



*Applying principles of the Massachusetts
Responsible Gaming Framework
to Sports Wagering Policy and Practice*

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Massachusetts Gaming Commission

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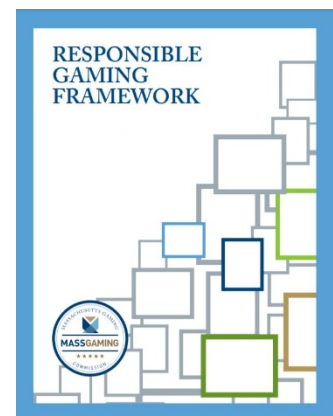
This document is intended to provide an overall orientation to responsible sports wagering practices and policies. It draws upon the guiding principles, strategies, and measures of the Massachusetts Gaming Commission (MGC)'s Responsible Gaming Framework and the limited but very thoughtful body of research done in this area.

Introduction

In drafting the expanded gaming statute (Chapter 194 of the Acts of 2011, MGL chapter 23K, or “the Gaming Act”), the Massachusetts Legislature laid out a vision for casino gaming that would create the greatest possible economic benefit to the Commonwealth. Legislators also identified the need to establish a comprehensive plan to measure and mitigate gambling-related harm as an important component of the successful implementation of the law. Therefore, the Gaming Act allocated a portion of gaming taxes to create a Public Health Trust Fund to support research and public health strategies, including responsible gaming programs.

To fulfill the mandate of the expanded gaming law, the MGC developed a Responsible Gaming Framework (RGF) with the expressed goal to create an effective, sustainable, measurable, socially responsible, and accountable approach to gambling. Within this goal is an expectation that legalized gambling in the Commonwealth will be conducted in a manner to minimize harm. The RGF is supported by the MGC’s annual research agenda and guides the strategies and measures described within. The MGC Responsible Gaming Framework can be found [here](#).

To understand the relationship between research and practice, the MGC laid out three responsible gaming objectives, including regulatory, research, and education objectives (Fig.1).



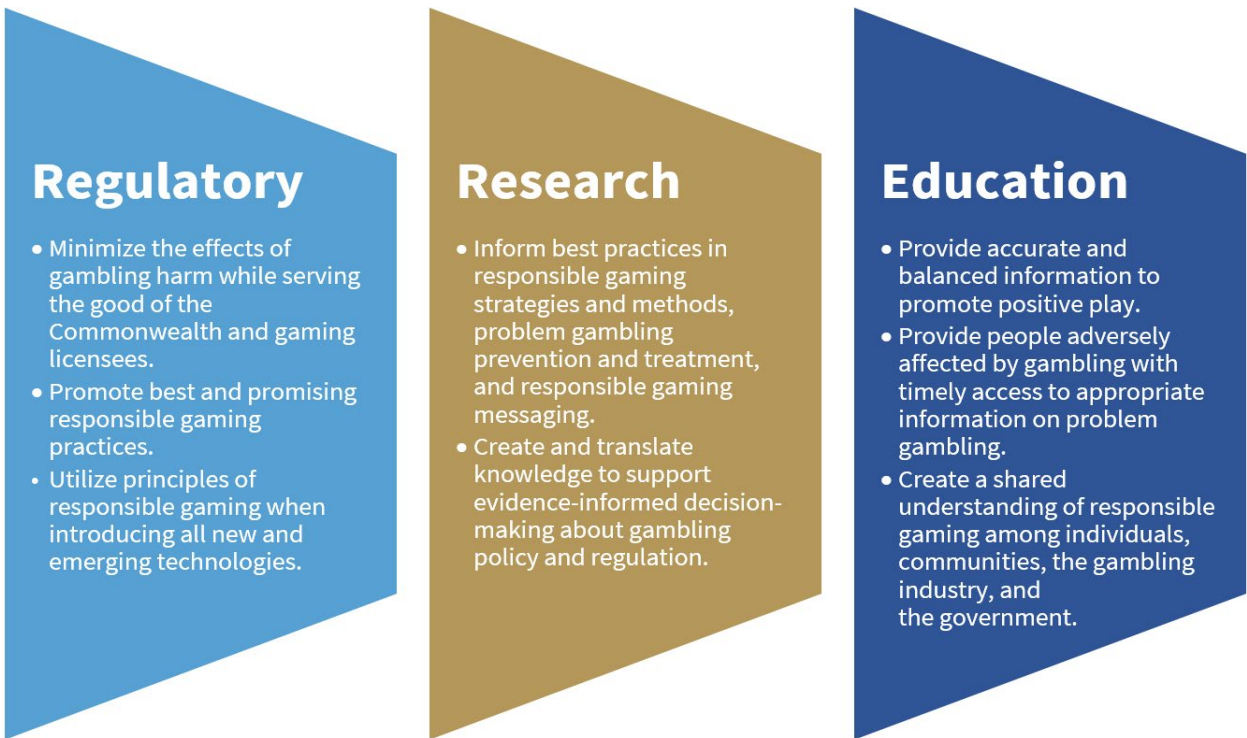


Figure 1. The Massachusetts Gaming Commission Responsible Gaming Objectives

Massachusetts Gaming Commission Responsible Gaming Programs

Based on the RGF, the MGC has designed and implemented several innovative programs aimed at promoting responsible gaming and reducing gambling-related harm.

- **GameSense** encourages casino patrons who chose to gamble to adopt and/or maintain positive behaviors and attitudes that reduce the risk of gambling-related harm. The program offers tips on responsible gaming, engaging tools, and advice and referrals to reduce harm. GameSense Info Centers are located on-site at all Massachusetts casinos, adjacent to the gaming floor, in high-traffic areas, and staffed by trained GameSense Advisors during casino operating hours. Guests can also access 24-hour responsible gaming tips, tricks, and information and chat online with a GameSense Advisor at [GameSenseMA.com](https://www.gamesensema.com).



- [PlayMyWay](#) is a first-of-its-kind budget-setting tool for slot machine play at Plainridge Park Casino. This tool allows patrons the ability to monitor the amount of money they spend on slot machines.



PlayMyWay will be available at MGM Springfield in 2021 and Encore Boston Harbor in 2022.

- [Voluntary Self-Exclusion](#)(VSE) is designed to assist patrons who recognize that they have experienced a loss of control over their gambling and wish to invoke external controls. VSE allows patrons to voluntarily prohibit themselves from accessing the gaming floor at all Massachusetts casinos for a predetermined length of time.

Relevant Research Findings from Massachusetts

The MGC has funded and will continue to fund studies to better understand the impact of expanded gaming in Massachusetts and to evaluate efforts to reduce gambling-related harm. Key study areas include, but are not limited to, public health impacts, economic impacts, and public safety impacts of expanded gaming. Below, we describe relevant findings from studies conducted with Massachusetts players, followed by strategies and measures based on the findings and on the RGF.

The Massachusetts Gambling Impact Cohort ([MAGIC](#)) is a prospective study of gambling and problem gambling conducted in Massachusetts over a six-year period (MAGIC Research Team, 2021), which found the following observations:



- **Sports wagering is a predictive variable for concurrent and future problem gambling.** Participation in sports wagering is considered one of the strongest predictive variables for concurrent and future problem gambling, including difficulty in limiting money and/or time spent on gambling, which leads to adverse consequences for the player or the community.
- **There was no significant change in gambling participation on sports wagering from 2013 to 2019; however, there was an increase in online gambling participation in 2016.** This coincides with increasing online gambling prevalence in most Western countries and because fantasy sports wagering (which is online) was legalized in Massachusetts in August 2016 as the first type of legal online gambling in the state.

In 2020, a research study was conducted to investigate the extent of positive play among 1,512 Massachusetts players (Wood & Tabri, 2021). Positive play can be defined as the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of players about gambling so that it remains a recreational activity and creates minimal risk of experiencing gambling-related harm. For example, only spending what is affordable to lose and sticking to personally allocated spend and time limits.

This study explored the specific areas where positive play could be further supported and identified the extent of positive play among different player segments. This study used the Positive Play Scale (PPS) to measure “healthy” gambling behaviors. The PPS has two gambling beliefs sub-scales to measure **positive beliefs** about gambling: *personal responsibility* and *gambling literacy*; as well as two behavior subscales to measure **positive gambling behavior**: *honesty & control* and *pre-commitment*. Study findings show:



- **Most Massachusetts players scored medium or low on gambling literacy.** The gambling literacy subscale measured the extent to which a player has an accurate understanding of the nature of gambling (high, medium, or low). For example, if I gamble more often, it will help me to win more than I lose. Only 37.5% of respondents scored high on gambling literacy compared to 76.9% scoring high on personal responsibility, 69.3% on honesty control, and 57.9% on pre-commitment.
- **Players in Massachusetts scored the second lowest on pre-commitment factors within the PPS dimension.** The pre-commitment subscale measures the extent to which a player considers how much money and time they should spend gambling. Findings show that 57.9% of respondents scored high on the pre-commitment subscale, the second lowest score after gambling literacy.
- **Positive play beliefs and behaviors were generally worse with younger age.** This trend was especially pronounced in relation to gambling literacy and pre-commitment.
- **Higher frequency multi-game players played less positively and reported more gambling-related problems** compared to lower frequency lottery players. High-frequency multi-game players are defined as people who played a wide variety of games a few times a month or more. On the PPS, the high-frequency multi-game players scored lower on gambling literacy and personal responsibility (taking ownership of their gambling behavior) and were more likely to be male and younger age and less likely to be white than lower frequency lottery players. Furthermore, during the period when casinos were closed due to the COVID-19 lockdown, online sports wagering increased for higher frequency multi-game players.

- **Players with higher levels of satisfaction with gambling were more likely to accept personal responsibility, be honest and in control of their gambling, and pre-commit to a money and time limit on their play**
- **Around half of players suggested they would find various online responsible gaming tools useful if online gambling was legalized in Massachusetts.**

Figure 2 provides a summary overview of the key relevant research findings of both Massachusetts research studies.



Figure 2. Relevant research findings from the “Massachusetts Gambling Impact Cohort (MAGIC)” (1. and 2.), and the “Positive Play: Measuring Responsible Gaming in Massachusetts”, (3.-5.), studies.

Translating Research Findings into Policy and Practice

Based on the research cited above, we present three recommendations when considering effective policy and practice (Fig.3).



Figure 3. Recommendations, based on Massachusetts research findings, for effective policy and practice, to support positive gambling behavior and minimize gambling harm.

Additional Considerations for Responsible Sports Wagering in Massachusetts

Because sports wagering collects extensive data related to player activity, there are opportunities to integrate principles expressed in the RGF, including promoting positive play, increasing informed player choice, and delivering timely access to appropriate information on problem gambling. Targeted strategies and measures, which are further described below, are informed by our extensive knowledge and experience in responsible gaming as well as findings from MGC-sponsored research.

Sports wagering and the technology supporting it is emerging and rapidly changing. There are challenges accompanying this evolution, such as increased availability, accessibility, and advertising of gambling through this new platform. Yet, there are also benefits in harnessing the technology to support safer gambling, such as offering player-management systems to monitor real-life gambling and allow players to set personalized limits.

Our recommended strategies and measures are based on the available evidence. However, where evidence is lacking, uncertain, or ambiguous, and there is reasonable concern that gambling-related harm may occur, a precautionary approach has been applied. The precautionary approach rejects the notion that risks are acceptable until harm has been proven or that risks can continue unmitigated until the effectiveness of a harm minimization measure is proven.

Strategies and Measures

Based on the [Responsible Gaming Framework's](#) principles of creating an effective, sustainable, measurable, socially responsible, and accountable approach to gambling, and on the key research findings conducted with Massachusetts players, we recommend four strategies and measures to ensure sports wagering in the Commonwealth is conducted in a manner that minimizes harm (Fig. 4).



Support Positive Play

- Offer play management systems to monitor real-time gambling and allow players to set limits.
- Offer automated alerts with the escalation of gambling expenditure.
- Offer cool-off periods similar to Voluntary Self-Exclusion but shorter in duration.
- Provide clear and concise information on how games and payouts work.
- Year-to-date win/loss statements.



Promote Public Health and Safety

- Prohibit use of credit cards and restrict casino credit.
- Support and promote Voluntary Self-Exclusion programs.
- Create measures to ensure players cannot have multiple accounts.
- Create measures to prevent and enforce compliance with age restrictions.
- Provide prominent advertising to helplines and resources.



Ensure Responsible Marketing

- Include responsible gaming messaging and promotion of problem gambling helpline.
- Offer marketing exclusion programs that limit operator to player communication.
- Gambling advertising should not: i) be placed unless at least 85% of the audience is expected to be of legal gambling age; ii) target persons who may have a gambling problem or those at greater risk of gambling related harm; iii) include content directed to or intended to appeal people below the legal age; iv) include anyone who appears below the legal gambling age.



Commit to Improvement and Reporting

- Record practices and progress relating to responsible gaming.
- Participate in responsible gaming program evaluation research and reviews and use findings to strengthen practices.
- Collaborate with the academic community to better understand the impacts of gambling through information exchange, including providing researchers access to data.

Figure 4. Strategies and measures recommended to ensure sports wagering in the Commonwealth is conducted in a manner that minimizes harm

Conclusion

The expanded gaming act provided the foundation from which the MGC had developed several nationally and internationally recognized responsible gaming programs to prevent and mitigate gambling-related harm. As the gaming landscape continues to expand and evolve, the MGC, in partnership with our many stakeholders, looks forward to continuing our role as a leader in creating research-driven innovation while effectuating the principles of the Gaming Act to meet the needs of Massachusetts' gamblers.

Definitions

Problem Gambling: Difficulties in limiting money and/or time spent on gambling which leads to adverse consequences for the gambler, others, or for the community (Neal, Delfabbro & O’Neil, 2005)

Responsible Gaming: The provision of gambling services designed to encourage players to maintain their gambling at a healthy level and minimize harm to consumers and the community (McMillen & McAllister, 2000)

Positive Play: The knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behavior of players about gambling so that it remains a recreational activity and creates minimal risk of experiencing gambling-related harm.

Informed Player Choice: The provision of timely, relevant, and clear information to enable players to make responsible gambling choices.

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