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Older Adults at High Risk for Gambling Problems

Detroit, MI -- Research from the Institute of Gerontology at Wayne State University revealed that one in five older adults who enter a casino eventually displays problem gambling behaviors. Peter Lichtenberg, Ph.D., director of the Institute of Gerontology and one of two authors of the study, said, "Urban elders are especially vulnerable to problems because a higher percentage of them have low income, few social supports and poor mental and physical health." Problem gambling behaviors include the compulsive need to bet more and more money, and lying to others about the amount of time and money spent on gambling.

The Institute of Gerontology research published in the *Journal of Aging Studies* involved 1,410 randomly selected adults, aged 60 and older. All resided in Detroit, the largest city in the United States with casino gambling. The study results pointed to poor health and decreased mobility as pre-disposing factors for problems. Persons in poor health have few options for activities that excite the senses yet require only minimal physical ability, so the stimulating environment of the casino has strong appeal. Lonely older adults may also look to the casino as a safe and acceptable place to socialize. The consequences of problem gambling are severe, however. Financial loss, the erosion of personal relationships, depression, suicide, substance abuse, and personality disorders are all closely associated with problem gambling.

The findings from this study confirm that gambling may soon become a serious health and financial problem among older adults. The number of older adults nationwide who visit casinos has doubled since 1975, a rate far surpassing any other age group.

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