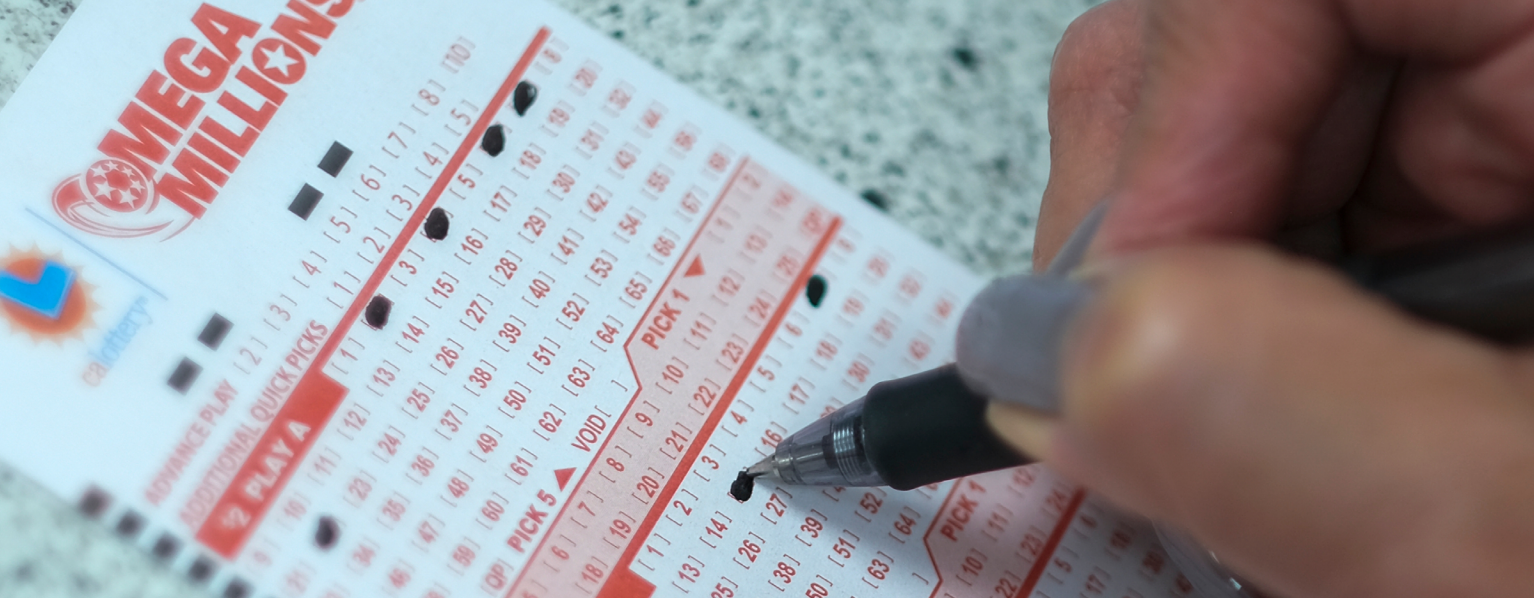


October 2024

Gambling and Associated Health Risks in California

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SUMMARY

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- > Of 7.2 million California adults who reported gambling in the past year, 6.7% (488,000) reported they had symptoms of problem gambling.
- > Adults who reported any gambling in the past year also reported other types of behaviors associated with increased risk of poor health outcomes, including binge drinking (24.4%), smoking (7.2%), use of e-cigarettes or vapes (6.4%), and substance use (2.4%).
- > Nearly one-fourth (24.9%) of adults with symptoms of problem gambling also reported experiencing serious psychological distress in the past year, compared with 13.5% of gambling adults without symptoms of a gambling problem.

Summary: This fact sheet uses the 2023 Gambling Module of the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) data to examine gambling in California and associated health behaviors and risks to inform future regulatory approaches and public health interventions.



1 in 4 (7.2 million)

California adults had gambled in the past year.

BACKGROUND

Certain gambling activities are currently permitted in California, such as tribal casinos, card rooms, lotteries, betting on horse racing, and charitable gaming.¹ Recent state propositions or measures to legalize additional forms of gambling – including online and sports betting – were proposed in 2022 and 2024 but failed.²

The rising opportunities for online and sports gambling has been accompanied by concerns of a potential increase in problem gambling. Problem gambling is defined as gambling that negatively impacts various aspects of a person's life.³ In addition, problem gambling can lead to, and is related to, other health behaviors such as smoking and binge drinking that contribute to poor health and well-being.⁴ California established the Office of Problem Gambling under the state Department of Public Health to provide information and resources for preventing and reducing the impacts of problem gambling.

This fact sheet uses the 2023 Gambling Module of the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) data to examine gambling in California and associated health behaviors and risks to inform future regulatory approaches and public health interventions. The Gambling Module is a new set of questions in the 2023 CHIS.

Gambling in California

Data from the 2023 CHIS show that 1 in 4 (7.2 million) California adults had gambled in the past year.

Men were more likely than women to have gambled in the past year (28.1% vs. 21.7%) (see Appendix, Exhibit A1). Young adults ages 18–24 were least likely to report gambling in the past year (17.6%), while adults ages 50–64 were the most likely to report gambling in the past year (29.1%) when comparing by adult age groups.



Among racial or ethnic groups, a higher percentage of American Indian and Alaska Native adults (40.4%), Black or African American adults (34.0%), and adults who identify with two or more races (32.2%) reported gambling compared to white adults (24.8%), Asian adults (19.9%), and the general adult population (24.8%).

Adults who worked full time were more likely to report gambling in the past year (27.5%) than adults who worked part time (19.6%) or adults who were unemployed but looking for work (19.0%).

Veterans were more likely than non-veterans to report gambling in the past year (32.0% vs. 24.4%).

Gambling and Behaviors Associated With Poor Health Outcomes

Adults who reported gambling in the past year were also more likely to report other behaviors associated with increased risk of poor health outcomes (see Appendix, Exhibit A2):

- 7.2% were current smokers, compared with 4.4% of adults who did not report gambling.
- 6.4% were current e-cigarette users, compared with 4.5% who did not report gambling.
- 24.4% reported binge drinking in the past month, compared with 15.7% who did not report gambling.
- 2.4% used substances like methamphetamine, heroine, or non-physician directed prescription drugs, compared with 1.2% who did not report gambling.

Problem Gambling

While most individuals who participate in gambling activities do not experience any health or financial issues, certain individuals may be at risk of problem gambling or gambling behaviors that can be damaging to a person or their family, which often has negative consequences in the individual's daily life.

Among California adults who had gambled in the past 12 months:

- 1.6% (112,000) reported that they needed help with living expenses from friends, family members, or public assistance programs because of gambling.
- 3.8% (274,000) reported that they had kept their friends or family from knowing how much they gambled.
- 4.7% (341,000) reported feeling restless, irritable, or anxious when trying to quit or cut down on gambling.

In all, 6.7% (488,000) of California adults who had gambled in the past 12 months reported signs of problem gambling.

Problem Gambling and Mental Health

Problem gambling can be emotionally difficult for an individual. Individuals may experience psychological distress or unpleasant emotions or feelings that can disrupt daily life experiences.⁵

- 29.0% of adults who became restless, irritable, or anxious when trying to quit or cut down on gambling also reported symptoms of serious psychological distress in the past year, compared to 13.5% of adults who did not experience restlessness, irritability, or anxiety when trying to quit or cut down on gambling.
- More adults who kept their family and friends from knowing about their gambling experienced serious psychological distress



Among gambling adults with any of the listed symptoms of problem gambling,

1 in 4 (24.9%)

reported experiencing serious psychological distress in the past year, compared to 13.5% of gambling adults without symptoms of problem gambling.

compared to adults who did not keep their gambling from family or friends (24.7% vs. 13.9%).

- 38.8% of adults who sought help from family or friends because of financial trouble caused by gambling reported experiencing serious psychological distress, compared to 13.9% of adults who did not experience financial trouble.

Among gambling adults with any of the above symptoms of problem gambling, 24.9% reported experiencing serious psychological distress in the past year, compared to 13.5% of gambling adults without symptoms of problem gambling.

28.2%

of gambling adults with any symptoms of problem gambling reported seeing a health care provider to discuss their mental health or alcohol or drug use in the past year.

Despite the importance of seeking professional help when experiencing emotional or mental health issues, data show the following for gambling adults with problem gambling:

- Only 27.6% of adults who became restless, irritable, or anxious when trying to quit or cut down on gambling saw any health care provider to discuss their mental health or alcohol or drug use in the past year.
- Only 32.9% of adults who kept their family or friends from knowing about their gambling saw any health care provider about their mental health or alcohol or drug use in the past year.
- Only 18.4% of adults who sought financial help from family or friends because of their gambling saw any health care provider about their mental health or alcohol or drug use in the past year.

Overall, only 28.2% of gambling adults with any symptoms of problem gambling reported

seeing a health care provider to discuss their mental health or alcohol or drug use in the past year.

Data Sources and Methods

In this fact sheet, gambling is defined as engaging in casino games, playing the lottery or scratch-offs, betting on sports or fantasy leagues, bingo, lotería, and online games like slots or card games. The questions included in the 2023 CHIS Gambling Module can be found at https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/2024-05/chis-2023-cawi-v.3.04-15may2024-adult-questionnaire_clean.pdf.

The 2023 CHIS Gambling Module includes questions adopted from the Alcohol Use Disorder and Associated Disabilities Interview Schedule (AUDADIS-IV) symptoms, and criteria in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)* for Pathological Gambling (PD), which helps identify individuals who may be experiencing signs of problem gambling.⁵

For this fact sheet, respondents who reported gambling in the past year and who responded “Yes” to any of the gambling questions related to withdrawal, lying, or borrowing money were considered to be experiencing symptoms of problem gambling.

Serious psychological distress was determined using the Kessler 6 scale. A K6 score of 13 or higher was considered serious psychological distress.

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Todd Hughes, Susan H. Babey, PhD, and Andrew Juhnke of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research for their thoughtful reviews of this fact sheet. We would also like to thank Jason Kwan and Joncarlo Montenegro of the CHPR Statistical Unit for their statistical analysis and assistance.

For information and resources, visit the Office of Problem Gambling, California Department of Public Health: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OPG>.



The California Health Interview Survey covers a wide array of health-related topics, including health insurance coverage, health status and behaviors, and access to health care. It is based on interviews conducted continuously throughout the year with respondents from more than 20,000 California households. CHIS interviews were offered in English, Spanish, Chinese (both Mandarin and Cantonese), Vietnamese, Korean, and Tagalog. CHIS is designed with complex survey methods requiring analysts to use complex survey weights in order to provide accurate variance estimates and statistical testing. CHIS is a collaboration of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, the California Department of Public Health, the California Department of Health Care Services, and the Public Health Institute. For other information about CHIS, visit chis.ucla.edu.

Endnotes

- 1 California Department of Justice. (n.d.) Bureau of Gambling Control. <https://oag.ca.gov/gambling/game>. Accessed on August 1, 2024.
- 2 Gedye G. 2022. Your Guide to Sports Betting and Everything Else to Know About Gambling in California. Cal Matters. <https://calmatters.org/explainers/sports-betting-california/>
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- 4 Butler N, Quigg Z, Bates R, Sayle M, Ewart H. 2020. Gambling With Your Health: Associations Between Gambling Problem Severity and Health Risk Behaviors, Health and Wellbeing. *Journal of Gambling Studies* 36: 527–538. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-019-09902-8>
- 5 Gebauer L, LaBrie R, Shaffer H. 2010. Optimizing DSM-IV-TR Classification Accuracy: A Brief Biosocial Screen for Detecting Current Gambling Disorders Among Gamblers in the General Household Population. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 55(2): 59–114. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1177/070674371005500204>

ISSN 2691-7475

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FS2024-3
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Editor-in-Chief: Ninez A. Ponce, PhD, MPP



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