

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 00:05**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Hi and welcome to the sixth episode of the fourth season of toward a more just future, a podcast from Rutgers School of Social Work. My name is Samantha Michael, and I'm the Director of Business Services here at the school this season, I'm speaking with directors and members of institutes and centers at the school about their work, their connections to the field of social work, engagement with communities throughout all of New Jersey and beyond, and how their areas of focus prove critical to the future. Today, we'll be speaking with Dr Lia Nower, who directs the Center for gambling Studies. Dr Nower is also a distinguished professor and serves as Associate Dean for Research for the school a clinician and attorney. She specializes in gambling disorder and related harm, and CO directs the Rutgers addiction counselor training certificate, also known as the Act program, which provides training towards licensure in drug and alcohol counselors. The Act program is also the first educational program nationwide to provide international gambling counselor certification, board certified training for gambling counselors. Dr Nower also serves as chair of the Public Policy Committee of the Rutgers addiction research center in the brain health institute at Rutgers Health. Dr Nower's research focuses broadly on gambling, video gaming and behavioral actions, as well as measurement, big data analysis and policy initiatives around Responsible Gambling in 2022 she received the Lifetime Research Award from the National Council on problem gambling in Washington, DC for her research contributions over the prior 20 years. She also received the Rutgers Board of Trustees Award for Excellence in Research, which recognizes tenured faculty members who have made distinguished research contributions to their discipline and to society at large. Dr Nower, thank you so much for joining us today. We're excited to have you here for our fifth episode of the fourth season of our podcast.

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 02:24**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Well, thanks for inviting me. I'm glad to be here

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 02:28**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

To kick us off, could you give us an overview of the Center for gambling studies or CGS and the work that you do?

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 02:36**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Sure. So the Center was founded in 2007 and it remains, actually the only gambling related Center at a school of social work in the world. It's one of maybe four gambling centers in the United States in general. It was founded to be focused on policy, on research and on training clinicians to treat individuals who have gambling problems. So a few of the things that we do, we do a wide range of things in those three areas so we will do, we do big data analysis. We do. We design screenings and treatments for individuals with gambling problems. We design frameworks to help evaluate Responsible Gambling strategies. We also have a sub unit within the center now that is headed by Vivid Anthony. She's the scientific director for video gaming

and eSports, and it's devoted towards increasingly, there's an there's a nexus between the two, but she focuses more on the pure video gaming and eSports, and then also moves over into the interactive gambling space as well. Jackie Stanmyer is the Associate Director of the Center.

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 04:05**  
**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Thank you for that. I understand that CGS was recently named a center of excellence. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 04:15**  
**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Sure. So the International Center for Responsible gaming is really the primary funder in gambling in the United States and one of the primary funders in the world. There is no federal funding for gambling research, so those of us that work in this area get funding from places like the icrg. And in 2023 they named us the center of excellence, and gave us a three year grant to look at emerging adults in gambling. And so we are doing a number of projects in this area. So the first year, we devoted our time to looking at the differences between the. Emerging adults and other adults in our two epidemiological prevalence studies in New Jersey, next year, we're launching the first ever national prevalence study of emerging adults and gambling, and we are running that parallel to a policy analysis that we're doing where we kind of give a rating to states as to how gambling involved they are, and then we're going to statistically see whether youth and emerging adults. We're also looking at in some states under 21 is, you know, not legal. So we're going to look at whether these individuals that gamble at higher intensity and higher frequency are located in these higher involved states or not, and what that means for policy. And then another of our projects is looking at phenotypes. So looking at the genetics of individuals who map according to these three different subgroups of people with gambling problems. And we're looking at that in two really large, one international, one national data set. And then the final study that we're going to be doing this would be in year three. We're going into year two. Takes a large online panel of emerging adults who have at least one gambling problem, and looks at a lot of sort of nuanced personality factors, like mattering, meaning control, and looks at really what are the things that are driving those that have the much higher rates of gambling problems and maybe co morbid mental health issues, substance based addictions, etc? So that's pretty much an overview of of our Center projects.

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 06:56**  
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Thank you for sharing that it's, it's, it's so timely in a lot of ways, from everything that we're seeing in the news, Leah around the kind of drastic expansion of online gambling too, right? So your work is so critical in that way. Can I ask a newbie question, maybe, and this is off script, so can I ask you just a second question? So it was the first time I heard you say that there's no federal funding for gambling research and this important work that you're doing, but I also know that there's this one 800 gambler number. So this is a Samantha Newby question. So that means that the even though the federal government and a lot of our local governments are behind a lot of those support functions the government and the Feds aren't behind that one 800 gambler

number. Then right. So, like, if someone needs support, that number is supported by nonprofits, then?

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 07:52**  
**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Correct. So that number, interestingly enough, is owned by the New Jersey Council on compulsive gambling, and it has been leased to the National Council on problem gambling, which is, which is our sort of parent organization. It's our nonprofit on the national level who does pretty much 90 to 100% of the advocacy on a federal level. And that's who, who sponsors that hotline, and then that hotline is sent to the different states where the individual councils actually answer the phone. Got it.

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 08:29**  
**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Thank you. Thank you for doing I know it was a sad question, but that's helpful for being context wise even. And it seems like New Jersey is kind of a trendsetter in this work too, right?

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 08:40**  
**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Definitely, we're, we lead the way, and, I mean, our regulators just pretty much in, in, in most of these ways, we are sort of thought of as the leader.

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 08:52**  
**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Um, so kind of taking a pivot a little bit to talk about you and and this work, can you tell us about the path that led you here and to the role that you're in now as director for the Center,

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 09:07**  
**Rutgers School of Social Work**

sure. So I am from Missouri, and I started off my career as a trial lawyer. So I was a public defender in rural counties in Missouri when I was a youngster, and in one particular county where it was pretty much all white males, and if you worked there and you were a female, you were harassed to death, there was a young older woman who was a court clerk, and she kind of protected me, and she was just a really nice person. And then one day she was gone, and I was like, Well, where is Carol? And she had embezzled a whole bunch of money to gamble, and in those days, that was just absolutely unheard of, and that was the first sort of introduction I had to this. And then a few years later, I became a prosecuting attorney, and I would see people come. Through our office, and they're there. They went to prison, and they may have never have had a parking ticket, but the the addiction drove them to embezzle so much money they couldn't pay it back, so they didn't have the option of probation or anything like that. So when I transitioned to being a treatment provider and went into an addiction practice, I kind of volunteered to do the gambling counseling, and found it to be so interesting, and when I then transitioned again to research, like I already had made up my mind that this was going to be my field of expertise,

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 10:37**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

so that all of that background had you starting in Missouri that wound up leading you to New Jersey and becoming director of the center then it sounds like,

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 10:49**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

yeah. So I was just in. I was um, I was applying at different um, at different universities, and Dick Edwards, who is our current interim dean. But was, was the dean, when I first came here, he just said, you know, if you come here, I'll give you your own center. So I said, Great. So that's how it started.

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 11:11**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

So, Lia, you're the inaugural director, then of the Center for gambling studies, correct? Okay, very exciting. And thank you for thank you for giving us the time to talk about it today. I know you mentioned it a little bit when you were talking about the Center of Excellence work that you guys are doing, but can you maybe talk to us a little bit more about some of the projects that you're working on, or maybe some of your team members are working on.

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 11:37**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Sure, we also have a real focus on athletes and athletics. And you know, a lot has been in the news lately. John Tay Porter of the raptors, you know, getting banned, and Otani is in baseball. His managers stealing all this money to gamble. And now the latest news story is threats. The baseball players are reporting they're getting threats that if they don't play better, someone's going to come for their family because there are bets on the game. So these things prompted us to apply to the New Brunswick Chancellor for money to develop and this is, this is a collaboration with Peter economy in psychology, we are going to develop sort of a an education platform for athletes coming to Rutgers. And we're also going to be training and incorporating gambling treatment and screening into the existing protocol for athletes. And we are hoping to develop a model that then could be replicated across the Big 10. And Jackie Stan Meyer is completing her dissertation looking at gambling among athletes and coaches. We also, let's see, I'm trying to think of what other as we have a lot of different athlete things going on now we're looking at MARK VAN DER moss is looking at suicide in large national data set. And we're looking at some sort of subsets of that, like Russian roulette, etc. So one of the things that we do in sort of our bread and butter is we analyze every single bet placed by every operator for both I gaming, which is casino, online casino, and poker, as well as sports wagering in the state of New Jersey. So that's about 20 billion bets, and we're looking at several things of interest. One is we're looking at people who may have started in sports or started in I gaming and then migrate to the other platform, because operators don't make their money off sports. They make their money off the casino online games. So the the goal is when they but the problem has been that only older people really play those and they have been trying to attract the younger market. But now with

sports wagering, if they can capture this younger market in the sports and then triage them to the i gaming, that's where they're going to clean up. And so we're analyzing this migration bi directionally, we're also looking at people who self exclude, who say, Well, I've got a gambling problem. I don't want you to let me gamble on your platform anymore. And they can choose to do that for one year, five years of lifetime. And we're looking at the individuals that only choose the small terms and then come back on to play, to see, well, what does their gambling look like before and after? We're also doing growth curve analyzes where we're looking by age classification by gender, as to how the escalation goes with gamble. And then when it starts to level off, like, how many years, how many months? And then a final thing we're looking at with regard to that is what's called Chasing, which is people that start to get into a gambling problem will start to escalate the proportion of their spend and their bets. And so we're trying to figure out ways of predicting who does this using AI, and then maybe then we can have an algorithm that alerts people so that then there can be intervention.

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 15:32**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Well, I'm curious. So the tail end we have what you talked about, there is opportunity for intervention, right? So can you maybe share a little bit about what you see the impact is on some of that analysis and maybe some of your other projects, because the work that you're doing is innovative in terms of the data and the different scenarios that people find themselves in, but You're also looking to build out intervention tools and policy, right? So can you talk a little bit about where you see impact beyond the analysis? Sure. So

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 16:08**

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with the things that we're doing, the big data analysis that we're doing, the goal is to develop these algorithms, to develop, you know, red flag indicators that regulators could then say, when you see this, you need to devise a response strategy, and then for us to sort of come up with a ladder of responses. So the first response may be an email saying, Hey, we noticed you doubled your bets in the past week. And then a little information, would you like to set a limit? And then it takes them to the Responsible Gambling page. As people get more and more severe or more and more pings, it would maybe be a phone call or a text message. And then at some point, there may be in some countries, they actually ban the person when or force them to take a cool off period from their gambling. Another thing that we're looking at is so we train, we've trained close to 500 gambling counselors in New Jersey in this 30 hour certification that's required to be a competent gambling treatment provider. And we're beginning, we've developed a gambling expert, which is a very brief intervention that can be used at hospitals, at doctors offices, at non mental health settings, to sort of raise the conversation with people that maybe seem to have some kind of gambling related problem, and then triage them into the service system. Another really exciting thing that we're doing is we're using GIS mapping, which is a statistical mapping that pulls in all of these socio demographic, socio economic and demographic data into a map on which we superimpose all the vetting data and the counselor locations, and it then allows regulators, legislators, anybody who wants to go in and pick variables of interest to them, to see where in the state we have adequate help and where in the state we really need to develop better

resources. So that's like a few of our projects and the practical implications of them.  
Thank you.

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 18:28**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Thank you for that, and it sounds like really innovative work for for a population that that needs those connections to the resources. So I appreciate the examples. Leah, thank you. And some of what you've talked about in your projects has kind of alluded to having collaborators, not only in the state at other nonprofits, but across the nation. So can you tell us a little bit about the center's network of collaborators? What does it look like who is involved, and then maybe a couple highlights,

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 19:05**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

sure. I mean, we work internationally, the University of Sydney, I've had, I've had a research affiliation there for probably 25 years, and work very closely with them. They're a really good research and clinical center. We work with the University of Gibraltar, where I've done policy work around what's called affordability. So we're trying to build a tool where individuals can assess how much they can actually afford to spend gambling. Um, we on a on a national level. I've been on the board for the National Council on problem gambling. Serve on the research committee, as do several people in our center, and they do the primary activism in the country. So we work with them. I've worked with responsible gaming groups at the American gaming Association. In and in the state are we work with the Division of gaming enforcement. They are the regulators for the state of New Jersey through the Office of the Attorney General, and some of our clinical projects we work with, like our training of counselors with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. So those are just a few of our partners. But then we work. We work just one on one with individuals who just email us, students who are doing a paper, people who have gambling problems, who need to be, you know, access services in their state. They may not be in New Jersey. We get emails from all over the country,

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 20:40**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

You're acting as a resource for nationwide, which is impressive and really has a shows your wide network too. Can we? Can we switch gears a little bit and talk? I'm looking to talk about funding. Leah, so the the fun stuff when it comes to funding, can you talk a little bit about what goes into making sure a center like this works, and then maybe a little bit about how you manage wanting to produce effective outcomes and impact and support future social work Leaders, while also balancing the need to keep the organization running

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 21:25**

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Sure. So, as I said before, there's no federal funding from gap for gambling research, which is a huge problem that we face. And so we have to get very creative. I mean, we've had grants from other countries. We've had grants, you know, a lot of state grants. We've had grants from private

companies. We just really have to craft really interesting and innovative, cutting edge projects and then try to sell them to people, most of the time, who haven't funded gambling projects before. And so I'm a team scientist, and so we work as a team. So by that, I may have an idea, or I may start on a grant, and I will then pull in people from the team who have expertise in different areas. So for example, on our Center of Excellence grant, I'm the PI on that. But you know, Jackie Stan Meyer and vivid and Anthony and Mark Vander moss are all co investigators, because they have different areas of expertise under this umbrella, and that is how we have managed to get and sustain the funding we try to train other people. You know, our field is not recognized at all. In social work, we have had a hard time even getting papers accepted social work conferences. The door has virtually been closed. It's an area that is not been of interest on an you know, with the national organizations. So we have just had to super impose the social work pieces on our work,

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 23:11**  
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thinking about all of those pieces. As a director, you're responsible for all the work that goes into making the center run and kind of leading those, and leading and building those, those collaborative efforts. Can you talk a little bit about some of the major areas of responsibility that you have?

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 23:31**  
**Rutgers School of Social Work**

I mean, so when I started the center, it was just me and God love him. Kyle Taylor, who was a doctoral student. He wasn't even in gambling. He was a disabilities researcher and but he he was just, he could do everything. And we sort of built this from the ground up. Um, now I sort of served as, like the rain maker and the idea, man. So I'm kind of like the primary grant funder, Grant getter. And then I do a lot of, you know, organizing and multitasking at the top level. So, you know, figuring out deploying teams, deploying figuring out which people should be on which teams for which project, and making sure that we have all these projects kind of moving along. I also do the budgeting and expense piece and sort of oversee the ethics compliance. And then Jackie Stan Meyer, who's the Assistant Director, she does the day to day supervision of the work and of the individuals working on various projects, and then works with me, sort of to flesh out the big picture, etc.

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 24:45**  
**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Thank you for that. I It sounds like you have a strong team that's supporting you and this important work.

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 24:51**  
**Rutgers School of Social Work**  
Very, yeah, very lucky.

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 24:56**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

You mentioned in the in the previous question that I asked you talked. A little bit about how social work as a as a field, doesn't necessarily see gambling as a critical area of importance, which kind of leads into the next couple questions I have. So in conversations about social work, right? We have a strong commitment to connecting research and practice. How do you see your center, contributing to that mission and kind of the field?

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 25:24**

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Well, all of our work has practical applications. So we don't do any projects that sort of sit in the ivory tower. I mean, all of our work goes from the ivory tower to the trenches and to communities, to individuals, just every one of our projects, you know, we develop tools for people to use. We, you know, we try to guide policy makers and people who make decisions around mental health based on sort of empirical evidence. I think that, you know, we take a very systems view to everything we do as well. So the framework from which we move is very social work driven all of our work from before there were dei initiatives, has always focused on cultural differences. You know, diversity among people, and how gambling disproportionately impacts certain groups. I think we would love to see more of an interest in social work, and for this to become more of a mainstream interest in our field. So

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 26:36**

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some of those reasons, I think, are kind of your answer to my next question, but I mean supporting the Future of Social Work leadership is a constant and a critical need. This area is timely, right? We see it in the news frequently. Why would you say for the social work field and for everyone that gambling and kind of these resources and an overall understanding of its impact is a critical area of focus for for those involved.

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 27:06**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

The primary reason is because all of the people that we are we serve in social work, are the ones that are disproportionately impacted by problem gambling, harms, um individual active duty military, military veterans, people of color, people who identify as Latinx, people who identify as LGBTQ, plus, children, adolescents, people With who identify with disabilities. These are all the groups that problem gambling disproportionately impacts, and yet social work is absent from the conversation. Leah, do

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 27:52**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

you see kind of the newsworthy aspect of a lot of this impacting its its importance in the in the next few years, especially recognizing kind of the how tech is growing, and you see a new app maybe every other week.

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 28:10**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

You know, I'm hoping, I'm hoping that's the case. I mean, I think all of this press around all of these athletes, I think that that is helping, because it's getting the media all riled up, and then hopefully some non profit groups are going to be interested, and I'm hoping some foundations will want to fund some of the work that we do. But I'm just not I'm just not sure about what it's going to take to get social work really excited about this issue.

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 28:40**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Thank you. So just switching a little bit to talk more geographically about New Jersey and Rutgers. Can you talk about some of your aspirational goals for New Jersey in this work, understanding that they sound like a leader in a lot of different areas, and then any similar goals you may have for Rutgers as an institution,

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 29:02**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Sure. So I, my sort of wish list would be headed by us being able to develop and implement a systematic framework across every institution that could possibly identify an individual who is starting to have a gambling problem, schools, consumer credit agencies, physicians, offices, hospitals, jails, ports, bankruptcy, just a whole range of places that if we just had A few people trained in the very basic identification, and then really knowing where to send people. We could catch people at a very early stage, and we could really help them and provide education and intervention. So that would be my goal for the state, for Rutgers, you know, I. I would like to see us be able to do a campus, campus climate survey for gambling the same way that rev does the campus, campus climate survey for family violence. I think it is really important, and I know that 60 minutes and then CBS has done something recently about how rampant all of the sports wagering is, dorms, etc, and I think that we really start to need to address this in a positive way.

**Samantha Michaele, Director of Business Services 30:30**

**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Thank you for that. I don't have any other questions, but I just wanted to thank you for sharing your time and your journey with us today, and it was so amazing to hear about the the impactful work that you and your team are doing. Thank you. Dr Nower!

**Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research & Distinguished Professor; Director, Center for Gambling Studies 30:50**

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thank you.