Introduction. In the general population, problem-gambling severity lies across a spectrum, ranging from non-gambling through recreational gambling to problematic gambling. Cross-sectional data indicate that subsyndromal levels of gambling (i.e., not meeting the threshold for pathological gambling or in DSM-5 gambling disorder) are associated to varying degrees with poor health, particularly psychopathology. However, few studies have investigated incident psychiatric or general medical conditions with respect to problem-gambling severity.

Methods. Secondary analysis of data from waves 1 and 2 of the National Epidemiological Survey of Alcohol and Related Conditions was conducted. The 2 waves (collected from 2001–2002 and 2004–2005, respectively) included at wave 1 measures of problem-gambling severity (operationalized using inclusionary criteria for pathological gambling with individuals acknowledging one or more criteria categorized as having at-risk/problematic gambling - ARPG) and at waves 1 and 2 measures of psychiatric and medical conditions. Logistic regression analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which ARPG prospectively related to new (incident) psychiatric and general medical conditions.

Results. Relative to non-ARPG, ARPG was prospectively associated with: 1) incident nicotine dependence among adult women; 2) incident alcohol use disorders among adult men; 3) incident anxiety disorders and substance use disorders among older adults; and 4) incident cardiovascular conditions among older adults.

Conclusions. The findings of incident psychiatric disorders and cardiovascular conditions in relation to ARPG suggest that public health policies and initiatives should incorporate considerations relating to problem-gambling severity.