



Alan Levine
Secretary

DHH NEWS

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National Problem Gambling Awareness Week Begins March 1

Baton Rouge – A 2008 study conducted for the Department of Health and Hospitals revealed as many as 100,000 Louisiana citizens struggle with problem gambling every day. As the nation's economic crisis deepens, that number may grow even larger as people find themselves tempted to address financial difficulties by gambling.

To help raise awareness about Louisiana's services for those experiencing problems with gambling, Gov. Bobby Jindal has declared the week of March 1, 2009 as Problem Gambling Awareness Week. The movement coincides with a national effort taking place.

"Problem gambling is a serious health issue," said Department of Health and Hospitals Secretary Alan Levine. "Roughly three percent of Louisiana's adults will find themselves having some problems with gambling in their lifetime."

The 2008 Louisiana Study on Problem Gambling also found that 50 percent of 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th grade students have engaged in some form of gambling, most of them in the previous year. The study is used for determining if gambling as a whole is spreading statewide or is concentrated in certain areas, as well as identifying areas of the state where youth are at risk for developing problem gambling addictions.

"Pathological gambling is often called the 'hidden addiction' because gamblers don't exhibit the external physical symptoms of alcoholism or drug addiction, but they do suffer social, family and financial problems as a result of their gambling," said Office for Addictive Disorders Assistant Secretary Michael Duffy. "Our counselors can help people cope with these issues."

"Like others diseases, it's helpful to address the problem in the earlier stages," Duffy said. "If you are feeling guilty about gambling or using gambling to help with a financial problem, I encourage you to contact the Gamblers' Helpline and contact a counselor for a free assessment."

A toll-free helpline (1-877-770-7867) is available to people with gambling problems. It handled over 2,400 calls for help last year. DHH also manages a Web site aimed at preventing problem gambling among youth at www.thegamble.org.

Louisiana was one of the first states to have a publicly funded residential treatment center for compulsive gamblers, called CORE: Center for Recovery, in Shreveport. The state also offers a full range of counseling and treatment programs for problem and compulsive gambling free of charge to Louisiana citizens.

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The Office for Addictive Disorders promotes and supports healthy lifestyles for individuals, families and communities by maintaining a comprehensive and accessible system of prevention and treatment services as part of a fully integrated health care system. For more information about problem gambling, please visit www.helpforgambling.org.

The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals serves to protect and promote health statewide and to ensure access to medical, preventive and rehabilitative services for all state citizens. To learn more about DHH or Louisiana Health First, visit <http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov>.

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