



VIRGINIA PARTNERSHIP FOR GAMING AND HEALTH

AT VIRGINIA
COMMONWEALTH
UNIVERSITY



2025

STRENGTHENING VIRGINIA'S
RESPONSE AS GAMING EXPANDS
ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH



Virginia Partnership
for GAMING & HEALTH
Hope | Support | Solutions



VCU

VCU College of
Health Professions

2025 By the Numbers

1,267

Virginians
served

Connecting individuals and families across every region of the Commonwealth with treatment navigation, peer recovery support, and trusted providers.

93%

connected to treatment
within one week

Rapid access to care ensures individuals receive support during moments of vulnerability, helping prevent financial, emotional, and behavioral health crises before escalation.

95-97%

reduced or stopped gambling

Follow-up outcomes demonstrate sustained recovery across time periods ranging from one week to one year, reflecting the impact of coordinated care and lived-experience recovery support.

A **coordinated**
Commonwealth
response

As legalized gambling evolves, Virginia has prioritized ensuring that prevention, treatment and recovery access, and workforce development, grow alongside it, strengthening communities while supporting responsible economic growth.

Meeting a **Changing Moment**

Across the Commonwealth, legalized gambling has expanded at a pace few could have anticipated just a decade ago. Alongside new opportunity comes a shared responsibility to ensure Virginians have access to support when gambling begins to impact financial stability, wellbeing, or family life. The strength of Virginia's response will be measured not only by economic growth, but by how effectively we protect the health and resilience of our communities.

The Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health (VPGH), housed at Virginia Commonwealth University, was created through the Virginia Problem Gambling Treatment & Support Fund to meet this moment through coordination, collaboration, and compassion. In 2025, VPGH provided direct services to 1,267 Virginians statewide. These support seekers are immediately connected to peer recovery support, and 93% met with a treatment provider within one week--before financial or emotional stress escalate into crisis. In addition, their follow-up outcomes demonstrate the lasting impact of timely intervention and coordinated care; nearly all individuals reported that they had reduced or stopped their gambling.

This progress reflects the dedication of clinicians, peer recovery specialists, researchers, state agency partners, and community organizations strengthening Virginia's behavioral health response as gambling continues to evolve. By expanding provider capacity, investing in prevention and outreach, and advancing research that informs policy and practice, VPGH supports a balanced approach that aligns economic opportunity with responsible public health stewardship.

Virginia is leading nationally by demonstrating that innovation and accountability can move forward together, ensuring growth is accompanied by access to care, recovery pathways, and informed decision making. We remain committed to building a system that responds quickly, supports recovery, and strengthens communities across the Commonwealth so that every Virginian seeking help encounters compassion, connection, and a clear path forward.

Carolyn E. Hawley, PhD, CRC

Executive Director

Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health
at Virginia Commonwealth University

Hope. Support. Solutions.



About the Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health

The Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health (VPGH) at Virginia Commonwealth University serves as Virginia's only statewide infrastructure for problem gambling awareness, treatment access, recovery support, workforce development, and research innovation. Funded by the Commonwealth's Problem Gambling Treatment and Support Fund, VPGH ensures that as legalized gambling expands across Virginia, access to prevention, care, and recovery grows alongside it.

Our goal is clear: every Virginian has access to timely help, compassionate support, and sustainable recovery.

Strengthening Communities Across the Commonwealth

VPGH advances Virginia's coordinated response to gambling-related harm by:

- Expanding access to trained clinicians specializing in gambling treatment
- Supporting recovery through peer-led services grounded in lived experience
- Strengthening workforce capacity across regions of the Commonwealth
- Generating data to inform public health policy and decision-making
- Connecting individuals and families to coordinated treatment and recovery support

VPGH staff

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Peer Recovery Specialist, Region 1 Coordinator

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Peer Recovery Specialist, Region 2 Coordinator

2025 Impact at a Glance

1,267

Virginians served,
both new referrals and
ongoing support seekers

Including:

- Working adults
- Veterans and military families
- Students
- Retirees



693

new referrals

17%

increase from 2024

93%

connected with an
external provider
within 1 week



132

trained clinicians statewide

200+

outreach initiatives

4,000+

Virginians reached
through prevention
and education



95-97%

reduced or stopped
gambling across
follow-up periods

These outcomes demonstrate
both immediate engagement
and sustained recovery success
among VPGH support seekers.



Initial Intake Data

693

new referrals



received ongoing services



referred to peer recovery services



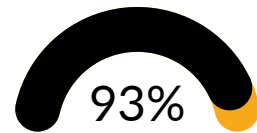
referred to treatment

Rapid Access to Care

When individuals seek help, timing matters. Rapid engagement helps prevent escalation into financial instability, behavioral health crises, housing disruption, and emergency healthcare utilization. Evidence consistently shows that early access to coordinated behavioral health services improves outcomes and reduces reliance on higher-cost crisis systems.*

Traditional behavioral health systems often involve extended wait times. Our coordinated intake and referral model connects individuals directly to trained providers across the Commonwealth, supporting early stabilization, strengthening access to care when it is needed most, and helping reduce pressure on emergency and crisis response systems.

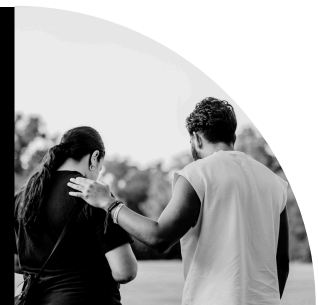
For many individuals, the first request for help may also be the only one. Connecting 93 percent of help seekers to treatment within one week ensures that Virginia's response meets people at the moment they are ready to change.



connected to treatment within 1 week

"I am very appreciative of how quickly [VPGH] onboarded and connected me with other team members. I've felt alone for a long time, but am now hopeful."

—VPGH support seeker



*Sources:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2020). National guidelines for behavioral health crisis care: Best practice toolkit. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/media/document/samsha-national-guidelines.pdf>

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). Fostering healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development in children and youth: A national agenda. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25201>

Recovery Outcomes

Follow-up engagement demonstrates sustained improvement, with 95-97% of support seekers reporting reduced or no stopped gambling behavior at various follow-up intervals.

This level of sustained recovery reduces recurring service demand and long-term public system utilization.

Follow-up data

Of respondents, those who reported decreased or not gambling



"This is a powerful resource provided to people who find themselves in need. The guidance that was given provided me with the necessary tools to put myself back on track."

—VPGH support seeker

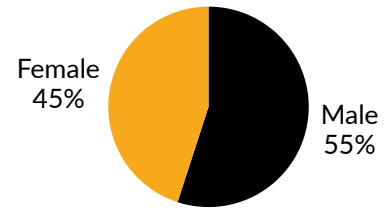
"I feel like I have been embraced by the people I have talked to. I'm so looking forward to beginning my life again without gambling."

—VPGH support seeker

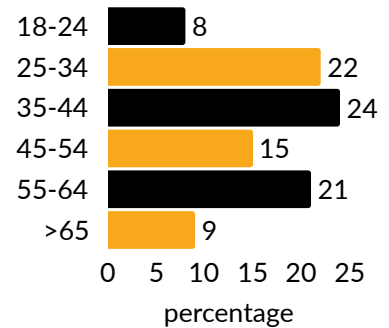
Who Seeks Help?

Age and Gender Distribution

Help seekers represented a diverse cross-section of Virginians, with 55% identifying as male and 45% as female, reflecting broad engagement across genders. The largest help-seeking populations were adults ages 25–44 and individuals approaching retirement age, life stages closely tied to workforce participation, financial responsibility, and long-term planning. Early access to prevention and treatment services helps protect stability for individuals and families during these critical years.



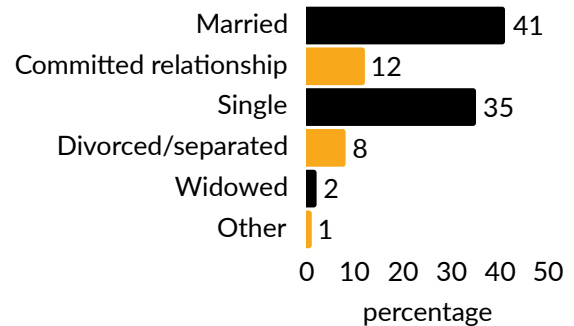
Support seekers by gender



Support seekers by age

Relationships and Family Stability

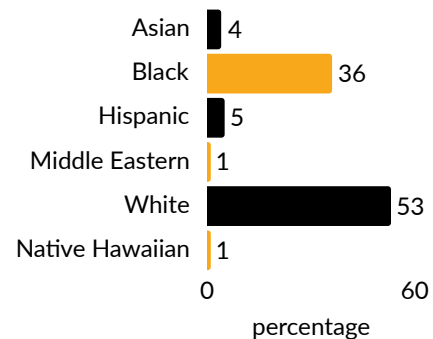
Gambling-related harm often affects entire households, influencing financial security, relationships, and family wellbeing. Through rapid treatment navigation and peer recovery support, VPGH helps individuals stabilize during critical moments, strengthening families and supporting healthier communities across Virginia.



Relationship status

Diversity of Reach

Services were accessed by individuals across racial and ethnic communities statewide.



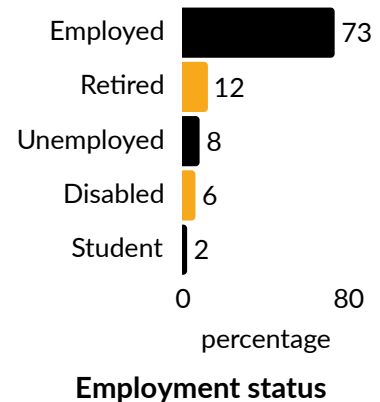
Support seekers by ethnicity

Who Seeks Help?

Workforce Stability

The majority of individuals seeking support through VPGH were actively employed at intake, demonstrating that gambling-related harm affects working Virginians across industries and income levels. Research shows that untreated behavioral health challenges contribute to reduced workplace productivity, increased absenteeism, and employment disruption, while timely access to treatment improves workforce participation and economic stability (World Health Organization, 2016; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019).

By helping individuals stabilize early, treatment services strengthen families, support employers, and contribute to healthier communities and long-term economic prosperity across the Commonwealth.



Supporting recovery protects:

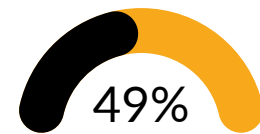
- Workforce productivity
- Family financial stability
- Employer retention

Co-Occurring Behavioral Health Needs

Gambling harm frequently overlaps with broader behavioral health needs: 49% of individuals seeking support reported a current or past co-occurring mental health concern, and many also present with substance use. This reinforces the importance of integrated screening and coordinated referral pathways to help Virginians access appropriate care early while reducing repeated treatment episodes and long-term system costs.



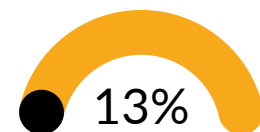
of support seekers reported pre-existing substance use disorder



reported a co-occurring mental health issue

Supporting Military Families

Virginia maintains one of the largest veteran and active-duty populations in the nation.

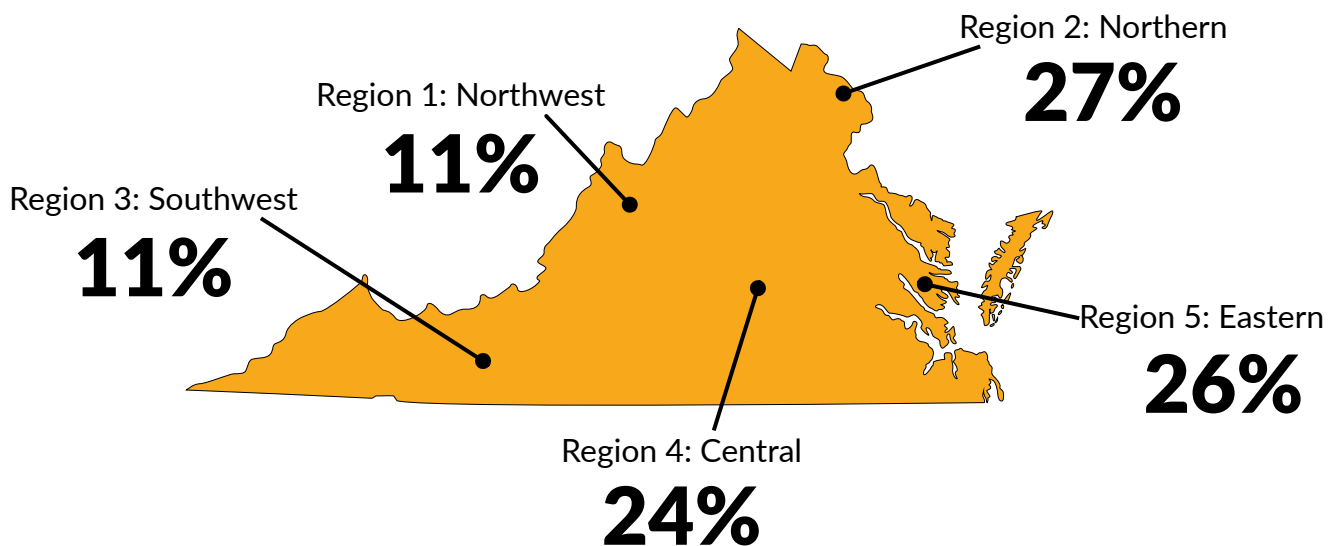


of individuals seeking help identified as veterans or active-duty military members

Serving Virginians Across the Commonwealth

VPGH delivers support across every region of the Commonwealth, ensuring access to services regardless of geography. In 2025, individuals seeking help came from both metropolitan centers and rural communities, demonstrating the reach of a coordinated statewide network built to connect Virginians with care when they need it most.

Distribution of New Referrals Across Virginia's Five Health Regions



There are many individuals and families across Virginia seeking to change gambling habits, and VPGH provides vital connections to both clinicians and peer support services to aid them in their recovery. I find peer support particularly valuable; their personal experience and communication skills are excellent resources for those seeking help.

—Shana Storms, LPC, LSATP, NCC, ICGC
Region 2 VPGH Network Provider



Outreach Programs

VPGH outreach initiatives strengthen partnerships and expand awareness of prevention, treatment, and recovery services through local, state, and national presentations, agency collaboration, and program development. In 2025, outreach efforts supported partners across corrections, K-12 education, colleges and universities, the legal and judicial system, healthcare settings, community organizations, and more, extending prevention and early intervention efforts throughout Virginia.



Row 1 (from left): Elizabeth Childress at Breaking the Cycle; Azeem Majeed at United Community Solutions; Lisa Cochran, Matthew Britt, Sean Fournia, and Elizabeth Childress at Research to Recovery. **Row 2:** Lisa Cochran and Shruti Sampath at Senate Wellness Fair; Carolyn Hawley at CBS This Morning; VPGH display at Rockbridge Prevention Forum. **Row 3:** Matt Britt and Sean Fournia at McShin Recovery Fest; Elizabeth Childress, Azeem Majeed, Carolyn Hawley and Jennifer Davis-Walton at the National Council on Problem Gambling National Conference.

Research on Recovery

By leading research and developing statewide data, VPGH equips decision makers with actionable insight to anticipate emerging needs, strengthen workforce capacity, and ensure prevention, treatment, and recovery resources are aligned with communities across the Commonwealth.

Current areas of focus:

- Workforce and service delivery in gambling
- Epidemiology and gambling behavior
- Co-occurring conditions and risk amplifiers
- Prevention, education and public awareness
- Culturally responsive services

Changing the Narrative

For more than 10 years, David L. Robbins has been helping veterans process their experiences in the military through writing as part of the Virginia War Memorial's Mighty Pen Project.

It's not an uncommon strategy. Narrative therapy and writing exposure therapy have long been used to help people break down past traumas and heal by retooling stories about their lives.

But Robbins isn't a therapist—and the Mighty Pen isn't narrative therapy.

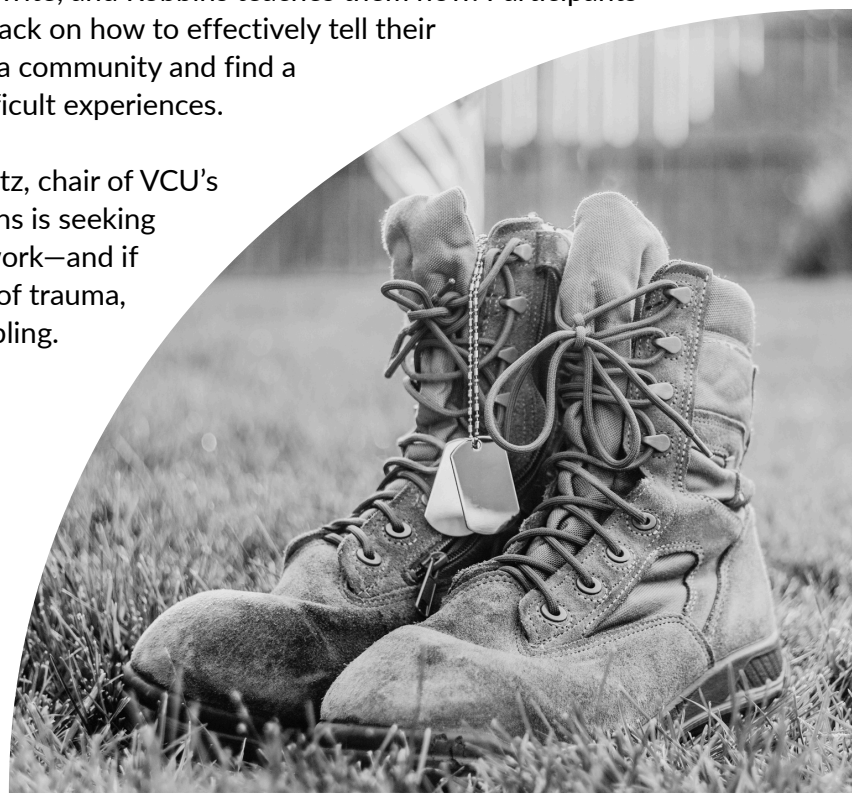
Robbins is a *New York Times*-bestselling author and creative writing professor, and the Mighty Pen's 12-week writing workshop looks more like what students experience in his classroom at Virginia Commonwealth University. Veterans sign up because they want to learn to write, and Robbins teaches them how. Participants choose their subject matter, and he offers feedback on how to effectively tell their story. Throughout the course, participants form a community and find a safe and supportive environment for sharing difficult experiences.

Through a research partnership with Jared Schultz, chair of VCU's Department of Rehabilitation Counseling, Robbins is seeking to better understand what makes his methods work—and if they could help those experiencing other forms of trauma, including those who struggle with problem gambling.

Read more



VPGH builds connections between researchers and community organizations—like the Mighty Pen Project—and invests in studies that improve outcomes for those who struggle with addiction.



"The VPGH training helped me better understand how to use different approaches based on an individual's needs, and the importance of meeting people where they are, of educating them and giving them hope, of helping them understand that they're not alone."

—Tammy Muir, LPC
Region 3 VPGH Network Provider



Building Virginia's Treatment and Recovery Workforce

VPGH strengthens Virginia's treatment and recovery infrastructure by centralizing access to trained clinicians and peer recovery specialists. Providers receive specialized training at no cost, equipping them to deliver gambling-specific care and serve as referral resources. This investment in workforce development ensures access to competent services across the Commonwealth, regardless of geography.

132

trained clinicians

25

certified peer recovery specialists



"I made a vow when I entered the Department of Corrections that if I was ever given the opportunity to be free, that I would spend the rest of my life giving back to my community, just like the people who believed in me. When someone reaches out, I try to be for them exactly what I needed when I was in that space."

—Azeem Majeed, R-CPRS-PG, i-FPRS-Trainer, MARS-T Lead Peer Recovery Specialist (Region 5)

Recovery is possible.

Scan to connect with our team.



No judgment.
No pressure.
Just support.

vpgh.org

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