

The Gambling Accountability and Transparency Study Treatment Services Provider Training

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The purpose of this part of the study was to describe the training programs that are available in New Mexico to treatment providers working with problem gamblers. These programs were examined in relation to current national standards. Some of the representatives who lead the training efforts in the state were interviewed. Relevant documents (e.g., conference brochures) were also reviewed to supplement the interviews.

1. What treatment services training programs exist in New Mexico?

The three entities that provide the main source of therapist training are the New Mexico Council on Problem Gambling (NMCPG), the Evolution Group, Inc, and the Responsible Gaming Association of New Mexico (RGANM). The NMCPG trains therapists in New Mexico on an as-needed basis. Also, the national affiliate of the NMCPG, the National Council on Problem Gambling, offers annual conferences for therapists. The Evolution Group offers semi-annual to quarterly training sessions for therapists and other professionals. The RGANM sponsors annual conferences. The Evolution Group sometimes provides technical assistance to the RGANM's annual conferences.

2. What is the content, duration, and format of existing trainings?

The NMCPG provides therapists with relevant information on gambling. Examples of topics at past conferences include the neurobiology of gambling, pharmacological considerations, domestic violence, ethics, and issues of comorbidity. The duration and format of the NMCPG's trainings varies depending on group size, with larger groups attending more formal conferences often lasting two days. The Evolution Group normally offers two to four trainings a year. Each training lasts two days. Training topics include general information about gambling, suicide and gambling, screening and assessment, and treatment planning using a body-mind-spirit paradigm. The format of these trainings is largely informal, interactive, and experiential. Also, the Evolution Group often invites individuals recovering from problem gambling to serve on a panel. The annual conferences sponsored by the RGANM offer information on best practices in the intervention of problem gambling. Renowned speakers in the field of gambling from the U.S. and Canada are invited to present. These conferences last two days, and the format ranges from formal lectures to interactive approaches depending on the presenters.

3. How many providers receive this training?

The number of treatment providers that receive the NMCPG's training varies. Sometimes treatment providers may receive one-on-one training because of a need that has arisen in a particular area. Recently, the NMCPG sponsored a conference for approximately 400 individuals

from New Mexico and Texas. The Evolution Group's quarterly trainings average about 35 to 40 people. The annual conferences sponsored by the RGANM draw approximately 200 individuals. However, most of the individuals who attend the above training opportunities do not complete the gambling certification process.

4. How often do they need to be re-certified, or how often do they need to acquire continuing education units?

Currently, there is no process of re-certification of individuals certified as gambling counselors in the state of New Mexico. However, the International Gambling Counselor Certification Board and the National Council on Problem Gambling require re-certification of National Certified Gambling counselors every three years through completion of 60 continuing education units (CEUs) of which 30 CEUs must be gambling-specific (NCPG, 2008).

5. Is specialized training generally considered necessary by experts in the field? Are there national standards for training, and if so, do current training programs meet them?

Yes, first and foremost, individuals treating problem gamblers should have a professional license that is in good standing with their respective licensing board. Moreover, specialized training and certification to treat people with gambling problems is considered necessary by experts in the field (Shaffer, LaBrie, LaPlante, & Kidman, 2002). The interviewed experts in this study emphasized that a background in the treatment of mental health disorders or other addictions is insufficient to treat problem gamblers.

The International Gambling Counselor Certification Board established standards for training, and these standards are used by the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG, 2008). There are two levels of certification: National Certified Gambling Counselor – Level I (NCGC-I) and National Certified Gambling Counselor – Level II (NCGC-II). Criteria for NCGC-I certification include: 30 hours of gambling-specific training or education and 100 hours of clinical experience treating gamblers or family members. The more rigorous NCGC-II certification requires 60 hours of training or education and 2,000 hours of clinical work in the field of gambling.

The NMCPG is the local organization that certifies gambling counselors in New Mexico. The NMCPG uses the above standards for certification, but the organization adopts a middle ground approach. The NMCPG requires 40 gambling-specific CEUs for certification, which are between the NCGC-I and the NCGC-II criteria. The NMCPG also offers provisional certification when therapists attain 12 CEUs in the area of gambling. The NMCPG estimates that it costs about \$12,000 in supervision fees to receive the necessary supervision hours for national certification. According to the NMCPG, these costs would not allow many individuals in New Mexico to be certified in the treatment of problem gambling. Thus, the NMCPG's criteria allow for provisional certification, which is a stepping stone to national certification. Individuals who are provisionally certified must be supervised by a NCGC; for every 10 hours of client contact, they must receive one hour of supervision.

The Evolution Group takes into consideration the NCGC-I criteria when training therapists. Treatment providers can earn 12 CEUs at each one of the Evolution Group's training sessions. Thus, in a year when the Evolution Group offers only two trainings, treatment providers can earn 24 CEUs. They can supplement these CEUs and easily complete the education requirements for NCGC-I by attending other conferences or training sessions offered by the other organizations. Likewise, treatment providers can typically earn 12 CEUs at the RGANM's annual conferences.

6. Please provide training by scope of license – counselors, therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, etc.

Training usually does not vary by type of license. Counselors, therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and others often attend the same training sessions or conferences. In some instances, however, certain conferences are aimed at a particular profession (e.g., medical) and that profession's licensing board approves the training for continuing education units. In general, the gambling-specific training sessions or conferences offered by the NMCPG, the Evolution Group, and the RGANM do make professionals eligible for certification if they complete the application process.

In sum, there are sufficient local opportunities for treatment providers to receive training and education in the field of problem gambling. Professionals can easily complete the education requirements of NCGC-I or the NMCPG by attending the training programs and conferences offered by the NMCPG, the Evolution Group, and/or the RGANM. Despite the high rates of attendance at these trainings, very few therapists complete the certification process. While more therapists in general may be more attuned and sensitive to problem gambling because of these trainings, there is a need for more certified gambling counselors, especially in areas outside of Albuquerque. Perhaps individuals conducting the gambling trainings can inform participants about the certification process to increase interest and awareness. Moreover, national standards require that a process of re-certification be upheld every three years. All professionals must complete CEUs at regular intervals to stay up-to-date with the most current and relevant information in the field. Certified gambling counselors should not be excluded from re-certification, especially since the field of gambling is just emerging and expanding. Finally, this study was descriptive and the aforementioned training programs were not systematically evaluated. Some of the organizations have obtained participant feedback regarding the presentations and have anecdotally received high marks. Future work can review this feedback and perform other evaluations to examine the basis, utility, and efficacy of current training programs.

References

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