

THE GAMBLING ADDICTION PREVENTION (GAP) ACT

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The National Council on Problem Gambling estimates that as many as 56,000 active duty members of the Armed Forces meet criteria for gambling disorder, and studies have shown that veterans have elevated rates of gambling problems— at least twice the rate of the general adult population.¹ Gambling disorder is an addiction similar to other substance use disorders, such as those associated with alcohol and drugs.² In addition to causing financial and legal problems, it is also correlated with an increased incidence of suicide attempts, substance use disorders, and other behavioral health conditions.³ Prevalence of gambling disorder in the military is a serious health and financial issue, and also poses a national security concern, harming individual readiness and human performance and increasing affected servicemembers' susceptibility to blackmail and other malign influence.⁴

A 2017 report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that while slot machines were removed from all domestic military installations after 1951 – when Congress prohibited gambling devices from being installed or used on any possession of the United States – the Department of Defense (DOD) currently has 3,141 slot machines on overseas U.S. military installations. Between fiscal years 2011 and 2015, those slot machines generated approximately \$100 million per year for the Department. However, the GAO also found that the DOD does not systematically screen military personnel for gambling disorder.⁵

According to the DOD, about 120 military personnel were diagnosed with gambling disorder or were seen for problem gambling each year between FY2011 and FY2015 – yet these estimates rely only on the records of those military personnel seeking treatment within the Military Health System. In addition, less than 10 percent of people with gambling problems seek help, due to the shame, stigma and misunderstanding of gambling disorder. The GAO recommended that the DOD incorporate questions on gambling disorder in its annual health assessments and DOD-wide surveys in order to better understand the prevalence of gambling disorder in the military and improve the military's ability to offer treatment.⁶

The Gambling Addiction Prevention (GAP) Act

The Gambling Addiction Prevention (GAP) Act of 2018 implements the GAO's recommendations related to screening for gambling disorder by requiring the DOD to include gambling disorder screening questions in health assessments for members of the armed forces and in other survey and research efforts. The bill also requires the DOD to develop policies and programs to prevent and treat gambling problems, in coordination with other behavioral health efforts. On military sites where gambling activities take place, such policies and programs would include provision of educational materials and promotion of responsible behavior.

Endorsed by the National Council on Problem Gambling, Association of Problem Gambling Administrators, National Center for Responsible Gaming, Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling, and Montana Council on Problem Gambling.

¹ National Council on Problem Gambling, “Gambling Addiction in Military,” February 2017, <http://www.ncpgambling.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/GAO-Report-Talking-Points-v4.pdf>; American Journal on Addictions, “Pathological and problem gambling among veterans in clinical care: prevalence, demography, and clinical correlates,” J. Westermeyer, J. Carnive, P. Thuras, and M. Spring, April 25, 2013, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23617862>.

² American Psychiatric Association, “What is Gambling Disorder?” <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gambling-disorder/what-is-gambling-disorder>.

³ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, “Gambling Problems: An Introduction for Behavioral Health Services Providers,” 2014, <http://www.ncpgambling.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Gambling-Addiction-An-Introduction-for-Behavioral-Health-Providers-SAMHSA-2014.pdf>.

⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “DOD and the Coast Guard Need to Screen for Gambling Disorder Addiction and Update Guidance,” Jan. 30, 2017, <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-114>.

⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office, Supra.

⁶ U.S. Government Accountability Office, Supra.