



CRISIS TEXT LINE |



AN OPEN LETTER TO AMERICA'S GOVERNORS AND STATE LEGISLATORS: OPPOSE ADDICTING iGAMING BILLS

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing millions of patients, providers, and employers across the nation, we write to express our strong opposition to the legalization of online casino gambling, and we urge states that have enacted authorizing legislation to repeal those laws. A growing body of clinical and public-health evidence shows that iGaming is uniquely addictive and is associated with significant harms to mental and physical health, exacerbating an already severe mental health crisis in the United States. The mental health of your constituents is worth far more than the short-term revenue promised by the iGaming industry. We recognize the budget pressures facing states, but the evidence shows that any short-term revenue from iGaming is outweighed by long-term costs to mental health systems, public health, families, and employers.

"There is no denying that our current infrastructure is ill equipped to handle the number of problem gambling cases in our country, to say nothing of the rapid rate at which the problem is expanding. We face a severe shortage of qualified, credentialed addiction counselors^[1], let alone those qualified to treat the complicated problems brought on by iGaming. The expansion of iGaming is equivalent to courting a public health crisis that can easily become the equivalent of our current SUD/Mental Health treatment challenge."¹

Startling Problem Gambling Prevalence Rates

iGaming poses a significant public health threat, particularly to young people. Its constant, mobile accessibility allows online casinos to be available at all times, driving dramatically higher rates of problem gambling that exceed eight times the prevalence seen in states without iGaming. In Pennsylvania, a study conducted by Penn State University's Social Science Research Institute found that over half of intake calls to the state's problem gambling hotline now reference online gambling "underscoring how digital wagering is driving demand for support services."²

In New Jersey, a Rutgers University study found a 21.6% incidence rate for problem gambling within a specific online panel sample and calls to the NJ 1-800-GAMBLER helpline have

¹ <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/behavioral-health-workforce-under-pressure-preparing-today-tomorrow/>

² Sharp, C. (2026). *Helpline Call, Self-exclusion Enrollment Rise with Popularity of Pennsylvania Online Gambling*. PlayPennsylvania. <https://www.playpennsylvania.com/news/helpline-calls-self-exclusion-enrollment-rise-with-popularity-of-pennsylvania-online-gambling/>

increased by a shocking 300% since legalization. The most concerning trend is the rise of dual-mode gamblers, those who participate in both online and offline gambling. These individuals face the highest risk, with over 50 percent showing signs of problem gambling.³

iGaming Contributes to Social Isolation

Unlike traditional wagering in social settings, online gambling often occurs in isolation, making it harder for others to recognize addictive patterns. This isolation exacerbates mental health challenges and allows issues to escalate unnoticed. According to the Office of Problem Gambling Services for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, “When you put (on) a public health lens, what you see is that those individuals have higher rates of obesity, consuming alcohol at higher rates, and using prescription drugs at a higher rate.”⁴

iGaming Exacerbates Youth Mental Health Crisis

Experts have confirmed these alarming trends. A 2024 study in the *Journal of Addiction Medicine* showed that internet gambling disorder was associated with an 83 percent increased risk of suicide ideation.⁵

Similarly, Dr. Shekhar Saxena of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health recently remarked that online gambling “[is] continuous... intense, and it can be financially – and also physically and mentally – extremely harmful.”⁶

The American Psychiatric Association notes in its diagnostic manual that gambling disorder is associated with high rates of co-occurring conditions including Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), anxiety and substance use disorders of all kinds (opioid and alcohol).⁷

Taken together, the evidence demonstrates that iGaming poses a significant and preventable public-health risk. We urge policymakers to prioritize evidence-based mental health protections over short-term revenue projections that fail to account for long-term social and health costs, and to oppose legislation that would legalize iGaming or, where enacted, to reconsider and pursue repeal.

³ Nower, L., Stanmyre, J.F. & Anthony, V. (2023). *The Prevalence of Online and Land-Based Gambling in New Jersey*. Report to the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement. New Brunswick, NJ: https://socialwork.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/2023-10/Prevalence_Report_2023_Final.pdf.

⁴ Manzhos, M. (2025, January 25). Why is online gambling a public health issue? *Deseret News*. <https://www.deseret.com/lifestyle/2025/01/24/gambling-sport-betting-addiction/>

⁵ Orozco, R., Borges, G., Caldas-de-Almeida, J. M., Gutiérrez-García, R. A., Albor, Y., Jiménez Pérez, A. L., Valdés-García, K. P., Baez Mansur, P. M., Covarrubias Díaz Couder, M. A., Hernández Uribe, P. C., & Benjet, C. (2024). Internet Gaming Disorder and the Incidence of Suicide-related Ideation and Behaviors in College Students. *Journal of addiction medicine*, 18(6), 643–648. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ADM.0000000000001331>

⁶ Manzhos, “Why is online gambling a public health issue?”

⁷ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision*. (DSM-5-TR) 2022. American Psychiatric Association. American Psychiatric Association Publishing.

Sincerely,

ActNow For Mental Health

Crisis Text Line

Foundation for Social Connection ACTION NETWORK

International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium (ICRC)

NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals,

Psychotherapy Action Network

Kennedy Forum