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**MEDIA CONTACT:** Stephany Dugan, [ra-dapressoffice@pa.gov](mailto:ra-dapressoffice@pa.gov)

## **“Every Story Matters”: Shapiro Administration Kicks off Problem Gambling Awareness Month to Highlight Resources, Help Available**

*Individual in recovery from problem gambling shares story to encourage other Pennsylvanians, help amplify awareness and break down stigmas associated with problem gambling.*

**Harrisburg, PA** – Today, the **Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP)** joined the **Pennsylvania Lottery**, the **Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board (PGCB)**, the **Council on Compulsive Gambling of Pennsylvania (CCGP)**, and an individual in long-term recovery from problem gambling to kick off March as National Problem Gambling Awareness Month.

This year marks the 21st anniversary of National Problem Gambling Awareness Month. This year’s theme is “Every Story Matters.” The yearly designation is designed to increase public awareness of the availability of treatment and recovery services and encourage health care providers to screen their service recipients for problem gambling.

“Knowledge is power. I encourage all Pennsylvanians to learn about the signs of problem gambling and to use that knowledge to help spread the message that treatment and resources are available,” said **DDAP Deputy Secretary Kelly Primus**. “As we see with substance use disorders, the same holds true with problem gambling. With the right treatment and supports for problem gambling, recovery is not only possible, but also probable.”

“While most people won’t experience problems with gambling, some will,” said **Council on Compulsive Gambling of Pennsylvania Executive Director Josh Ercole**. “Being aware of possible warning signs and knowing where to turn for assistance is so important. In Pennsylvania, help is just a call away.”

Penn State University, in conjunction with DDAP and PGCB, conducts an annual assessment of the impacts of interactive gaming, also referred to as online gambling or iGaming in Pennsylvania. The report is designed to establish the prevalence of online gambling in Pennsylvania, examine the demographic characteristics of adult Pennsylvania online gamblers, and identify the characteristics associated with experiencing problems with online gambling. The key findings of the 2023 report indicate:

- Approximately 16 percent of adult Pennsylvanians engaged in some form of online gambling last year;
- The most popular form of online gaming is sports betting; and
- Those who gamble both online and offline tend to gamble more and are more likely to exhibit problem gambling behaviors, followed by online-exclusive gamblers, and then

offline-exclusive gamblers.

Gambling, even through legal avenues, becomes a problem when individuals begin to develop strained relationships with loved ones, borrow money to gamble, gamble to experience a high or feeling, and miss work, school, or other activities and obligations in order to gamble. These behaviors can have a serious impact on a person's financial, physical, and mental health. Other symptoms of problem gambling include trying to hide or lying about gambling, using gambling as an escape to avoid dealing with other problems, and feeling like the habit is out of control but being unable to stop.

"Since the expansion of gaming to include online gambling and sports wagering, there is greater access to gambling which in turn increases the number of individuals who may develop a gambling disorder," said **Elizabeth Lanza, Director of Compulsive and Problem Gambling for the PGCB**. "Therefore, the PGCB has not only implemented additional self-exclusion avenues, we have implemented a robust online [Self-Exclusion Program](#) system that provides individuals 24/7 access to enroll in the Board's voluntary self-exclusion programs. We also require operators to offer all online players the ability to gamble within their means by setting their own time or spending limits to promote responsible gaming practices."

More information on the PGCB's Self-Exclusion programs, along with ways to identify a gambling problem within an individual, can be found through the agency's special [website](#) that is specific to its efforts in compulsive and problem gaming.

"Through collaboration with our valued partners, the Pennsylvania Lottery is committed to raising public awareness of problem gambling, but also providing tools and resources to players who may be suffering from gambling-related harms," said **Pennsylvania Lottery Executive Director Drew Svitko**. "We encourage any individuals participating in any type of gambling to do so responsibly. If someone is experiencing a problem with gambling, there are resources available across the Commonwealth, including the 1-800-GAMBLER helpline, which the Lottery helps to fund. Remember that when choosing to gamble, it should be kept fun and as a source of entertainment."

Individuals seeking compulsive or problem gambling treatment can call Pennsylvania's helpline at 1-800-GAMBLER (1-800-426-2537). This helpline is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to connect callers with local resources in their community. A [live chat option](#) is also available online or via text message at 1-800-522-4700 for those seeking help who may not be comfortable speaking to a helpline operator.

Throughout the month of March, DDAP, PA Lottery, PGCB, and CCGP will be providing opportunities for individuals to receive information on available problem gambling resources, including:

- March 18 from 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM in the East Wing Rotunda of the Capitol; and
- March 27 from 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM in the [Olmstead Building](#) on the Penn State Harrisburg campus.

For more information on the Shapiro Administration's problem gambling resources, visit [ddap.pa.gov](http://ddap.pa.gov).

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