

Gambling & the Military

Tineka Rice, LCSW-C, ICGC-II



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on Problem Gambling

Objectives

1. Identify at least three risk factors that are distinctive to military culture and veteran life that increase the likelihood of developing a gambling disorder.
2. Describe at least two culturally sensitive screening methods for gambling among active-duty military and veterans.
3. Identify and locate at least three military-specific resources for active-duty military and/or veterans who are experiencing gambling related problems.





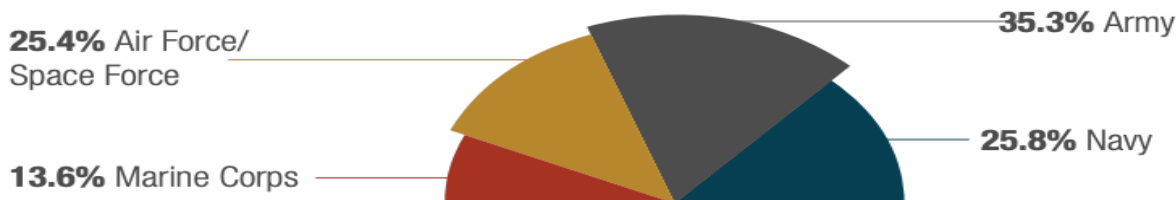
U.S. Department of Defense

2023 DEMOGRAPHICS PROFILE

ACTIVE-DUTY MEMBERS

More than 1.2 million active-duty members serve in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Space Force.

Service Branch



Enlisted and Officer



81.6%

Enlisted

27.4 Average age of Enlisted



18.4%

Officers

34.3 Average age of Officers

Education

1,038,909 Enlisted		234,473 Officers	
77.9%	0.1%	No High School Diploma or GED	0%
		High School Diploma/ GED or Some College	5.7%
9.2%		Associate's Degree	1.2%
8.5%		Bachelor's Degree	45.3%
1.7%		Advanced Degree	38.2%
2.6%		Unknown	9.6%

Gender



82.3%

Male active-duty members



17.7%

Female active-duty members

Race and Ethnicity

32.0%

of active-duty members identify with Racial Minority groups*

19.5%

of active-duty members are Hispanic or Latino

*Racial minority includes Black or African American, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Multi-racial, and Unknown

Geographic Location

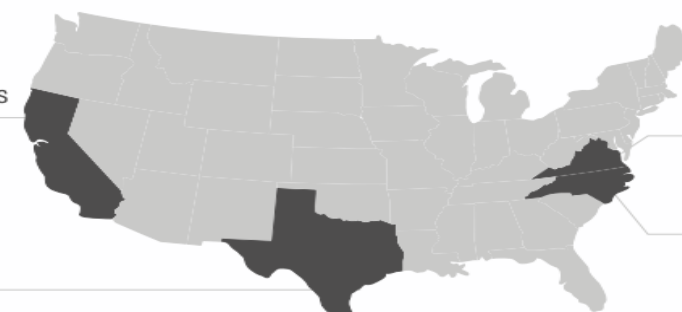
87.4% of active-duty members are located in the United States and U.S. Territories. The map depicts the four U.S. states with the largest percentage of active-duty members.

California:
14.1% of members

Virginia:
11.1% of members

North Carolina:
8.1% of members

Texas:
9.9% of members



Source: 2023 Demographics Profile of the Military Community (Department of Defense); <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2023-demographics-report.pdf>

FYI



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- Gambling has been identified as a growing public health issue.
- It is a widely practiced form of entertainment and involves wagering something of value for an uncertain outcome.
- A behavioral disorder develops when gambling becomes excessive (*despite negative consequences*).
- Persistent and recurrent patterns of excessive gambling activity/behavior that leads to significant impairment and/or distress characterizes Gambling Disorder

Rayner, C., Treacy, S., Dighton, G. *et al.*

History of Veterans and Gambling



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- Slot machines on military installations since the 1930s - Removed from domestic installations in 1951
- Approximately 3,141 video slots on installations in 12 countries
- Annual revenues of more than \$100 million dollars to DoD department of Morale, Welfare & Recreation (MWR).
- The rate of problematic gamblers in the military is thought to be around twice that of the rest of the general population, according to the National Council on Problem Gambling

Etuk, Shirk, Grubbs, et al. (2020)

General Gambling Statistics



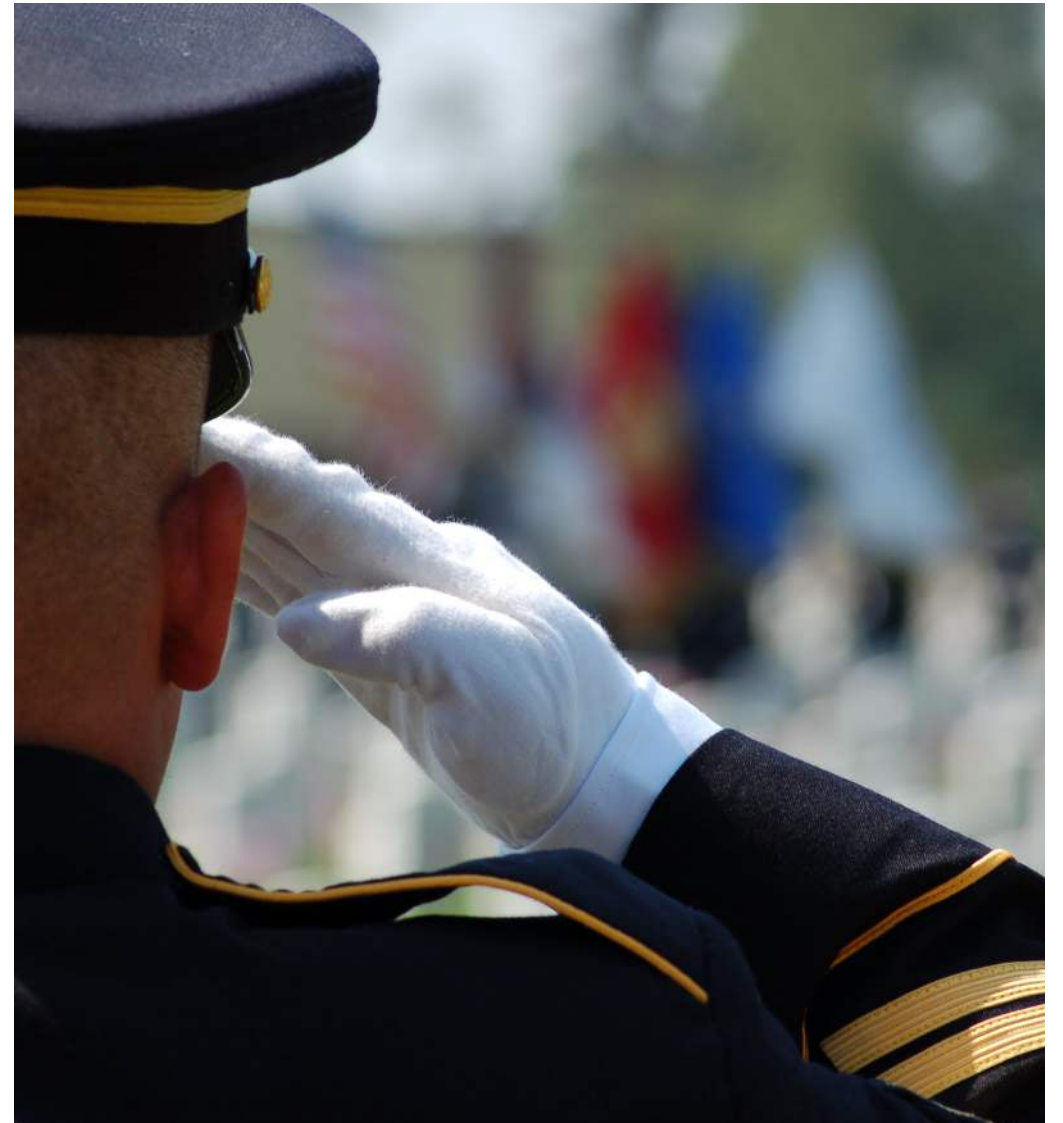
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- 20% of the total world's population has gambled
- 3% of the U.S. population engages in online gambling
- Men gamble (69%) twice as much as women (36%)
- 6% of college students have a serious gambling related problems
- Families where a member compulsively gambles are more likely to experience domestic violence
- More than two thirds of persons with risky gambling behaviors engage in criminal activities related to gambling
- Las Vegas is one of the most popular gambling destinations for Americans
- There are 462 commercial casinos in the U.S. as of 2020

<https://www.americangaming.org/resources/american-attitudes-2023/>

Gambling Statistics Among the Military

As many as 56,000 active-duty military members meet the criteria for Gambling Use Disorder





Unique Risk Factors *for Service Members*

Risk taking behavior

Deployment stress

Boredom

Limited recreational options

*Younger male service members are
among the highest risk demographic*



Risk Factors Among International Military Populations

Younger age

Male gender

Lower rank or educational attainment

Exposure to combat deployment*

Strains of frequent family separation*

Veterans

- 3 out of 25 (12%) of the Gulf War era Vets have been diagnosed with PTSD
- Vets diagnosed with PTSD have a 60% higher rate of gambling addiction than the general population.
- For most folks, their job is what they do; military deeply defines who they are
- Young men, many under the age of 25 are sent into high-risk situations when the executive function of the brain is not fully developed.



Back to Civilian Life



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Upon return from service, veterans may struggle with:

Assimilation back to civilian life

Finding a new career

Reassessing goals in life



Return From Active Duty

Service members may return with...

Physical disabilities

Mental health illness or related issues
(i.e., depression, PTSD, survivor's guilt)

Substance Use Disorders



Research Shows



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- Gambling research and problematic gambling has been understudied
- Active duty and veterans are at increased risk (2-3x more) over that of the general population
- More data is needed from the DoD
- The VA is making strides to understand what problematic gambling looks like for veterans in our community

Division on Addiction

Problem Gambling Among Military Servicemen and Veterans: Insights from Lived Experience and Research

Research Shows



- Among military populations, **internationally**, lifetime prevalence rates for gambling disorder range between 2% and 29%, exceeding the general population estimates of approx. 0.4 - 1.6%
- U.S. veterans have consistently shown elevated rates of PG, ranging from 2.2% to 9% compared to that of civilians with a range of 1% to 4%



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Longitudinal Data



Civilian data shows...

- More times than not, mental health issues present prior to issues related to gambling, which tend to be secondary.
- *What we know is that PG often co-occurs with other MH issues. Our service members have extraordinary vulnerabilities, due to high stress situations (e.g., combat & deployment from family), coupled with increased accessibility to gambling on military installations.*

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Problem Gambling Among Military Servicemen and Veterans: Insights from Lived Experience and Research



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A Veteran's Experience...

"One of the things you're taught in the military is how to compartmentalize so feelings, emotions, fear, none of that exists. The mission comes first. So, you're taught to take all of that stuff and tuck it away and it's got to go somewhere... and for me where it went was to the slot rooms."

- David Yeager



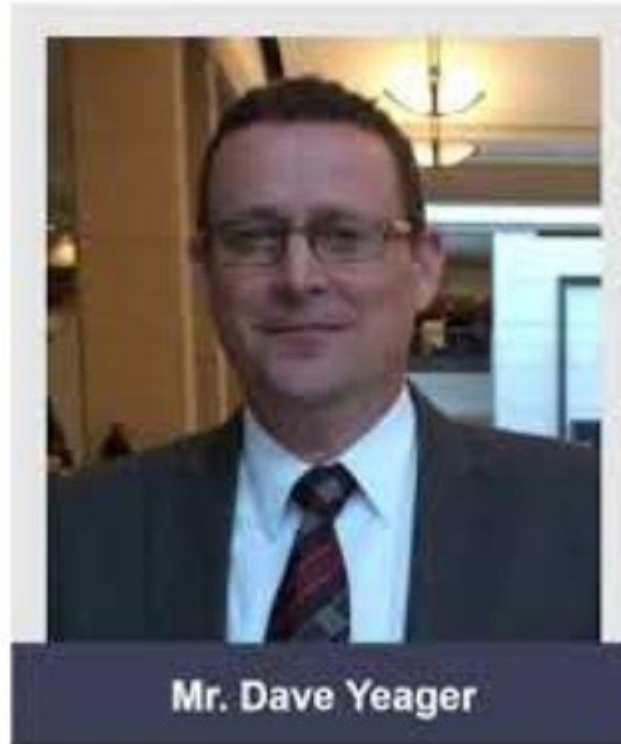
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A Veteran's Experience



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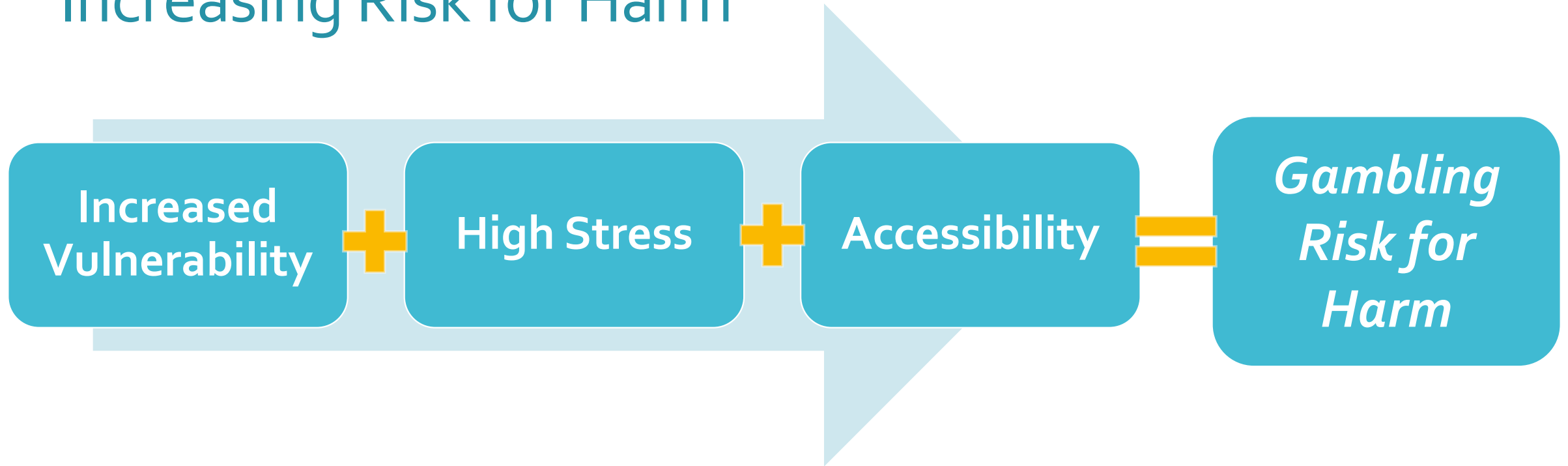


m-tac MDA Institute for Alcohol & Drug Abuse Treatment
for Problem Gambling Treatment

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkfm4q_tvAc



Formula for Military: Increasing Risk for Harm



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Barriers to Seeking Treatment



Fear of stigma



Concerns about military career impact



Limited awareness of available treatment options or military-specific interventions

Barriers to Seeking Treatment *continued...*

- Reporting requirements
- Military culture promotes stoicism and self-reliance
- Mission accomplishment is prioritized over personal discomfort
- Sickness is seen as a sign of weakness
- Unique health-related challenges among veterans and physical impairment
- Isolation and identity confusion (post separation)

Vana, N., Kraus, S.W., Way, B.M. *et al.*



Treatment Barriers (for providers)

- Lack of knowledge/education
- Misunderstanding of gambling as an addictive disorder
- Lowering providers anxieties
- Increase understanding of problematic gambling, signs and symptoms
- Lack of screening

- Strive for cultural competence
 - Have some knowledge of military culture, history, and service members unique experiences.
- Address stigma and underreporting
 - Stigma around mental health issues and PG is still very much an issue. Be supportive, non-judgmental, and empathetic.
- Be mindful of military specific stressors
 - Consider including questions that acknowledge combat trauma, deployment, and occupational pressures and how these experiences may impact gambling behavior

Culturally Sensitive Considerations



Research supports the use of evidenced based gambling screening tools:

- PGSI
- SOGS
- BBGS
- NODS-CLiP

**Validity in military populations is not fully established.*

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Screening for
Problematic
Gambling

Problem Gambling Severity Index

Thinking about the last 12 months, answer the following questions with the response:

0 Never. 1 Sometimes. 2 Most of the time. 3 Almost always.

1. Have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?
2. Still thinking about the last 12 months, have you needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?
3. When you gambled, did you go back another day to try to win back the money you lost?
4. Have you borrowed money or sold anything to get money to gamble?
5. Have you felt that you might have a problem with gambling?
6. Has gambling caused you any health problems, including stress or anxiety?
7. Have people criticized your betting or told you that you had a gambling problem, regardless of whether or not you thought it was true?
8. Has your gambling caused any financial problems for you or your household?
9. Have you felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?



Problem Gambling Severity Index

TOTAL SCORE

- Score of 0 = Non-problem gambling.
- Score of 1 or 2 = **Low Risk:** with few problems or no identified negative consequences.
- Score of 3 to 7 = **Moderate Risk:** problems leading to some negative consequences.
- Score of 8 or more = **High Risk:** problems gambling with negative consequences and a possible loss of control.

Ferris, J., & Wynne, H. (2001). The Canadian problem gambling index: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

Answer Yes or No to the following questions:

1. During the past 12 months, have you become restless, irritable or anxious when trying to stop/cut down on gambling?
2. During the past 12 months, have you tried to keep your family or friends from knowing how much you gambled?
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?

A “yes” answer to any of the questions means the person is at risk for developing a gambling problem.

Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen - BBGS

- **A culturally sensitive approach combines standard screens with military-specific considerations.**
- Incorporate questions that explore the relationship between gambling and unique military experiences including:
 - Using gambling as a coping mechanism for trauma, stress, or separation from family.
 - The impact of gambling on operational effectiveness, mission readiness, and discipline.
 - Specific gambling behaviors common among service personnel.
- Screen for common co-occurring conditions, such as PTSD, substance misuse and integrate gambling questions when screening for other risky behaviors and anxiety.

Screening



- **Screen. Screen. Screen.**

- *Why?* Because of high rates of suicide attempts and suicidality among veterans reporting PG or a gambling disorder
- Service members and veterans with PG experience various challenges that place them at greater risk for attempting suicide
- Early intervention is critical!!!

How to Help



Lower Risk Gambling Guidelines (LRGG)



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It is recommended that people:

Do not gamble more than 1% of
their household income per month

Do not gamble more than four
days per month

Do not gamble more than two
types of games regularly

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When Not To Gamble



Stressed



Bored



Anxious



Depressed



Resources



For Active Duty

- The Brandon Act – This bill makes it easier for service members to seek help by requesting a mental health evaluation for any reason, at any time.
- TRICARE – offers mental health care for beneficiaries
- Military One Source – support for military personnel and their families
- Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP)
- Military Crisis Line – dial 988 (*press 1), or access online chat by texting 838255

Military One Source

<https://home.army.mil/imcom/Organization/human-services/g1-personnel/asap>

Resources For Veterans



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- **Veterans Health Administration (VAMCs)**
 - <https://www.va.gov/health/>
 - <https://www.va.gov/maryland-health-care/>
- **MD Department of Veterans and Military Families**
 - <https://veterans.maryland.gov/>
- **Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training (MCVET)**
 - <https://www.mcvet.org/>
- **US Department of Veterans Affairs: Vet Centers (Readjustment Counseling)**
 - <https://www.vetcenter.va.gov/>

Resources Gambling



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- National Council on Problem Gambling:
 - <https://www.ncpgambling.org>
- SMART Recovery:
 - <https://www.smartrecovery.org/gambling-addiction>
- Gamblers Anonymous:
 - <https://www.gamblersanonymous.org/ga/locations>
- Gam-Anon:
 - <https://gam-anon.org>
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
 - <https://988lifeline.org>
 - Call: 988
- Crisis Text Line:
 - Text HOME to 741741
 - <https://www.crisistextline.org>

Resources Gambling – Maryland



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- Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling:
 - mdproblemgambling.com
 - helpmygamblingproblem.org
- Maryland Council on Problem Gambling - Faith-based Advocacy & Assistance:
 - <http://www.marylandproblemgambling.org>
- CASH Campaign of Maryland (Creating Assets, Savings and Hope):
 - <https://cashmd.org>
- Maryland Legal Aid:
 - <https://www.mdlab.org>
- Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service:
 - <https://mvlslaw.org>

Takeaways

- Active-duty military members and veterans have higher rates of gambling disorder than the general population
- Gambling addiction is treatable
- Recovery is possible

Questions & Comments

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Thank
You!



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**For more information on the Center's
training programs, please contact:**
Training@MDProblemGambling.com
or call (667) 214-2120

[https://www.mdproblemgambling.com/training/
upcoming-training-and-events](https://www.mdproblemgambling.com/training/upcoming-training-and-events)

Citations



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