 1% increase look like?
  - Most vulnerable at risk but who else could be vulnerable but we don't know about yet?
  - How much can prevention, education and responsible gambling practices keep these rates down?

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## How do you manage underage from accessing sports betting?

- Enforcement? (who is going to do that?)
- Parents / teachers / coaches?
- Containing access to digital currency?
- Impact of advertising
- Focus should be on
  - Delaying onset of betting
  - Minimizing frequency of betting
  - Lessons from Tobacco / Alcohol?

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## What happens to public health with sports betting expansion?

- What are the societal costs and benefits associated with sports betting?
- What happens to overall quality of life?
  - Individuals
  - Families
  - Communities
- Which forms of sports betting are more harmful?

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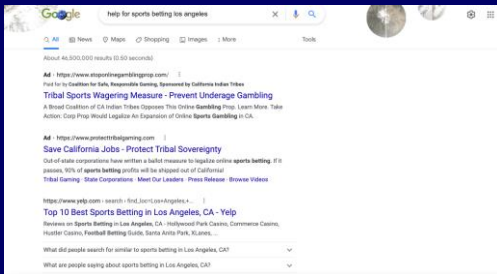
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## “help for sports betting”




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## Sports Betting: To Do List

1. Focus on sources of money
  - Online loan / predatory lenders
  - Teasers / Promos
  - Crossover from Financial Tech (Fin Tech)
2. Examine Impact RG Messaging
  - Gambling is NOT a way to make money
  - How to manage FOMO
  - You do NOT have special skills in predicting future events

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## Sports Betting To Do List

3. Inform state legislators /regulators about what we are seeing or not seeing in clinic setting
4. Work with media to convey messaging and stories related to sports betting
5. Develop innovative ways to reach sports bettors at very early stages of problem gambling and increase demand for services (early detection)

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## California Gambling Education and Treatment Services (CALGETS)

[problemgambling.ca.gov](http://problemgambling.ca.gov)




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# Westside Gambling Treatment (Telehealth, California)



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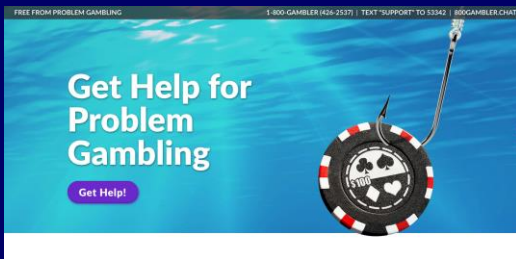
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# freefromproblemgambling.com



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# Gambling and Athletes

Focus on Sports Betting

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### How does sports betting impact athletes?

- Gambling Disorder
- Sport Integrity
- Athlete Well-Being (Physical and Mental)

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### Gambling Disorder in Athletes

- Globally, prevalence rates of GD higher in athletes, than non-athletes
  - Student-Athletes (solid signal)
  - Professional Athletes (inconclusive?)
  - Gender differences (solid signal; M>F); certain sports?
  - Personality Traits of Athletes
    - Highly competitive, impulsive, risk-takers, difficulty dealing with loss, obsessive
  - Availability and Access increase risk:
    - time, technology, "insider knowledge", peers,

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### Sports Betting and Sports Integrity

- Expansion of betting and newfound partnerships between sports organization and betting operators has led to
  - Intensified fan engagement
  - Concerns about fixing / corruption / fairness
  - Ethical and exploitative concerns (athletes as commodity)
  - New areas of regulation and policies for athletes
    - (can I bet, should I bet , where can I bet?)

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## NCAA Survey (current)

- One in 3 high-profile athletes receive abusive messages from someone with a betting interest.
- Higher-profile events with sports betting markets attract increased volumes of abuse or threats.
- Ninety percent of harassment is generated online or through social media.
- In sports with high volumes of betting, 15%-25% of all abuse surrounding that competition is betting related.
- During March Madness, Signify covered nearly 1,000 Division I men's and women's basketball student-athletes, 64 teams, over 280 coaches and 120 NCAA match officials.
- Across the Division I Men's and Women's Basketball Championships, over 54,000 posts/comments were flagged by Signify's AI for potential abuse or threats and reviewed by human in-house analysts.
- Of those 54,000, 4,000 were confirmed as abusive or threatening and reported to the relevant social media platforms, with some elevated to law enforcement.
- More than 540 abusive betting-related messages were directed at men's and women's basketball student-athletes, including death threats.
- Women's basketball student-athletes received approximately three times more threats than men's basketball student-athletes.
- Student-athletes are not the only group experiencing these threats and abuse. Game officials, administrators and other athletics employees have been harassed related to their respective involvement in competitions.

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## Sports Betting has Increased Athlete Harassment

- Since 2018 ---
  - Significant rise in harassment and abuse of athletes related to sports betting
    - Digital: social media, comments, direct messages
    - In-person threats ; at games, in real life
    - Critical, physical, sexual, objectifying
  - Precise numbers are opaque but the trends are clear and a response must be developed

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## Gambling as a part of athletic training experience

- Gambling impacts body, brain and mind performance
- Gambling disorder is easily hidden
- Gambling behavior, even recreationally, can put athletes into risky situations
- Education, screening, referral to treatment, consistently communicating and adhering to gambling policies
- Increasing therapist skills and abilities around gambling behaviors

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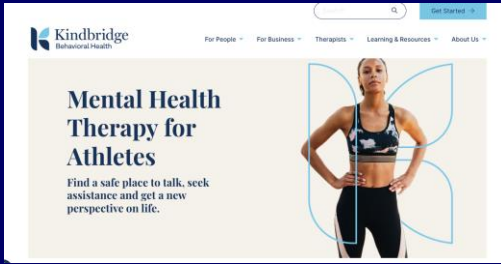
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## Kindbridge Athlete Well-Being Program



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## EPIC Solutions: Lived Experience Speakers



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## Gam-Ban: Software Blocker



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# Gambling Addiction App




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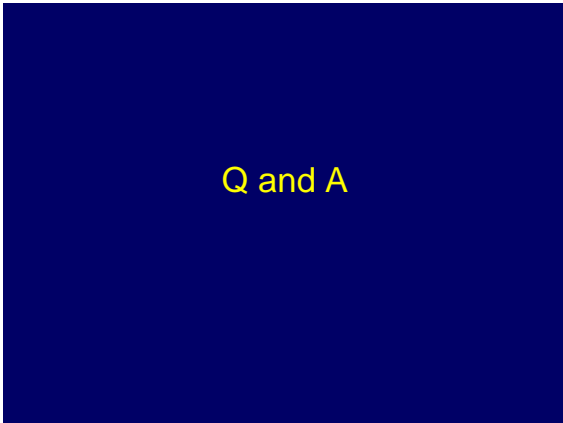
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# Q and A




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## Contact Information

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Office of Problem Gambling  
Telus  
Beit T Shuvah  
Westside Gambling Treatment  
UPAC  
CalGETS Providers  
CalGETS Supervisors  
CCPG  
RSBIHC  
Vision y Compromiso  
Friday Night Live

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