

With the basketball playoffs set to start March 19, this time of year can be especially difficult for Nebraskans who struggle with problem gambling. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services’ Division of Behavioral Health is urging Nebraskans to learn the warning signs of gambling addiction this March in recognition of Problem Gambling Awareness Month.

“Filling out brackets and betting on sports may seem harmless, but can lead to problem gambling,” said Maya Chilese, program director of the Gamblers Assistance Program in the Division of Behavioral Health. For Nebraskans who do choose to play, Chilese said that it’s important to know what’s legal, and stick to limits on time and money spent.

“When people spend more time gambling, play to relieve stress, lie about gambling, or borrow from others to play, they’re engaging in problem gambling,” she said.

Problem gambling will be classified as a behavioral addiction, in the soon-to-be-released Diagnostic Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) from the American Psychiatric Association. Treatment services may include crisis intervention, individual counseling, group therapy and family counseling. Help is often available at no to low cost for gamblers and their families.

Treatment for problem gambling is available,” Chilese said. “And it works.”

Nebraskans who are struggling can seek help through the Gamblers Assistance Program’s Problem Gambling Helpline, 1-800-GAMBLER (1-800-426-2537), available 24/7.