

The Oklahoman

What to do after you lose the Powerball lottery

Sam Turner, Deseret News

Published: January 14, 2016 Updated: Jan 13, 2016

<http://newsok.com/article/5472487>

As Americans rush out to buy tickets for the [Powerball](#) lottery before Wednesday's drawing, readers have been bombarded by online articles offering financial advice on what to do after winning the lottery.

But the advice will fall flat to most readers — besides maybe satisfying their curiosity — as the odds of winning the grand prize are less than one in 292 million.

Yet in spite of these dismal odds, people keep purchasing tickets and the \$1.5 billion jackpot continues to grow, a phenomenon that lottery critics say preys primarily on those who can least afford to take the gamble.

According to [Time Magazine](#), now is a better time than ever to buy lottery tickets. Mathematically, the enormous jackpot increases the value of a ticket marginally beyond its \$2 cost. The value of the tickets, however, does not change the probability of winning. The vast majority of players will be losers.

So what happens to all those losers? Most will go on to play the lottery again. According to [CNN](#), over half of American adults have purchased a lottery ticket in the last 12 months. Americans spend an estimated \$70 billion per year on lottery tickets, more than they do on books, movie tickets, video games, sports tickets and music combined, reported [the Atlantic](#).

When you break down \$70 billion per year, it's about \$25 per adult per month. However, the majority of lottery tickets are purchased by just 20 percent of lottery customers, reports [CNN](#). That means that while most play casually, there are many who play habitually.

The [Multi-State Lottery Association's](#) own website acknowledges the game's addictive potential with this warning: "Play responsibly." The MUSL reminds players that the lottery is "just a game" and that it should be "enjoyable entertainment for adults." But ofte, those who are funding the lottery cannot afford to lose. On average, households that bring in under \$12,400 a year spend about 5 percent of their income on lottery tickets, according to [Wired](#).

[Les Bernal](#), national director of Stop Predatory Gambling, has heavily criticized the exploitation of the poor by government-sanctioned gambling. Bernal claims that state-sponsored lotteries prey on the poor, “exploiting aspects of human psychology and inducing irrational and irresponsible behavior.”

As many critics have compared state-lotteries to a tax, Bernal hearkens back to the injustice of taxation without representation, calling state lotteries “taxation by exploitation.”

One of the primary counter-arguments to Bernal’s position is the income that the lottery brings in for government programs such as education. This income, however, may actually hurt education more than it helps. “We found that states with education lotteries came to spend less on education than they would have spent if they had not adopted the education lottery,” Patrick Pierce, a professor at St. Mary’s College in Indiana who researches the politics of legalized gambling, told [Marketplace](#). While states can spend as much as \$600 billion on education in a year, Marketplace reported, the lottery may generate only \$18 billion. It’s a relatively small amount, and ironically, the supplement leads governments to spend less overall on education.

Ultimately, if the lottery is meant to fund public programs, Pierce told CNN, the poor are “paying more than their fair share.” Whether playing the lottery fills a psychological need of hope for a better tomorrow, the odds are the same: one in 292 million.