



PROBLEM  
GAMBLING  
PREVENTION

# The Intersections

Problem Gambling and Suicide Prevention

**June 12, 2025 | 1:00 – 3:30 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



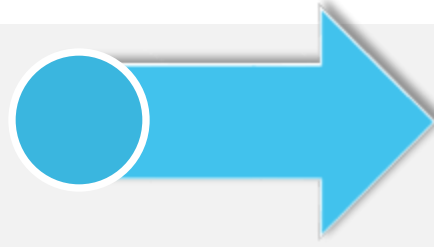
Describe risk and protective factors for problem gambling

01



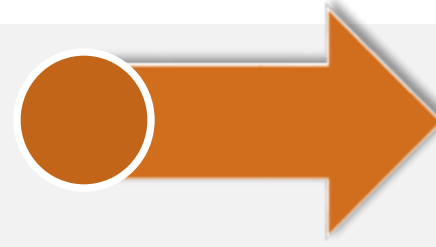
Identify warning signs and risk and protective factors for suicide

02



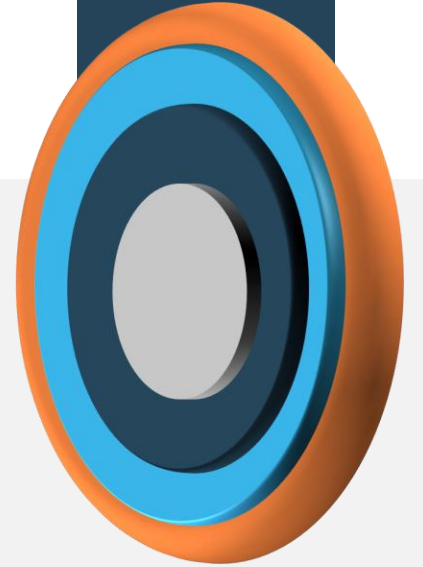
Describe the overlapping risk factors of problem gambling and suicide

03



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

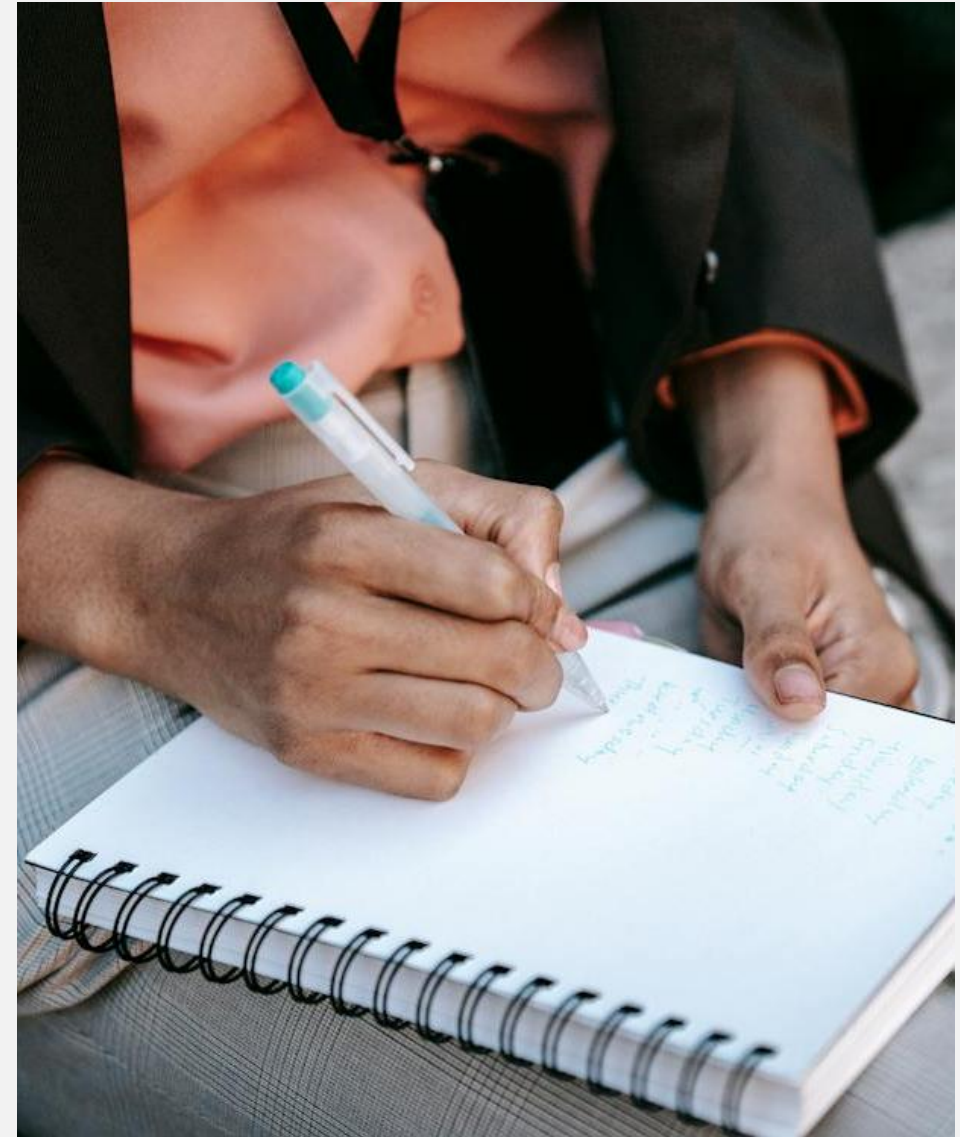
04



# AGENDA

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



# POLL

*What category do you identify with?*

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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

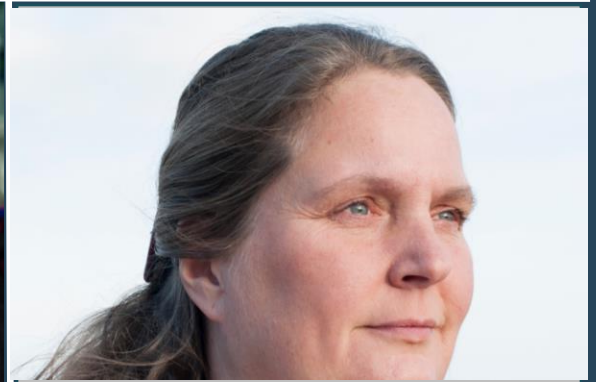
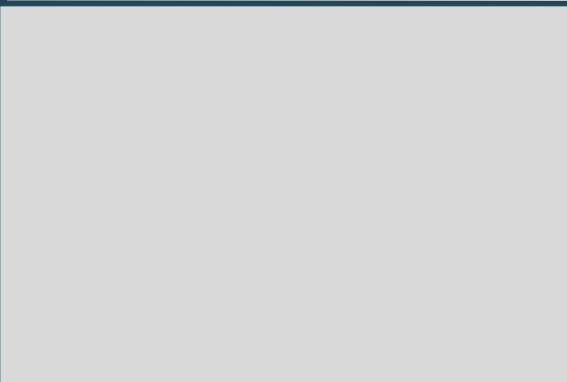
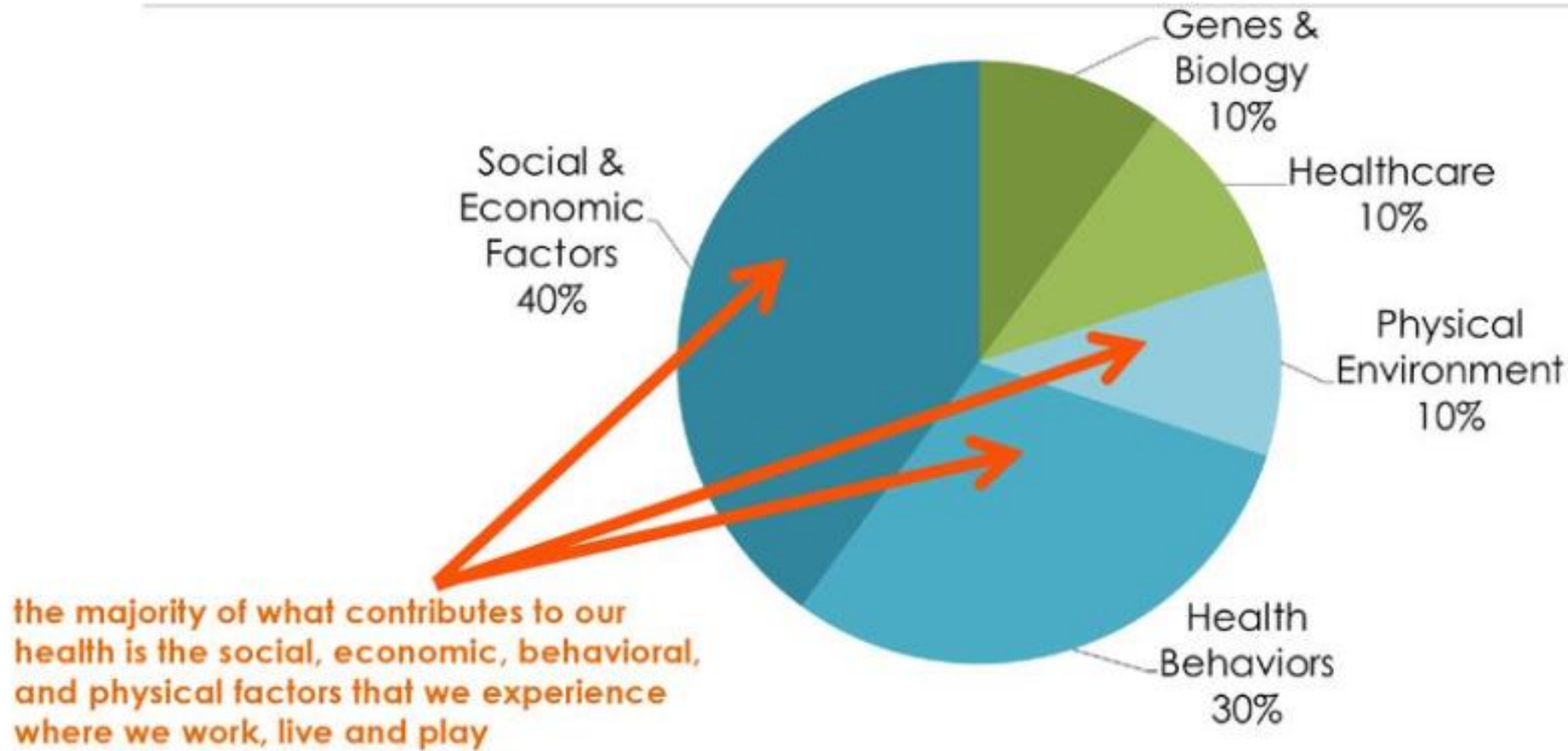


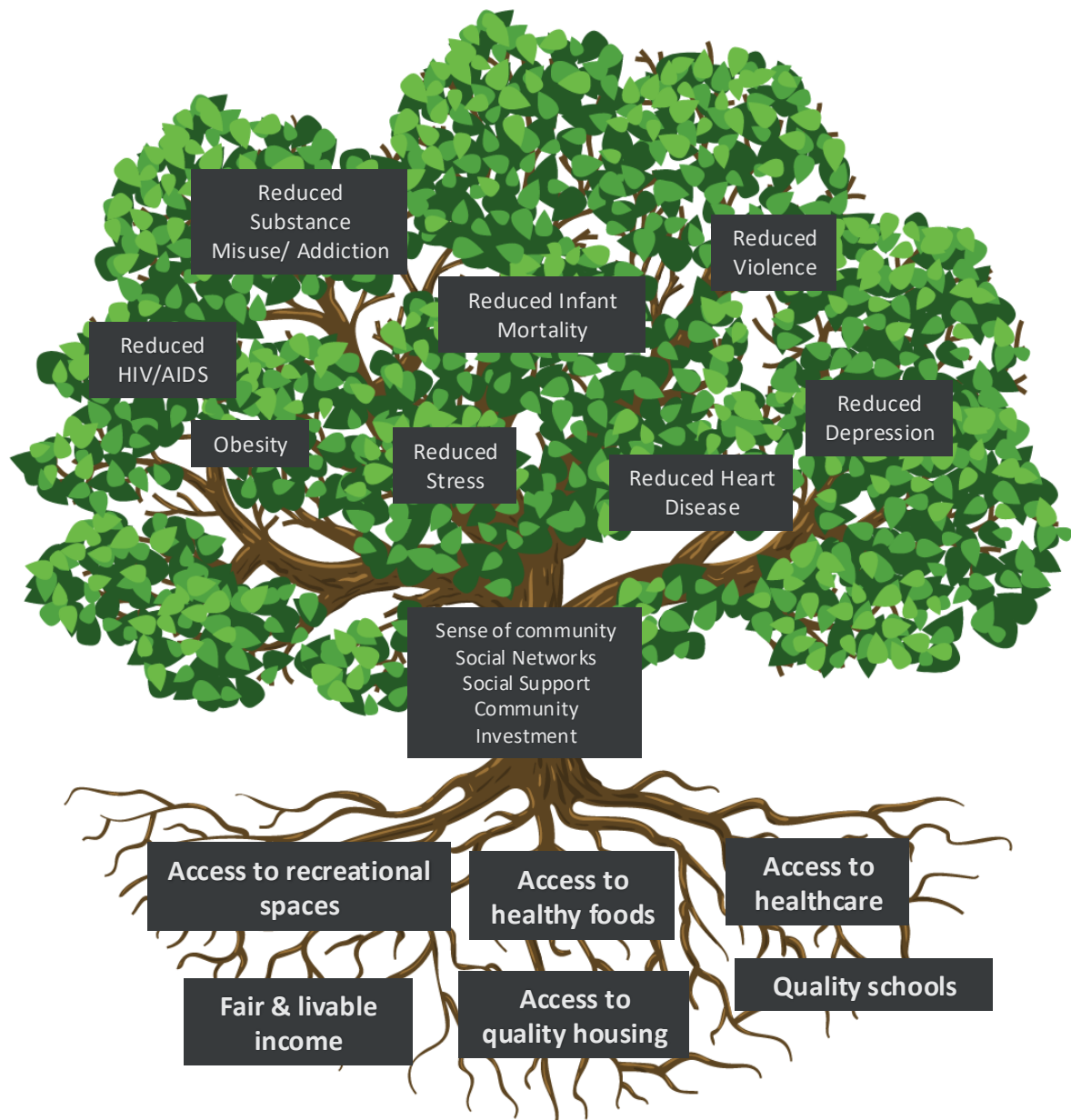
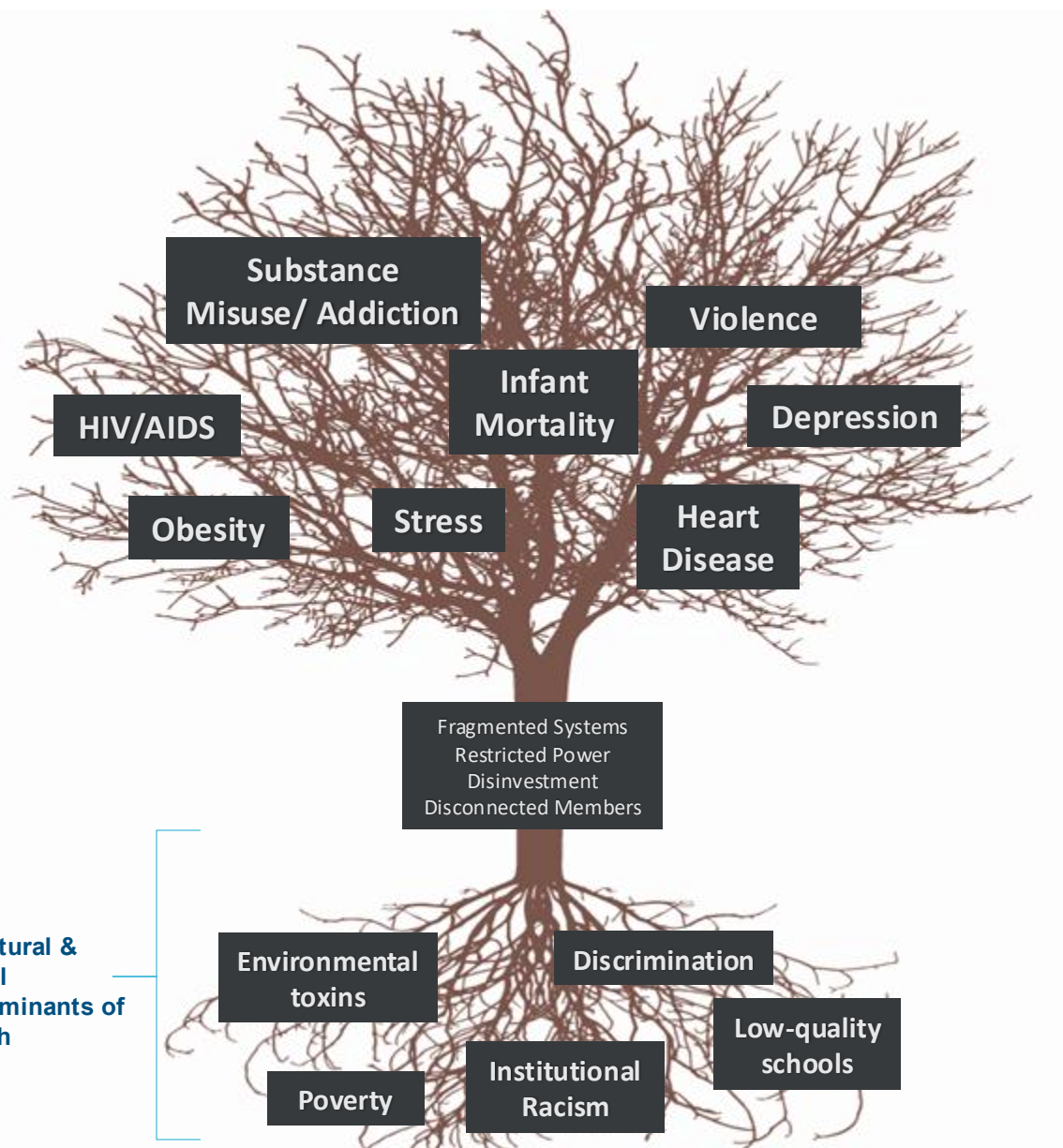
Image Source: <https://www.i-fink.com/building-sustainably/>



# WHAT MAKES US HEALTHY?

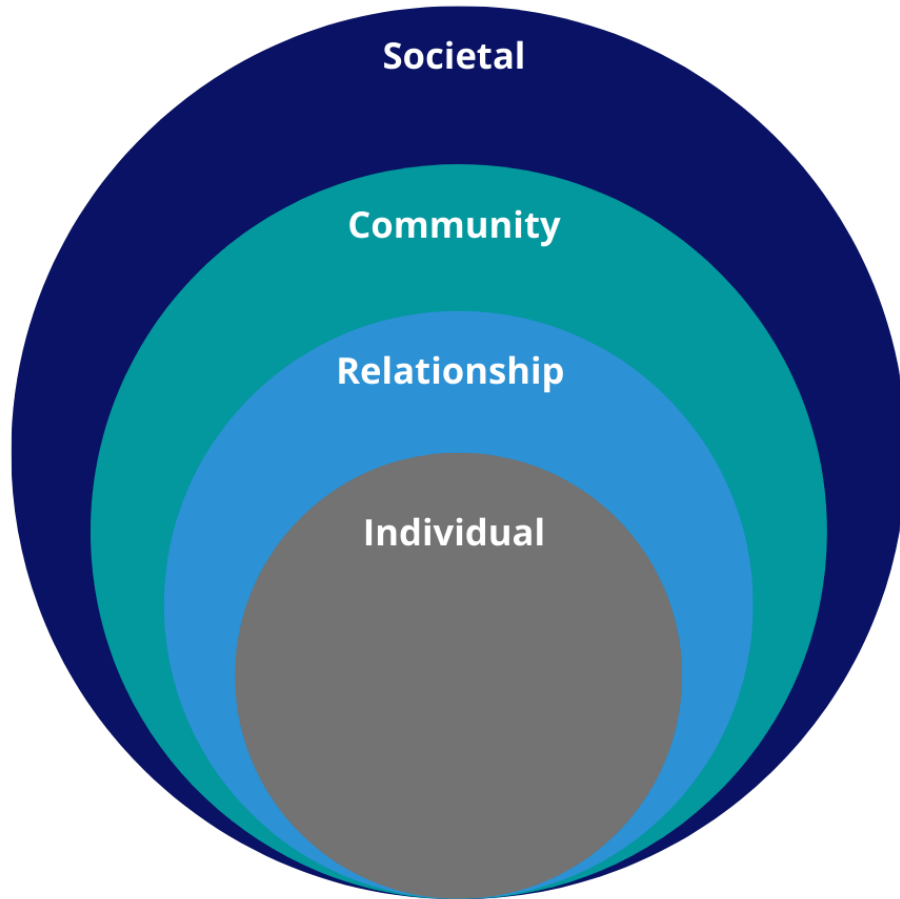


Our environments cultivate our communities, and our communities nurture our health.





# 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

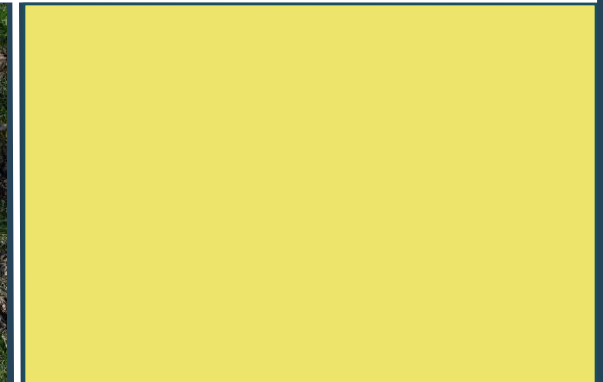
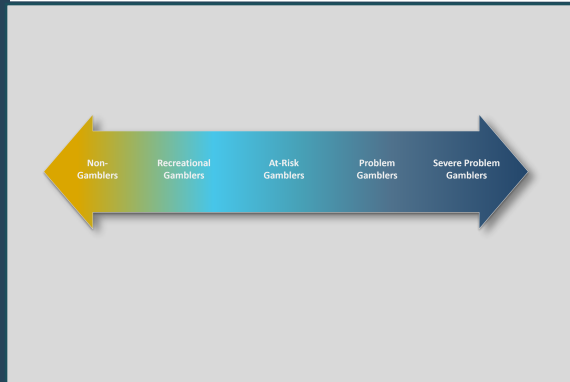


Image Source: <https://www.i-fink.com/building-sustainably/>



# Definition of Gambling

“Betting money or material goods on an event with an uncertain outcome in the hope of winning additional money and/or material goods.”

Source: (Williams, et al., 2017)



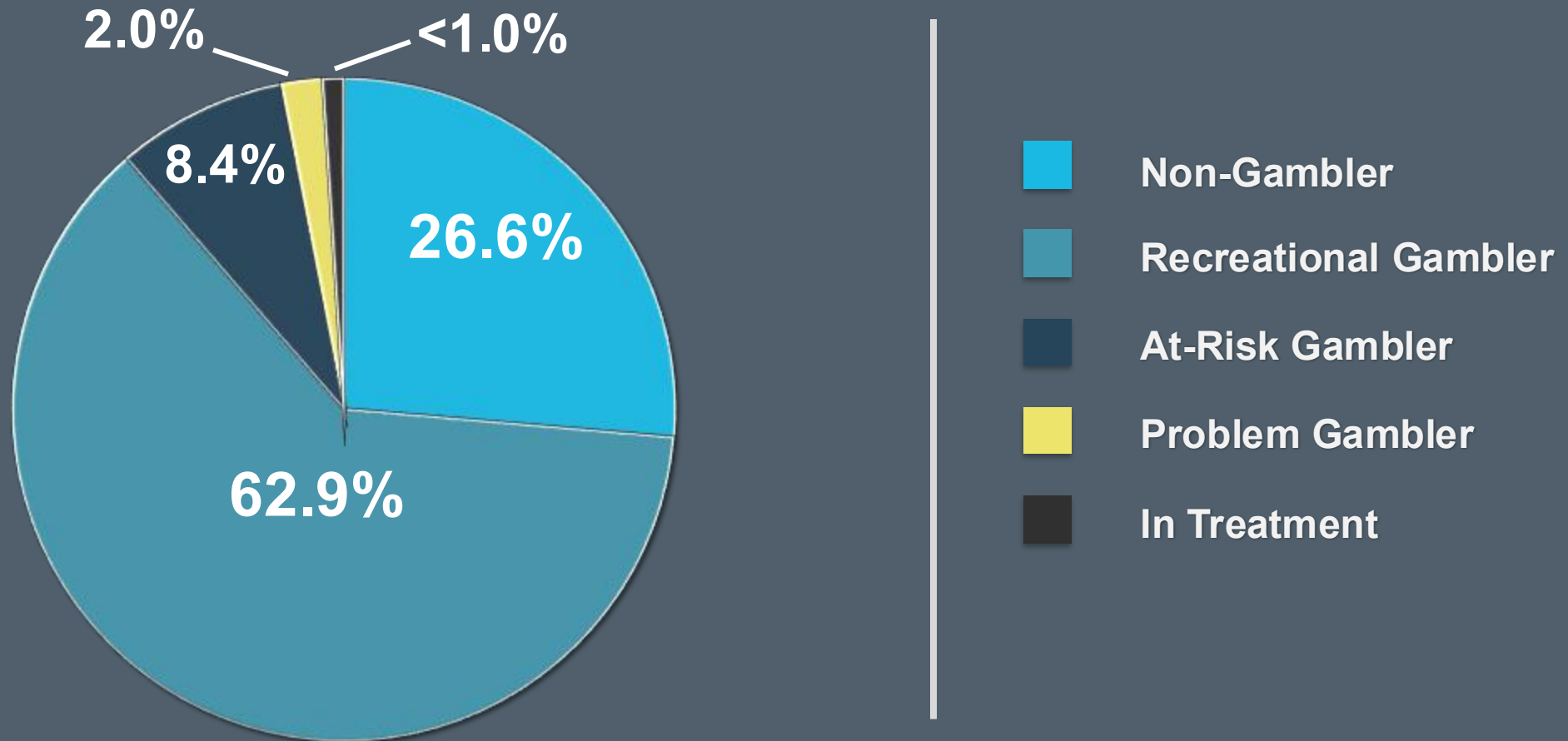
# Defining Our Language: The Gambling Continuum



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**

# Massachusetts Problem Gambling Prevalence



Adapted from SEIGMA Survey, 2017, UMass School of Public Health & Health Sciences

# 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

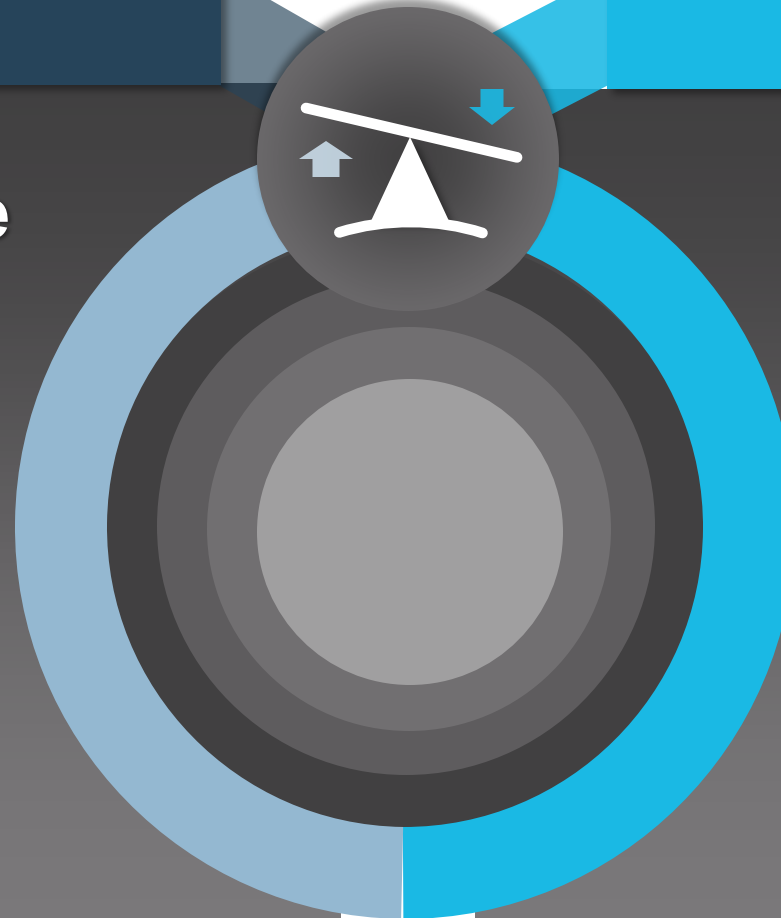
## Risk Factors

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



## Protective Factors









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

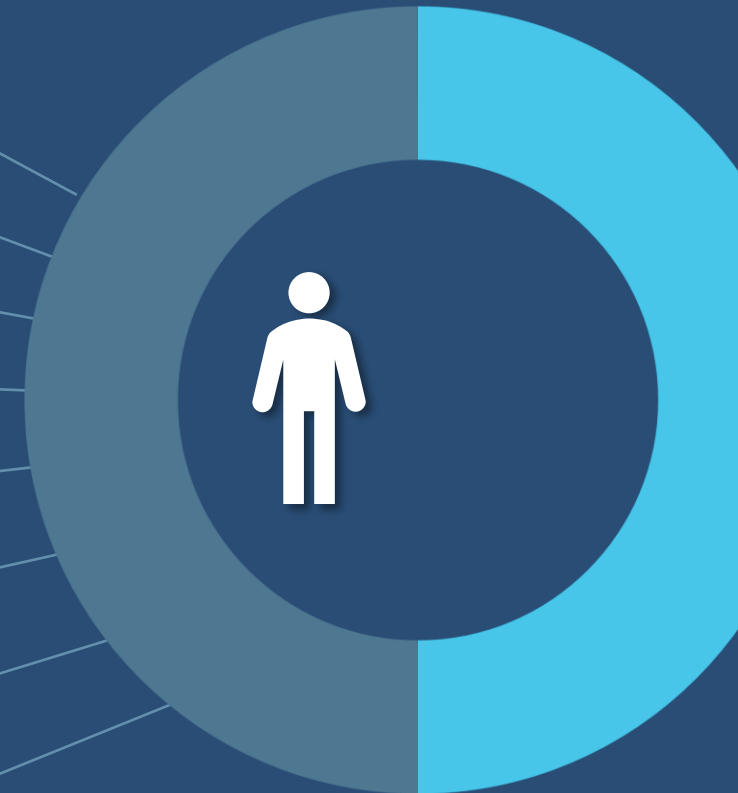


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# Risk and Protective Factors for Problem Gambling

# Risk Factors For Problem Gambling

- Early Big Win** 
- Low SES** 
- Early Gambling Onset** 
- Impulsivity** 
- Stress and Coping** 
- Substance Use Disorder** 
- Mental Health Disorder** 
- 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
- Males
- 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 for Problem Gambling







5-MINUTE BREAK



# Case Study Part I



# 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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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.



# In Chat Box

- What are Janice's risk factors for developing a problem with gambling?
- What are Janice's protective factors that help prevent problem gambling?
- What signs do you see that may indicate Janice is having a problem with 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**
- **Protective Factors**

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 3: Suicide Through a Public Health Lens



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

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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.

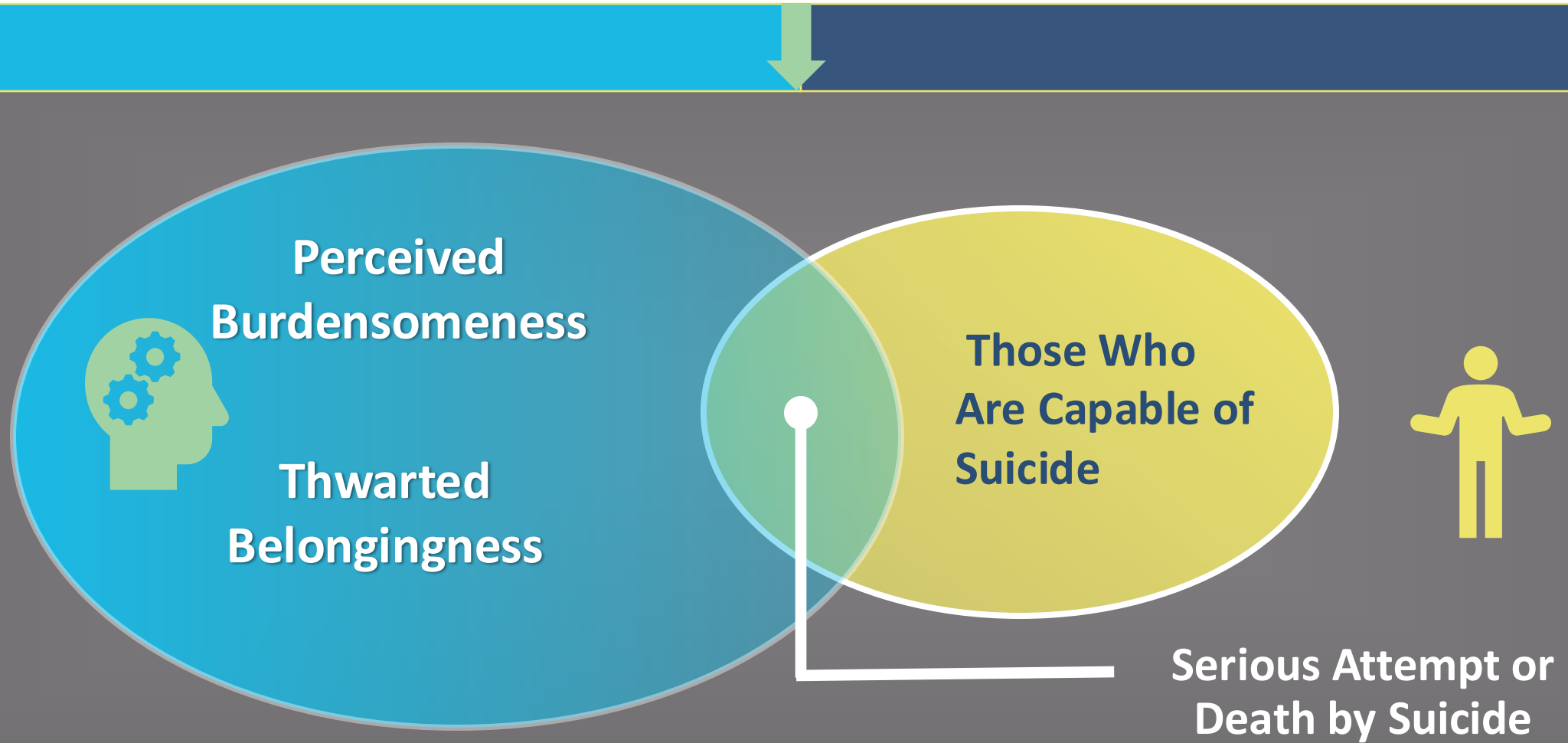
# Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicidal Behavior

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# Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicidal Behavior

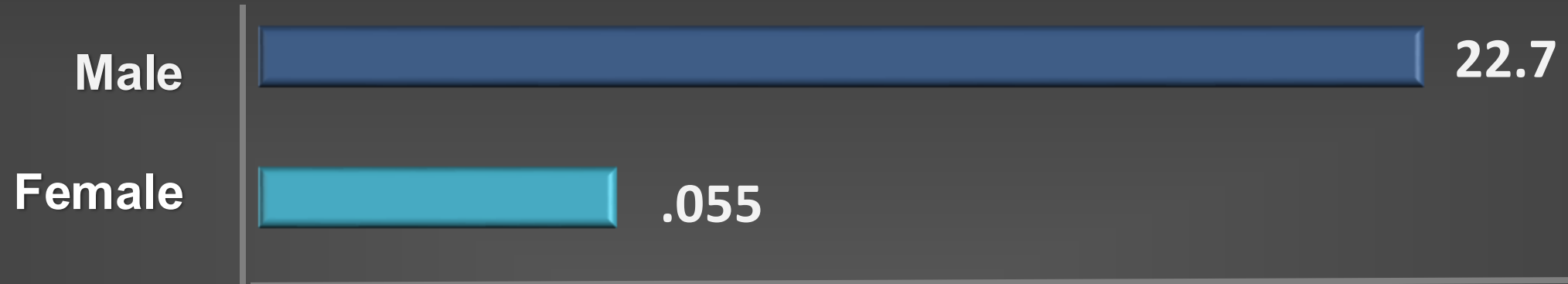


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# Demographics of Suicidality

# 2023 Suicide Deaths Nationally by Gender

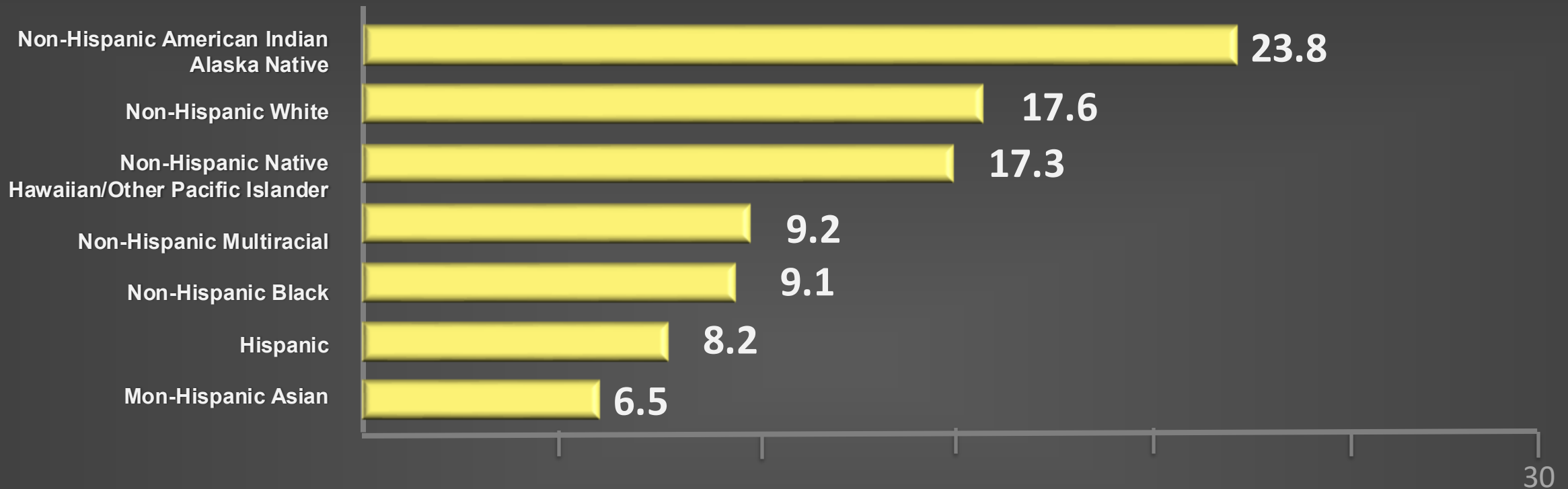
(Per 100,000) ←



- 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\*)

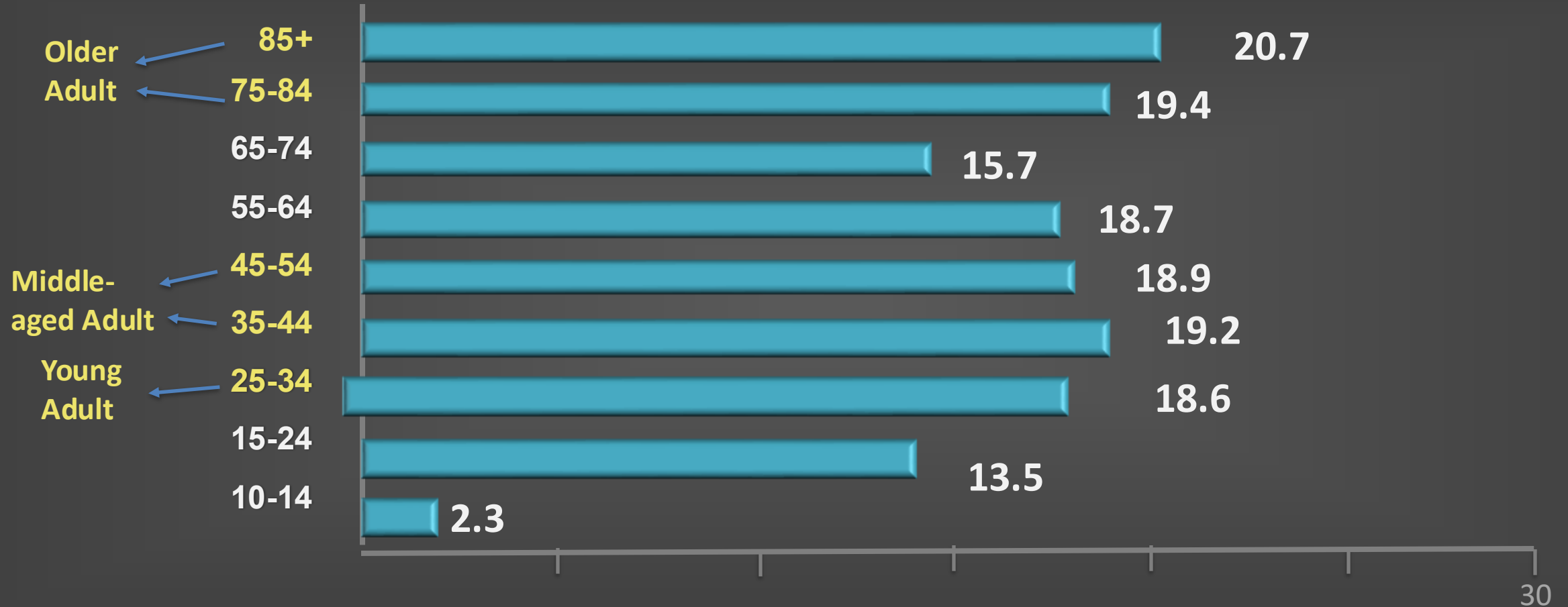


## Rate of deaths vs. percentage of overall deaths

- 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/Generqueer

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




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# Risk and Protective Factors for Suicidality

# Risk Factors for Suicide

**Prior Suicide Attempts** 

**Family History of Suicide** 

**Exposure to Suicide** 

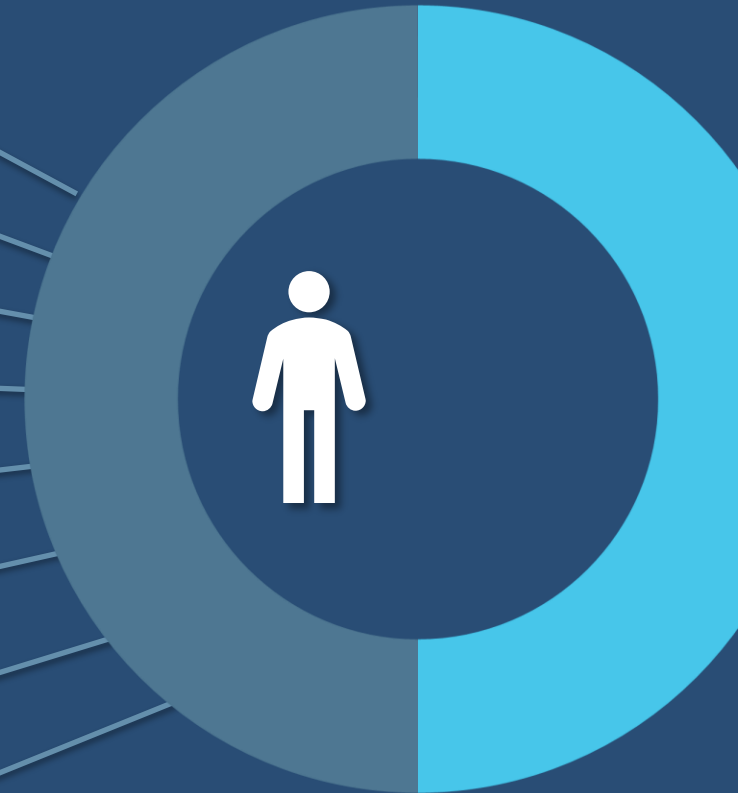
**Access to Lethal Means** 

**Psychosocial Factors** 

**Mental Health Diagnosis** 

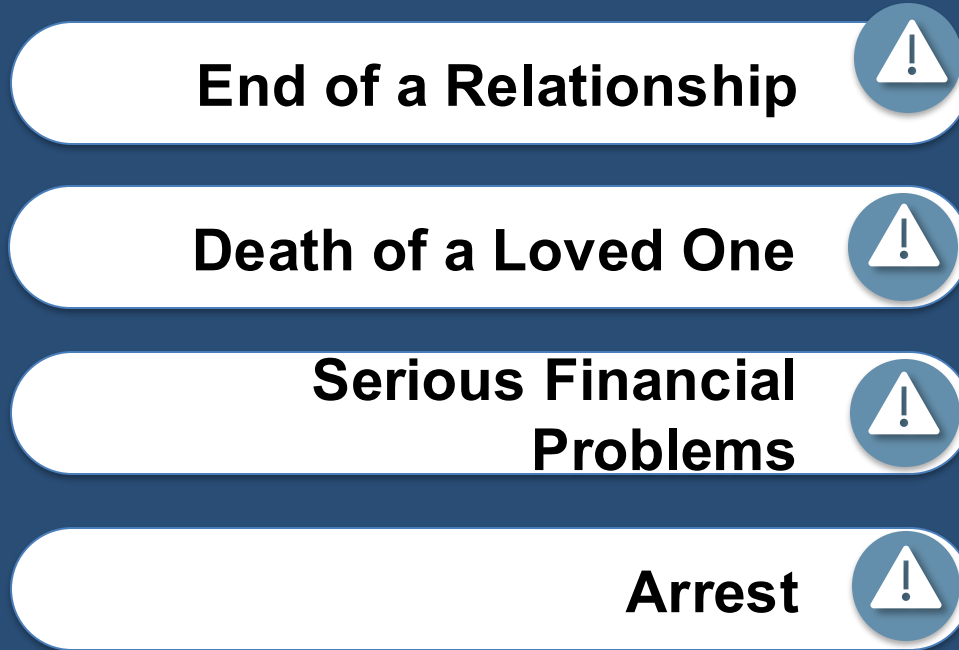
**Social Isolation** 

**Medical Factors** 





# Precipitating Events 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.

### Color Codes:

- **Risk factors**
- **Protective Factors**



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

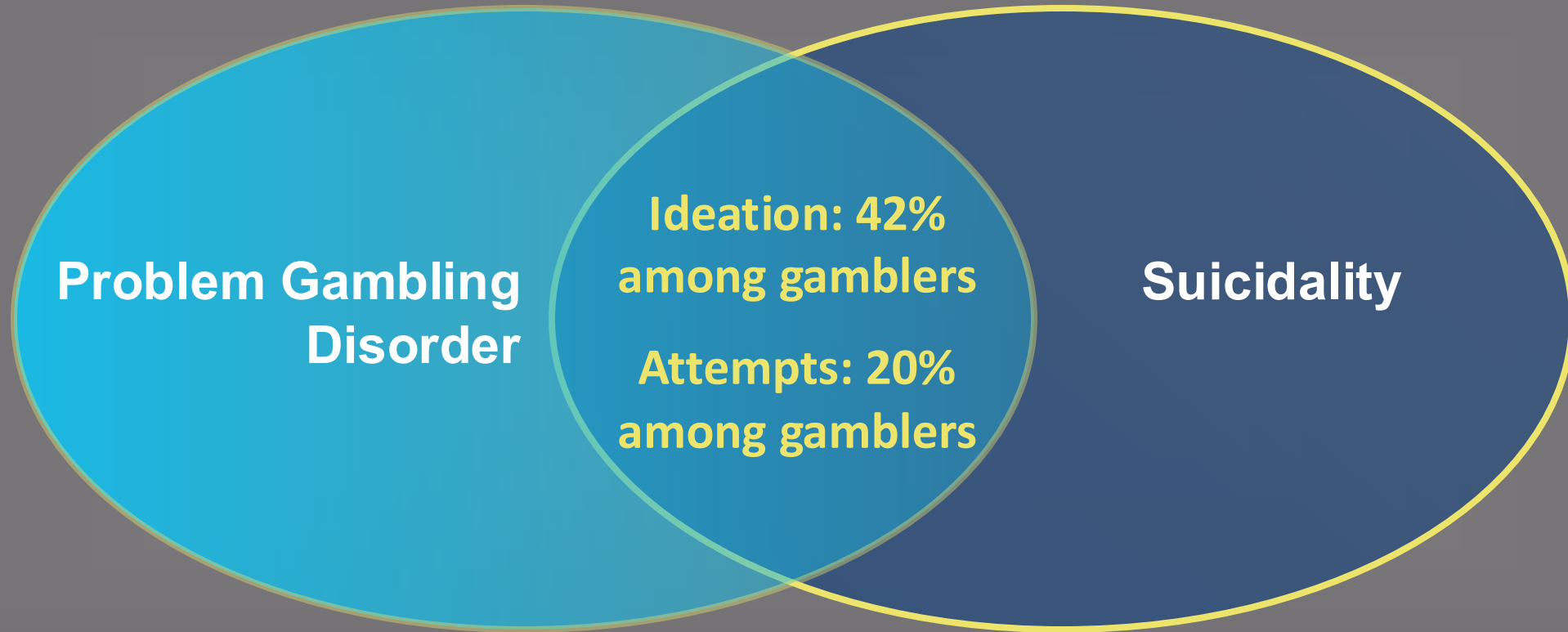


Image Source: <https://www.i-fink.com/building-sustainably/>

# 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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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 fewer opportunities 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.



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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?



# 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.



# 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)

# 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**





# Wrap-Up

What are you taking away from today?

- ✓ Any insights you had?
- ✓ Anything important and/or new?
- ✓ How can you address PG and Suicidality in your role





PROBLEM  
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# Evaluation

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HH3TFFN>





# THANK YOU

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# Upcoming MCOE PGP Trainings

## **The Intersections of Problem Gambling and Violence Prevention (New Training!)**

**Wednesday, June 18th from 10:00  
AM ET to 12:00 PM ET**



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