

**Problem Gambling in Los Angeles County:
Problem Gambling Prevalence and Services in Asian American Communities**

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Introduction

There are four types of gamblers: social, professional, problem, and compulsive. Social gamblers are individuals who gamble recreationally and acknowledge a spending limit. Professional gamblers use gambling as a source of income and do not chase losses to recover after losing a fold. Problem gamblers possess a gambling habit that impedes on their basic needs and chase losses. Compulsive gambling or pathological gambling is a mental health disorder outlined in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual IV (DSM IV). Compulsive gambling affects the gamblers, their family members, their employment attendance, their health, and their mental health. Problem gambling and compulsive gambling (problem gambling hereafter) has become an increasing social issue in many Asian immigrant communities in Southern California. Though there are only very few problem gamblers in California, their addiction costs the state nearly \$1 billion (Simmons 2006). The costs result in divorces, child custody battles, fraud, imprisonment, theft, depression, suicide attempts, and treatment services.

While 3.7% of all gamblers in California suffer from compulsive gambling and 9.5% are at-risk, disaggregate data show disparities in particular vulnerable populations (Volberg et. al. 2006). For example, 60% of California Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian gamblers are compulsive gamblers (Gambling Risks in Different Communities Presentation 2009). Twenty-one percent of California Chinese American gamblers are compulsive gamblers and another 14.7% are problem gamblers (NICOS Chinese Health

Coalition). In 2000, two cardrooms in San Jose brought the local government \$7.5 million through taxes. Seventy percent of the revenue were produced by Asian games (Simmons 2006). Target marketing by the casinos and cultural factors contribute to this significant disparity. Casinos contract bus agencies to transport clients from the San Gabriel Valley where the zip codes have the largest populations of Asian Americans in Los Angeles County. Casinos also provide \$15 to \$25 monetary coupons and free lunches for those in San Gabriel Valley who utilize the bus services. For poor, unemployed, and often senior Asian immigrants, this is a great incentive.

Map Analysis

Referring to the map 1, one can see the ease in accessibility to nearly *every* casino in Southern California. Gamblers from Los Angeles County would travel to the County of San Bernardino, Riverside, San Diego, and even Imperial to be patrons at casinos. Almost all casinos in Southern California are within 0.5 mile away from major freeways including the 105, 710, Interstate 10, 60, 74, 5, 8, and Pala Road. This accessibility allows gamblers to easily travel between counties and even worse between casinos because of their close proximity to each other. Compulsive gamblers who lose at one casino often will visit the next closest casino to chase their losses. Casinos that are further from the freeway likely have less patrons because of their difficult accessibility to gamblers wishing to travel from another casino more easily.

Many of the buses that transport clients to casinos leave from cities in Los Angeles County including Los Angeles (Koreatown and Chinatown), Monterey Park, San Gabriel, Alhambra, Hacienda Heights, and Rowland Heights. Though some of the casinos are located within American Indian reservation areas that have one-lane windy roads, they remain easily accessible even for large buses.

For instance, Pala Road which leads to the Pala Band of Mission Indian Reservation is a small windy road that even buses use to

Map 1

Highway Accessibility to Casinos in Southern California

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County Shapefile: UCLA Mapshare (gts.ats.ucla.edu)

Major Roads: UCLA Mapshare (gts.ats.ucla.edu)

Casinos: (www.cgcc.ca.gov/cardrooms.asp & www.cgcc.ca.gov/tribalinformation.asp)

Southern California Major Highways was derived by selecting all major roads within "Southern California Counties and converting to shapefile

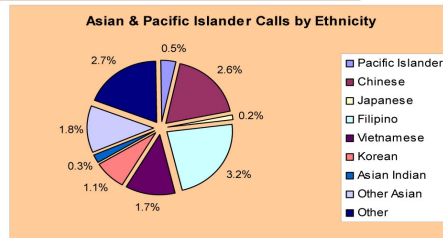
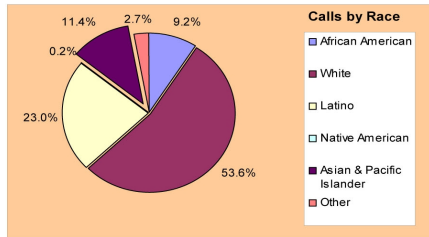
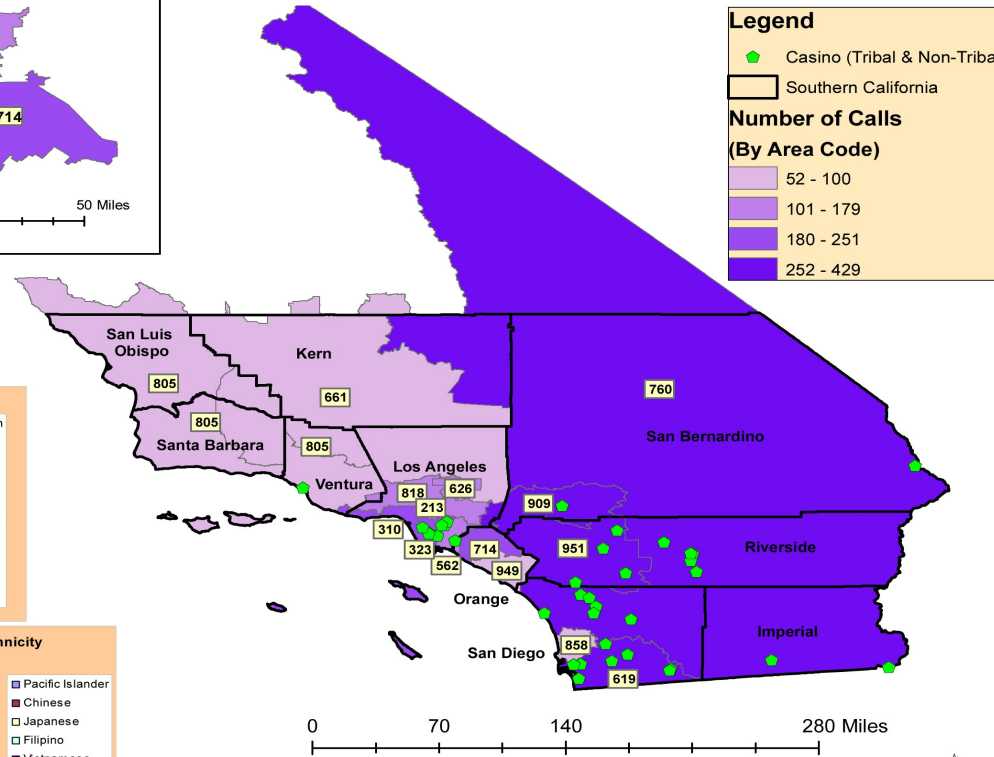
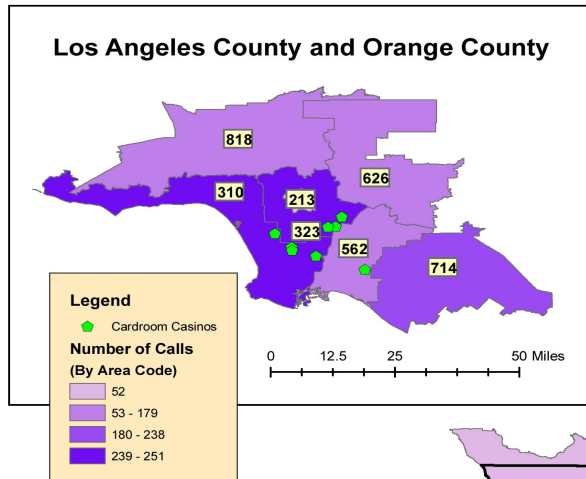
transport patrons to Pala Casino. The wide distribution of casinos throughout Southern California make it extremely difficult to gauge the impacts of problem gambling in various communities because gamblers travel all over different counties to gamble.

Map 2 show the number of calls made into 1-800-GAMBLER by area code in 2006. 1-800-GAMBLER is a helpline that operates 24 hours a day and 7 days a week for gambling addicts to call for counseling, referral, and help. The four categories of calls was classified through natural breaks. The least amount of calls are made from Kern, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties as well as the northern part of Los Angeles County. The counties with fewer number of calls into 1-800-GAMBLER are also the counties with the least amount of casinos. Ventura County only has one casino adjacent to the ocean while other counties have a greater number of casinos. Area codes 760, 951, 619, and 951 in Riverside, San Bernardino, Imperial, and San Diego County excluding area code 858 all have significant numbers of casinos. Many of the calls are made from the casino room or from the personal cell phones of the gambler.

Interestingly, looking at the inset map of “1-800-GAMBLER Calls and Locations of Casinos” it shows that most calls made into the helpline come mostly from area code locations that have casinos including 310 and 323. However, although area code 714 is absent of any casinos there are still 180 to 251 calls made into 1-800-GAMBLER. Area code 714 includes Orange County, where there is the largest population of Vietnamese people outside of Vietnam and a significant population of Latino immigrants. Area codes 818, 626, and 562 have 101 to 179 calls made into 1-800-GAMBLER, which are fairly significant considering the smaller number of residents living in these areas compared to the highly dense areas in the City of Los Angeles.

1-800-GAMBLER Calls and Location of Casinos

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Area Code and County Boundaries:
 UCLA Mapshare (gis.ats.ucla.edu)
 California Council on Problem Gambling: California Helpline Statistics
 July 1, 2008 - June 30, 2009
 (Bensinger, DuPoint & Associates)

Southern California Counties was derived by selecting counties in Area Codes and converting to shapefile.
 Los Angeles County and Orange County was derived by selecting area codes within Los Angeles and Orange County and converting to shapefile.

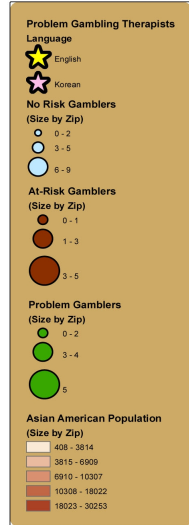
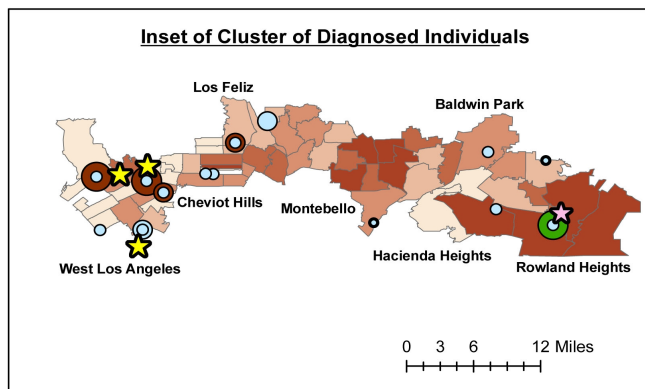
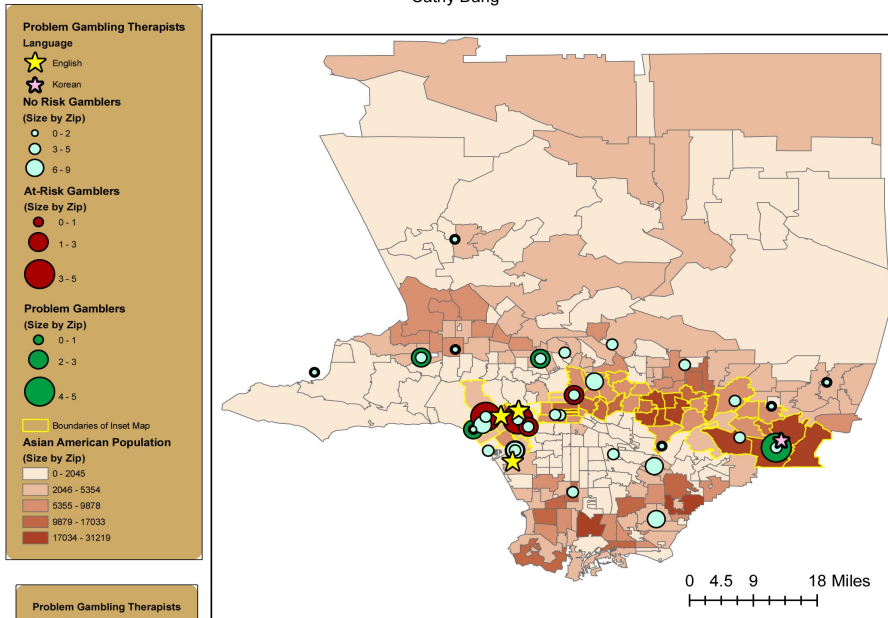


The 1-800-GAMBLER helpline services are only in English and Spanish. One small non-profit organization in San Francisco, NICOS Chinese Health Coalition, started a helpline that is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Pacific Standard Time. The helpline services monolingual Chinese- and Mandarin-speaking problem gamblers and their family members. Considering the large population of immigrant limited English proficient (LEP) Chinese and Korean Americans living in area code 626 (San Gabriel Valley), LEP Cambodian Americans living in area code 562 (City of Long Beach), and LEP Vietnamese Americans living in area code 714 (City of Westminster), 101 to 179 calls from area codes 626, 562, and 180 to 251 calls from area code 714 is extremely disturbing. California helplines need to more adequately address the needs of LEP Asian American immigrants. Little data exists to prove the number of calls made by Asian immigrants who were not serviced by the 1-800-GAMBLER helpline.

Map 3 shows that there are greater numbers of at-risk and no risk gamblers living in the western part of the County which has smaller populations of Asian American residents. The 2006 California Problem Gambling Prevalence Survey notes that the study did not recruit enough Asian and Latino respondents proportional to the state (Volberg et. al. 2006). There were 7,121 respondents statewide and only 504 Asian respondents, which is only 7% of the sample pool while Asian Americans make up a little over 12% of the state (Volberg et. al. 2006). Despite such miniscule Asian sample size in the survey, the map shows that there are at least four to five problem gamblers living in the eastern part of Los Angeles County which has some of the largest populations of Asians, 17,034 – 31,219. Asian Americans do not seek help until their problems become extreme or dire. There are more no risk gamblers residing in the less populated Asian communities.

Gamblers, In-language Therapy, and Asian American Populations in LA County

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Zip Codes: gis.ats.ucla.edu
 Race Demographics: 2000 U.S. Census Summary 1 P9, P10
 (http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/D/Tables?_lang=en&_lang=en&_mt_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U_9006)
 At-risk & Problem Gamblers: 2006 CA Problem Gambling Prevalence Survey (Not Yet Published)
 Cardrooms: www.cgcc.ca.gov/cardrooms.asp



Map 3

The inset map of “Gamblers, In-language Therapy, and Asian American Populations in Los Angeles County” also points out that there are only four problem gambling therapists in the entire county. Problem gambling is a difficult addiction to treat and only a few therapists are trained to practice in gambling intervention. Referring to the western side of the inset map, there are a total of 7 to 13 at risk gamblers west of Cheviot Hills. The at-risk gamblers are also near three of the four problem gambling therapists, which may mean the services in the area do greater work in preventing and intervening with problem gambling on the western side of Los Angeles County. On the contrary, in Rowland Heights where there is a heavy population of Asian residents (18,023 – 30,253) who are mostly Chinese and Taiwanese, there is only one therapist who is Korean-speaking. There are insufficient services and therapists who

target heavily populated Asian American communities to prevent and intervene with problem gambling facing the communities.

Map 4 shows that most of the Gamblers Anonymous meetings are for English speakers only. There are only four Gamblers Anonymous meetings for Spanish speakers. Although there are large populations of Asian Americans on the eastern part of Los Angeles County ranging from 2,046 to 31,329, most meetings in the heavily populated Asian communities are still only English-speaking. There is one meeting for Spanish-speakers. Los Angeles County has one of the largest populations of Koreans, Chinese, and Filipinos in the United States, yet there are only two Gamblers Anonymous meetings that are for Korean- and Chinese-speakers. Even with the one Gamblers Anonymous meeting in Chinese, Mandarin- and Cantonese-speakers at the meeting cannot understand each other.

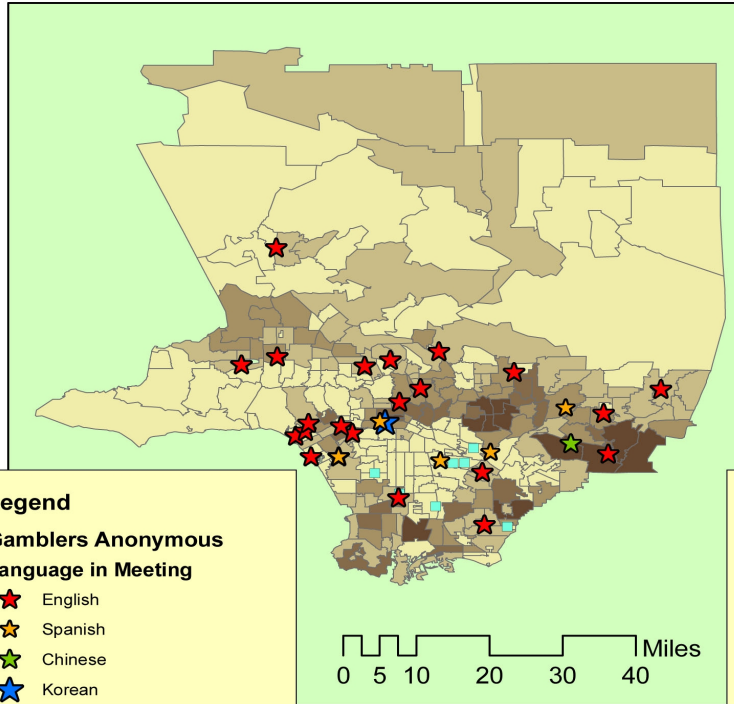
Gamblers Anonymous meetings are initiated by compulsive gamblers themselves, but vulnerable and underrepresented populations need greater support in developing their own 12-step recovery programs. Also, it is critical to note that there are many meetings in close proximity to casinos. Since Gamblers Anonymous meetings are initiated by compulsive gamblers in their community, we can draw conclusions that many of the compulsive gamblers who attend the meetings also live near casinos. People living in communities with casinos are more vulnerable to problem gambling than those who do not have casinos in their community.

Frequency of Gamblers Anonymous meetings are also greater in English-speaking areas in the western part of Los Angeles County. There is one Gamblers Anonymous meeting that convenes four times per week in the western part of Los Angeles County. Greater number of meetings per week help to intervene and reduce the number of problem gamblers because there are greater opportunities for the gamblers to attend the 12-step recovery program. Every day is a difficult day for an addict and it takes much

Map 4



Gamblers Anonymous Meetings in LA County (Language and Frequency)



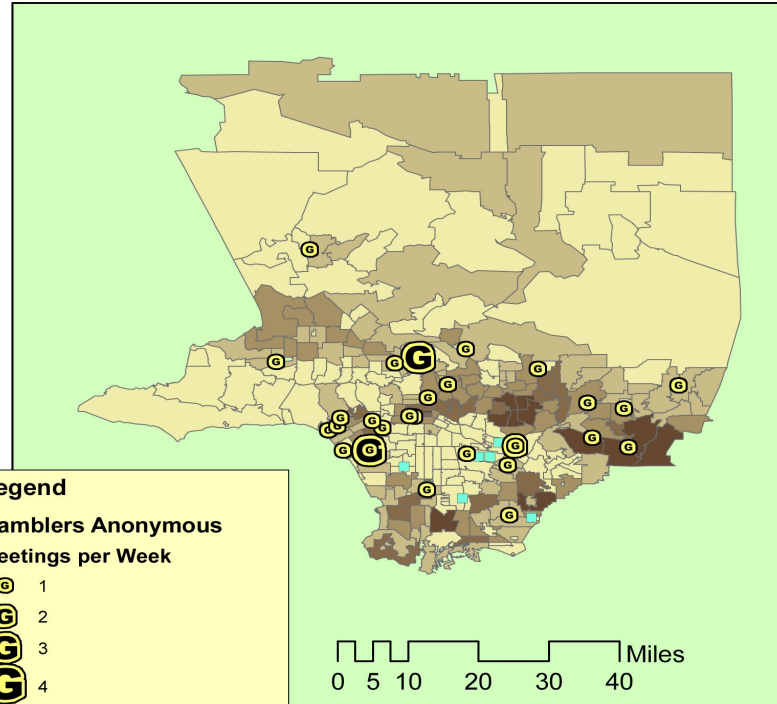
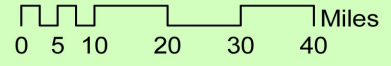
Legend

Gamblers Anonymous Language in Meeting

- ★ English
- ★ Spanish
- ★ Chinese
- ★ Korean
- Casinos

Asian American Population (Size by Zip)

- 0 - 2045
- 2046 - 5354
- 5355 - 9878
- 9879 - 17033
- 17034 - 31219



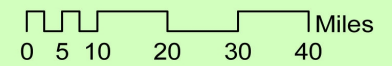
Legend

Gamblers Anonymous Meetings per Week

- ⊙ 1
- ⊙ 2
- ⊙ 3
- ⊙ 4
- Casinos

Asian American Population (Size by Zip)

- 0 - 2045
- 2046 - 5354
- 5355 - 9878
- 9879 - 17033
- 17034 - 31219



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Zip Codes Shapefile: UCLA Mapshare (gis.ats.ucla.edu)
 Race Demographics: 2000 US Census Summary 1
 (https://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?_bm=y&-_lang=en&-mt_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U_9006)
 GA Meetings: Gamblers Anonymous International
 (www.gamblersanonymous.org/mtgdirCA.html)
 Cardrooms: www.cgcc.ca.gov/cardrooms.asp

might and power to refrain from gambling. On the western part of Los Angeles County, one can see that there are more at-risk gamblers and less problem gamblers compared to the eastern part of the County that is heavily populated by Asian Americans. The higher frequency of meetings likely help to reduce the number of problem gamblers while helping those who are at-risk. Gamblers Anonymous International can better support vulnerable immigrant populations in increasing the number of meetings they have in one week.

Recommendations

The casinos will remain easily accessible to everyone since they are built a half mile off nearly every major freeway. The physical accessibility of current casinos cannot be changed, but future potential construction of casinos can be challenged through policies to prevent such easy access. Additionally, current buses that have been contracted to transport clients from the San Gabriel Valley should be taxed for the pollution that is brought into the community. For example, in the City of San Gabriel, there are three to four buses that arrive in the morning every day to take clients to casinos including Pechanga Casino, Pala Casino, Morrongo Casino, and San Manuel Casino. They return in the evening everyday. The bus transportation to the casinos take place seven days a week, including all holidays. The tax on the buses should be allocated to mental health services. There should also be mental health specialists on the bus to survey and intervene with individuals who may be problem gamblers.

To address the lack of in-language 1-800-GAMBLER services, revenue casinos contribute to the state should be used to fund helplines that are culturally and linguistically competent. Currently, California tribal casinos provide \$140 million in revenue to support gambling addiction programs, grants to local governments impacted by tribal casinos, and the general fund

(www.lao.ca.gov/2007/tribal_casinos/tribal_casinos_020207.aspx). Casinos are able to hire employees and card dealers who speak the language of the patrons many of whom speak Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Khmer. Yet, funding has not been appropriately allocated to improve helplines for gambling addicts. It is unclear and unknown how many LEP Asian-language callers have sought help from 1-800-GAMBLER, but was not provided with the help.

The maps help with determining the location of outreach and intervention work. Recently, the Office of Problem Gambling (OPG) has obtained funds to train more problem gambling specialist. OPG is seeking therapists who speak Asian languages to train and certify them as problem gambling specialists. In-language culturally and linguistically competent mental health and drug abuse services are a constant struggle to obtain for Asian American communities. Mental health services are extremely important in treating gambling addiction, but prevention is critical to reducing rates of problem gambling and the negative impacts resulting from the addiction. Community outreach workers in conjunction with mental health service providers should develop strong rapport with the residents living in the eastern part of Los Angeles County (San Gabriel Valley). They are in significant need of education on problem gambling and its effects on individuals, families, and their entire community. Since many Asian immigrants do not culturally believe in sharing one's personal and familial issues, outreach workers and mental health therapists would have to educate residents on the repercussions of gambling addiction.

Although addressing disparities through mental health services, support groups, and accurate research are important, measures also need to be taken legally to prevent predatory lending from casinos. Mental health treatment for problem gamblers will not be helpful if the gamblers are continuously aided by irresponsible casino loans.

Conclusion

Problem gambling services fail to service those most vulnerable to gambling addiction in Los Angeles County. Asian Americans are at high-risk for problem gambling as data shows in mental health studies. However, in-language therapy, Gamblers Anonymous meetings and 1-800-GAMBLER counseling do not exist for limited English proficient Asian American immigrants. There are greater at-risk gamblers on the western part of Los Angeles County where there are fewer Asian American immigrants. The existing therapists likely help the gamblers maintain their status of at-risk and prevent them from becoming problem gamblers. On the other hand, Asian Americans who reside mostly in the eastern part of Los Angeles County do not have therapists who speak their language and do not receive help until it is too late. Funding for problem gambling services need to more appropriately address those most vulnerable – Asian American limited English proficient immigrants – whose rates of problem gambling are more acutely severe than the general population of problem gamblers.

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