

Problem Gambling Treatment and Support Advisory Committee Meeting
August 25, 2026
Meeting Minutes-Draft

Committee Member Attendance: In-person – Carolyn Hawley, Waqas Ahmed, Bryana Clark-Black, Kevin Johnson, Garth Williams, Kevin Hall, Joel Maddux. Online – Anne Rogers, Juliet Rutter, Carolene Layugan (for Dean Hestermann). Absent: Jim Bebeau.

Others present: Josie Mace, Willard Robertson, Kunal Patel, Azeen Majeed, Elizabeth Childress, Jennifer Davis-Walton, Nora Gentry, Emma Freeman, Holly Hanks Wanta, Tom Dozier, Lisa Cochran, Nash Wiley.

- **Voluntary Exclusion Program Updates:** Print Cowan provided a comprehensive update on the growth and trends of the Voluntary Exclusion Program, highlighting increased enrollments, demographic shifts, and regional participation, with input from Carolyn and Carolene regarding communication challenges and policy clarifications for participants and gaming operators.
 - **Enrollment Growth and Demographics:** Print Cowan reported that the Voluntary Exclusion Program has seen significant growth, with 547 enrollees as of July 31, 2026, and an average of 10-15 new enrollments daily. Most participants are males aged 18-45, though there has been an uptick in female lifetime enrollments. The program also tracks both active and inactive enrollees, with 130 people currently reapplying, indicating ongoing engagement.
 - **Regional Participation and On-Site Intakes:** The team noted increased in-person intakes at temporary casinos in Norfolk and Petersburg, with on-site lottery staff facilitating enrollments. Regional data analysis shows higher percentages of enrollments in areas with smaller populations, and some regions, such as Grayson County, have no participants.
 - **Communication and Policy Clarification:** Carolene raised concerns that some Virginia VEP participants were unaware their exclusion applied to all gaming operators, not just the property where they initiated the request. Caesars sends exclusion notification letters to participants, but Virginia Lottery policy currently does not. Carolyn and Carolene discussed improving communication and training to ensure participants understand the scope of their exclusion.
 - **Partnerships and Support Routing:** Carolyn described ongoing efforts to partner with treatment professionals and improve call routing for individuals seeking support, including plans to more effectively direct calls from the lottery phone line to appropriate resources. The team is working with Caroline to streamline support for those contacting the program.
- **Helpline and Treatment Data Trends:** Willard Robertson and Carolyn shared data on helpline usage and treatment referrals, noting increased intakes, demographic shifts, and the rollout of new public awareness and outreach campaigns, with Anne and other participants discussing the implications for service coordination and resource allocation.
 - **Helpline Usage and Intake Statistics:** Willard Robertson reported over 10,500 calls, texts, and chats to the helpline from January to June 2026, with 831 intakes marking a 4% increase over the previous year. The trend shows younger

individuals (35 and under) are reaching out for help sooner, with less time elapsing before seeking assistance compared to past years.

- **Treatment Referral and Outcomes:** Carolyn presented data from the Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health, showing a 36% increase in referrals for ages 25-24, and 93% of individuals connected to external providers within one week. Follow-up data indicates 95-97% of individuals reduced or stopped gambling within three to twelve months.
- **Demographic and Gambling Type Analysis:** Treatment seekers are more evenly split between males and females, with notable participation from older adults (55-64). The primary types of gambling reported include sports gambling (27%), slots (21%), online gambling (17%), and skill games (13%), with trends shifting due to legal changes and increased machine availability.
- **Outreach and Research Initiatives:** The partnership is launching several research projects targeting students, school staff, and older adults, including a Quest grant from VCU to study college gambling behaviors and collaborations with Virginia Tech and aging groups to address risks among older adults. A new dashboard for treatment and outreach data is set to launch soon.
- **Claims Data Dashboard and Screening Pilots:** Anne introduced the updated all-payer claims data dashboard for problem gambling, detailing its features and trends, and Anne, Carolyn and Bryana explained the ongoing screening pilot across CSBs, including survey methods, referral processes, and preliminary findings on co-occurring disorders.
 - **Claims Data Dashboard Features:** Anne demonstrated the All Payor Claims dashboard, which tracks problem gambling claims from 2019 to 2024, including rates per 100,000 population, age group breakdowns, service types, payer sources, and trends in care. The dashboard allows filtering by region, year, and diagnosis, though data lags by several years.
 - **Screening Pilot Implementation:** Bryana described the screening pilot involving six CSBs, using the PGSI and other surveys at intake for substance use and mental health services. The surveys assess gambling frequency and impact, with referrals made for high scores. Fairfax and Rappahannock are joining the pilot, and IT improvements are underway to better track survey data.
 - **Preliminary Data and Referral Rates:** Early data from CSBs starting the pilot in March/April show that 2-3% of clients score high enough for problem gambling disorder to warrant referral for services. The goal is to screen all clients, though participation is voluntary, to better understand co-occurring disorders and service needs.
- **Committee Role, Advisory Function, and Fund Appropriation:** Josie, Anne, and Carolyn led a discussion clarifying the committee's advisory role, responsibilities, and relationship to the Problem Gambling Treatment and Support Fund, including questions about direction from the commissioner, fund appropriation challenges, and proposed actions for future meetings.
 - **Advisory Committee Structure and Duties:** Josie explained the legal framework for advisory, policy, and supervisory boards in Virginia, confirming the committee's advisory status, which involves providing advice and acting as a liaison between agencies and the public. The committee was established to ensure collaboration among stakeholders in problem gambling.

- **Direction and Engagement with Commissioner:** Question asked by Carolyn and Waqas whether any commissioner has provided specific direction to the committee, noting the need for clearer objectives and more effective engagement. Anne confirmed that no tasks have been assigned by a commissioner yet.
- **Fund Appropriation and Spending Challenges:** Anne reported that the fund received \$2 million more in revenue than appropriated last year, resulting in a balance close to \$11 million. The fund is non-reverting, but appropriation authority limits spending. DBHDS conversations are ongoing with the governor's office to increase the appropriation, and committee members discussed prioritizing needs and supporting advocacy.
- **Proposed Actions and Legislative Engagement:** Carolyn recommended inviting the commissioner and legislators to the next meeting to clarify goals and support coordination, especially with upcoming gambling bills. Anne and others agreed, noting the importance of structured conversations and potential projects to enhance statewide service coordination. Waqas suggested having the Commissioner attend one of the quarterly meetings to let the committee know what he would like to get out of this group.
- **Responsible Gaming Education Month Activities:** Juliet announced upcoming activities for Responsible Gaming Education Month at Hard Rock Bristol, involving Elizabeth and other team members, and VPGH shared plans for related webinars and success stories during September, with Carolyn reminding participants of ongoing wellness webinars.
 - **Property-Level Education Initiatives:** Juliet shared that Hard Rock Bristol is planning a range of activities for Responsible Gaming Education Month, including collaboration with Elizabeth and the property team to promote responsible gaming practices.
 - **Webinars and Outreach:** VPGH announced a September webinar focused on Responsible Gaming Education Month and Recovery Month, with plans to share success stories on LinkedIn and other social media platforms. Carolyn reminded participants of a monthly wellness webinar featuring Barbara Mashall.

Follow-up tasks:

- **VEP Program Communication:** Reach out to gaming operators and responsible gaming teams to improve communication to VEP participants about exclusion applying to all Virginia gaming properties, and coordinate with Carolene and Kunal for further discussion. (Carolyn, Carolene, Kunal)
- **Committee Direction and Commissioner Engagement:** Invite the Commissioner of DBHDS to the next meeting to provide guidance and share his vision for the committee's role and objectives prior to the legislative session. (Carolyn, Anne)
- **Legislator Participation:** Invite key legislators, including chairs of gaming committees, to the next meeting to facilitate structured conversation about upcoming gambling bills and fund distribution. (Carolyn)
- **Meeting Location Planning:** Investigate the possibility of hosting the next meeting in or near the State House or General Assembly building to increase legislator attendance, and address potential parking and security concerns. (Carolyn)

- **Data Dashboard Distribution:** Send slides and relevant data dashboards presented during the meeting to all participants for review and reference. (Carolyn)