

Latino Perspectives on Gambling

The Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance (NPGA) approached CLUES, a provider of behavioral health and human services to Latinos in Minnesota and asked them to bring together individuals from the Latino community for a roundtable discussion to share insights with NPGA about gambling and problem gambling in their community. Eleven individuals met as a group on June 29, 2007 with a facilitator and recorder from CLUES. They discussed how gambling has affected their lives, their families and the community. The following presents a synopsis of what was said and learned as a result of this meeting.

Views among Hispanics about compulsive gambling

- Seen by some as a way to escape from financial problems, loneliness and other problems; also as a way to get easy money and/or to fill a sense of emptiness
- Some younger Hispanics do not see it as a problem – seen as a way to have fun, having no effect on them
- Drawn to gambling by the media
- How a person feels about gambling depends on how they view themselves within American culture and the influences of other cultures
- Some clients in treatment for alcohol and other drugs believe, according to a roundtable participant, “since I don’t waste my money on alcohol or drugs, I can waste it on gambling.”
- There is a lack of awareness in the community about gambling as a problem
- Gambling happens when there is no structure
- Casinos make gambling more attractive and acceptable by having buffets and music – some even have Latin musicians which pulls more Latinos into the casinos
- Marketing by casinos to younger Hispanics as they come of age, and experience early wins, makes it easy for gambling to become a habit; casinos know this and use propaganda – providing easy access with their free bus rides to the casino, music, food, etc.
- Gas stations with lotto and scratch cards attract Hispanics to gambling – access is very easy to gas stations
- Some Hispanic gamblers use God as an excuse – “God wants me to win.”

Is compulsive gambling a problem in the community?/How does it affect the family?

- Some report that gambling is a problem and that problems are on the rise
- It is a growing problem among those Hispanics who are not well informed and those from older generations
- Younger people are tempted by the notion of finding or receiving easy money
- Traditionally it has been more of a problem among men, but the problem is growing among women too
- One participant, a probation officer, reported that some of his clients who have drinking problems also experience gambling problems when on probation because they are not allowed to drink alcohol while on probation and gambling is their way to cope with the stress of that prohibition
- Because gambling is part of the culture in their home countries, some Hispanic families have no awareness that it can be a problem
- “It is also a chain with gambling within the family from grandparents, to parents to their children.”
- Domestic abuse can be related to gambling among Hispanic men who gamble and then do not provide money for the family and household
- One participant related the story of a family that raises money in order to gamble and whose members only want presents of money – they get angry if they do not receive cash presents
- Some Hispanics do not admit when they have a gambling problem
- Families are important support groups, but sometimes the gambler’s fellow gamblers become their “family”

Knowledge of available resources

- While helplines exist, there are not enough resources for Hispanics in their own language – some new immigrant families come to the US and do not know how to speak, read or write in English.
- A participant with a client in treatment reported that the client had looked but not found any resources about gambling issues
- Resources in Spanish cover depression, other health issues and alcohol, but nothing on gambling

Recommendations

- Mental health and chemical health counselors who do assessments/screenings or intakes for clients in treatment do not ask questions that would catch gambling problems
- More marketing to Hispanics – information about gambling problems
- More resources about gambling geared to the Hispanic population in Minnesota – raise awareness of the problems and educate
- Have Hispanic people who have had gambling problems volunteer to give talks and presentations
- Provide an awareness video for Hispanic audiences
- Churches, restaurants and other businesses can provide information in Spanish to the Hispanic population about finding help and organizations where they can find treatment for or counseling about problem gambling – these should also be on billboards and in bathrooms of casinos – said one participant, “It should be the responsibility of the casinos to provide information to the gamblers on the effects of gambling.”
- There should be a group, like AA, for Hispanic gamblers that includes trained mental health and chemical dependency counselors
- Use the media to illustrate the issue of problem gambling and promote places that can help with this problem – public service announcements on radio and TV as well as videos and brochures can communicate this information
- Leaders in various Hispanic communities within Minnesota can help raise awareness and educate about problem gambling and its effects
- Raise awareness in the family as to how gambling affects the children of problem gamblers
- Schools can create awareness of problem gambling and can incorporate messages into curriculum topics
- Hospitals, clinics and public and private organizations can pass along helpful information to the Hispanic population
- Northstar should find out how many Hispanics in MN have, or are affected by gambling problems so they will know where to help provide necessary services
- Find qualified and trained people to help with the Hispanic community, fill gaps in helping people – call casinos to see if they have information about helping people
- Provide information in Spanish and in a simple, readable format that is culturally specific
- Promote prevention awareness through ads in Spanish and promote to all age groups
- Provide funding to train people to help in the community
- Form a committee to recommend ways to help the Latino community
- Develop screening tools
- Develop a system where they can limit time spent in casinos
- Raise the age to 21 for entering casinos
- Create more problem gambling support groups
- Work with NPGA and utilize what they have to offer