



February 21, 2019

To: Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
Advisory Committee on Problem Gambling (ACPG)

Re: SFY 2020-2021 Request for Applications (RFA)

Bridge Counseling Associates will not participate in the SFY 2020-2021 Request for Applications.

Bridge Counseling had high expectations when it applied to become a funded Problem Gambling agency in Nevada approximately two years ago. We knew that as a CCBHC we could provide co-occurring and supportive services to problem gambling clients as most problem gamblers have co-occurring substance abuse and/or mental health issues that must be treated concurrently. We know this from published evidence and from historical, local treatment. The experience of Bridge's Certified Problem Gambling Supervisor on staff is that a majority of Gambling Disorder clients have Mental Health disorder needs.

We supported one Certified Problem Gambling Supervisor and two Bridge clinicians as Certified Problem Gambling Counselor-Interns. Both interns are fully licensed Mental Health Specialists and fully licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselors as well. One counselor is also fluent in Spanish.

There are a few reasons that brought us to the decision to sever funding ties from this program:

First, Bridge Counseling Associates does not appear to have ever been listed on the national problem gamblers helpline. We have repeatedly contacted the 24/7 to the National Help Line number and never been referred to Bridge Counseling Associates regardless of location identified in Las Vegas or co-occurring needs identified. In fact, when specifically asking about Bridge Counseling Associates as an option, our callers were informed that Bridge was not a listed agency. When brought to the attention of this committee we were informed that we should have contacted a committee member before making research calls. The implication is apparent that there is a direct connection to that call number and local, for-profit specialty clinics. There were no clients referred to this agency even though Bridge also has a 24/7 call line staffed by mental health licensees taking calls and knowledgeable about schedules and our problem gambling counseling team.

Second, a DHHS Problem Gambling Services FY 2020 & FY 2021 Strategic Plan was published recently that directly disparaged this agency and the Nevada Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Agency in one broad and ill-informed opinion of the author. This was never discussed with this agency and is not accurate especially considering our first item stated above. SAPTA certifications are irrelevant to the referral system or to those who are clients for more serious mental health and/or substance abuse treatment. This appears to represent frustration that the Office of Community Partnerships and Grants (OCPG) may be moved to the Bureau of Behavioral Health Wellness and Prevention (BHWP) soon. The more frustrating point, however, is

that the work of the sole author of this "Strategic Plan" was endorsed by the DHHS Advisory Committee on Problem Gambling. This was neither an accurate or appropriate Strategic Plan nor should it ever have made disparaging and inaccurate statements about a participating agency. The conclusion documented in a strategic plan that a CCBHC "could not compete" with a specialty clinic that only provided gambling disorder treatment was inappropriate especially given the fact that the plan did not sufficiently address clients with co-occurring issues who were only being treated for problem gambling at these specialty clinics and whose substance and mental health issues were likely ignored or at best referred to an agency where problem gambling was not treated.

Third, funding for therapeutic sessions does not reflect the time and standard funding available for fully licensed mental health therapists and/or substance abuse counselors. To fund CPGC-I's who have full Nevada mental health and substance treatment licenses, at a minimal level is not reasonable and is potentially a barrier to treatment at quality, co-occurring treatment agencies. The quarterly, day-long sessions of data collection and account review requiring the involvement of multiple, high level staff are excessive and not consistent with even federal or state programs with which we are compliant.

Bridge Counseling Associates remains committed to the treatment of problem gamblers in this state. We believe that this program is simply broken and has become a barrier to the quality, co-occurring therapy that most problem gambling clients require.

We are very disappointed to have been forced to make this decision even as new Problem Gambling Specialty courts are being realized in Southern Nevada. While we are still open and receptive to seeing new problem gambling clients and will not turn any away, we realize we will have to remove ourselves from what appears to be a closed network of specialty clinics.

Bridge Counseling still employs three problem gambling clinicians of a total of 46 clinicians and will continue to provide the unique Online Gaming Prevention program we developed with the small seed funding of this group.

Nevada laws and counseling standards are changing despite the rhetoric in the current Strategic Plan and Bridge Counseling Associates looks forward to the day when unique licensing is not required, and problem gambling treatment is paid directly through SAPTA or some other state agency and/or billable directly through Medicaid.

We wish our State of Nevada the best in addressing the ever-present issue of problem gambling.

Sincerely,

David Robeck
President/CEO