



PROBLEM
GAMBLING
PREVENTION

The Intersections

Problem Gambling and Suicide Prevention
October 22, 2025 | 10 am – 2 pm

Sarah Jerome | Technical Assistance Provider

Lauri Solomon | Technical Assistance Provider



EDC.ORG

Introducing Today's Presenters



Sarah Jerome, MPH, MA
Trainer



Lauri Solomon, EdD
Trainer



Objectives

The Intersections of Problem Gambling and Suicide



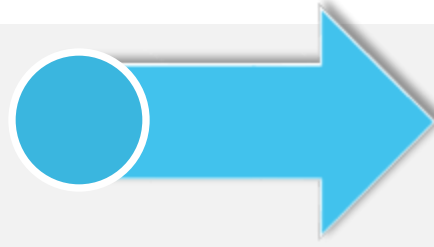
Describe risk and protective factors for problem gambling and suicide

01



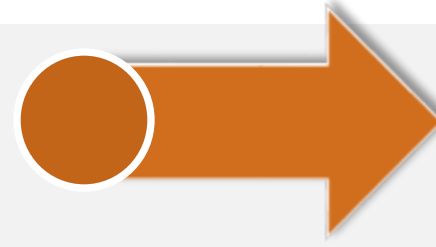
Identify warning signs of problem gambling and suicide

02



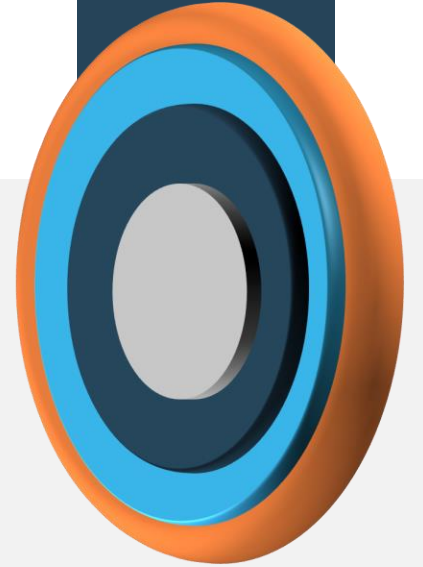
Describe the intersection of problem gambling and suicide

03



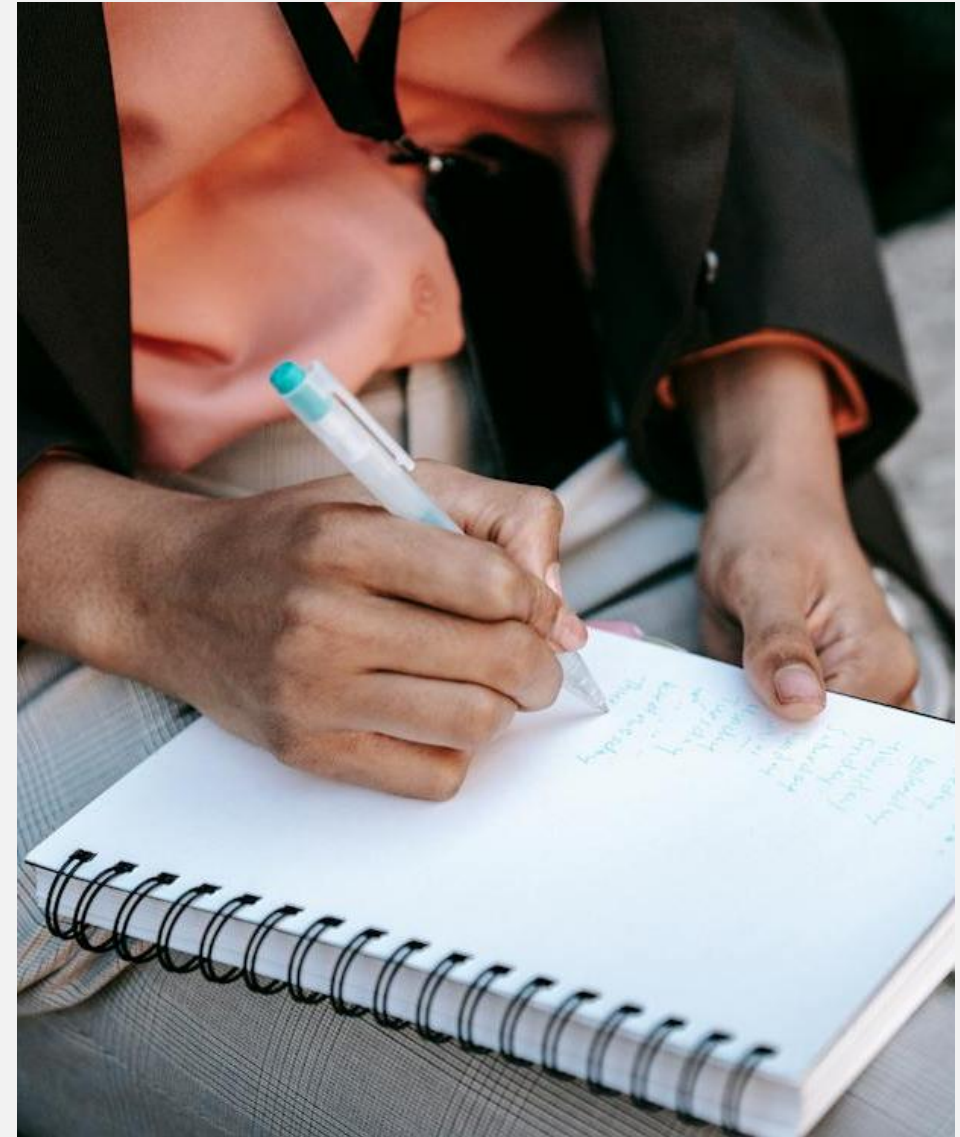
Identify resources and tools to support individuals at risk for suicide or problem gambling

04



AGENDA

- Public Health Lens
- Introduction to Problem Gambling
- Introduction to Suicide
- Intersections of Problem Gambling and Suicide



POLL

What category do you identify with?

Experience/expertise with gambling and problem gambling

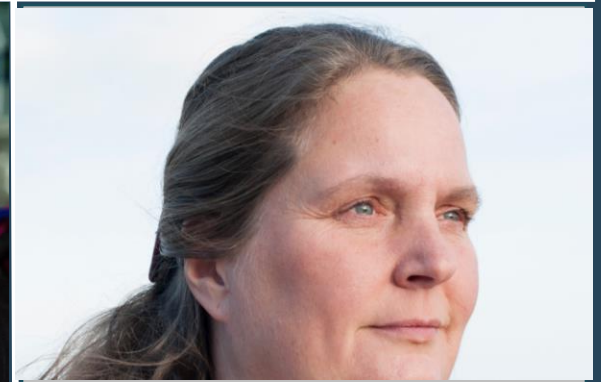
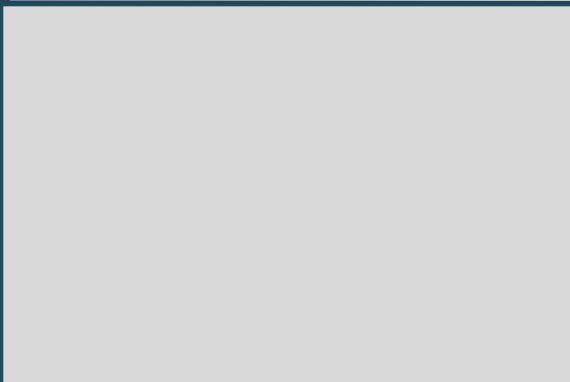
Experience/expertise with suicide prevention and suicide

Experience/expertise with both topics

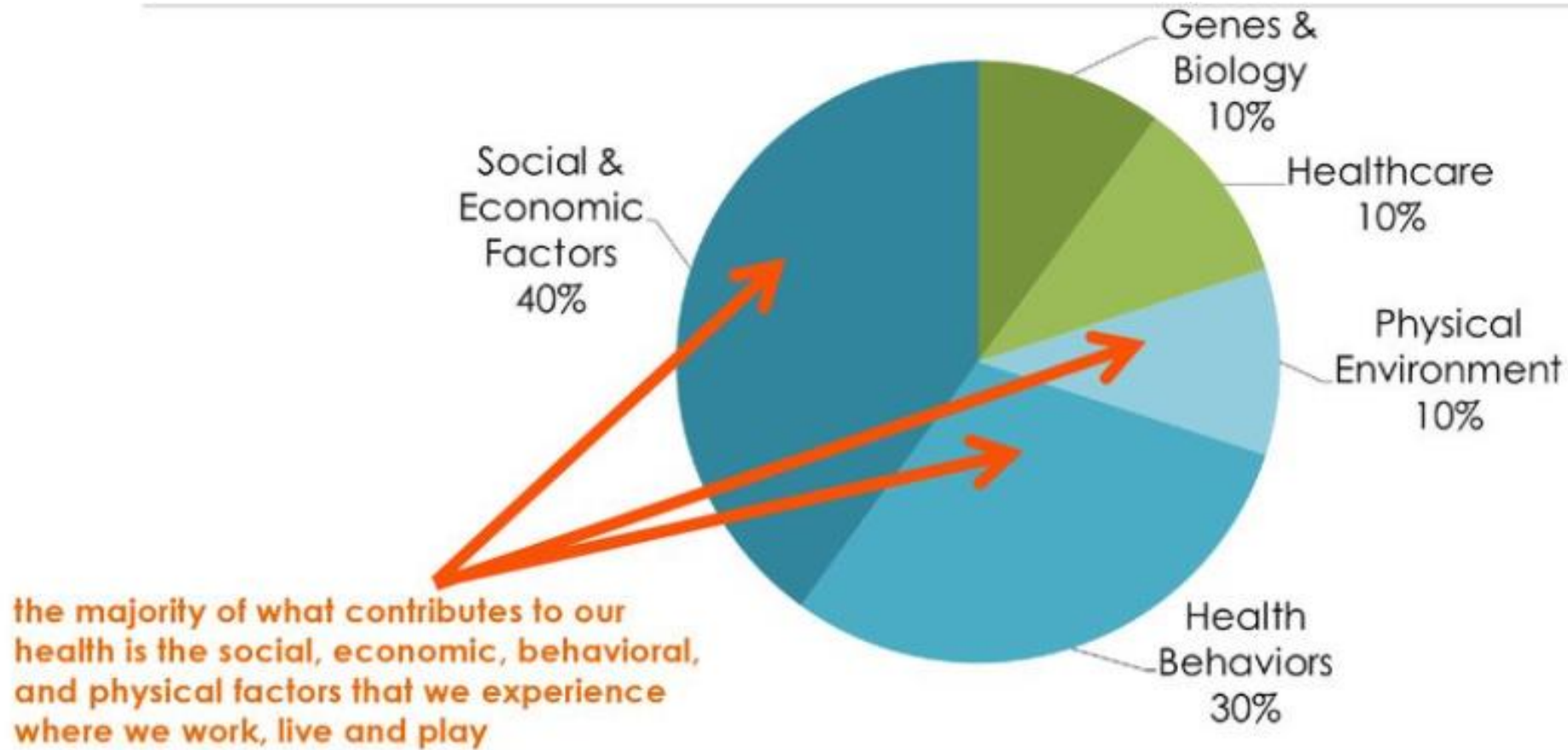
No experience/expertise with either topic



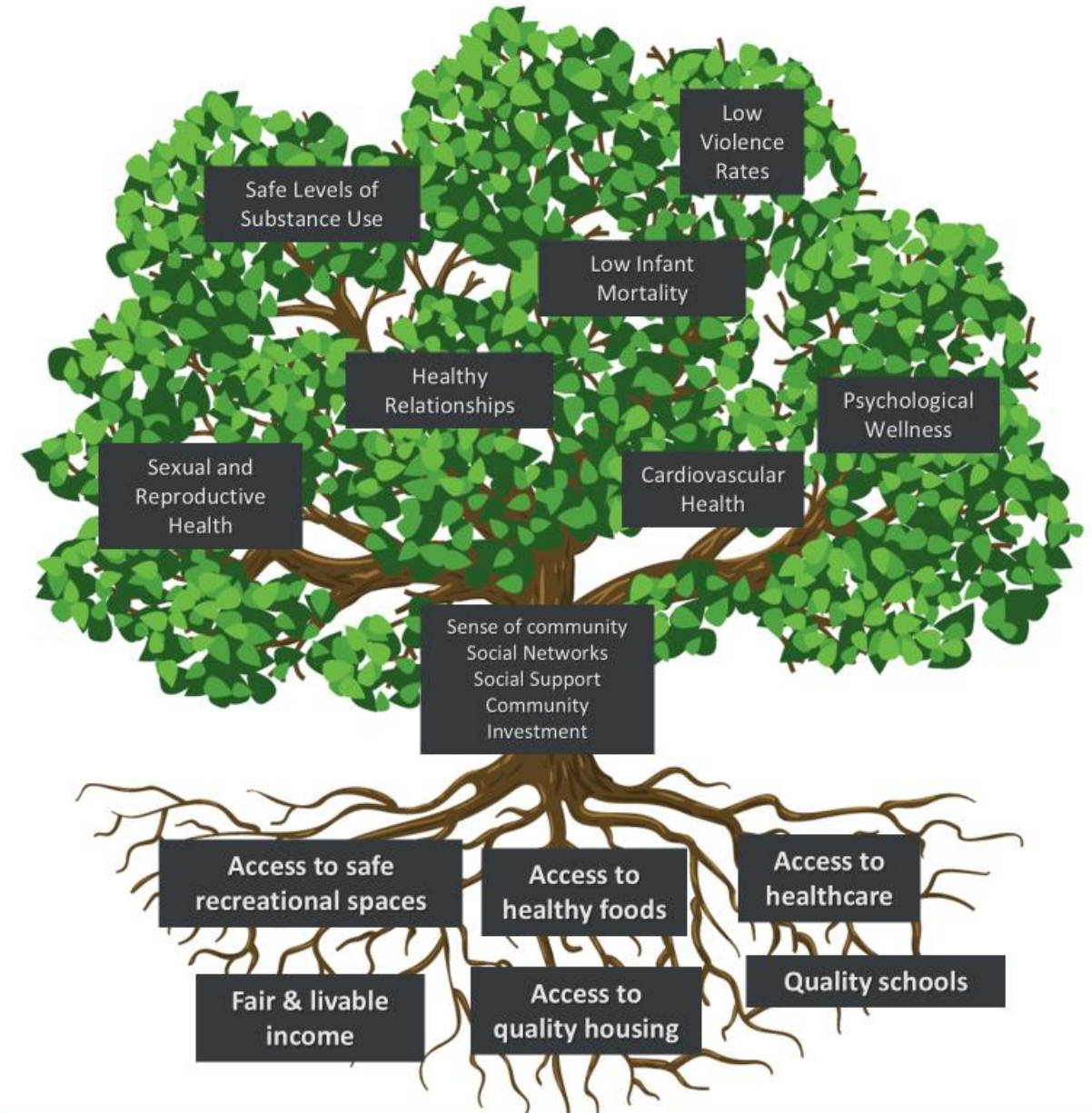
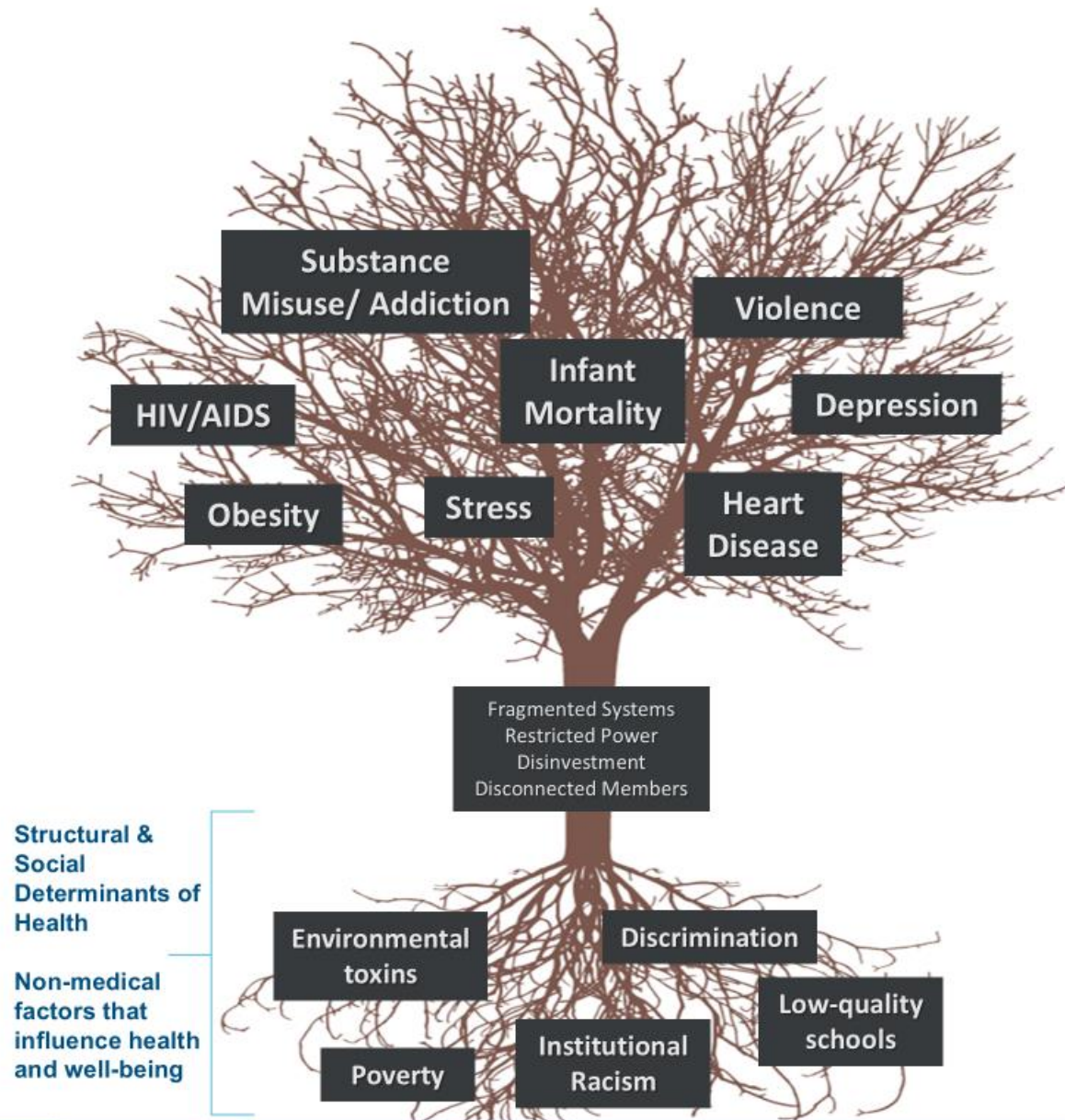
SECTION 1: Public Health Lens



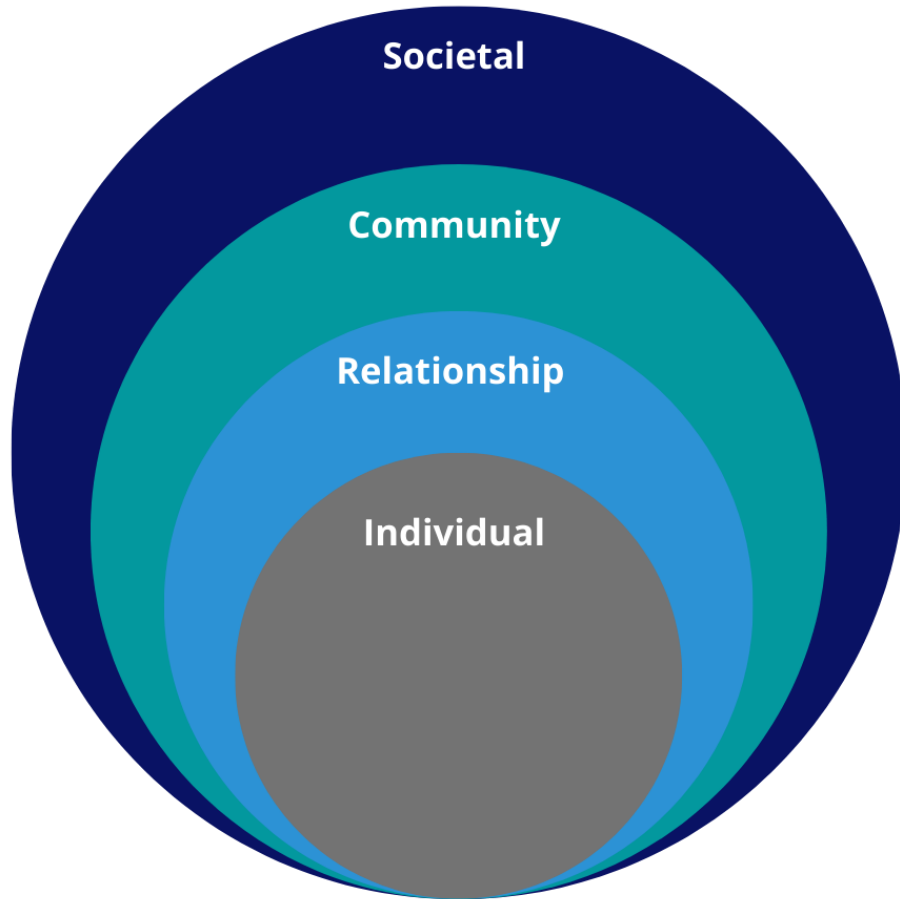
WHAT MAKES US HEALTHY?



Our environments cultivate our communities, and our communities nurture our health.



SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL MODEL



- This model considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors.
- Helps us understand the range of factors that put people at risk for problem gambling or protect them from experiencing negative consequences of problem gambling.



Case Study

Meet Janice



Janice is a 45-year-old, married woman who has been secretly gambling on the internet for the past year. She used to get together with her girlfriends for trips to the casino a few times a year. She really enjoyed the social aspects of the trips, as well as the high of gambling. She only works part-time and so has limited money to spend, so she would generally be very careful about her money. Her father, Luis, was terrible about money. Her mother had to work two jobs because her father would blow all of the family's money on alcohol. This often led to huge arguments between her parents. Sometimes her father would become verbally abusive to anyone who came close to him. It was better to stay away and stay quiet.

Her father was recently diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease and has moved in with Janice and her husband, Rudy. This changes her whole routine and she has less opportunity to join her friends on the casino trips. She finds herself turning to internet gambling to relieve her stress and escape from the pressure. Rudy does not know how she spends her time. At first she won a few times and with her extra money she was able to take Rudy and the kids out to eat a few times. She told Rudy that she had gotten a bonus at work, and they all had a really goodtime. It was the first time in months that she had felt close to Rudy.

Over the next few months, Luis' health declines rapidly and he has become increasingly belligerent and difficult to care for. It reminds Janice of her childhood. She finds herself spending more and more time, up to several hours a day, gambling on the internet. She really has to scramble to find the time to do the other things she needs to get done. A few times she has been very late to pick up the kids. And, she is not winning as often. As a matter of fact, she is losing more than winning.

SECTION 2: Problem Gambling Introduction

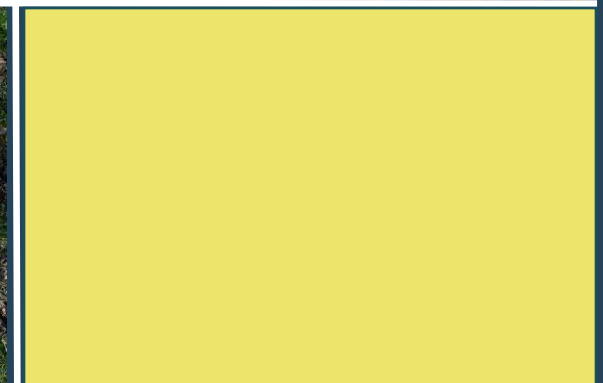
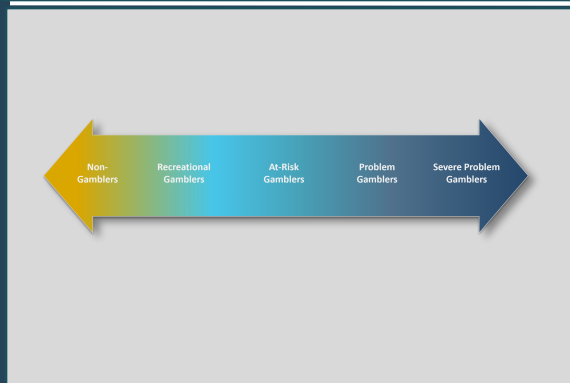


Image Source: <https://www.i-fink.com/building-sustainably/>

Definition of Gambling

Betting anything of value on an event with an uncertain outcome in the hope of winning additional money, material goods, or anything of value.

Source: (Williams, et al., 2017)



Defining Our Language: The Gambling Continuum

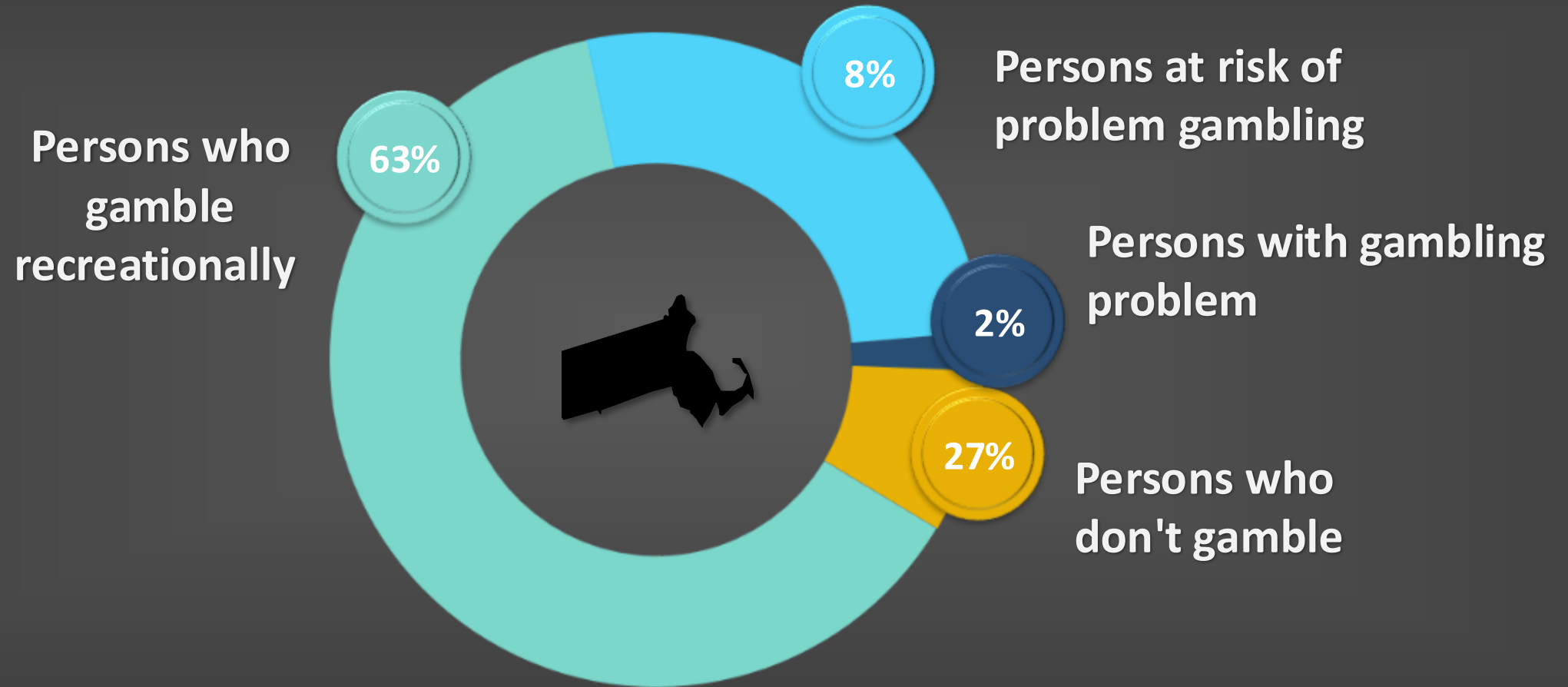


This is the gambling continuum, referred to as a spectrum as participation can range from not gambling to problem and severe problem gambling.

People can move back and forth across this continuum

Gambling Participation

Massachusetts



Why Do People Gamble

Fun

Socializing

Hoping for a big win

**The excitement of
risk-taking**

**Trying to win back
lost money**

Impulsivity

**Trying to feel better
about themselves**

**Escaping from
loneliness,
depression, anxiety
and/or other
unpleasant feelings**

**Hiding from life's
problems**

**Distraction from
physical and/or
emotional pain**

SECTION 2: Gambling Risk & Protective Factors



Image Source: <https://www.i-fink.com/building-sustainably/>

Risk and Protective Factors

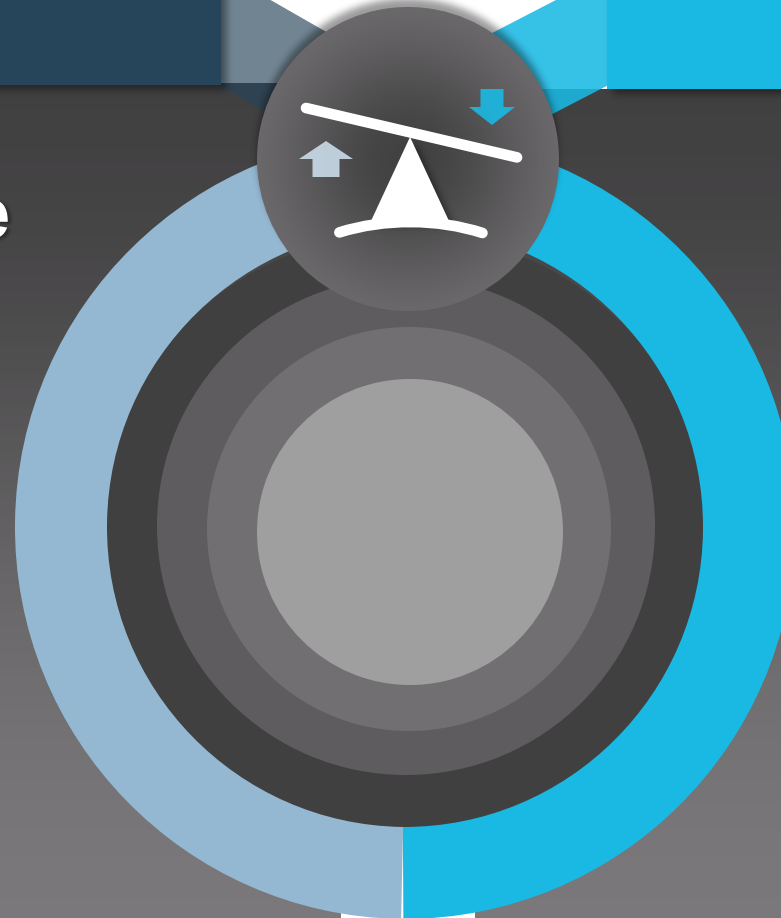
Risk Factors

Factors that **increase** the likelihood of developing problem gambling or suicide



Protective Factors

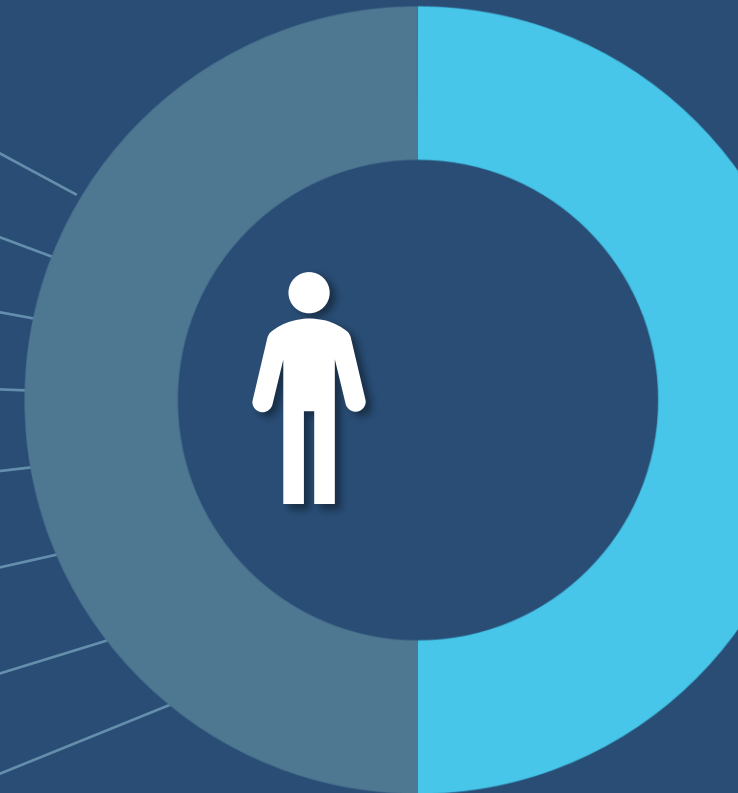
Factors that **decrease** the likelihood of developing problem gambling or suicide



Risk and Protective Factors for Problem Gambling

Risk Factors For Problem Gambling

- Early Big Win** 
- Not Understanding the Odds** 
- Early Gambling Onset** 
- Impulsivity** 
- Stress and Coping** 
- Substance Use Disorder** 
- Mental Health Diagnosis** 
- Family Issues** 



People Who Are At Higher Risk for Problem Gambling

First, a word about language

AVOID

High-risk people or High-risk population
Vulnerable
Priority
Targeted

INSTEAD USE PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE

People who are at increased risk for (condition)

*People who live or work in settings that put them
at increased risk for...*



Support #StateWithoutStigmaMA

People Who Are At Higher Risk for Problem Gambling

Research shows that some groups are at higher risk for developing problem gambling, including:

- Youth
- Men
- People of color
- Older adults
- People with a high school diploma or less
- People with an annual income of less than \$15,000
- People who are unemployed
- People with a disability
- Casino employees
- People with a history of incarceration
- People who misuse substances



Co-Occurring Disorders

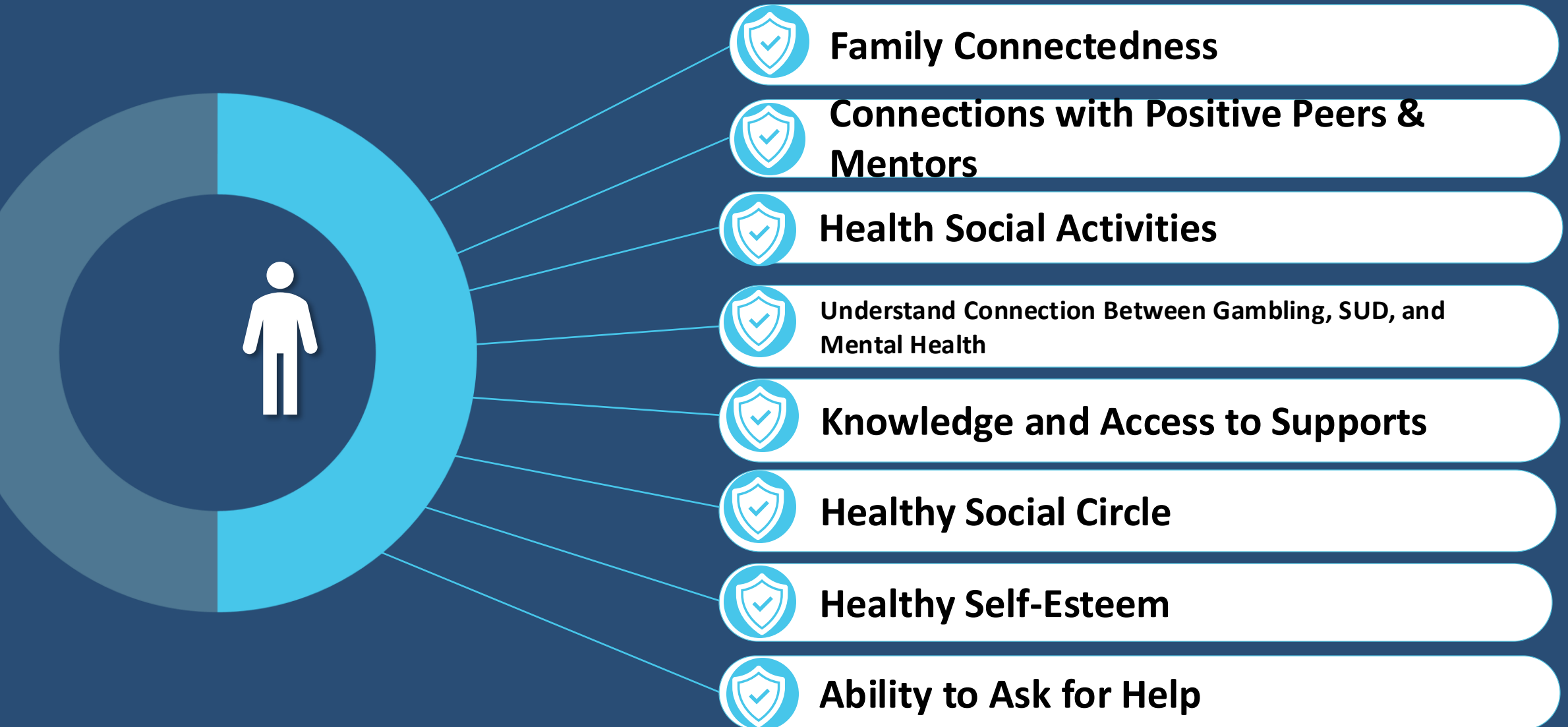
Substance Use Disorders & Problem Gambling

- 72% Alcohol Disorders
- 38% Drug Use Disorders
- 60% Nicotine Dependency

Mental Health Disorders & Problem Gambling

- 50% Mood Disorder
- 41% Anxiety Disorder
- 61% Personality Disorder

Protective Factors (Examples)





5-MINUTE BREAK



Case Study Part I

Meet Janice...Again



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Over the next few months, Luis' health declines rapidly and he has become increasingly belligerent and difficult to care for. It reminds Janice of her childhood. She finds herself spending more and more time, up to several hours a day, gambling on the internet. She really has to scramble to find the time to do the other things she needs to get done. A few times she has been very late to pick up the kids. And, she is not winning as often. As a matter of fact, she is losing more than winning.



- What are Janice's risk factors for developing a problem with gambling?
- What are Janice's protective factors that help prevent problem gambling?

Meet Janice...Again



Janice is a 45-year-old, **married woman** who has been **secretly gambling on the internet** for the past year. She used to **get together with her girlfriends** for trips to the casino a few times a year. She really enjoyed the social aspects of the trips, as well as the **high of gambling**. She only works part-time and so has limited money to spend, so she would **generally be very careful about her money**. Her father, Luis, was terrible about money. Her mother had to work two jobs because her father would **blow all of the family's money on alcohol**. This often led to huge arguments between her parents. Sometimes her father would become verbally abusive to anyone who came close to him. It was better to stay away and stay quiet.

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Color Codes:

- **Risk factors for PG**
- **Protective Factors for PG**

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SECTION 3: Suicide Through a Public Health Lens



Image Source: <https://www.i-fink.com/building-sustainably/>

This material can be hard for
some people.

Take care of yourself!



Case Study Part II



Six months later, Janice has lost all of the family's retirement money and then some. Her husband Rudy recently discovered this when the bank called about late payments on their mortgage. He threatened to leave her and take the children unless she stopped gambling. She did. She has not gambled in the past month, but her relationship with Rudy and the children continues to be strained. He just wants results. No discussion.

Janice is fraught with guilt for what she has done and often thinks about suicide. She has taken to walking the neighborhood after work for an hour or more dreading going home to the constant mistrust and questioning. Of course, her husband accuses her of gambling again when she doesn't come right home, but she can't bear the awful feeling of being in the house. She feels she has no place to go and that there is no way to make this right. She is afraid that the constant tension and fighting with her husband is likely to impact the kids.

This reminds Janice of what her parents were like, and she had sworn that she would never let that happen to her family. She is so embarrassed that she has stopped answering calls from her friends and family. Her friends keep trying to get her to go to the casino with them because that always used to cheer her up.

Janice has been thinking more and more about her favorite uncle, who died by suicide when she was a teenager. He was the one person who she felt really "got" her. She has started walking near the train tracks more and more often.

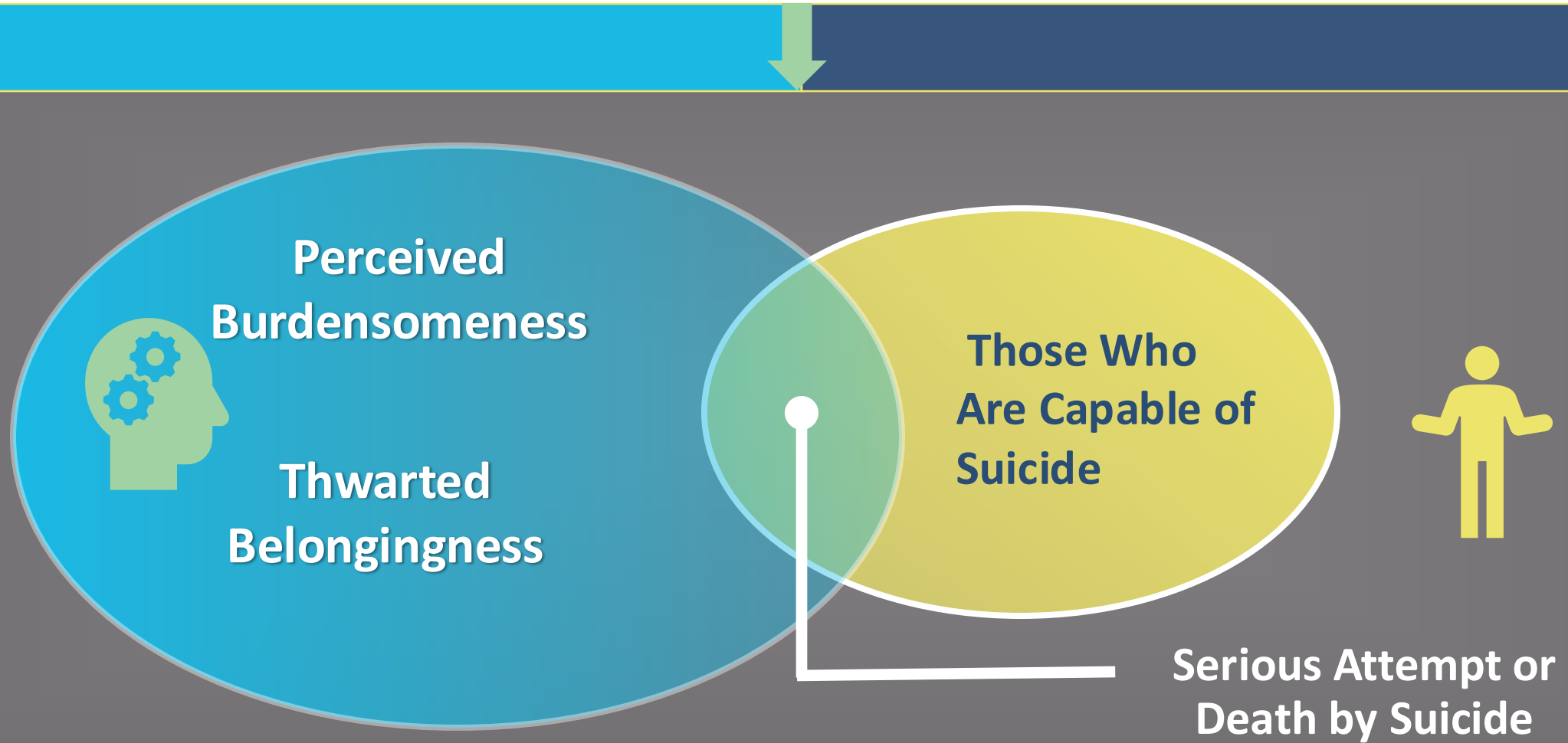
Sensitive Language

The language we use about suicide can affect our attitudes toward people who think about, attempt, or die by suicide.



Avoid:	Use this instead:
Committed Completed Suicided Successful	Died by suicide Suicide death Killed themselves
Failed attempt	Suicide attempt
Suicide gesture Suicide threat	Suicidality Suicidal intensity Describe behavior

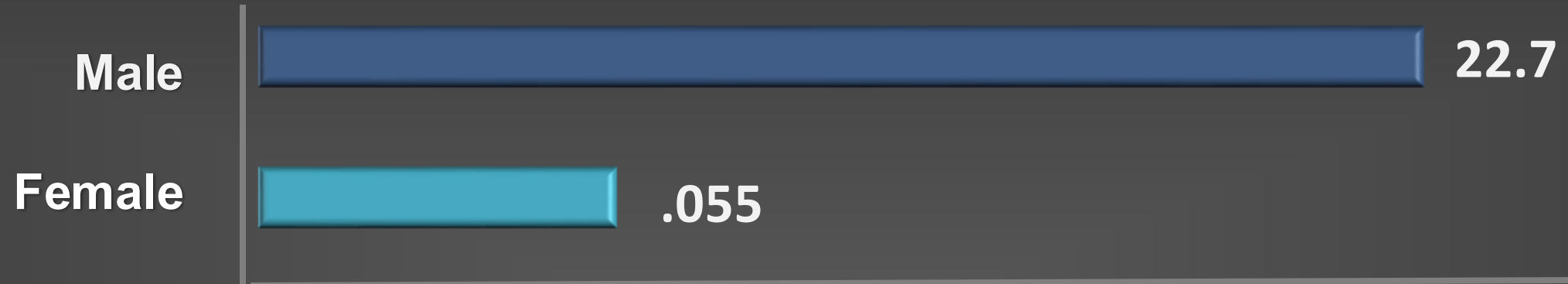
Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicidal Behavior



Demographics of Suicidality

2023 Suicide Deaths Nationally by Gender

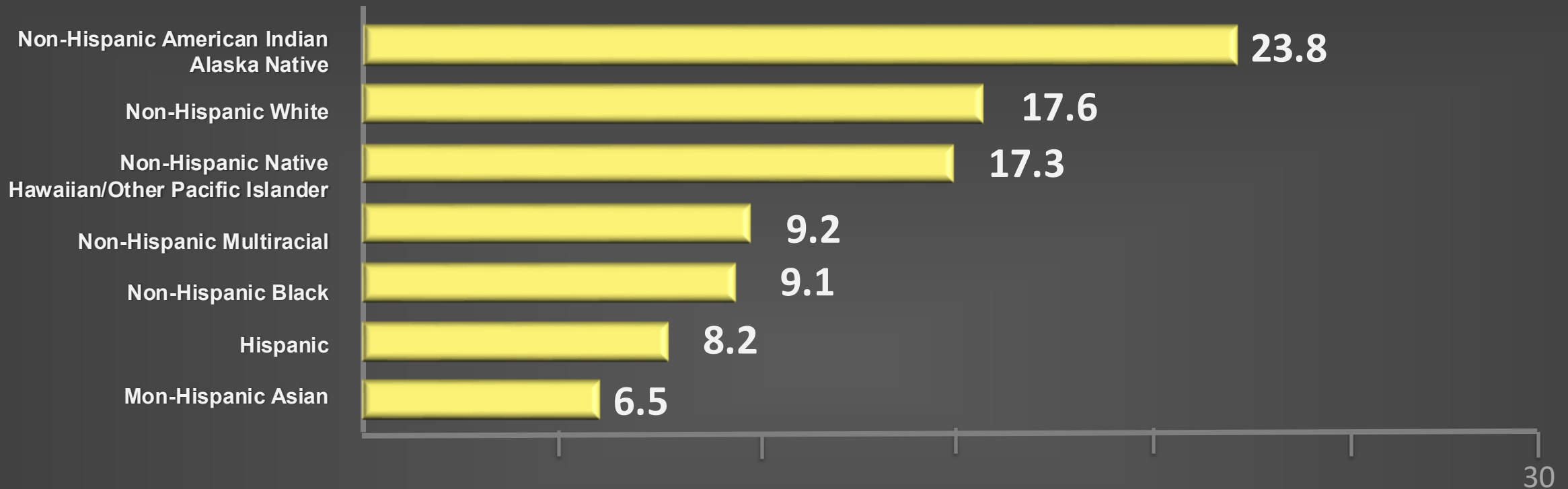
(Per 100,000) ←



- The suicide rate among males in 2020 was **4 times higher** than the rate among females
- Men die more, women attempt more
- Men use more lethal means

2023 Suicide Deaths Nationally by Race & Ethnicity

(Per 100,000*)

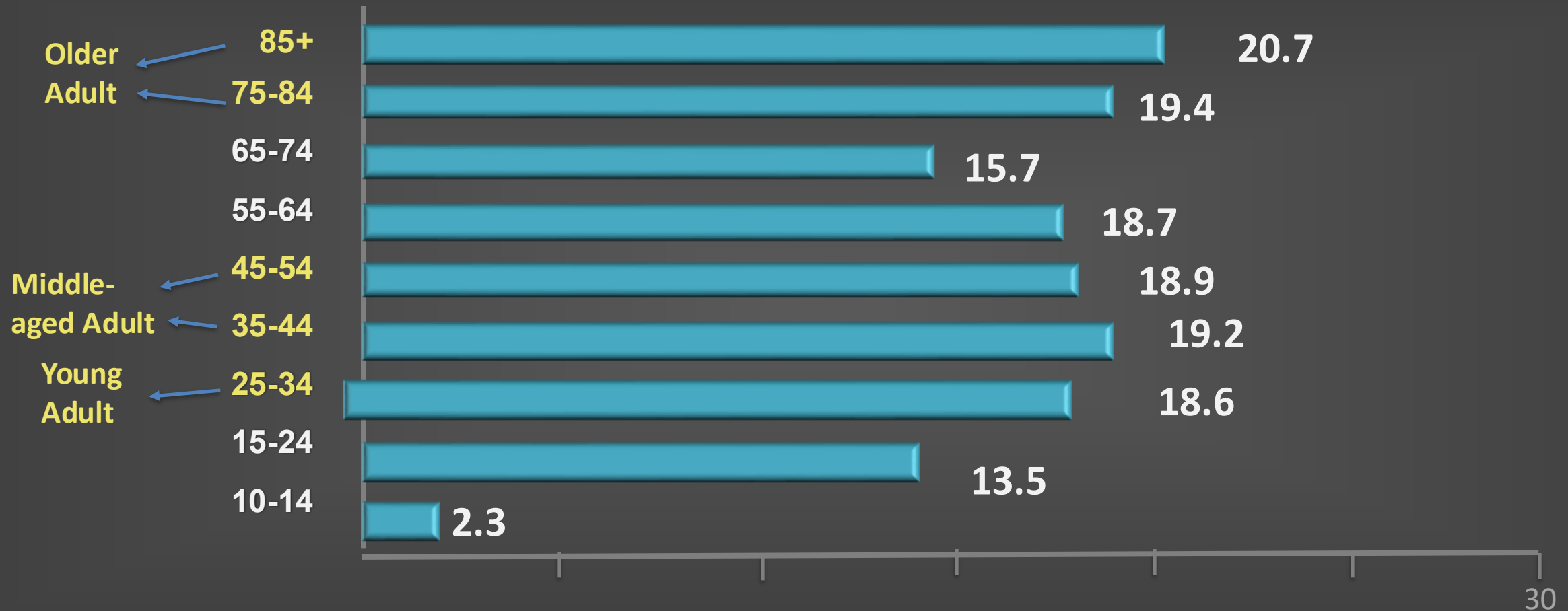


Rate of deaths vs. percentage of overall deaths

- When you look at the racial group with the highest rate of suicide, it's Indigenous people
- Funding the groups with the highest number of deaths ensures the group with the highest rates does not receive adequate funding

2023 Suicide Deaths Nationally by Age

(Per 100,000*)



Suicide Deaths Nationally – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity



Considered suicide in the past year

- 39% of LGBTQ+ Youth
- 46% of Gender Expansive Youth

LGBTQ youth who felt high levels of social support from their family reported attempting suicide at less than half the rate

Attempted suicide in the past year

- 12% of LGBTQ Youth
- 14% of Transgender Women
- 18% of Transgender Men
- 13% of Nonbinary/Genderqueer
- 11% Questioning

Trevor Project 2024:

18,000 LGBTQ youth ages 13-24

People Who Are At Higher Risk for Suicidality

Research shows that some groups are at higher risk for developing problem gambling, including:

- Older Adults (75+)
- Middle-Aged Adults (35-54)
- Young adults (25-34)
- Men – deaths
- Women – attempts
- Indigenous People
- People experiencing homophobia
- People experiencing transphobia
- Veterans
- Rural

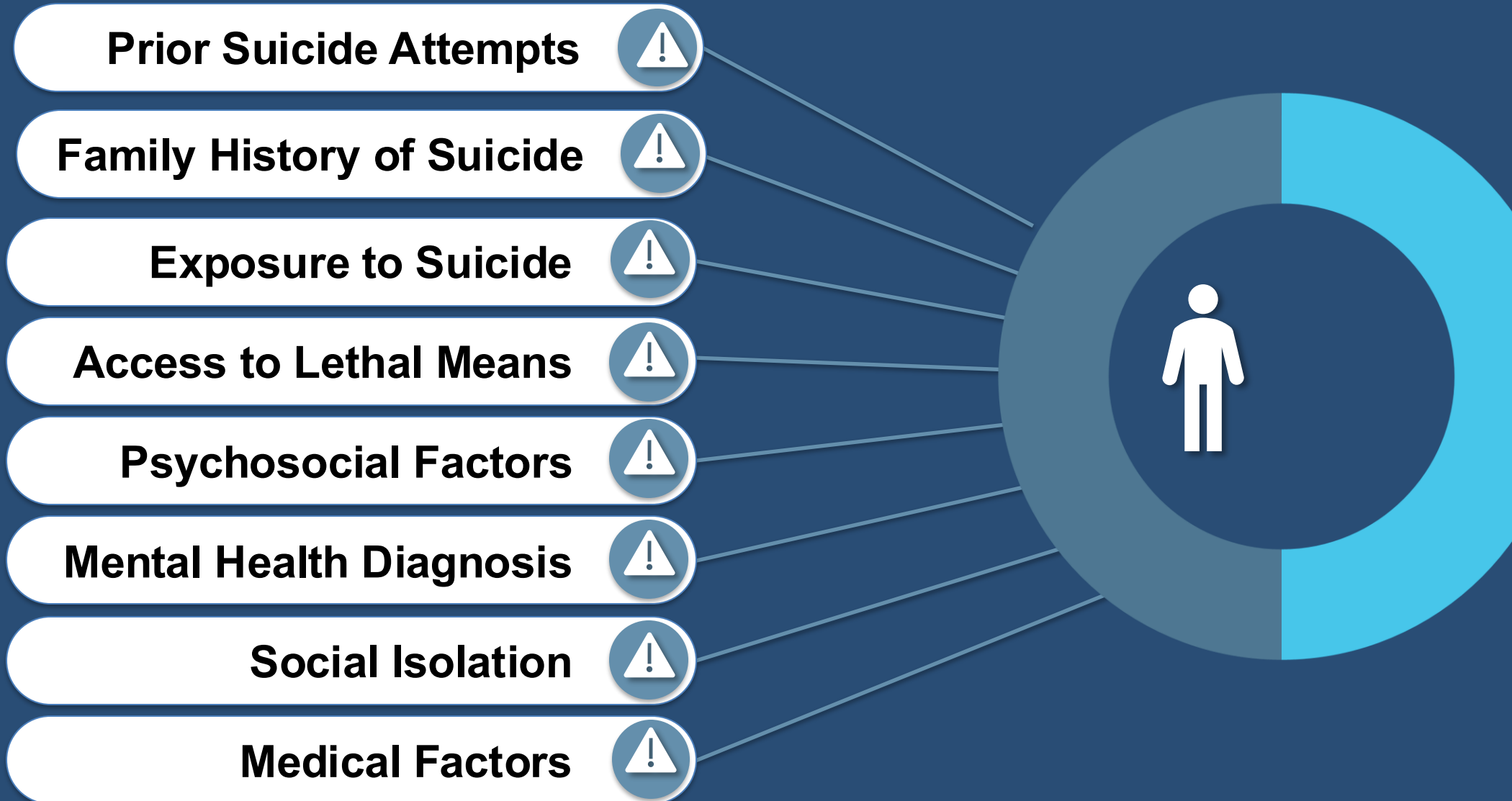


Risk and Protective Factors for Suicidality



What would
you guess are
risk factors for
suicide?

Risk Factors for Suicide



Precipitating Events for Suicide





What would
you guess
are protective
factors for
suicide?

Protective Factors for Suicide





Case Study Part II



Six months later, Janice has lost all of the family's retirement money and then some. Her husband Rudy recently discovered this when the bank called about late payments on their mortgage. He threatened to leave her and take the children unless she stopped gambling. She did. She has not gambled in the past month, but her relationship with Rudy and the children continues to be strained. He just wants results. No discussion.

Janice is fraught with guilt for what she has done and often thinks about suicide. She has taken to walking the neighborhood after work for an hour or more dreading going home to the constant mistrust and questioning. Of course, her husband accuses her of gambling again when she doesn't come right home, but she can't bear the awful feeling of being in the house. She feels she has no place to go and that there is no way to make this right. She is afraid that the constant tension and fighting with her husband is likely to impact the kids.

This reminds Janice of what her parents were like, and she had sworn that she would never let that happen to her family. She is so embarrassed that she has stopped answering calls from her friends and family. Her friends keep trying to get her to go to the casino with them because that always used to cheer her up.

Janice has been thinking more and more about her favorite uncle, who died by suicide when she was a teenager. He was the one person who she felt really "got" her. She has started walking near the train tracks more and more often.



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Color Codes:

- **Risk factors for suicide**
- **Protective Factors for suicide**

A close-up photograph of a bright blue, vintage-style alarm clock. The clock has two large, rounded bells and a silver-colored metal handle arching over the top. The clock face is white with black numerals, and the numbers 11, 12, and 1 are visible. The background is a solid, light pink color. The text "Break Time" is superimposed in the center of the image in a large, white, sans-serif font with a subtle drop shadow.

Break Time

SECTION 4: Intersections of Problem Gambling and Suicide

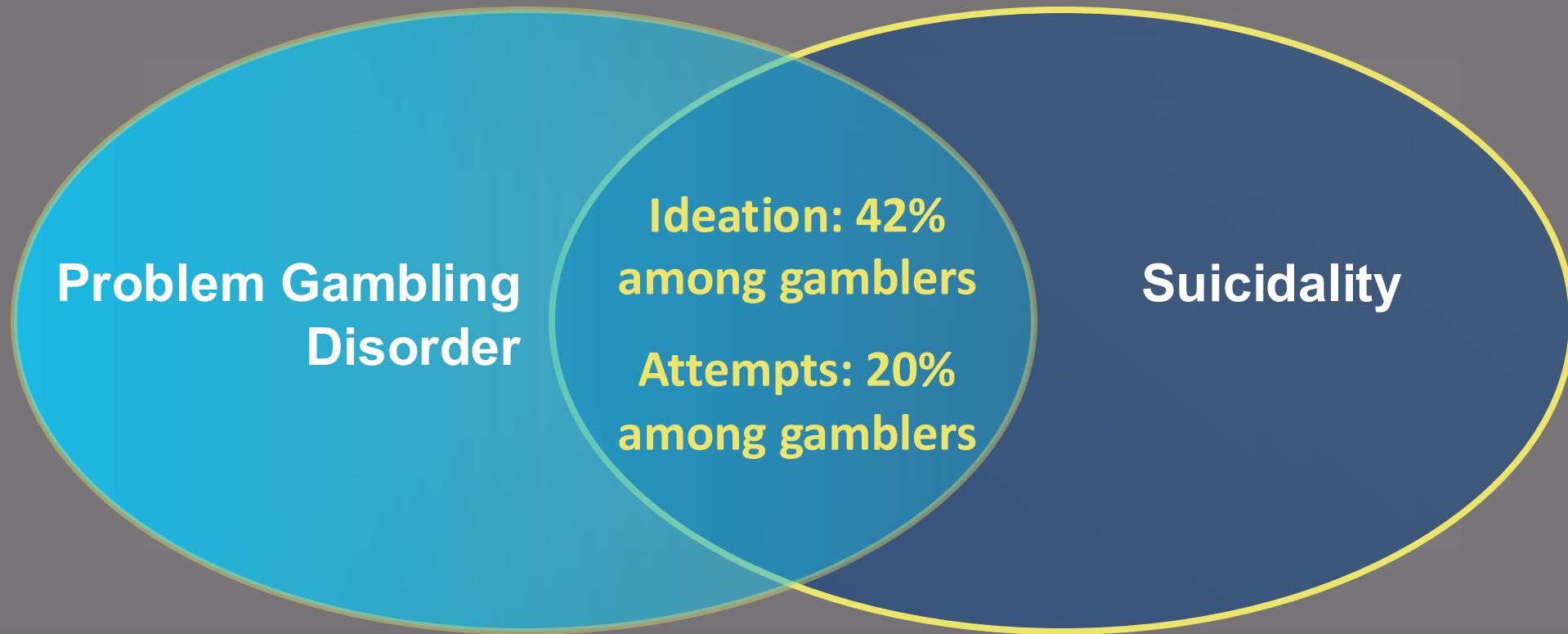


Image Source: <https://www.i-fink.com/building-sustainably/>

Co-occurrence Rates

Problem Gambling

Suicidality



People with Problem Gambling Have Among the Highest Rates of Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors

- In a 2019 study, people diagnosed with disordered gambling were over 15 times as likely as the general population to die by suicide
- 17-24% of problem gamblers attempt suicide
- The development of problem gambling and suicidality is bi-directional

Shared Risk Factors



Shared Protective Factors





Case Study

Small Group



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Review



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Color Codes:

- **Risk Factors for both**
- **Protective factors for both**



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Debrief

- Did you notice anything new?
- Was anything applicable to your work?

Social & Structural Determinants of Health



Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Public Health Professionals Gateway, Social Determinants of Health

Shifting the Narrative

Building Protective Factors: Education

Ability to obtain high quality education



- Increase safe and supportive school environments
- Increase school-based pathways to help
- Increase coping and problem-solving skills
- Reduce the stigma of mental illness and addiction (including gambling)

Shifting the Narrative

Building Protective Factors: Healthcare

Ability to obtain high quality health care services



- Increase the availability of supportive health and behavioral healthcare
- Universal gambling and suicide screening tools in primary care and behavioral health care settings
- Communicate broadly that help is available, treatment works, and no one should suffer alone
- Increase the pathways to finding help
- Reduce the stigma of mental illness and addiction (including gambling)

Shifting the Narrative

Building Protective Factors: Built Environment

Ability to have positive relationships and community connection



- Reduce accessibility of lethal means
- Reduce accessibility of and/or exposure to gambling (casinos, sports betting, scratch tickets, etc.)

Shifting the Narrative

Building Protective Factors: Social & Community

Ability to live safely and avoid danger



- Support connections to communities that hold moral or cultural objections to suicide and/or gambling
- Communicate broadly that help is available, treatment works, and no one should suffer alone
- Increase community-based pathways to finding help
- Increase coping and problem-solving skills
- Increase the feeling that life is worthwhile, e.g., caring for pets, connections to family, and future goals
- Support connectedness to individuals, family, community, and social institutions

Shifting the Narrative

Building Protective Factors: Economic Stability

Ability to afford health supporting purchases, such as food and housing



- Economic social safety net
- Increase access to daily necessities, e.g., food, housing, heat, etc.

RESOURCES

Massachusetts Problem Gambling Helpline

- Call 1-800-327-5050
- Visit <https://gamblinghelpline.ma.org> to speak with a trained Specialist to receive support. Specialists are available 24/7.

Gamblers Anonymous

- <https://gamblersanonymous.org/>

HOW TO GET HELP

- **988** (talk or text) 
 - Anyone can call a hotline for support, including friends, family, professionals, or anyone in need of help for a person experiencing suicidal intensity
- **The Trevor Project** – LGBTQ2S+ resource
 - Text: 678-678, Voice: 866-488-7386
 - Computer-based chat:
<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/>
- **Trans Lifeline** – Will not contact emergency services
 - Voice: 877-565-8860
 - <https://translifeline.org/>
- **Local suicide hotline**
- **911**
- **Go directly to an emergency room**





THANK YOU

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