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Casino Control Commission and DOH Join Forces to Combat Gambling Addiction in the Virgin Islands

Memorandum of Understanding establishes training and certification program for local counselors to provide accessible, low-cost assistance for individuals struggling with gambling addiction in both territory districts

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The V.I. Casino Control Commission (VICCC) and the V.I. Department of Health have partnered to address problem gambling in the U.S. Virgin Islands, according to a release issued Friday.

A Memorandum of Understanding, finalized on October 24, 2024, establishes a joint initiative to train and certify counselors in the territory's two districts, St. Thomas-St. John and St. Croix, for treating gambling addiction.

The VICCC has allocated funds to train six counselors, three in each district, through The Center for Addiction Studies and Research, according to the release. The training focuses on identifying risk factors for gambling addiction, implementing suicide prevention strategies, and delivering effective treatment options. Additionally, the initiative includes funding for the counselors to receive supervision by a board-approved clinical consultant, culminating in an internationally recognized certification by the International Gambling Counselor Certification Board.

Marvin L. Pickering, chairman and CEO of the VICCC, stressed the importance of providing accessible, confidential, and low-cost local assistance for individuals struggling with gambling addiction. “While residents will continue to have access to 1-800-GAMBLER and other national resources, it has always been the position of the VICCC to ensure that assistance is locally available and easily accessible,” he stated.

VIDOH Commissioner Justa Encarnacion highlighted the need for community resources to address gambling-related challenges and foster informed decision-making about gaming activities. She expressed optimism that the program will enhance public awareness and strengthen services for individuals and families facing such issues.

According to the release, both leaders commended the collaboration between their teams and acknowledged the contributions of VICCC Vice-Chair Commissioner Carolyn P. Hermon-Percell, whose leadership was instrumental in bringing the initiative to fruition. The program aims to promote health and wellness while reducing the social and economic costs of gambling addiction in the Virgin Islands.

For more information, individuals are encouraged to contact the VIDOH’s Division of Behavioral Health at (340) 718-1311 or Linda I. Smith, Executive Director of the VICCC, at (340) 718-3616.