

New resources provide responsible gambling strategies.

Gambling is a source of entertainment for many people, but it can cause significant financial, personal and family turmoil. A new public awareness campaign, Play It Safe, will help Nebraskans understand their limits and offer resources for those struggling to stay in control.

“With Play It Safe, we want Nebraskans to understand the risks of gambling and know how to play responsibly if they do choose to gamble,” said Scot Adams, director of the Department of Health and Human Services’ Division of Behavioral Health. “The first defense against problem gambling is to know which behaviors are considered low-risk and which ones may be warning signs of a potential problem.”

A new website, PlayItSafe.ne.gov, highlights responsible gambling behaviors, provides education on the signs of problem gambling and offers resources for people who need help with problem gambling. The site also features the What’s the Deal? blog, which will help inform Nebraskans about specific and timely gambling topics, such as youth and elderly gambling. Radio, TV, print and Web advertising will help ensure the campaign reaches audiences statewide.

“Having an awareness of responsible gambling is so important,” said Maya Chilese, program manager for the Department of Health and Human Services’ Division of Behavioral Health Gamblers Assistance Program. “As many as 55,000 Nebraskans may engage in problem gambling behaviors—and they may not even know they’re doing so. For those affected by problem gambling, treatment is available and it works.”

The Division supports a statewide Problem Gambling Helpline, available 24/7, which can provide immediate support and referral information to local providers. The Helpline number is 1-800-GAMBLER (1-800-426-2537).

Treatment may include individual counseling, group therapy, family counseling, and crisis prevention.

Chilese added that oftentimes people think of problem gambling as being about illegal activity, but legal gambling, like the lottery and keno, can also lead to concerns for some people.

The Division of Behavioral Health in the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services administers the Gamblers Assistance Program. GAP provides funding for the helpline, treatment services, prevention and outreach services, and counselor training. The program is paid for by funding from the state Lottery and the Health Care Cash Fund. These services are not funded by taxes.