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UMass Amherst Research Team Releases Results of an Unprecedented Survey about Gambling Attitudes, Participation, and Problems in Massachusetts

Results Establish Baseline Data in a First-of-its-Kind, Long Term Research Agenda To Assess Impacts of Gaming

On Thursday, June 11th, a research team from the School of Public Health and Health Sciences at UMass Amherst will release a comprehensive report of findings from a large baseline population survey that assessed Massachusetts residents' attitudes about gambling, gambling participation, and gambling-related problems. Nearly 10,000 Massachusetts residents completed the survey, making it the largest and most representative gambling survey ever conducted in the United States.

The survey is just one piece of the broader Social and Economic Impacts of Gambling in Massachusetts (SEIGMA) Study that is unique in obtaining information about gambling involvement and problem gambling prevalence *prior* to the introduction of casino gambling. The project is part of a legislatively mandated research agenda, which is funded and overseen by the Massachusetts Gaming Commission (MGC). Findings from this survey—completed well before any casino or slot machine gambling was available in Massachusetts—will be essential in developing strategies to minimize gambling-related harm.

The study's Principal Investigator, Rachel Volberg stated, "Not many people realize how unusual it is for a problem gambling survey to be completed before some new type of gambling becomes available. The Commonwealth is fortunate that both the Expanded Gaming Act and the Massachusetts Gaming Commission so clearly and forcefully supported such an effort and I am excited to share our findings before any casinos begin operations in our state."

Data were collected from September 2013 to May 2014. Respondents were randomly selected to participate in the survey and could complete it online, on paper, or by phone. Respondents were asked about their participation in the following gambling activities: lottery games, raffles, sports betting, bingo, casino gambling, betting on horse racing, wagering against others, and online gambling. The survey also asked about respondents' attitudes toward gambling, gambling-related problems, prevention awareness, and use of available problem gambling services.

Highlights from the survey include:

- Over half of Massachusetts adults (59%) perceive the impact of gambling expansion on the state to be neutral, beneficial, or very beneficial while 41% perceive the impact to be somewhat or very harmful

- In contrast to this, about half of respondents (46%) perceive the impact of gambling expansion on their own communities to be harmful while a little over a quarter (28%) perceive the impact to be beneficial
- Overall, nearly three quarters of Massachusetts residents (72%) report participating in at least one gambling activity in the past year
- Nearly 6 in 10 people report playing the lottery
- Just under a quarter (22%) of Massachusetts adults report visiting casinos to gamble
 - Over half of people who do so (65%) visit casinos in Connecticut
- While a quarter of the population does not gamble, close to 40% gamble yearly, 20% gamble monthly, and 15% gamble weekly
- There are significant differences in overall gambling participation associated with gender, age, and race/ethnicity:
 - Men are more likely to gamble than women
 - Middle-aged adults are more likely to gamble than younger adults
 - Whites are more likely to gamble than Hispanics, Blacks or Asians
- The current prevalence of problem gambling in Massachusetts is 1.7% of the adult population
- An additional 7.5% of the population are at-risk gamblers
- Based on the percentages above, it is estimated that between 67,500 and 109,100 adult residents are problem gamblers and between 353,400 and 426,200 adult residents are at-risk gamblers
- There were significant differences in problem gambling associated with gender, race/ethnicity, and education:
 - Men are 3 times more likely to have a gambling problem than women
 - Blacks are 4 times more likely to have a gambling problem than Whites
 - Individuals with only a high school diploma are 2 times more likely to have a gambling problem than individuals with a college degree
- About 4 in 10 Massachusetts residents are aware of media campaigns to prevent problem gambling
- However, just over 1 in 10 of adults is aware of non-media prevention programs in schools and communities around the state
- The number of respondents who report desiring or seeking is too small to report, indicating a potentially underserved population that may be in need of treatment or other services

While these key findings offer a lot of information about gambling and gambling-related problems in Massachusetts, the SEIGMA Research Team is planning deeper analyses of the data in coming months. These analyses will examine factors that may contribute to or cause problem gambling, relationships between gambling attitudes and gambling participation, and factors associated with particular types of gambling. In addition to this survey, the SEIGMA Research Team has collected a substantial amount of secondary social and health data. In partnership with the UMass Donahue Institute, the team is also conducting a comprehensive analysis of the economic and fiscal impacts of expanded gambling. All of the data collected by the SEIGMA team will be made public over time, to enable other researchers and stakeholders to interact with the data and conduct their own analyses, adding to the body of knowledge about gambling in Massachusetts.

The SEIGMA team will repeat the survey one year after all of the new gaming facilities have become operational in Massachusetts to measure the impacts of gambling expansion in Massachusetts. Measuring the same behaviors and using the same methods at subsequent points in time will be useful

in monitoring changes in attitudes, gambling participation, and problem gambling prevalence in Massachusetts. Results of this and subsequent surveys will be useful in developing data-driven strategies to promote responsible gambling, raise awareness about problem gambling, and design general and targeted prevention and treatment programs for problem gamblers and their families.

For a PDF of the full report or more information about the SEIGMA study, please visit:

<http://www.umass.edu/seigma/>.

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