

Southeast Asian Perspectives on Gambling

Representatives from agencies and organizations serving Southeast Asians living in Minnesota took part in a discussion of their perspectives on gambling. In addition to representatives from multicultural agencies, there were representatives from the Lao, Vietnamese and Cambodian communities in Minnesota. A total of six representatives met with a facilitator and recorder from the Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance (NPGA) on December 8, 2006. Below is a summary of the discussion.

Why this meeting/discussion?

Because NPGA addresses problem gambling and its affects throughout Minnesota, it is important for Northstar to reach out to and be inclusive of all cultural groups. Prior to this meeting, there had been no formal introductions between Northstar and representatives of Southeast Asian communities in Minnesota.

What are we trying to learn?

The goal of this roundtable discussion was to ask Southeast Asian community representatives about the impact, both positive and negative, of gambling on their communities; to identify communities' needs and learn if they are being met; and to identify any gaps in services. Further, Northstar hoped, through this discussion to learn what services are currently provided to these communities to avoid service duplication; identify possible areas of collaboration and discuss how to proceed collaboratively; and finally, to identify potential funding sources for needed services.

Topics covered: gambling in Southeast Asian communities; prevalence; inducements; impact of problem gambling in their communities; barriers to obtaining help; effective approaches; and recommendations.

Gambling in Minnesota's Southeast Asian Communities

- History of gambling in their countries of origin (soldiers gambled when not fighting; other people gambled on animal competitions – chickens, water buffalo, fish, crickets)
- Gambling is a feature of New Year's celebrations and funerals (attendees stay up all night)
- Many Southeast Asians participate in more than one form of gambling (e.g. lottery, casinos, sports betting) and do so for fun and within their means
- Gambling is a social activity and tends to be self-limiting, but with 24-hour casinos, some gamble in isolation
- Most gamble, but only using "extra" money
- When they gamble, it's as a group, for social interaction; being part of a group also means that they can borrow money from others when they run out
- Those who are problem gamblers are concerned about "losing face" in their community
- Leaders in Minnesota's Southeast Asian communities want to help decrease problem gambling in their communities

Prevalence – lacking concrete data, the roundtable participants share the following observations about gambling prevalence in their communities

- Problem gambling is a hidden or secret problem
- What they are seeing is "the tip of the iceberg." There are many more problem gamblers in their communities, but they do not seek services
- Problem gambling is a serious problem in their communities; among the most serious problems facing their communities

Inducements – roundtable participants believe that Southeast Asians are disproportionately represented among casino patrons because:

- Casinos: are attractive places where they feel welcome, even if they do not speak English; offer inexpensive food and the opportunity to be winners; advertise and promote gaming in Southeast Asian communities; and send buses to shuttle them (for free) from their communities to casinos
- Southeast Asians see more positives than negatives arising from gambling

Impact of problem gambling on Southeast Asian Communities in Minnesota

- Financial problems – some lose money that was to pay for food, housing and other basic needs
- Family and community resources can be stretched when people lose money gambling
- Problem gambling is seen as a way to avoid, or a manifestation of, an underlying problem – isolation, depression, poverty, inability to speak English or other social adjustment problems and/or to escape from the pain of being a refugee or immigrant
- Anger and verbal and/or physical violence can come from conflicts that arise as a result of gambling
- Possibility of family dissolution
- The community stigmatizes problem gamblers/problem gamblers feel shame

Barriers to obtaining help

- Shame/fear of losing face
- Denial that there is a problem
- Lack of awareness of the problem
- Lack of awareness of available services for problem gamblers and their families
- Not a cultural norm to seek help from social services
- Not enough resources in the community to address problem gambling; Asian social service agencies have very limited resources and are being asked to do more with less and less money

Effective approaches

- Use non-traditional approaches – Southeast Asians report that the medical model does not work for them, particularly since some in the community do not speak English and treatment is language-dependent
- Explain that problem gambling is a mental health, not a financial issue
- Let them know that they can get help
- Western/American minds need to take into account the differences between Eastern and Western minds/sensibilities

Recommendations for NPGA and Minnesota regarding Southeast Asian communities

- Maintain communication with communities; look for opportunities to cooperate and collaborate – do not attempt to initiate efforts focusing on Southeast Asian communities without input/assistance/partnership from within the communities
- Assist communities with public awareness
- Encourage community members to seek assistance from existing services/use existing resources (Gambling Helpline, gambling treatment)
- Advocate for Southeast Asian communities by communicating communities' needs to representatives of the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the gambling industry
- Help secure continuing, not one-time funding – help with getting positive responses/funding from DHS, the legislature, gaming industry – one time funding “is like giving us a car, but no gas to drive it”
- Southeast Asian communities should receive a proportion of gambling revenues to help respond to problem gambling
- Understand that Southeast Asians are a unique population and current services do not work for them – advocate for non-traditional services
- Southeast Asian response to problem gambling in their communities cannot be the same as the response/approach used in mainstream society