



# Reflections on the Treatment of Sports Bettors with Gambling Disorder

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UCLA Gambling Studies Program

Four Directions Conference

Fall 2023

9/21/2023

# Goals and Objectives

- Illustrate how the expansion of sports betting has impacted state public health issues related to gambling behaviors
- Develop three techniques and strategies for screening and assessment of sports bettors who may be at risk for gambling disorder
- Name three treatment strategies that should be applied to sports bettors with gambling disorder
- Form future strategies for advocacy and community engagement around the issue of sports betting

# Discuss



# Case Example: Greg

- Greg is a 39 year old male who has been a patient of mine since 2018
- Alcohol Use Disorder, Anxiety Disorder (Generalized and Social)
- Responded very well to treatment and recovery story remarkable

# Greg

- Moved to New York in 2019 for a new career, started a family, bought a home
- Continues to be seen remotely every few months for medication, brief therapy and support

# Greg

- New York launches online sports betting in January 2022
- Greg starts “playing” during NFL Playoffs and Super Bowl
- Starts out \$40-80 per week
  - Single game bets, no “exotics”
  - Watches the games he bets on
  - Wife “kinda” aware

# Greg

- March Madness 2022 / MLB Baseball Season
- Greg continues to “casually” bet and wins a 5-leg parlay = ~\$2,500
- Betting frequency increases, betting amounts increase, betting types become more varied
  - “Just really exciting”

# Greg

- By August, Greg has:
  - Spent (or lost?) \$2500 + \$5000 of his own money leading him to
  - Lie
  - Chase
  - Preoccupied
  - Not able to cut down
  - More anxiety



# Greg

- By September 2022,
  - Wife discovers expenses and relationship nearly ends
  - Emotional pain escalates to near suicidality
  - Alcohol use returns
- Tells Dr. Fong during the last 30 secs of regular appointment

# Greg's Mindset about Gambling

- Not an escape
- Action-oriented: Increase Dopamine
  - Enhanced the entertainment experience
- Goal-oriented: To Make Money
- Liked competition: Show off "knowledge"
- Chasing losses wasn't to cover finances but to "get money back from corporations"

# Issues Raised

- What were his vulnerabilities?
  - AUD or the environment?
- What could have been done to prevent this?
- How could have sought help sooner?
- Treatment principles
  - Will tried and true treatment strategies work?
  - What needs to be done differently?

# Language

- Sports Wagering
- Sports Betting
- Sports Gambling
- Sports Gaming
- Sports entertainment
- Words baked into everyday usage
  - Parlay, over/under, bet. . . .

# The California Story

# California Prevalence Study (2006)

n=7,121 respondents, 18 years and older

Lifetime:

Problem gambling 2.2%

Pathological gambling 1.5%

Past-Year:

Pathological Gambling 1.3%

Highest Risk:

African-Americans, Disabled, Unemployed,  
Men

# Current State of Gambling in California

- Cardrooms:
  - 84 licenses (1771 tables)
- Lottery:
  - \$8 billion in sales (2021)
- Tribal Casinos
  - 62 casinos
- Horse Racing
  - Online, off-track, in-person

GAMING BY THE NUMBERS

# California

California is home to gaming suppliers and tribal gaming operators that support jobs for more than 124,000 Californians and \$3.45 billion in tax revenue and tribal revenue share payments annually for all levels of government. Tribal revenue sharing funds problem gambling prevention programs and supports local governments across California.



- |                |               |                |                  |
|----------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| Alpine         | Corning       | Lakeside       | Rohnert Park     |
| Alturas        | Covelo        | Laytonville    | San Jacinto      |
| Anza           | Crescent City | Lemoore        | San Pablo        |
| Auberry        | El Cajon      | Lincoln        | Santa Ynez       |
| Bishop         | Friant        | Loleta         | Smith River      |
| Blue Lake      | Geyserville   | Middletown     | Susanville       |
| Brooks         | Havasu Lake   | Nice           | Temecula         |
| Burney         | Highland      | Oroville       | Thermal          |
| Cabazon        | Hoopa         | Pala           | Trinidad         |
| Campo          | Independence  | Palm Springs   | Tuolumne         |
| Cathedral City | Indio         | Pauma Valley   | Twentynine Palms |
| Coachella      | Iona          | Placerville    | Upper Lake       |
| Coarsegold     | Jackson       | Point Arena    | Valley Center    |
| Colusa         | Jamestown     | Porterville    | Wheatland        |
|                | Jamul         | Rancho Mirage  | Willits          |
|                | Klamath       | Redding        | Winterhaven      |
|                | Lakeport      | Redwood Valley | Yreka            |



**124,274**

Jobs Supported



**\$19.96 Billion**

Annual Economic Impact



**\$3.45 Billion**

Annual Tax Impact &  
Tribal Revenue Share  
Payments to Governments

\*All location data is as of Dec. 31, 2021.



# Currently Available Sports Betting in California

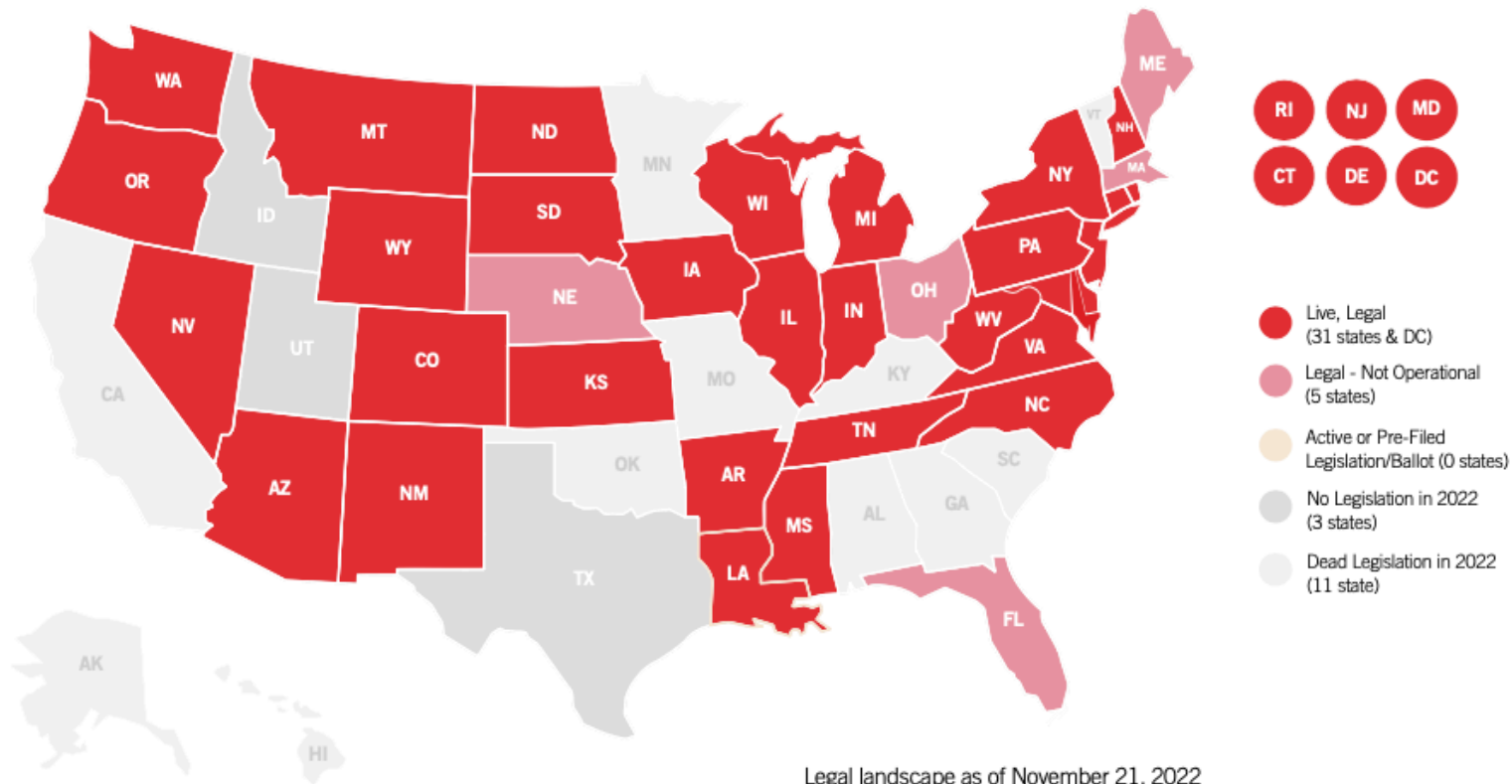
- Fantasy Sports (Regulated)
  - Daily
  - NOT Same Day Parlays
- Unregulated sports betting (online)
- Unregulated sports betting (IRL)
- Online Horse Racing Betting

# November 2022 Elections

- Two, competing propositions on the ballot
  - mobile sports betting
  - In-person, brick and mortar sports betting
- Both propositions failed
  - Why?
- What happens next ---- come 2024?

# The National Story

# U.S. Legal Sports Betting



LEARN MORE

AmericanGaming.org



AMERICAN GAMING ASSOCIATION

# What have we learned since 2018?

- Increase in calls to gambling helpline
- Robust participation when sports betting introduced (especially mobile)
- New types of bets and betting options
- Incidence and prevalence of gambling disorder -- what's changed?
- National discourse and coverage

# Trends to consider

- Emergence of same-game parlay as dominant, preferred type of bet
- Where does the tax money go and at what cost?
  - Zero sum game?
- Newfound partners / collaborators
  - Sports organizations + colleges + operators
- What is the impact of social media coverage?

THIS 25-LEG PARLAY TURNED \$1 INTO  
**\$94,543.65**

PARLAY LEGS:



- ✓ MARQUETTE MONEYLINE
- ✓ NC STATE +7.5
- ✓ CLEMSON +7.5
- ✓ BOWLING GREEN -5.5
- ✓ LIPSCOMB -1.5
- ✓ TOLDEO MONEYLINE
- ✓ VERMONT MONEYLINE
- ✓ DETROIT MERCY -8.5
- ✓ ROBERT MORRIS MONEYLINE
- ✓ FLORIDA -7.5
- ✓ LIBERTY MONEYLINE
- ✓ BUFFALO -3.5
- ✓ VILLANOVA -2.5
- ✓ TEXAS TECH +8.5
- ✓ TEXAS A&M -5.5
- ✓ TENNESSEE MONEYLINE
- ✓ VIRGINIA TECH MONEYLINE
- ✓ BOISE STATE -2.5
- ✓ SOUTH CAROLINA +15.5
- ✓ MICHIGAN STATE -5.5
- ✓ ARKANSAS STATE -8.5
- ✓ GEORGIA TECH -0.5
- ✓ BOSTON COLLEGE +8.5
- ✓ IOWA -7.5
- ✓ LOYOLA (MD) MONEYLINE

# California Gambling Education and Treatment Services (CALGETS)





# CALGETS

- Statewide, no-cost treatment
- Helpline, Outpatient, IOP, Residential
- Group Treatment
- Telehealth or in Person
- Gambler or Affected Individual
- Annually
  - 700-1000 Gamblers
  - 300-500 Affected Individuals

# CALGETS and Sports Betting

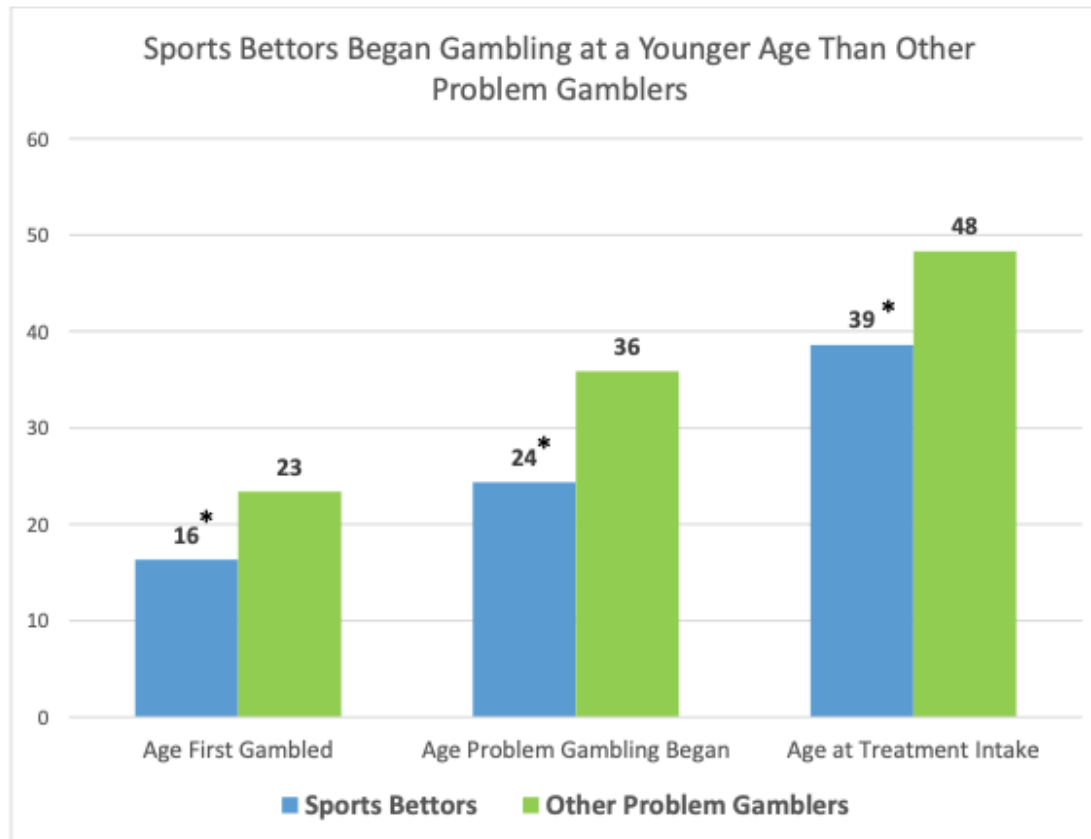
- Across all venues,
  - slot machines (44%),
  - blackjack (32%)
  - poker (27%)
  - **sports betting (22%)**were the most commonly selected gambling activities.



# CalGETS Fast Facts

## Problem Gamblers in CalGETS Treatment: Sports Bettors

June 2019



Problem gamblers who entered CalGETS outpatient treatment between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018 were asked about the types of gambling in which they engaged. Approximately 17% reported sports betting. The sports bettors were overwhelmingly male (97%, compared to 65% of all outpatient gamblers).

Sports bettors began gambling at a significantly younger age and reported that their problem gambling began, on average, a decade earlier than other gamblers in CalGETS treatment. They also entered treatment nearly a decade earlier.

Sports bettors' severity of gambling disorder is similar to that of other problem gamblers.

Sources – *Outpatient Problem Gamblers*: CalGETS Fiscal Year 2017-18 dataset, prepared for the California Department of Public Health, Office of Problem Gambling by the University of California Los Angeles Gambling Studies Program. \* Significance at  $p < .001$

In California, problem gamblers can receive no-cost treatment through CalGETS. ☎ If you or someone you know has a gambling problem, call 1-800-GAMBLER.

# Diagnostic Considerations with Sports Bettors

# Screening

- Sports betting is not specifically mentioned in commonly used problem gambling instruments
- How do we reach this population?
- Tell me about your interests in sports?
- In the last 12 months, how has betting on sports impacted your life?
- What is your relationship with sports?

# DSM-5 Gambling Disorder

- No changes in DSM-5-TR to GD
- In general, no distinction between forms of gambling
  - Gambling Disorder, Slots
  - Gambling Disorder, Poker
  - Gambling Disorder, Sports Betting
  - Gambling Disorder, Online
    - SHOULD WE DO THIS?

# Clinical Experience With Sports Bettors (at UCLA)

- Since start of 2020
  - Male
  - Educated
  - Ages 18-35
  - Caucasian
  - Loved watching sports or playing sports
  - Technologically very capable
  - Resistant / dismissive of GA
  - Supportive but absent families
  - Psychologically aware

# During intake session

## Sports Betting History:

Collect as specific information as possible













- Where / When / Why / How / Who
- Type of sports
  - Why not other sports?
- Type of bets
  - Straight, exotics
  - Long-shots vs favorites
- Sources of gambling capital
- Goals of sports betting – for what?



# Treatment Principles With Sports Bettors

- Is there a proven form of treatment for sports bettors?
  - Medications, psychotherapy, 12-step?
- What are the desired clinical outcomes?
  - Can they resume watching sports as entertainment?
- What are unique treatment strategies?
- What are possible treatment errors?

# Sports-betting-related gambling disorder: Clinical features and correlates of cognitive behavioral therapy outcomes

Gemma Mestre-Bach<sup>a</sup> , Roser Granero<sup>b c m</sup> , Bernat Mora-Maltas<sup>d m</sup> ,  
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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2022.107371> 

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## Highlights

- Sports bettors constituted a minority of patients with gambling disorder (GD).
- Older age of GD onset and higher GD severity were seen among sports bettors.
- Sports bettors showed lower likelihood of dropout compared to other gamblers.

## Background and aims

The number of patients with gambling disorder (GD) whose gambling preference is sports betting is increasing. However, their clinical profile and their responses to psychological treatments -compared to patients with other forms of gambling- have not been thoroughly studied. Therefore, the aims of this study were: (1) to compare the clinical characteristics of GD patients whose primary gambling activity was sports betting (SB+;  $n = 113$ ) with GD patients with other primary gambling activities (SB-;  $n = 1,135$ ); (2) to compare treatment outcomes (dropout and relapses) between SB + and SB- patients; and (3) to explore relationships between specific variables (GD severity, psychological distress and personality features) and treatment outcome in SB + and SB- GD patients, through correlation models and path-analysis.

## Methods

The cognitive behavioral treatment consisted of 16 weekly sessions. Personality features, psychopathology, and sociodemographic and clinical factors were assessed.

## Results

The SB + group included higher proportions of younger patients who were single and had higher educational levels, older ages of GD onset, and greater GD severities. Regarding treatment outcomes, the dropout rate was lower in the SB + group, and no between-group differences were found regarding relapse. Dropout within the SB + group was related to being unemployed, and relapse was related to being unmarried and experiencing more psychological distress.

## Discussion and conclusion

The differences between SB + and SB- GD patients suggest that GD patients with sports-betting problems may benefit from tailored therapeutic approaches.

# Treatment Principles

- No head-to-head clinical trials between modalities
- Principles of recovery
  - Focus on starting healthy self-care
    - Home
    - Health
      - Sleep, nutrition, physical movement
    - Purpose
    - Community

# Treatment Principles With Sports Bettors

- Time
  - Less driving around
- Urges / Cravings / Preoccupation
  - More centered around not accepting losses (persisting until winning)
- 12-step
  - Not as likely to accept or be interested in going

# Treatment Principles

- Must address the seduction of the enticements and offers
  - No-risk, sweat-free bets
- Use digital innovations
  - Gam-Ban
  - Mobile apps
  - Chat function
- Must identify and manage sources of financial capital (online payday loans, etc)



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# Treatment Principles

- Addressing FOMO with sports bettors
  - Replacement / substitution for sports?
  - Where can healthy dopamine release be found?
  - Challenging views on finances
  - Grit / resiliency training
    - Who teaches us how to handles losses?



# Treatment Principles

- Restoring certain aspects of sports
  - purpose,
  - Identity
  - community
  - Hope
  - “Thrill of victory and the agony of defeat”
  - Removal of sports = grief process
  - How does this get brought into therapy?

# Issues To Consider in the Future

# What happens to the rate of gambling disorder?

- Increase incidence and prevalence of problem gambling and gambling disorder
  - By how much?
    - For every 100 NEW bettors = # GD?
    - What would a 1% increase look like?
  - Most vulnerable at risk but who else could be vulnerable but we don't know about yet?
  - How much can prevention, education and responsible gambling practices keep these rates down?

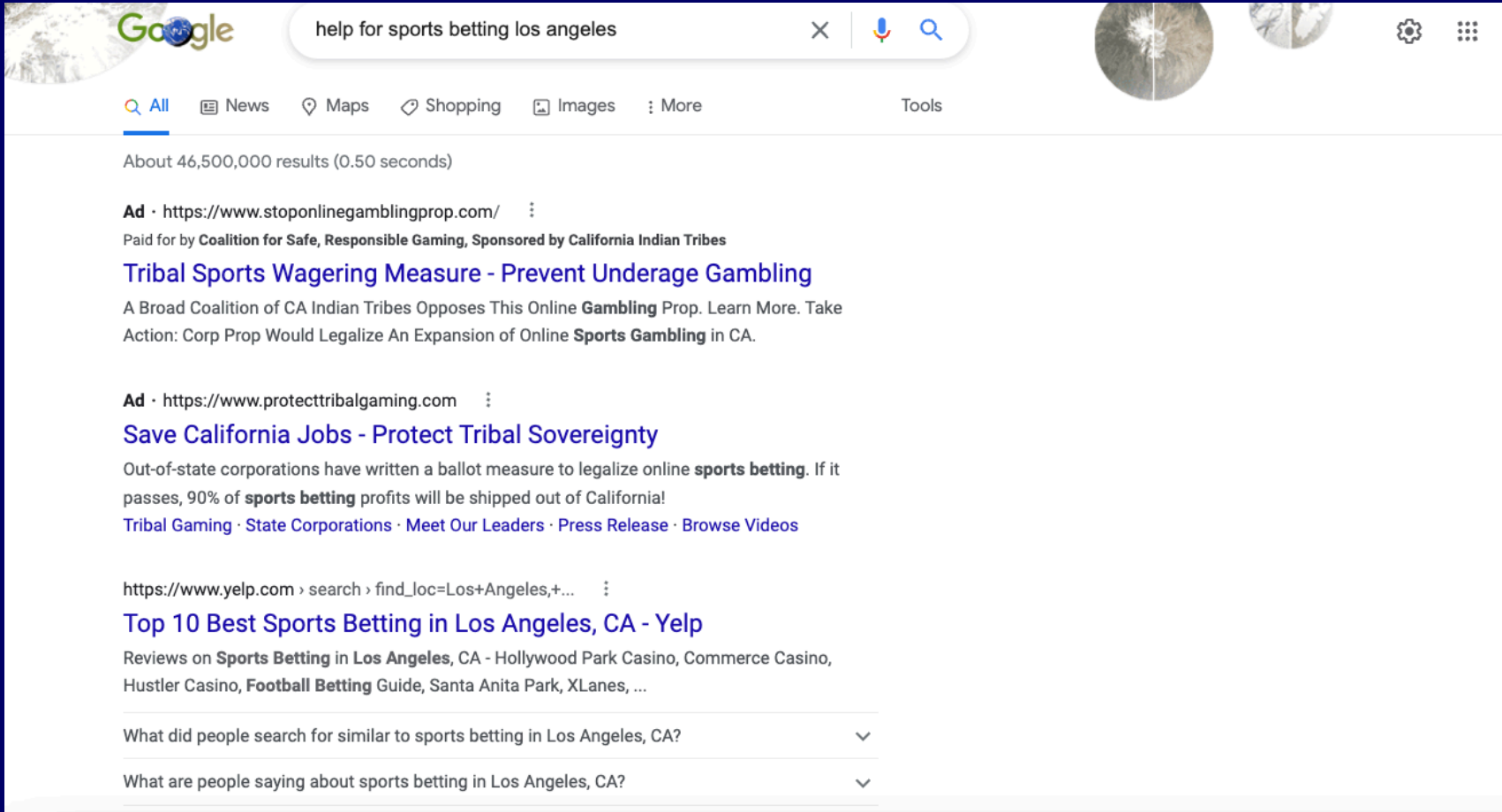
# How do you manage underage from accessing sports betting?

- Enforcement? (who is going to do that?)
- Parents / teachers / coaches?
- Containing access to digital currency?
- Impact of advertising
- Focus should be on
  - Delaying onset of betting
  - Minimizing frequency of betting
  - Lessons from Tobacco / Alcohol?

# What happens to public health with sports betting expansion?

- What are the societal costs and benefits associated with sports betting?
- What happens to overall quality of life?
  - Individuals
  - Families
  - Communities
- Which forms of sports betting are more harmful?

# “help for sports betting”



The image shows a screenshot of a Google search results page. The search bar at the top contains the text "help for sports betting los angeles". Below the search bar, there are navigation links for "All", "News", "Maps", "Shopping", "Images", and "More". The search results show approximately 46,500,000 results in 0.50 seconds. The first result is an advertisement from "https://www.stoonlinegamblingprop.com/" titled "Tribal Sports Wagering Measure - Prevent Underage Gambling". The second result is an advertisement from "https://www.protecttribalgaming.com" titled "Save California Jobs - Protect Tribal Sovereignty". The third result is from "https://www.yelp.com" titled "Top 10 Best Sports Betting in Los Angeles, CA - Yelp". At the bottom, there are two expandable sections: "What did people search for similar to sports betting in Los Angeles, CA?" and "What are people saying about sports betting in Los Angeles, CA?".

Google

help for sports betting los angeles

All News Maps Shopping Images More Tools

About 46,500,000 results (0.50 seconds)

**Ad** · <https://www.stoonlinegamblingprop.com/>

Paid for by Coalition for Safe, Responsible Gaming, Sponsored by California Indian Tribes

### Tribal Sports Wagering Measure - Prevent Underage Gambling

A Broad Coalition of CA Indian Tribes Opposes This Online **Gambling** Prop. Learn More. Take Action: Corp Prop Would Legalize An Expansion of Online **Sports Gambling** in CA.

**Ad** · <https://www.protecttribalgaming.com>

### Save California Jobs - Protect Tribal Sovereignty

Out-of-state corporations have written a ballot measure to legalize online **sports betting**. If it passes, 90% of **sports betting** profits will be shipped out of California!

[Tribal Gaming](#) · [State Corporations](#) · [Meet Our Leaders](#) · [Press Release](#) · [Browse Videos](#)

<https://www.yelp.com> › search › find\_loc=Los+Angeles,+...

### Top 10 Best Sports Betting in Los Angeles, CA - Yelp

Reviews on **Sports Betting** in **Los Angeles, CA** - Hollywood Park Casino, Commerce Casino, Hustler Casino, **Football Betting** Guide, Santa Anita Park, XLanes, ...

What did people search for similar to sports betting in Los Angeles, CA? ▾

What are people saying about sports betting in Los Angeles, CA? ▾

# Sports Betting: To Do List

1. Focus on sources of money
  - Online loan / predatory lenders
  - Teasers / Promos
  - Crossover from Financial Tech (Fin Tech)
2. Examine Impact RG Messaging
  - Gambling is NOT a way to make money
  - How to manage FOMO
  - You do NOT have special skills in predicting future events

# Sports Betting To Do List

3. Inform state legislators /regulators about what we are seeing or not seeing in clinic setting
4. Work with media to convey messaging and stories related to sports betting
5. Develop innovative ways to reach sports bettors at very early stages of problem gambling and increase demand for services (early detection)



# California Gambling Education and Treatment Services (CALGETS)

[problemgambling.ca.gov](http://problemgambling.ca.gov)



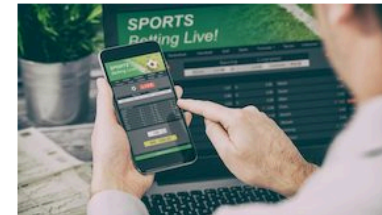
# Westside Gambling Treatment (Telehealth, California)

**WESTSIDE**  
**GAMBLING TREATMENT**

Call or email today for more information and  
to make an appointment:  
Dan Field, LCSW  
dan@westsidegambling.com  
(213) 359-7722

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Expert help for crypto/trading, sports betting and gaming addiction



## What We Offer

Westside Gambling Treatment offers high-quality, no-cost enhanced outpatient (EOP) group treatment for California residents with problem online gaming, stock/crypto trading, and sports betting behavior. With program options geared for working and non-working adults, a typical weekly schedule comprises eight hours of group programming with a single individual meeting with certified problem gambling specialist. Curriculum is based on state provided treatment manuals and includes the following topic areas:

# freefromproblemgambling.com

FREE FROM PROBLEM GAMBLING

1-800-GAMBLER (426-2537) | TEXT "SUPPORT" TO 53342 | 800GAMBLER.CHAT

## Get Help for Problem Gambling

Get Help!



# Acknowledgements

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Office of Problem Gambling

Telus

Beit T'Shuvah

Westside Gambling Treatment

UPAC

CalGETS Providers

CalGETS Supervisors

CCPG

RSBIHC

Vision y Compromiso

Friday Night Live



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