

# Seniors and Gambling

More and more frequently, seniors are spending their savings, hoping for one big payoff to compensate for their shrinking retirement income. Gambling operations cater to seniors by offering shuttle bus service, corner store scratch and pull tickets, community bingo halls, and even Internet casinos. Seniors who use their life savings to gamble can face devastating results and may feel confused or embarrassed about their problem.

## Recognizing the Problem Senior Gambler

Problem gambling can start in many ways for seniors. It can start with loss of interest in participation in normal activities with friends and family or when a senior has a lot of time on their hands. They may begin gambling to escape feelings of oppression from family or from daily responsibilities. It may become a way to fill a void of loneliness and boredom after the loss of a spouse or after retirement.

Whatever the reason, it is important to spot the signs of a problem. Watch out for the following common indicators:

- Changes in normal communications with family members
- Frequent unexplained absences
- Repeatedly borrowing money from friends and family
- Bills are overdue and being paid late
- Personality changes
- Neglect of finances and health
- Denial of gambling and refusal to talk about it
- Started gambling with a group but now gambles alone

The following is a profile of the typical Senior Gambler from British Columbia Statistics can be helpful in spotting the warning signs:

- 70 per cent suffer from chronic pain
- They gamble to create a distance from a spouse or relative or as a means of asserting independence from a controlling relationship
- They gamble to engage in a leisure activity with a spouse or as a way to make up for limited alternatives for socializing
- Have an average of 7.7 free hours per day

## Helping Senior Gamblers

Factors such as embarrassment, shame and denial often prevent older adults from seeking assistance for problem gambling. Rather than going to an outside source, seniors often prefer to entrust their concerns to family and friends.

It is important for family and friends who recognize the problem to seek out help for the senior and then stay involved in the recovery process. Many gambling support groups exist and can provide resources for recovery.