AGA Releases Revised Code of Conduct for Responsible Gaming

In conjunction with the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Gaming, the American Gaming Association (AGA) released an updated version of the document in January. Changes to the Code reflect various ways that the gaming entertainment industry has evolved during the past decade.

The Code is a pledge to employees, patrons and the public to promote responsible gaming in every aspect of the commercial casino industry, including employee training, customer education, the prevention of underage gambling, responsible alcohol service, and responsible marketing and advertising. All AGA member companies adhere to the provisions of the Code, and it has become a model for responsible gaming programs in international jurisdictions and non-member casinos across the country.

“We have always viewed the Code of Conduct as a living document – one that should, and does, adapt along with the industry – and this updated Code will continue to address responsible gaming as it relates to all aspects of our business,” AGA President and CEO Frank J. Fahrenkopf said.

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Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr., president and CEO of the AGA

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“The recognition of the Code’s 10-year anniversary and the release of this update will serve as an opportunity for gaming companies and casino properties to re-educate employees and patrons about our industry’s commitment to responsible gaming.”

When the Code was developed in 2003, it created a consistent, industrywide approach to responsible gaming, illustrating the impact the issue has on the industry’s daily operations. Throughout the past decade, it has remained as a blueprint for responsible gaming best practices.

To reflect the many ways that the gaming industry has changed during the past 10 years, the updated Code was developed by a task force of legal, regulatory, compliance, communications and marketing professionals representing AGA member companies and was approved by the AGA board of directors in October 2012.

The Code’s revisions reflect that the Internet has allowed the gaming industry to connect and communicate with employees, patrons and the community in new ways compared to a decade ago. The Code acknowledges the use of social media platforms as a vehicle for marketing, and it addresses new technologies and how they alter companies’ communications with customers. However, the Code does not address online gambling because of the specific issues and complexities it raises and the fact that it is not yet an established form of legal gambling in the U.S.

The 10th anniversary also served as an appropriate time to reacquaint the gaming industry employees and patrons and regulators with the Code’s provisions. To explain the changes to the Code, while also explaining the role the Code plays in daily operations. To commemorate the anniversary of the Code, the AGA has translated the newly updated Code brochure into Spanish and traditional Chinese.

For more information on the Code of Conduct for Responsible Gaming, or to download a copy of the new brochure, visit the AGA’s website at: http://www.americangaming.org/social-responsibility/responsible-gambling/code-conduct.
A top economic analyst, an authority in public health and mental health treatment, a longtime operations and financial leader in the gaming industry and two prestigious researchers from top-tier universities will broaden the expertise of the National Center for Responsible Gaming’s (NCRG) leadership. True to their mission, the NCRG announced in October 2012 that it has expanded its board of directors and Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) by electing three and two new members, respectively.

**Board of Directors**

To broaden the NCRG’s reach, the board of directors elected Jonathan S. Halkyard, executive vice president and chief financial officer of NV Energy; Kathleen M. Scanlan, senior advisor of special projects for the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling; and Andrew S. Zarnett, managing director for Deutsche Bank as new members.

“I’m pleased that Jonathan, Kathleen and Andrew are joining the NCRG board, as I know that they will help us to further fulfill our mission to address gambling disorders and responsible gaming from all perspectives,” said Alan Feldman, chairman of the NCRG and senior vice president of public affairs for MGM Resorts International. “Both Jonathan and Andrew bring a strategic perspective to understanding responsible gaming, and Kathy will help to guide our education initiatives that focus on the prevention and treatment of gambling disorders.”

Halkyard joined NV Energy in July 2012. Prior to this, he served as executive vice president and chief financial officer for Caesars Entertainment Corporation. During his 13 years with Caesars, he held a number of key operations and finance positions including director of finance for Harrah’s Lake Tahoe, assistant general manager of Harrah’s and Harvey’s Lake Tahoe and assistant general manager of Harrah’s Las Vegas.

Scanlan has been with the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling since 1987. There, she led the council to expand its programs and services, increase prevention efforts and grow online resources that reach minority populations. Since 2011, Scanlan’s role has been to oversee the council’s special initiatives.

Zarnett currently serves as the co-head of high yield research and an analyst in the Gaming, Lodging and Leisure High Yield Debt division at Deutsche Bank. He also is a member of the executive committee of the Leverage Debt Group and previously was a senior gaming equity analyst for the gaming, lodging and leisure division at Ladenburg Thalmann & Co.

**Scientific Advisory Board**

The NCRG’s SAB, a group of leading, independent scientists whose role is to ensure the organization follows rigorous standards in awarding grants for only the highest-quality research proposals, also added two members to its ranks: Tammy Chung, Ph.D., associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh; and Miriam Jorgensen, Ph.D., M.P.P., research director of the Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management and Policy at the University of Arizona and research director of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development. The addition of Drs. Chung and Jorgenson brings increased diversity to the SAB, as well as a new perspective on funding research to better understand youth gambling and the impact of gaming on minority populations.

Dr. Chung is a leading researcher in the field of substance abuse disorders, focusing on assessment, diagnosis and the course of these disorders in the adolescent community and treatment samples. For the past 15 years, Dr. Jorgensen’s work has primarily focused on issues of governance and economic development in Indian Country, with a concentration on the ways individual Native nations’ social and cultural characteristics affect development.

For a complete list of members of the NCRG board of directors and SAB, visit www.ncrg.org.
For almost two decades, research has been able to give the public a better understanding of what it means to gamble responsibly by eliciting a clearer glimpse into the best practices of effective responsible gaming programs. In 2012, the Ontario, Canada-based Responsible Gambling Council (RGC) launched the RG Check program to elevate the level of responsible gaming programs among the province’s commercial operators.

RG Check is a voluntary accreditation program that gives gaming companies the opportunity to have an independent assessment and endorsement of the quality of their responsible gaming program. Administered through the RGC, RG Check awards an accreditation designed to provide a comprehensive assessment of how operators in Canada measure up to the standards and assess any needs for improvement. “The focus of the RG Check program is on the relationship between the patron and the gaming venue,” RGC Executive Director Jon Kelly, Ph.D., said.

RG Check accreditation is typically a six-month venture, initiated by the gaming operator’s interest in working with the RGC. Once the gaming industry member indicates that it wants to go through the RG Check process, the first step is to have the RG Check program administrators collect information about the operator’s responsible gaming programs. From staff and patron surveys to a review of policies, the program administrators attempt to be as thorough as possible in evaluating the responsible gaming program. This information collection process also includes mock self-exclusion demonstrations at the gaming property and subsequent site visits.

Once the information is compiled, the RG Check program administrator creates a report that details the strengths and weaknesses of how the operator’s performance as measured by the Responsible Gaming Index. The index consists of eight core responsible gaming standards: corporate policies, self-exclusion, advertising and promotion, informed decision making, assisting patrons who may have problems with gambling, access to money, venue and game features and employee training. These eight standards correspond to 40 criteria – benchmarks that define each standard in detail.

After evaluation, RG Check program administrators give a copy of this report to the gaming property. Each property is allowed to submit a written response before the report is submitted to an independent accreditation board.

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The final decisions for accreditation rest with the RG Check accreditation board, which is comprised of four members who have held more prominent academic and public policy roles within the Canadian provinces. Once accredited, the gaming operator holds this accreditation award for three years, during which it must provide annual updates for compliance according to the accreditation board’s stipulations.

The RG Check program has been in development for three years, and the first accreditation was issued in 2012 to Caesars Windsor. The company believes that the independent assessment enhances its responsible gaming program, especially since it was benchmarked against international best practices.

“Achieving accreditation assists Caesars Windsor in maintaining its focus and commitment on responsible gaming,” Caesar Windsor’s Vice President of Legal and Compliance Carolyn Marcotte said. “Caesars Windsor is very proud to be the first venue to achieve this distinct accreditation.”

According to Dr. Kelly, more than 25 other gaming operators have received accreditation in 2012 through the RG Check program. For more information, visit www.rgcheck.com.

Caesars Windsor’s Lori Cowie (left), manager of legal affairs and compliance, and Carolyn Marcotte, vice president of legal affairs and compliance, accept the RG Check accreditation certificate in 2012.

The 13th Annual NCRG Conference on Gambling and Addiction
Understanding New Trends in Recovery and Research

The 13th annual NCRG Conference on Gambling and Addiction took place from September 30 to October 2, where more than 350 attendees gathered at the Sands Expo and Convention Center at the Venetian in Las Vegas to explore new trends in recovery, research and responsible gaming. This year’s NCRG Conference addressed the latest changes in health care delivery systems, the science of recovery, the use of brief interventions, the impact of Internet gambling, public and private funding issues, ways to serve the cultural needs of minority populations and more.

“This year’s NCRG Conference provided a unique opportunity for stakeholders in the fields of gambling disorders and responsible gaming from around the world to gather and discuss the latest research, share best practices, and learn from one another.”

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practices and explore real-world applications for new scientific findings,” said Alan Feldman, chairman of the NCRG and senior vice president of public affairs for MGM Resorts International. “On behalf of the NCRG, I would like to extend a special thanks to all of our sponsors for making this event possible.”

The event featured nationally renowned speakers, including Thomas McLellan, Ph.D., CEO of the Treatment Research Institute and former science advisor and deputy director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, and H. Westley Clark, Ph.D., director of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. There also was a roundtable discussion examining the issues surrounding responsible gaming best practices and regulations for Internet gambling that featured Mark Lipparelli, former chairman of the Nevada Gaming Control Board.

For this year’s event, the NCRG continued its partnership with Global Gaming Expo (G2E), co-locating once again to make it easier for attendees of both events to learn about best practices in responsible gaming. The “NCRG at G2E” sessions provided updates on how research is redefining how we diagnose, treat, study and prevent gambling disorders.

The first session addressed how treatment providers report on their use of funds and how government and the private sector evaluate the impact of treatment services. The second session showcased the research supported by the NCRG, which has led to a number of significant advancements in the field of research on gambling disorders.

Another highlight of the conference was when the NCRG proudly named Randy Stinchfield, Ph.D., L.P., associate director of the Center for Adolescent Substance Abuse Research at the University of Minnesota Medical School, the recipient of the NCRG 2012 Scientific Achievement Award in recognition of his pioneering contributions to the field of research on gambling disorders. Dr. Stinchfield was honored at an awards luncheon on Monday, October 1. To view Dr. Stinchfield’s acceptance speech, visit the NCRG’s YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/NCRGBlogTeam.

“Dr. Stinchfield is regarded by his peers as a pioneer, and his research in youth gambling, the assessment of gambling disorders and the measurement of treatment outcomes has paved the way for future studies in this growing field,” said Linda Cottler, Ph.D., M.P.H., chairwoman of the NCRG’s Scientific Advisory Board, and chair and dean’s professor of epidemiology in both the College of Public Health and Health Professions and the College of Medicine at the University of Florida.

Those who couldn’t attend the NCRG Conference can visit the NCRG’s blog, Gambling Disorders 360° at blog.ncrg.org, to read about the conference sessions and listen to audio posts from leading researchers and industry representatives.

The 14th annual NCRG Conference is scheduled for September 22-24 in Las Vegas. Updates and announcements will be available on the NCRG website at www.ncrg.org/conference.
Helping Human Resources Professionals Address Gambling Disorders in the Workplace

Gambling disorders and responsible gaming aren’t just casino issues – they’re community issues. From local companies and nonprofit organizations to government officials and civic leaders, everyone in the community has a role to play in getting educated and helping to spread the word about available resources.

To help the public better address gambling disorders and find resources for help, the National Center for Responsible Gaming (NCRG) launched the Gambling and Health publication series in conjunction with the 15th annual Responsible Gaming Education Week.

The Gambling and Health series is designed to educate specific audiences about gambling disorders and responsible gaming, as well as the resources available for those who may need help. The first edition, titled “Gambling and Health in the Workplace,” is a research-based guide for human resources (HR) and employee assistance (EA) professionals to learn about gambling disorders, encourage responsible decisions when gambling and understand practical ways to assist and refer individuals with gambling problems.

“Helping employees with addiction is an important part of health promotion in the workplace, and many EA professionals and HR managers are not as familiar with gambling disorders as they are with alcohol and drug problems,” said Alan Feldman, chairman of the NCRG and senior vice president of public affairs for MGM Resorts International. “This guide is designed with those professionals in mind as a way to bridge the gap between research and practice and equip them with the tools necessary to help them in their daily lives.”

Additionally, there is a one-page flyer for employees that outlines facts about the issue and resources to learn more about gambling addiction. The guide and one-pager are available as free downloads at www.ncrg.org/gamblingandhealth.

A Definitive Guide for Clinicians to Understand Gambling Disorders

Health care providers who specialize in addiction face a host of challenges in their clinical practice, including growing pressure from insurers and the government to use evidence-based treatment practices. Because some clinicians may not screen for gambling disorders in their patient assessments, the NCRG released the seventh volume of Increasing the Odds: A Series Dedicated to Understanding Gambling Disorders, an essential training guide necessary for any clinician to recognize, understand and treat gambling disorders. The NCRG’s monograph series provides easy-to-understand summaries of seminal peer-reviewed research on gambling disorders, as well as implications for future research and prevention efforts.

“The on-going national focus on both quality and efficiency of care demands that clinicians utilize quality, evidence-based information on clinical issues in their treatment protocols,” said Feldman, “This edition of Increasing the Odds was designed to be a comprehensive toolkit for any clinician, whether they see clients with addictions or not, to use in their daily practice to better understand and treat gambling disorders.”

Topics in this volume of Increasing the Odds cover a full spectrum of issues focused on assessing, diagnosing and treating pathological gambling. The authors, who also are leading researchers, covered topics such as youth gambling, brief screenings and assessment instruments.

This volume comes with an online component of the many brief screens and assessment instruments that are available for gambling disorders. To encourage the use of these screens, the NCRG made them available as a free download on the organization’s website.

“What Clinicians Need to Know about Gambling Disorders” and the assessment instruments are available at www.ncrg.org/resources/publications/monographs.
In 2012, various community leaders in the Toledo, Ohio, area came together to develop and launch the Toledo Pledge, a communitywide partnership effort to increase awareness of gambling disorders. From government and law enforcement to social services, organizations joined forces to take the steps necessary to increase community involvement and address the issue through education initiatives.

The Toledo Pledge states the following: “I will learn how to recognize the signs of a potential gambling problem, how to intervene with someone who has a problem, and what treatment options are available in our community. I will share this information with others and intervene when I recognize someone displaying the signs of problem gambling.”

Another version of the Toledo Pledge, which organizations can sign, has similar language. It also provides warning signs to help recognize problem gambling among employees or members, adding: “We will show compassion and patience to those with a gambling problem and commit to assisting them with steps toward a gambling-free life.”

Peter R. Silverman, a Toledo-based attorney and member of the Ohio Casino Commission who is actively involved in this local initiative, said the pledge’s aim is to reach a level of community awareness for gambling disorders similar to that for substance abuse.

“To some degree, people can identify it, know how and when to intervene and know where to send people for help,” Silverman said, regarding drug and alcohol issues. “We realized that [to reach this same level of awareness for gambling disorders] we needed to go beyond traditional media education and beyond simply publicizing the gambling hotline.”

To raise awareness about the Toledo Pledge and inform the community about gambling disorders, local stakeholders developed education initiatives that companies, service organizations, unions or places of worship could use to inform their employees or members. This, in turn, would encourage the employees and members to learn how to identify gambling disorders, know when to refer resources to individuals who might need help and to understand more about the treatment options available.

Organizers launched the program by publicizing it directly to the largest companies and organizations in the community. They also have created materials to distribute, including the brochure, “A Quick Guide to Safer Gambling: How Do You Play?” which offers guidance and encourages those concerned for themselves or someone they know to directly contact COMPASS, the Mental Health Board or the United Way. In addition to COMPASS, other organizations joining this effort include the Lucas County Commissioners and the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Lucas County.

The partner organizations are currently working toward the second phase of educating about The Toledo Pledge. They are developing methods to encourage these stakeholders to follow through on the pledge agreement, in order to send a broader message to a wider group of companies and organizations. This effort includes person-to-person encouragement, offering speakers for public events, providing materials and developing media and online campaigns to promote awareness.

“We’ll know we’ve done our job when our citizens have the same level of awareness of gambling problems as they do of drug and drinking problems, and the same level of commitment to address the problem,” Silverman said. “Part of our statewide Commission effort is to support and fund each local community in developing its own local approach to education and treatment coupled with the formal statewide program.”

“We’ll know we’ve done our job when our citizens have the same level of awareness of gambling problems as they do of drug and drinking problems.”

– Peter R. Silverman, member, Ohio Casino Commission
With new staff members and collaborative partnerships, the Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling in Washington state is setting ambitious goals to increase awareness of gambling disorders and encourage responsible gaming in 2013. Led by Executive Director Maureen Greeley, the Evergreen Council is dedicated to expanding the availability of services for those affected by gambling disorders and encouraging research and programs for education, prevention and treatment.

The Evergreen Council serves as a connection hub for both counseling services and residential treatment options for individuals with a gambling disorder. Its website and the state helpline are resources for individuals and their family members to receive information about in-state counseling services for gambling disorders and other addictions. Additionally, the council currently is the only source of funding for residential pathological gambling treatment. In order to give individuals the care that they need, the council pays to send patients to neighboring states to receive treatment at residential facilities.

For 2013, the organization also has expanded its contract with the state certification boards to offer more education opportunities for clinicians wanting accreditation to treat those with gambling disorders. Throughout the year, Greeley and her staff will organize two conferences and quarterly trainings that will be attended by mental health practitioners from across the state. The National Center for Responsible Gaming (NCRG) will be partnering on one of those trainings as a part of its 2013 Treatment Provider Workshop Series. The Evergreen Council also will host the 27th annual conference for the National Council on Problem Gambling on July 19 and 20.

The organization’s third goal for 2013 is to work with new partners to reach a wider audience with information about gambling disorders, ways to gamble responsibly and resources to use for help. In December 2012, the council, the council launched a new initiative that expanded its prevention programs targeting youth and solicited the help of other non-profit organizations and radio personalities.

In the first part of a two-part campaign, the Evergreen Council partnered with Washington DECA, a Seattle-based organization that helps high school students develop leadership skills and real world experience in marketing, business and entrepreneurship. Over the course of a few months, Washington DECA and the Evergreen Council led nine teams of teenagers to develop a multimedia, peer-to-peer marketing campaign that aimed to raise awareness of the warning signs of a gambling disorder. Teams developed messaging that was age-appropriate and culturally relevant.

To take the program one step further, Greeley and her team enlisted the help of Clear Channel/KUBE 93 FM’s Eric Powers who will lend his voice to this peer-to-peer awareness initiative. The most relevant and impressive campaigns by the high school teams will be featured on the radio station’s website, and public service announcements will be aired throughout the year.

“We are excited to be partnering with KUBE 93 and Clear Channel Media on the DECA student group projects,” Greeley said. “This campaign provides students with an opportunity to create peer-to-peer messaging that is effective in raising awareness of problem gambling issues and available resources. It’s a great model for prevention that targets the youth demographic. We’re looking forward to expanding the program with other schools in the future.”

The first wave of the campaign will be aired this month by Powers, and the campaign will continue throughout the first half of 2013.

For more information on the work of the Evergreen Council or partnership opportunities, visit www.evergreencpg.org.
The Next Generation of Gambling Researchers

The field of research on gambling disorders has changed dramatically in the past 16 years, thanks, in part, to young investigators who dared to ask novel research questions that helped to establish the public’s understanding of the issue. There will likely be many more changes to come in the next 16 years, but one way we get a sneak preview of the future of this field is in the projects produced by the NCRG’s Early Stage Investigator (ESI) grants. The NCRG’s Scientific Advisory Board, the governing arm of the NCRG’s research funding program, established the ESI category to fund grants intended for researchers within 10 years of receiving their Ph.D. or similar degree. Requirements for this grant category also include that a researcher has a strong publication history and support and mentorship from their university or institution to put them on the path to a successful career in gambling research.

The NCRG awarded three ESI grants in 2012 to up-and-coming researchers in this field. Iris Balodis, Ph.D., an associate research scientist at Yale University School of Medicine, was granted almost $65,000 to study stress reactivity and risk taking behavior among those with a gambling disorder. “I think this is a really promising and relatively unexplored area in this field of research,” Dr. Balodis said. “I also hope that some of the comorbidity issues that we will study will help us build a better understanding of how these disorders interact with each other.”

Comorbidity, when a person has other disorders in addition to their primary diagnosis, is one of the most difficult issues to contend with when researching gambling disorders. Understanding comorbidity will be necessary for the field of gambling disorder research to address important issues like the nature of addiction and the relationship between these addictive disorders.

The second early stage grant went to Jennifer Tackett, associate professor of psychology at the University of Houston, for her study to explain how motivations to seek rewards and avoid punishment when youth are making risky decisions may or may not lead to disordered gambling behavior when they become adults.

“I am really looking forward to integrating my previous work on personality development into an understanding of the development of youth gambling,” Dr. Tackett said.

NCRG Chairman Alan Feldman presents 2012 Outstanding Poster Honorable Mention awards to Corey Pilver, Ph.D. (left) and Dr. Balodis, Ph.D. (right), both of Yale University.

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The NCRG is offering nearly $1 million in 2013 for research funding. For more information, visit the NCRG’s Research Center at www.ncrg.org/research-center.
A more complete understanding of youth gambling could eventually lead to preventive interventions designed to head off a gambling problem before it begins. “Adolescence is a critical developmental period for examining the emergence of gambling problems,” Dr. Tackett said, “but the things that make adolescence so important – the major changes occurring across biological, behavioral, and social levels – also present interesting challenges to the researcher.”

The third early career grant went to Dr. Heather Gray, research associate at Cambridge Health Alliance, a teaching affiliate of Harvard Medical School, for a project that expands previous work on the actual betting behavior of online gamblers. Dr. Gray and her colleagues have “been working on an evidence-based algorithm to predict gambling disorders and this project will give us a chance to test if this metric could be applied to a broader population.” A computer model that could help identify and classify people with different levels of disordered gambling behavior would be very useful to clinicians. “I think it would be interesting to explore ways to develop more targeted intervention strategies as a way to improve the effectiveness of these strategies,” Dr. Gray said. “People with only slightly elevated risk will likely respond differently than people with higher risk to the same warning message.”

The work of the three 2012 NCRG ESI grant recipients are pieces in the larger puzzle of understanding and treating gambling disorders. It is clear that the subjects examined in the ESI projects – Internet gambling, youth gambling and comorbidity – will be important to the field of gambling research in the coming years, and we expect that this year’s class of ESI grantees will be leading the way towards a better understanding of gambling disorders and responsible gaming for years to come.

Self-exclusion is one of the most widely used responsible gaming strategies. These programs allow individuals to literally “exclude” themselves from a gaming venue as a way of dealing with problematic gambling behavior. These programs can be mandated by the government or voluntarily established by casinos and other gaming operators.

In 2012, Caesars Entertainment Corporation launched a new program to enhance their commitment to responsible gaming. The “RG ID @ Slots” program builds on the company’s self-exclusion program, which allows a guest to request to have all privileges, including play privileges, denied at all Caesars owned, managed or operated properties.

“Although the intent of self-exclusion is for the gambler to take responsibility for his or her own actions – a crucial step in treatment and eventual recovery – Caesars developed this functionality as an extension of our self-exclusion program to further help guests who have chosen not to gamble,” Caesars’s Vice President of Responsible Gaming Policies and Compliance Jennifer Shatley said.
The “RG ID @ Slots” program launched in Illinois in January 2012 and expanded to all of Caesars’ U.S. properties by the end of the second quarter. During that time, Shatley visited each of the company’s properties that implemented the RG ID @ Slots program for set-up and testing. She also held training sessions with the surveillance and responsible gaming teams.

According to Shatley, once a self-excluded guest inserts a rewards card into a slot machine, an alert system is immediately triggered. Within seconds, a notification appears on the closed-captioned television screens (along with an audio alert) in the surveillance office, signaling to the surveillance team that a self-excluded guest is playing a slot machine. The notification also provides the exact location of the slot machine.

The surveillance team immediately contacts security to intervene. Depending on the jurisdiction and its self-exclusion policy, the guest could be escorted off the property, arrested or handed over to the gaming control commission. Additionally, the guest will not be allowed to collect any winnings from the casino.

The insertion of the rewards card will also generate a notification email sent to a pre-determined list of recipients, which includes Shatley, each property’s responsible gaming chairperson and security supervisors. Shatley explained this is just one of many responsible initiatives the company has implemented to reinforce their commitment to responsible gaming.

“Caesars has a history of industry leadership and responsible gaming program innovation,” Shatley said. “We’re never ‘finished’ with our commitment to encourage responsible gaming and to assisting customers’ honor self-exclusion decisions. We will continue to add to and refine our capabilities and responsible gaming program as proven methods emerge.”

Can we identify young adults who may be at risk for developing a gambling disorder? Can brain imaging, genetics and other approaches help us identify the most effective treatment for gambling problems? What roles do gender, age, race and ethnicity play in the development of gambling disorders?

These are just a few of the key questions that have driven the work of the NCRG Centers of Excellence in Gambling Research at the University of Minnesota and Yale University School of Medicine for the past three years.

The NCRG launched the NCRG Centers of Excellence in 2009 as an evolution to the organization’s approach to funding research and making those study results applicable to the public. The goal of the Centers of Excellence is to advance understanding of gambling disorders through innovative, multi-disciplinary research investigations. The three-year grants were intended to provide funding for a stable, long-term institutional focus on a complex set of gambling-related problems.

Both the NCRG Centers of Excellence at the University of Minnesota and Yale University have provided leadership in the field by conducting cutting-edge investigations of gambling-related disorders, translating research findings for the public to use and understand, and (3) cultivating the next generation of gambling researchers through mentorship.

The leader of the NCRG Center of Excellence at the University of Minnesota, Jon E. Grant, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., has focused his research to develop a predictive model for the early detection of people at risk for...
pathological gambling. This approach would allow for an intervention before symptoms become ingrained, difficult to treat and functionally impairing. What is learned about the susceptibility to a gambling problem will be vital to the development of prevention and treatment.

Dr. Grant and colleagues recruited 426 young adults, which is one of the highest at-risk groups for gambling problems. All participants have undergone extensive cognitive and psychiatric evaluations, and the preliminary findings suggest that cognitive dysfunction with the brain’s circuitry in a specific frontal lobe may impact decision-making in at-risk gamblers prior to the development of problems with gambling and other impulsive behaviors.

This NCRG Center of Excellence also explored the impact that family history can have on addictive disorders. Research showed that participants with at least one parent with an addiction (defined as drug and alcohol dependence and pathological gambling) were significantly more likely to report problems due to gambling, have significantly higher rates of co-occurring psychiatric problems and report significantly more marijuana and tobacco use. Overall, these findings suggest that even at a stage of low-risk gambling before developing problems, those with a possible environmental and/or genetic risk of addiction exhibit a range of problematic behaviors and might be at a greater risk for developing a gambling disorder.

The Yale Gambling CORE (Center of Research Excellence), led by Marc Potenza, M.D., Ph.D., professor of psychiatry, child study and neurobiology at Yale University School of Medicine, has employed a multidisciplinary approach. His team has integrated epidemiological, public health, clinical, treatment, prevention, genetic, behavioral and neuroimaging methods to understand gambling disorders. This NCRG Center of Excellence has conducted research on a variety of topics including brain imaging and gambling among high school students.

Using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), Dr. Potenza and his team were able to observe the neural responses of individuals with pathological gambling to monetary rewards and punishment in real time. The findings indicate that future treatment development might target normalizing activity in an area of the brain that controls responses to rewards and punishments in order to understand and treat impulsive thoughts and behaviors.

The Yale team also analyzed survey data from 2,006 Connecticut high school student gamblers and observed that problem gambling was found more frequently in adolescents who gambled online versus those who didn’t participate in Internet gambling. The researchers concluded that it is clinically important to assess for teenagers’ involvement in Internet gambling, particularly because adolescent at-risk/problem Internet gambling appears specifically associated with non-peer involvement.
heavy alcohol use and poor academic functioning. This survey also revealed that young people who receive instant lottery tickets as a gift tend to begin gambling earlier in life – a possible risk factor for more severe gambling disorders later.

Mentorship also is a key component of the NCRG Centers of Excellence, with the goal of cultivating the next generation of researchers. The early stage investigators from both Centers of Excellence have already made an impact on this field. Brian Odlaug, M.P.H., a key member of the NCRG Center of Excellence at the University of Minnesota, received a joint appointment at the University of Chicago and the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, where he will continue his doctoral work in public health focusing on translational public health in mental illness. Yale’s Iris Balodis, Ph.D., has also been extensively involved in the Dr. Potenza’s studies. Her poster at the 2012 NCRG Conference on Gambling and Addiction was awarded an honorable mention. Balodis also received an NCRG Early Stage Investigator Grant this year to pursue stress and neurocognitive research in individuals with and without pathological gambling.

Drs. Potenza and Grant have made incalculable contributions to the third aim of the grants category by their involvement in numerous educational and dissemination programs. They have been featured in the NCRG’s webinars and treatment provider workshops, and serve on the planning committee for the annual NCRG Conference on Gambling and Addiction.

The work of both NCRG Centers of Excellence are scheduled to wrap up in the spring of 2013. At that time, the NCRG will report on the projects’ findings and plans for 2013-2015.

Setting the Stage for a Better Understanding through New Research – The NCRG’s Project Grants Program

In 2012, the National Center for Responsible Gaming’s (NCRG) research grants program had a productive year. From brief interventions and treatments for gambling disorders among college students to explorations of new gaming jurisdictions, the NCRG awarded more than $870,000 in project grant funding to nine worthy researchers for their innovative and relevant projects.

The NCRG’s research grants are awarded through a competitive project grants program that allows investigators from research institutions around the world to apply for funding for specific research projects. All research proposals are reviewed and selected by independent peer-review panels of distinguished scientists in the field to ensure that only the highest quality research is funded.

Seed Grants
“A Benchmark Study for Monitoring Exposure to New Gambling Opportunities”
Principal Investigator: Sarah E. Nelson, Cambridge Health Alliance
Awarded $28,750

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is nearing an historic change to its legal gambling landscape, expanding legal gambling opportunities to include

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large resort-style casinos. This presents a unique opportunity to learn about the short- and long-term ramifications of such expansion on public health. This project will use a state-representative online survey to establish a baseline estimate of gambling behaviors and health within Massachusetts’ communities that can be used as the benchmark for a future long-term longitudinal investigation of the effect of gambling expansion on public health.

“Sequential Decision Making and Illusionary Pattern Detection in Gamblers”

Principle Investigator: Andreas Wilke, Ph.D., Clarkson University
Awarded $28,675
Dr. Wilke will use two novel computerized decision-making paradigms to investigate gamblers’ perceptions and choices when they decide to continue or cease betting on sequential events. Understanding how illusory patterns relate to gambling decisions may reveal important aspects of gambling behavior that could lead to new screening tools for gambling risk.

“Mindfulness-based Relapse Prevention for Problem Gambling”

Principle Investigator: Katie Witkiewitz, Ph.D., University of New Mexico
Awarded $28,129
Mindfulness-based relapse prevention (MBRP) is an aftercare treatment that has been successfully applied to a wide variety of psychological and substance use disorders. The goal of this study is to conduct a pilot randomized controlled trial to evaluate the efficacy of MBRP in the treatment of problem gambling. It is hypothesized that individuals who receive MBRP will have significantly better gambling and substance use outcomes following treatment, and that better outcomes following MBRP will be mediated by changes in urges to gamble and measures of impulsivity.

Early Stage Investigator Grant

“Stress Reactivity and Risk-taking Behavior in Pathological Gambling”

Principal Investigator: Iris Balodis, Ph.D., Yale University School of Medicine
Awarded $64,797
Risk-taking behaviors and stress both activate the sympathetic nervous system and are implicated in addiction processes. However, mechanisms underlying the relationship between the stress response and engagement in risky behaviors are not well understood both in healthy subjects as well as in populations with pathological gambling. The goal of this grant project is to examine how stress system reactivity can predict measures of behavioral control, and the research will integrate multiple indices of stress, incorporating physiological, subjective and behavioral measures.

“Expanding the Study of Actual Internet Gambling Behavior: Exposure and Adaptation within a Newly Opened Market”

Principle Investigator: Heather Gray, Ph.D., Cambridge Health Alliance
Awarded $141,362
Dr. Gray and her colleagues in Iceland will conduct an analysis of actual Internet gambling records collected in that country. The study will use these records to study gamblers and gambling behavior, “high risk” gamblers and how people adapt to new gambling opportunities.

“The Peer Group Regulates Motivational Pathways to Gambling in Youth: Implications for Early Intervention”

Principle Investigator: Jennifer L. Tackett, Ph.D., University of Houston
Awarded $64,800
Motivations to seek rewards and avoid punishments have been shown to explain pathways toward gambling behavior in adults, but these “motivational pathways” have not yet been examined in youth.
This study will investigate the extent to which aspects of disposition (i.e. extraversion and neuroticism) and motivational pathways predict distinct pathways to youth gambling. The study will also examine the influence of peers, an influential variable on many youth behaviors, on gambling behavior.

**Large Grants**

**“Web-based Screening and Brief Intervention for Disordered Gambling Among Emerging Adults”**  
Principal Investigator: Mary Larimer, Ph.D., University of Washington  
Awarded $172,500  
Dr. Larimer will recruit participants aged 18-25 through social media to assess their gambling behavior and will customize a screen and brief intervention and examine its effectiveness on gambling disorders among this population.

**“Evaluating the Potential of Mixed-function Serotonergic Compounds for Treatment of Gambling Disorders”**  
Principal Investigator: T. Celeste Napier, Ph.D., Rush University Medical Center  
Awarded $172,500  
The long-term objective of this study is to expedite the discovery and development of effective treatment strategies for pathological gambling. The project will use unique rat models to determine if medications used for other diseases can be repurposed for the treatment of gambling disorders. The medications they have selected to test are already known to be safe when used by humans; therefore, successful outcomes from our studies can be rapidly and safely deployed.

**“Characterization of Pathological Gambling as an Addictive Disorder”**  
Principal Investigator: Jeremiah Weinstock, Ph.D., Saint Louis University  
Awarded $168,824  
Current conceptualizations of pathological gambling as a psychiatric disorder are shifting from categorization as an impulse-control disorder to a behavioral addiction. The purpose of this study is to examine pathological gambling’s conceptualization as an addiction by examining the biological stress response of people with pathological gambling, those with alcohol use disorders and healthy controls. Stress response has been linked to alcohol use disorders, and this data, along with data on underlying risk factors, can help clarify the relationship between pathological gambling and other addictive disorders.

**Travel Grants**

**“Creating Change: A Past-focused Model for PTSD and Addictions”**  
Principal Investigator: Jon Utley, Psy.D, VA Boston Healthcare System, VA Bedford/ Boston University School of Medicine  
Awarded $1,500  
The Travel Grant supported Dr. Utley’s participation in the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies conference where he presented a paper on Creating Change, a new past-focused behavioral therapy model developed for comorbid post-traumatic stress disorder and addictions. The model is designed to address all types of addictions, including substance use disorders, pathological gambling and other key behavioral addictions.

For more information on the NCRG’s research grants program, visit www.ncrg.org/research-center.