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AGENCIES JOIN TO PROMOTE PROBLEM GAMBLING AWARENESS WEEK
Self-help Workbook to Aid Californians

SACRAMENTO – Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proclaims March 9-15, 2008 as Gambling Awareness Week in California. The Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs unveils “Freedom from Problem Gambling” self-help workbook.

“It is important to acknowledge the severe impacts of problem gambling,” said Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in proclaiming March 9-15 as “California Problem Gambling Awareness Week”. “Problem gambling affects people from all segments of society and can negatively influence the gambler’s family, friends, employer and community.”

“Problem gambling is a chronic condition and we are committed to the development of statewide programs to assist in the prevention and reduction of problem gambling,” said Renée Zito, Director of the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs.

The Freedom from Problem Gambling self-help workbook, the first of its kind for problem gamblers, was developed by Drs. Timothy Fong and Richard Rosenthal of the UCLA Gambling Studies Program. The free workbook, not intended to replace treatment, was designed to help gamblers assess whether they have a gambling problem, understand their gambling behavior and why they gamble.

“The Freedom from Problem Gambling self-help workbook is a self-paced assistance tool to help people focus on the different aspects of their gambling,” said Steve Hedrick, Deputy Director of California Department of Alcohol and Drug Program’s Office of Problem Gambling (OPG). “It offers strategies to help people stop or reduce gambling if the behavior becomes a problem.”

The workbook is made available to counselors, those who call into the toll-free help lines, and self-excluded gamblers – those who specifically ask a gambling establishment to exclude them from doing so. The workbook can be found online at: <http://www.problemgambling.ca.gov>.

Several state agencies have joined together to promote problem gambling awareness week, including the California Horse Racing Board, California Gambling Control Commission, Department of Justice’s Division of Gambling Control, Department of Mental Health, California State Lottery, California Council on Problem Gambling and OPG. The agencies will offer information, assistance, and referrals to services to increase public awareness about problem gambling behaviors. Beginning in March, a Public Service Announcement produced by the California State Lottery, will air to further promote problem gambling awareness week.

According to the California Council on Problem Gambling, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping problem gamblers, 4,718 Californians with gambling problems called the organization's gambling help line in 2006, a 22 percent increase from 2005. Callers were nearly evenly split between male (51.3 percent) and female (48.7 percent), and the majority of callers were between 26 to 55 years of age. Individuals most frequently reported stress, depression, anxiety, credit problems and alienation from family as negative effects of gambling.

The nation's most comprehensive prevalence study of problem gambling, released by OPG in 2006, found between 746,500 and 1,203,400 California adults are considered pathological or problem gamblers. In addition, 2.2 to 2.7 million California adults are at-risk for developing gambling-related problems.

OPG is mandated by the Legislature to develop programs designed to reduce the prevalence of problem and pathological gambling among California residents. Problem gambling prevention programs include toll-free helpline services, public awareness campaigns, training and research.

For help with problem gambling call 1-800-GAMBLER (1-800-426-2537). Individuals may also log on to http://www.problemgambling.ca.gov/OPGhelp_survey.shtml to take a free interactive quiz to determine if they might have a gambling problem.

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