

Senior gambling addiction rates soaring

By Lynn Stuart Parramore, AlterNet

Atlantic City boasts fabulous amenities for America's senior citizens. See the broad boardwalk, perfect for fresh air and exercise. Notice the limited-mobility seniors rolling along on rented scooters and the wheelchair-bound joining the fun at easily accessible slot machines and blackjack tables. Feast your eyes on dozens of exotic and affordable buffets, and don't miss the drug discounts and free lunch coupons handed out at every turn. All day and far into the night, the buses zip to and from retirement centers, carrying promises of excitement. And did you hear? Tony Bennett's here tonight, crooning all those songbook classics grandma knows by heart. And she's not going alone. She found a date on an Atlantic City senior hookup site.

Look: just over there is your neighbor Mr. Jones, professional man and pillar of the community. At 68 he's the picture of respectability and sound judgment.

Only now he's hunched over a blackjack table, hands trembling over a stack of plastic chips. Mr. Jones has blown through \$200,000 of his retirement savings so far this year. He has fallen behind on his house payments. His children, who live far away, don't have a clue what Dad has been doing every afternoon these last few months since Mom died. Mr. Jones keeps his habit a secret. Once a sunny optimist, he feels humiliated. Mr. Jones hates the person he has become.

Seniors are the fastest growing population of gamblers. They are gambling away their income, their savings, and their chance for a secure future. When they lose, they can't make it up or start over. It's a no-win game, driven by a greedy

industry united in unholy alliance with policy makers and politicians who turn a blind eye to the social and economic costs of gambling.

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