



National Problem Gambling Helpline: Call or Text 1-800-GAMBLER or visit 1800gamblerchat.org

June 11, 2025

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Defense
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Christopher Coons
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations
Committee, Subcommittee on Defense
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman McConnell and Ranking Member Coons,

On behalf of the following 29 national, state, and local organizations who support mitigating problem gambling harm, we urge you to address the lack of research around the issue of gambling addiction in the military and veteran community. As you begin to work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Defense Appropriations bill, we ask that you consider including gambling addiction as an eligible research topic in the Peer-Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP) to support service members and their families.

Approximately 7.5-10.5 million Americans experience the clinical behavioral health condition of gambling addiction, with servicemembers experiencing the disorder at a 2x higher rate than civilians.^{1, 2} Risk factors for turning from recreational gambling to gambling addiction include being male, between the ages of 18 to 29 years old, tendency for high risk taking, as well as struggling with high stress, depression and PTSD.^{3, 4, 5} Unfortunately, this behavioral health condition can have life altering consequences if a servicemember does not receive treatment including bankruptcy, divorce, homelessness, substance use disorder, or, in the more serious cases, death by suicide with a rate significantly higher than those without a gambling problem.^{6, 7, 8} In particular, rates of lifetime homelessness is six times higher among veterans who had problematic

¹ *FAQs: What is problem gambling?*. National Council on Problem Gambling. (n.d.). <https://www.ncpgambling.org/help-treatment/faqs-what-is-problem-gambling/>

² Van der Maas, M., & Nower, L. (2021). Gambling and military service: Characteristics, comorbidity, and problem severity in an epidemiological sample. *Addictive Behaviors*, 114, 106725. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2020.106725>

³ Mishra, S., Lalumière, M. L., & Williams, R. J. (2010). Gambling as a form of risk-taking: Individual differences in personality, risk-accepting attitudes, and behavioral preferences for risk. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 49(6), 616–621. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2010.05.032>

⁴ Moreira, D., Azeredo, A., & Dias, P. (2023). Risk Factors for Gambling Disorder: A Systematic Review. *Journal of gambling studies*, 39(2), 483–511. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-023-10195-1>

⁵ Grubbs, J. B., Chapman, H., & Shepherd, K. A. (2019). Post-traumatic stress and gambling related cognitions: Analyses in inpatient and online samples. *Addictive behaviors*, 89, 128–135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2018.09.035>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Karlsson, A., & Håkansson, A. (2018). Gambling disorder, increased mortality, suicidality, and associated comorbidity: A longitudinal nationwide register study. *Journal of behavioral addictions*, 7(4), 1091–1099. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.7.2018.112>

⁸ Miedel SF, Peters J, Büchel C. Altered Neural Reward Representations in Pathological Gamblers Revealed by Delay and Probability Discounting. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2012;69(2):177–186. doi:10.1001/archgenpsychiatry.2011.1552

gambling, and an estimated 40% of those seeking treatment for a gambling addiction have made a suicide attempt.^{9 10} Gambling addiction carries an enormous cost burden with an estimated \$14 billion in social costs, related to healthcare costs, legal fees, bankruptcy, and job losses.¹¹

Despite the high prevalence and risk of gambling addiction amongst our service members and veterans, there is a lack of comprehensive research on how to best treat, intervene, and prevent this mental health issue within the military population. Congress has acknowledged the need for better support for our service members with gambling disorders. In the FY2019 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress mandated that gambling disorder screening occur for service members. In addition, the below signees, who range from the National Council on Problem Gambling to its state affiliate chapters and a number of its industry partners, have been working tirelessly to address the issue of problem gambling harm in the military. To build off these efforts, adding gambling addiction as an eligible topic under the PRMRP will address the gap in research on best ways to support servicemembers with gambling addiction. **For these reasons, we urge the committee to include gambling addiction as an eligible research topic in the program in Fiscal Year 2026.**

We would like to thank the committee for its support of critical issues impacting our service members mental and physical health. Strong bipartisan support for gambling addiction research for improved screening, treatment, and recovery will allow for lifesaving efforts for many of your constituents who have chosen to serve our country and their families. We look forward to working with you in FY26 to bolster this support, which will make a profound difference for the millions of Americans and their families impacted by gambling addiction.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

National Council on Problem Gambling and the below signees

⁹ Kausch O. Suicide attempts among veterans seeking treatment for pathological gambling. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2003 Sep;64(9):1031-8. doi: 10.4088/jcp.v64n0908. PMID: 14628978.

¹⁰ Stefanovics, E. A., Potenza, M. N., & Tsai, J. (2024). Prevalence and Clinical Characteristics of Recreational and At-Risk/Problematic Gambling Among Low-Income US Veterans: Results from the National Veteran Homeless and Other Poverty Experiences (NV-HOPE) Study. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 40(2), 915-935.

¹¹ *FAQs: What is problem gambling?*. National Council on Problem Gambling. (n.d.). <https://www.ncpgambling.org/help-treatment/faqs-what-is-problem-gambling/>

State Affiliates

Alabama Council on Problem Gambling & Gaming
Arizona Council on Compulsive Gambling
Arkansas Problem Gambling Council
California Council on Problem Gambling
Council on Compulsive Gambling of Pennsylvania
Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling
Delaware Council on Gambling Problems
Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling
Illinois Council on Problem Gambling
Indiana Council on Problem Gambling
Louisiana Association on Compulsive Gambling
Maine Council on Problem Gambling
Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling
Mississippi Council on Problem and Compulsive Gambling
Nebraska Council on Problem Gambling
North Carolina Council of Problem Gambling
New York Council on Problem Gambling
Oklahoma Association on Problem Gambling and Gaming
Oregon Council on Problem Gambling
Problem Gambling Coalition of Colorado
Problem Gambling Network of Ohio
Texas Coalition on Problem Gambling
Virginia Council on Problem Gambling
Wyoming Council on Problem Gambling

Industry Partners

BetMGM
FanDuel Group
MGM Resorts International