

# Community Perspectives on Encore Boston Harbor Casino

## Final Report



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Community Advisory Board

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# Executive Summary

Encore Boston Harbor (Encore), located along the Mystic River waterfront, opened in June 2019 in Everett, a Boston suburb with an industrial heritage. The Massachusetts Gaming Commission (MGC) funded NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC) and the Institute for Community Health (ICH)—the NORC-ICH team—to conduct a qualitative research study to capture community perspectives on how Encore has affected the day-to-day quality of life of people in the Casino’s surrounding communities. The NORC-ICH team used a community-engaged research approach, convening a community advisory board (CAB) to involve community members living and working around Encore in the research design, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of findings. The CAB ensured we represented community needs and perspectives throughout the study.

## Methods

We conducted semi-structured virtual interviews with community members in five languages (English, Chinese [Mandarin or Cantonese], Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Spanish) from February to May 2022.

**Data Collection Approach.** We recruited and trained four community members to conduct the interviews along with one NORC-ICH team member. We used both purposive and snowball sampling approaches to recruit participants with support from the NORC-ICH team, CAB members, and community interviewers to recruit eligible participants from communities surrounding the Encore Casino. Participants received a \$25 gift card upon interview completion.

**Participatory Analysis and Sensemaking.** The NORC-ICH team conducted thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview transcripts and notes. We conducted a “*data party*” with CAB members and community interviewers, one 90-minute focus group with four English-speaking participants, and one 90-minute small group discussion with two Spanish-speaking participants to collectively analyze and interpret preliminary findings. We triangulated findings to identify themes, commonalities, and variation across perspectives presented in this report. CAB members and community interviewers also reviewed and provided feedback on the draft report.

## Key Findings

We conducted 47 interviews in five different languages with community members of diverse backgrounds. Over half of participants completed their interview in a language other than English. Half of participants identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/e. A majority identified as female and were between 25 and 54 years old. Participants resided in eight communities around Encore; almost half of participants had lived in their community for over 10 years. A subset of six interview participants took part in the focus group and small group discussion for participatory analysis and sensemaking. This section presents key findings from the interviews, focus group, and small group discussion. We use the following descriptive language throughout the findings section to provide readers a sense of the

approximate number of participants with the perspectives and themes in our findings: few is <5, several is <10, some is 11-23, many is 24-39, most is 40 or more; we note if we only heard a perspective from a single participant.

## Views on Legalized Gambling

Participants had mixed views on legalized gambling. Some shared negative viewpoints, noting they believed Encore's introduction normalized gambling and promoted problem gambling behaviors. Some had positive views on legalized gambling and supported having a casino in their neighborhood. They believed that gambling is a form of entertainment and that community members should have the freedom to gamble if it is legal and regulated. The remaining few participants did not lean either negatively or positively, and instead shared neutral feelings about legalized gambling and casinos in their community. The focus group and small group discussion participants agreed that polarized views on legalized gambling are unsurprising given that multifaceted experiences and contexts (e.g., personal experiences, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and upbringing) may contribute to views on gambling.<sup>i</sup>

## Community Participant Perspectives on Encore

**Participants had mixed perspectives on the effects of Encore on the local economy, including employment, housing, and small businesses.**

- **Participants had mixed views on the effects of Encore on employment opportunities.** Some participants believed Encore created jobs and employment opportunities in the area. However, several noted they expected Encore to bring jobs and money to local communities prior to its development but have yet to see this come to fruition. Participants who identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/e and those who had lived in the communities surrounding Encore for more than 10 years often had negative views of the Casino's effects on jobs, including the quality of jobs. Many participants noted the COVID-19 pandemic led to job losses at Encore and uncertainty that negatively affected the finances of its employees.
- **Some participants described increasing rent and home prices in the communities surrounding Encore.** Some described seeing development of luxury apartments and condos in the area, but not of affordable housing. Some participants noted that the lack of affordable housing led to displacement of immigrant and middle-class families from their homes because they could no longer afford to live in the area. However, a few participants noted that increased housing prices are market trends affecting communities all around the state and the country and may not be directly attributable to Encore.
- **Participants had mixed views on the effects of Encore on local, small businesses.** Some participants noted that small businesses in the surrounding community closed or lost employees and clientele after Encore opened. However, a few focus group and small group discussion participants noted that Encore is commonly not in direct competition with many of the small businesses surrounding the Casino. Some participants stated that the presence of Encore made Everett a "destination," attracting people who might otherwise not have visited the

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<sup>i</sup> A review of a sample of notes and transcripts yielded no discernable pattern between participant views on legalized gambling and perspectives on specific effects of the casino on surrounding communities.

area, with some noting that this boosted the local economy and clientele for surrounding small businesses.

### **Participants also had mixed views on the effects of Encore on various social and environmental factors.**

- ***Encore improved roads and other infrastructure in surrounding neighborhoods but also increased traffic in the immediate area.*** Many participants who reported driving past Encore on Route 99 noted that its presence increased traffic in the area, resulting in longer commute times and increased congestion, particularly during its construction. Many participants discussed that roads surrounding Encore are now easier to traverse and some thought Encore brought new development to the area. Several participants noted that Encore brought more beautiful landscapes, parks, and recreational spaces to the area, but there were mixed views on the skyline. Participants also felt that Encore could do more to improve local infrastructure beyond the immediate Casino grounds, with a few noting that some construction equipment has still not been removed.
- ***Several participants noted they perceived that Encore has increased the level of crime in the area.*** A few described an increased presence of police and ambulances in the surrounding neighborhoods, as well as more general criminal activity. A few participants also expressed concern about Encore's effect on youth, noting that exposure to casinos normalizes gambling behaviors for young people.
- ***Participants had mixed feelings about Encore's effects on social connectivity and relationships in their community.*** For several participants, Encore is a new, fun place in town to gather with friends and host events, strengthening relationships in the community. A few participants noted that Encore strained relationships with friends and family and did not build a sense of community. One participant believed that Encore intentionally targets advertisements toward the Asian community.

### **Participants expressed concerns about the effects of Encore on community health, including mental health, alcohol use, and problem gambling.**

- ***Mental Health.*** Some participants believed that Encore has negatively affected the mental health of community members, particularly due to increased stress. A few participants noted that Encore is a place for entertainment and relaxation.
- ***Alcohol Use.*** Some participants expressed concerns that the atmosphere and environment that Encore creates are core contributors to higher alcohol consumption.
- ***Problem Gambling and Other Gambling-Related Harms.*** Some participants believed that Encore has contributed to more problem gambling, with a few noting that it is likely that many community members who would never have gambled did so only because of Encore's proximity. They believed that Encore has contributed to personal financial loss including loss of money needed for everyday things like groceries, utilities, and rent. Several participants shared personal or anecdotal stories about community members losing friends or familial relationships due to problem gambling.

## Participant Recommendations

Participants were asked about what they would like to see Encore do to improve their or their communities' quality of life.

**Many participants believed Encore should reinvest money to nearby communities through community programs, investment in infrastructure, and development of more parks and green spaces.** Several participants described the need for Encore to develop or invest in programs for local families in the surrounding communities. They recommended that the Casino provide or support social services and programs that support families and young people in surrounding communities, though focus group and small group discussion participants expressed concern about casinos engaging with young and impressionable people. Several participants recommended that Encore increase investment in infrastructure, including walking bridges, public transportation, and more parks and green spaces beyond the Casino grounds. Other recommendations shared by a few participants included reinvesting in environmental issues like clean energy, providing more local job opportunities, supporting local, small businesses, and supporting immigrant communities in the area.

**Some participants noted Encore should offer more support and resources for people experiencing problem gambling.** They described a need for Encore to provide educational materials and resources for people experiencing or at risk of gambling-related harms, including sharing pamphlets, posting visible signage, establishing programs that restrict people with a history of problem gambling from entering Encore, and providing resources for loved ones of individuals experiencing problem gambling. GameSense, a nonprofit organization with a presence at Encore, offers support and resources for people experiencing problem gambling. However, a few participants expressed the concern of *"trusting the Casino to police itself"* and suggested that the state, a foundation, or some other third-party entity may be more suited and equipped to provide these resources.

**A few participants articulated a need for Encore to more actively engage with community members to understand their needs.** These participants shared that beyond Encore providing money via tax revenue to the city, they wanted Encore to participate more actively in the community, engage with community members directly, participate in community meetings, listen to community needs, and develop programs and opportunities based on those needs.

## Discussion

**Community perspectives on Encore's effects on surrounding communities are difficult to disentangle from broader factors like the COVID-19 pandemic and rising inflation.** Encore opened just before COVID-19-related shutdowns and restrictions were put in place. In addition, data collection for this study occurred in early 2022, when external factors such as the continuing pandemic and broader economic trends, including high prices and rising inflation, were also prevalent. Participants, CAB members, focus group, and small group discussion participants highlighted that some findings reflect broader trends present throughout the Commonwealth and country, making it difficult to attribute community perspectives on these issues directly to Encore. That said, participants still perceived Encore as having a direct effect on their lives and community and that it likely contributed to these issues.

**Participants highlighted the perspective of “Encore for whom?” noting casinos likely have disproportionate effects on communities based on socioeconomic status and cultural background.**

Our findings echo prior research that opinions about casinos and legalized gambling are mixed and nuanced. Participants noted that mixed perspectives on casinos and legalized gambling are likely the result of differing personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and other factors. Thus, gambling-related research should consider which groups of community members may be disproportionately benefiting from or being harmed by the introduction of a casino to a community and ensure a broad perspective of views and identities are represented in gambling-related research to capture the full range of perspectives and experiences.

**Both Encore and local governments should more actively engage community members in decision making to account for community needs.** CAB members, focus group, and small group discussion participants noted that there needs to be a clear delineation between the perceived effects of legalized gambling and Encore on the city of Everett versus individuals living in surrounding communities. When making decisions about the Encore or future projects, the city of Everett should understand factors that affect community members’ lives like housing costs, job opportunities, and other day-to-day quality of life indicators. Thus, participants expressed interest in Encore and local governments soliciting thoughts and opinions from community members, as well as valuing perspectives and opinions that could be viewed as “*dissent*.” They also called for more equitable investment in people, infrastructure, and services that will have wider reach.

## Conclusion

Through a rigorous research agenda, MGC aims to fill research gaps on gambling, casinos, and related community impacts. In partnership with a CAB comprised of individuals who live and work in the communities around Encore, NORC-ICH conducted 47 interviews with individuals of diverse backgrounds; a subset of six took part in participatory analysis and sensemaking. This qualitative study grounded in community-engaged research principles sought to capture community perspectives on Encore’s effects on the day-to-day quality of life of people living in nearby communities.

Though difficult to disentangle Encore’s effects from those of the broader COVID-19 pandemic on the local economy, social and environmental factors, and community health, this study found that community perspectives on Encore and legalized gambling are mixed and nuanced. Participants reported both positive and negative effects of Encore on the local economy including job opportunities, housing, and small businesses, social and environmental factors including infrastructure and social connections, and health, including mental health and problem gambling. Participants recommended that Encore should engage with and invest more in the community, such as reinvest money to nearby communities through community programs; invest in infrastructure and develop more parks and green spaces; offer more support and resources for people experiencing problem gambling; and more actively engage with community members to understand and respond to their needs. Both Encore and the city of Everett should consider more actively engaging community members in decision making to account for community needs.

# Final Report

# Introduction

Massachusetts legalized casino gambling in November 2011 under Chapter 194, “An Act Establishing Expanded Gaming in the Commonwealth.” Three casinos now operate in Massachusetts: Plainridge Park Casino, Plainville, opened in 2015; MGM Springfield opened in August 2018; and Encore Boston Harbor (Encore) opened in June 2019 in Everett, a Boston suburb with an industrial heritage. This study focuses on Encore, a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design platinum-certified resort and casino providing dining, gaming, shopping, and entertainment.<sup>3-5</sup> Built in 2019 at a total cost of \$2.6 billion on the site of a former chemical plant, Encore is located along the Mystic River waterfront less than five miles from downtown Boston. An estimated 5.6 million gaming-age residents live within a 90-minute drive of Encore. The property includes more than 3.1 million total square feet, including slot machines, gaming tables, poker tables, 671 luxury hotel rooms and suites, an array of food and beverage outlets, and large group meeting spaces. The Casino employs more than 3,000 people and has created an adjacent six-acre public park and Harborwalk along the shoreline.

Public opinions of casinos and legalized gambling are both mixed and nuanced. A majority of U.S. adults view casinos and gambling favorably, with 71 percent saying casinos create jobs and 57 percent saying casinos help local economies.<sup>6</sup> Despite overall support, fewer than half (49%) of adults in the United States believe that casinos help their local communities. Additionally, research shows that communities of color often are disproportionately impacted by gambling, raising concerns that the introduction of casinos might generate increased crime, problem gambling, and racial discrimination.<sup>7-9</sup> It is important that research focus on the effects of casinos on host communities, i.e., the people who live and work in the host community or surrounding communities and their lived experience.<sup>10</sup>

## Definition of Problem Gambling

According to the National Council on Problem Gambling, “Problem gambling—or gambling addiction—includes all gambling behavior patterns that compromise, disrupt or damage personal, family or vocational pursuits. The symptoms include increasing preoccupation with gambling, a need to bet more money more frequently, restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop, ‘chasing’ losses, and loss of control manifested by continuation of the gambling behavior in spite of mounting, serious, negative consequences. In extreme cases, problem gambling can result in financial ruin, legal problems, loss of career and family, or even suicide.”<sup>1</sup>

Through a rigorous research agenda, the Massachusetts Gaming Commission (MGC) aims to fill research gaps on gambling, casinos, and their community impacts. MGC funded NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC)<sup>ii</sup> and the Institute for Community Health (ICH)—the NORC-ICH team—to conduct a qualitative research study grounded in community-engaged research principles to capture perspectives on the introduction of Encore and how it has affected the day-to-day quality of life of people in the Casino’s surrounding communities.

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<sup>ii</sup> NORC is not an acronym. More information about NORC’s name is available at: <https://www.norc.org/about/Pages/about-our-name.aspx>

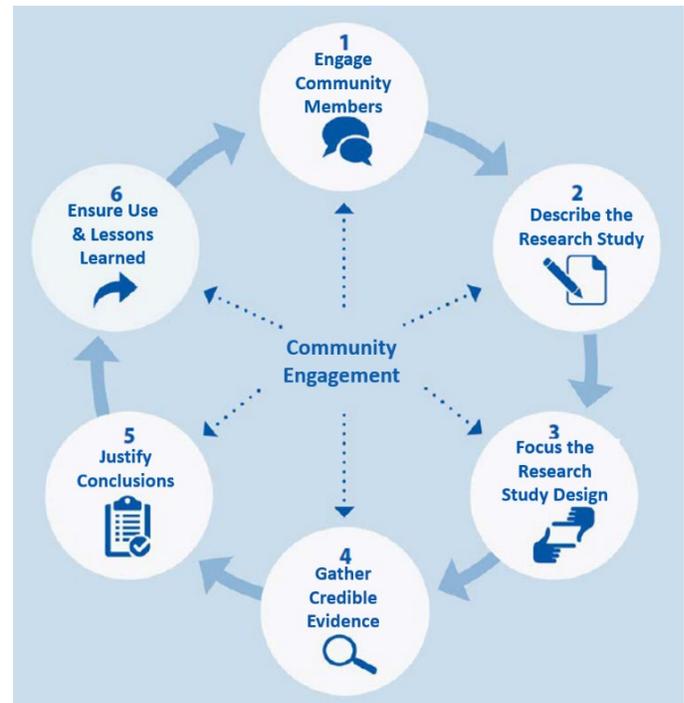
Through a community-engaged research approach, NORC-ICH intentionally involved community members living and working around Encore in the research design, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of findings. Engaging community members in the research and capturing underrepresented voices are critical to understanding how Encore has affected local communities and people's quality of life.<sup>2</sup> This approach facilitates in-depth learning as the research team works closely with local communities to understand, contextualize, interpret, and provide information on Encore's effects to MGC and the community.<sup>10,11</sup> Community-engaged research also contributes to a more holistic understanding of how to design and enact meaningful policy interventions while identifying strengths and limitations of existing policies.

Our study sought to build on existing research to better understand individuals' perspectives on the perceived effects of the introduction of Encore on the day-to-day quality of life of members of the surrounding communities. The NORC-ICH team also coordinated, when possible, with other study teams conducting gambling research in this area to build on existing research, share best practices and lessons learned around community engagement, and avoid overburdening community-based organizations and community members in Encore's surrounding communities.<sup>12</sup>

# Methods

Community-engaged research emphasizes joining with community members as equal partners throughout the full cycle of the research process (**Exhibit 1**). This study engaged community members throughout the design, implementation, and analysis of research activities to ensure findings are useful, relevant, and credible to communities surrounding Encore. Our guiding framework includes community-centered principles adapted from patient-centered outcomes research and community-based participatory research frameworks, including the following elements: reciprocal relationships (e.g., collaborative decision making), partnerships (e.g., fairly valuing community members' time, commitment to cultural responsiveness), co-learning (e.g., incorporating person-centeredness into the research process), transparency, honesty, and trust.<sup>13</sup> This approach enabled us to anticipate challenges and identify mitigation strategies around recruitment and implementation.

**Exhibit 1.** Framework for Community-Engaged Research Methods\*



\*Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Preventions Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health<sup>2</sup>

## Community Advisory Board (CAB)

Key to our community-engaged research approach was convening a CAB of seven individuals who live or work in communities surrounding Encore. Over the course of the project, from June 2021 to May 2022, the CAB ensured we represented community needs and perspectives throughout the research design, implementation, and dissemination.

Our recruitment strategy concentrated on identifying potential CAB members with lived experience or employment in Encore's surrounding communities. We avoided recruiting more than one CAB member from the same organization or community group. Research experience was not a requirement to participate in the CAB, and we encouraged individuals with different professions, perspectives, and languages to join. We identified and recruited CAB members by developing and distributing a flyer detailing information about the research, CAB responsibilities, time commitment, compensation, and contact information (in both English and Spanish). We also leveraged ICH's and NORC team members' personal and professional connections within the communities surrounding Encore, the result of two

decades of local community-engaged research, to generate a list of organizations and individuals to contact directly about participating in the CAB. We also engaged six other individuals over the course of the project to provide insights on design and implementation. These individuals could not participate in the CAB but provided ad-hoc input and insights that informed the project.

CAB members participated in one-on-one interviews and took a subsequent, brief follow-up survey to identify relevant values, interests, and concerns related to legalized gambling and Encore. The results of this engagement informed development of research questions and interview discussion guides. CAB members participated in an asynchronous focus group to reach consensus on research questions. CAB members also participated in five quarterly

meetings and reviewed all materials, including participant recruitment flyers and the interview discussion guide. Additionally, CAB members assisted with recruitment of community interviewers. All CAB members were compensated for their time.

#### Community Advisory Board Members: Community and Employer affiliations

- An employee at **GameSense**, an organization that is not directly linked to Encore yet works inside the walls of the casino to provide information and resources for responsible gambling
- An employee at the **Malden YMCA** who provides direct services to the communities surrounding Encore
- A **local business owner** and longtime community resident
- A staff member at **The Welcome Project**, a Somerville nonprofit organization that serves immigrants
- An employee at **Harvard University** and long-time community resident and volunteer
- A staff member at the **Sarepta Women & Children Empowerment Center**, a local nonprofit serving the Haitian community
- A local resident and volunteer at the **city of Everett**

## Data Collection

This study used a qualitative research design consisting of semi-structured virtual interviews with community members in five languages representative of those most frequently spoken in the communities surrounding Encore, as advised by the CAB: English, Chinese [Mandarin or Cantonese], Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Spanish. We translated all recruitment and materials using a certified translation vendor. All translations were reviewed for accuracy and accessibility by NORC-ICH team members, community interviewers, or CAB members. Data collection occurred from February to May 2022. The NORC Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the design, approach, and all materials, including interview guides and participant consent language.

**Interviewer Recruitment and Training.** In partnership with the CAB, we recruited four community members to serve as interviewers along with one NORC-ICH team member who lived near Encore. Each interviewer spoke English and at least one other language included in the study. Recruiting interviewers who lived and worked in the same communities as the interviewees helped generate trust and therefore more meaningful data. The NORC-ICH team trained interviewers in January 2022 to ensure a systematic approach to data collection, promote skill building, and contribute to the sustainability of future research efforts. Interviewers also completed CIRTification training, a tool that offers an interactive format of human subjects training for community research partners from non-academic

settings.<sup>14</sup> Interviewers received payment for time spent training, conducting interviews, analyzing findings, and reviewing the report.

**Participant Recruitment.** We used both purposive and snowball sampling approaches to recruit participants. This design helped ensure recruitment remained culturally responsive with a goal of reaching more community members who do not traditionally engage in research and with a wide range of opinions on casinos and community impact.<sup>15</sup> The NORC-ICH team, CAB members, and interviewers identified key organizations in Encore’s surrounding communities to assist with recruitment of participants. During initial CAB meetings, members suggested key community organizations for local outreach and recruitment. We also developed a flyer (available in paper and electronic format) for CAB members to share with contacts at local organizations, businesses, other community locations, and through social media (**Appendix A**). Participants completed an online screener or were administered a screener by community interviewers to gauge eligibility. Participants were eligible if they were aged 18 and older, spoke one of the study languages, and lived for at least two years in one of the following communities surrounding the Casino—Boston, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Malden, Medford, Revere, Somerville, or Winthrop.

**Semi-structured Interviews.** We developed a semi-structured interview guide in collaboration with the CAB (**Appendix B**). We designed the guide to take 20-25 minutes. Community interviewers each had access to a Zoom Pro account, and we used a scheduling app to facilitate connecting participants to interviewers in their preferred language. Interviewers read IRB-approved consent language and asked permission to record the interviews. Participants received a \$25 gift card upon completion of the interview. We used a transcription service for the English interviews and detailed notes from interviewers (in English) for interviews conducted in languages other than English.

## Participatory Analysis and Sensemaking

**Preliminary Analysis.** The NORC-ICH research team conducted thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview transcripts and notes. We developed a codebook based on the interview guide and updated the codebook based on themes that emerged during analysis using a deductive and inductive approach to analysis.<sup>16</sup> We used Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software, for coding.

**Participatory Analysis and Sensemaking.** Participatory analysis integrates participants and community members into the analytic process, and sensemaking gives meaning to data based on people’s lived experience to highlight cultural, structural, and contextual factors.<sup>17</sup> We conducted a “*data party*” with CAB members and interviewers, as well as one 90-minute focus group with four English-speaking participants and one 90-minute small group discussion with two Spanish-speaking participants to collectively analyze and interpret preliminary findings from the first 41 interviews. All English and Spanish speaking interview participants who agreed to be contacted for a follow-up were invited to continue their participation in the “*data party*.” While the initial goal was to conduct two focus groups (one in English and one in Spanish), due to scheduling conflicts and limited willing Spanish-speaking participants, we only conducted a small group discussion in Spanish. This approach enabled the NORC-ICH team, CAB, interviewers, and participants to gain a deeper understanding of perspectives and themes that emerged from the interviews and share perspectives while hearing from and responding to

others in the group. Focus group and small group discussion participants were also invited to share photographs or images that represent their or their community's experience with Encore. Community members received a \$75 gift card for participating, and CAB and interviewers were paid for their time.

We triangulated findings from all interviews and sensemaking activities to identify themes, commonalities, and variation across participant, CAB, and interviewer perspectives. We also invited CAB members and interviewers to provide feedback on the draft report.

## Strengths and limitations

The strength of qualitative research is that it provides an in-depth and contextualized exploration of the Casino's impact, engaging diverse perspectives of community members. Accordingly, we employed sampling approaches that are designed to generate this unique type of social knowledge to examine our research questions.<sup>18,19</sup> The use of rigorous qualitative techniques, purposive and snowball sampling approaches to identify a range of perspectives across Encore's surrounding communities improved the validity of the findings. Our methodological approach provides broader perspectives and deeper understanding about the implications, patterns, unintended consequences, and how they interact with the community. However, the community perspectives on Encore would not necessarily generalize to casinos in other contexts or at different moments in time nor are they representative of the general population surrounding the Encore Casino. There may be unique resources, community features, or local policies that support or inhibit communities in overcoming barriers and harnessing facilitators associated with casinos in other circumstances.

# Key Findings

This section presents key findings from the interviews, focus group, and small group discussion. We start with a description of participants and their views on legalized gambling. We follow with community members' perspectives on the effects of the introduction of Encore on three key areas: the local economy, social and environmental factors, and health. We then describe participants' recommendations for what they would like to see Encore do to improve their or other community members' quality of life. Based on CAB feedback about the importance of contextualizing findings as they are presented in this report, we added additional information from external sources of interpretation from the CAB, focus group, and small group discussion to contextualize participant findings where appropriate.

**We use the following descriptive language throughout the findings section to provide readers a sense of the approximate number of participants with the perspectives and themes in our findings: few is <5, several is <10, some is 11-23, many is 24-39, most is 40 or more;** we note if we only heard a perspective from a single participant. Given the qualitative approach to collecting data through semi-structured interviews and focus groups, our goal was not to quantify findings and provide specific percentages as the sampling is not intending to capture a representative sample of the population. Instead, through this qualitative approach, we offer an examination of in-depth, community-oriented perspectives about the Encore Casino within participants' respective communities. We collected basic sociodemographic and geographic data for all participants and summarize those details in the following section, so readers are able to interpret our findings within this context.

## Participant Overview

### Overview of Participants

We conducted 47 interviews in five different languages with community members of diverse backgrounds from eight communities surrounding Encore. Of these, six community members participated in the additional focus group or small group discussion during participatory analysis and sensemaking.

**Over half (53%) of participants completed their interview in a language other than English (Exhibit 2).** Interviewers conducted 12 interviews in Spanish, six in Portuguese, five in Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), and two in Haitian Creole, in addition to 22 in English. Half of all participants (49%) identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/e, while 28 percent identified as White (**Exhibit 3**). Twenty percent identified as Black, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. A majority identified as female (61%) and were between 25 and 54 years old (71%), but there was wide range in participant ages (**Exhibits 4 and 5**).

**Exhibit 2. Language in Which Participants Completed the Interviews**

Language	Interview Participants (n=47)
English	47%
Spanish	26%
Portuguese	13%
Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese)	11%
Haitian Creole	4%

**Exhibit 3. Race or Ethnicity of Participants\***

Race/Ethnicity	Interview Participants (n=47)
Hispanic or Latino/a/e**	51%
White	28%
Asian or NHPI***	13%
Black	11%
Prefer Not to Answer	4%

\*The survey asked about race and ethnicity as a select all that apply question. A participant can be represented as more than one identity in the table above and thus the percentage totals sum to more than 100%.

\*\*The Hispanic or Latino/a/e race or ethnicity category included individuals identifying as Brazilian.

\*\*\*NHPI: Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

**Exhibit 4. Gender Identity of Participants**

Gender Identity	Interview Participants (n=47)
Female	61%
Male	34%
Other	5%

**Exhibit 5. Age Group of Participants**

Age	Interview Participants (n=47)
18-24	12%
25-34	24%
35-44	27%
45-54	20%
55-64	12%
65+	5%

**Exhibit 6. Number of Years Living in Community for Participants**

Community	Interview Participants (n=47)
2-5 Years	32%
5-10 Years	21%
10+ Years	47%

**Exhibit 7. Current or Previous Employment at Encore Casino**

Community	Interview Participants (n=47)
Yes	11%
No	89%

**Participants resided in eight communities around Encore (Exhibit 8); over 40 percent were from Somerville or Malden.** Sixteen percent of participants were from Revere, 12% from Everett where the Encore Casino is directly located, 10% each were from Medford and Boston, 6% from Chelsea, and 2% were from Winthrop. No participants from Cambridge completed an interview. Almost half (47%) of all participants had lived in their community for over 10 years (Exhibit 6).

**Ten percent of participants had previous or current employment at Encore (Exhibit 7).** Four participants noted previously working at Encore and one participant identified current employment.

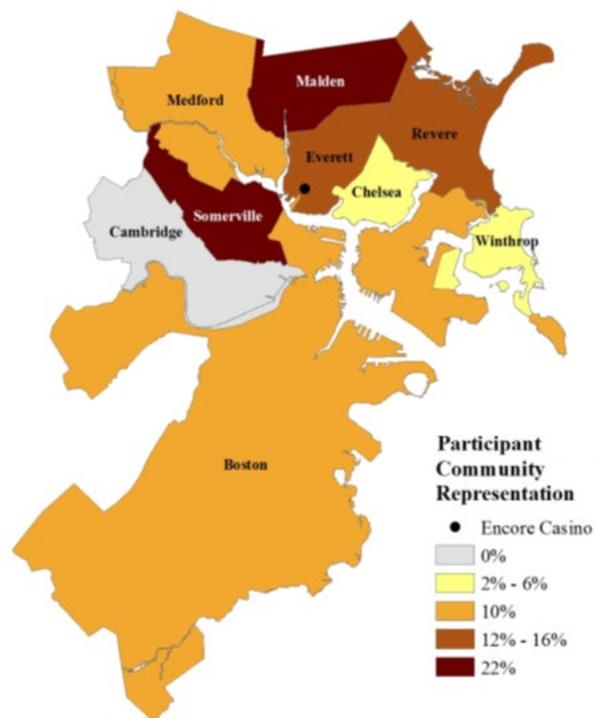
**A subset of six interview participants participated in the sensemaking focus group or small group discussion in either English or Spanish.** Four participated in the English language focus group and two in the Spanish language small group discussion. Participants identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/e, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or White. Participants were from all eligible age range groups except for 65+ and from five communities (Somerville, Revere, Medford, Boston, and Chelsea). Five of the six identified as female.

### Views on Legalized Gambling

Participants had mixed views on legalized gambling; many shared strong positive or negative viewpoints, while a few held neutral viewpoints.<sup>iii</sup>

**Some participants shared negative viewpoints on legalized gambling and the establishment of a casino in their communities.** These participants believed that Encore’s introduction normalized gambling and promoted problem gambling behaviors. Some participants believed that Encore provides no benefit to their community, and some shared the viewpoint that gambling is a predatory industry that thrives and profits from community members’ losses.

Exhibit 8. Community of Participants\*



\*This question was asked as a select all that apply. A participant can represent more than one community and thus the totals of the percentages sum to more than 100%.

*“The vice takes over and worsens people’s situation. Yeah, they can always go somewhere else but having it in our community makes access to it easier. You see this in other communities that have a casino. Vices go up, poverty goes up, everything gets worse. False expectations that things will be better, but it gets worse. I am against it.” – Hispanic or Latino/a/e-identifying Somerville resident*

<sup>iii</sup> A review of a sample of notes and transcripts yielded no discernable pattern between participant views on legalized gambling and perspectives on specific effects of the casino on surrounding communities.

**Some participants had positive views on legalized gambling and supported having a casino in their neighborhood.** Some believed that gambling is a form of entertainment and community members should have the freedom to gamble, with some noting that if casino gambling is legal and regulated, it is acceptable. They shared that the introduction of a casino only provides those with the desire to gamble the option and that it should not be prohibited because adults can make their own decisions about whether to gamble or not. They did not view Encore as distinct from other forms of leisure and entertainment. As a Revere resident noted, *"I think it should exist. If it is legal, I think it's okay... we have different forms of entertainment, we can go to a bar, a sports game, a casino. It's good with me. We can't prohibit these things."*

**The few remaining participants did not offer a positive nor negative view of legalized gambling in their community.** A few participants were ambivalent about legalized gambling while others held both positive and negative viewpoints, noting that regulations and individual self-control are core factors in determining the impact of the legalized gambling.

**All six focus group and small group discussion participants agreed that polarized views on legalized gambling are unsurprising given that multifaceted experiences and contexts may contribute to views on gambling.** Such factors include but are not limited to personal experiences, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and upbringing. For example, one focus group participant suggested that one's economic situation may contribute to the perspective they hold towards legalized gambling.

## Community Participant Perspectives on Encore

This section describes participant perspectives on the effects of Encore and legalized casino gambling in three key areas: the local economy, social and environmental factors, and health.

### Local Economy

#### Summary of Community Perspectives on Local Economy

- **Employment:** Participants noted Encore created jobs and employment opportunities in the area, but were also unsure whether promises of local jobs came to fruition and expressed concern about the quality of those jobs.
- **Housing:** Participants described increases in rent and housing prices and decreased housing affordability in communities surrounding Encore, leading to displacement of immigrant and middle-class families. However, participants shared that these may be broader market trends not directly attributable to Encore.
- **Small Businesses:** Participants noted that some small businesses in the surrounding communities closed or lost employees and clientele after Encore opened. Participants also described how Encore made Everett a *"tourist attraction"* that increased the number of people coming into the neighborhood, resulting in increased business and clientele for surrounding businesses.

#### **Employment. Mixed views of Encore's effects on employment opportunities.**

**Some participants believed Encore created jobs and employment opportunities in the area.** Encore increased employment opportunities for people in surrounding communities, with several noting they had applied for a job at Encore, knew of someone who had applied, or worked there. As one Malden

resident described, “I think [Encore has] been a positive impact on the community because there are more jobs... I have also been offered to work there, so it’s given a lot of employment opportunities... I know that it has given a lot of jobs to people in this area. I have a lot of friends that work there.” A few participants also described increased employment opportunities in transportation, retail, and the restaurant industry due to Encore.

**Several participants anticipated that Encore would bring jobs and money to the local communities but that they have yet to see direct evidence of the promise of local jobs come to fruition.** A few noted that jobs and opportunities were going to people from out of state or from other areas in Massachusetts, including during construction, despite data from other studies that indicate a majority of Encore’s construction budget went to firms based in Massachusetts, including firms based in Everett.<sup>20</sup> Several participants noted concerns about the quality of jobs at Encore, including low pay and poor working conditions (e.g., insufficient breaks, lack of tips).

*“Information that was going around before the [Encore] came up, I was excited because there were job opportunities... and pretty decent paying jobs... that was something that I was expecting to see. They also told us, as a resident you get first serve, and it just didn’t feel like that... I thought there were going to be job fairs, and I just thought it was going to be a lot easier for me as a resident, to get a job there, and it didn’t really feel like that.” – Black/African American-identifying Malden resident*

**There were some discrepancies in perceptions of job opportunities and quality of jobs by race and ethnicity.** Participants identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/e and those who had lived in the communities surrounding Encore for more than 10 years often had negative views of the Casino’s effect on jobs, including the quality of jobs. At the same time, both participants who interviewed in Haitian Creole believed that job opportunities at Encore were geared more toward those identifying as Hispanic or Latino/a/e, with one Revere resident noting, “Employment opportunities are directed and advertised to more Hispanics; there are not many Black workers in highly visible roles.”

**Many participants noted the COVID-19 pandemic led to job losses at Encore and uncertainty that negatively affected employees financially.** These perspectives align with news reports of over 3,000 furloughed workers and nearly 400 layoffs from Encore amidst the pandemic.<sup>21-23</sup> A few participants noted that Encore did its best to keep employees as long as possible during the pandemic. According to a recent report about the impact of COVID-19, Encore kept many of its employees on payroll while closed, particularly compared to other casinos in the state but made further layoffs after reopening.<sup>24</sup> Many participants attributed broad job losses to

*“I used to actually work at [Encore] and I was laid off during COVID... when I lost my job I was impacted definitely, because I fell back on my mortgage and it impacted my family until I was able to get another job. But it wasn’t because of the casino, it was more because of the pandemic, because that’s why they closed... But, I can tell you, that [Encore] did everything that they could to keep us actively working, to keep it going. They paid us for a long time because they didn’t want us to lose our jobs.” – Hispanic or Latino/a/e-identifying Everett resident*

lockdowns and restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic and not to the Casino. However, a few noted concerns that Encore did not rehire some employees or that bartender jobs were replaced by automated drink dispensers. These concerns echo news reports prior to the COVID-19 pandemic of “rightsizing” operations at Encore, including replacing the “back of the house” bartenders with

automated drink dispensers.<sup>25,26</sup> According to other data, Encore has made a 63 percent employment recovery, and most employees hired after reopening were prior employees.<sup>27</sup>

**Housing. Participants described increased rental and housing prices and declining housing affordability in nearby communities.**

**Some participants described increasing rent and home prices in the communities surrounding Encore, though a few noted these were broader market trends not directly attributable to the Casino.**

Several participants described seeing a lot of development of luxury apartments and condos in the area, but not development of affordable housing. A few participants also described increases in the prices of goods and services in the businesses around Encore. Participants who identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/e often had negative views of Encore's effects on housing costs. A few participants, CAB members, focus group, and small group discussion participants noted that increased housing prices are market trends affecting communities all around the state and the country and may not be directly attributable to Encore. A few participants noted they believe it is too early to see Encore's effect on the local housing economy. In addition, CAB members, focus group, and small group discussion participants discussed that findings about increased rental and housing prices in the community likely depended on the perspective on the participants. For renters, this increase was likely viewed negatively, while property managers and landlords were likely to see this as a positive effect of Encore.

*"It's a double edged sword—yes, there's more employment, but the wages aren't high enough to pay for these new apartments. It's not the same to have a restaurant as a casino. A casino is large and has a lot of businesses. It's like a mall with restaurants, movies, stores, etc. So I think yes, [Encore] is a factor in the higher prices for rent. I always think of the people who had to leave when they constructed the casino. Where did they go?" – Hispanic or Latino/a/e-identifying Somerville resident*

**Several participants noted that the lack of affordable housing led to displacement of immigrant and middle-class families from their homes because they could no longer afford to live in the area.**

Some homes were demolished or removed to build Encore, and participants noted that they do not know where those families went and whether tenants were forced to leave. In addition, the development of less affordable housing led to increased rent for immigrant and middle-class families and retail and industry workers, resulting in them moving out of the neighborhood because they could no longer afford to rent or buy homes in the area. A few participants also described overall price increases in the area and that Encore serves as a "symbol of wealth," noting that these increased prices have had negative effects on the day-to-day quality of life of community members.

*"A lot of the homes across the street were removed to make space for [Encore], and nobody really knows where those people went. We don't know if those were tenants who were removed or homeowners that were bought out... A lot of people have had to leave because their rent is too high, and they can't live in that area anymore. We need to be able to help the affected families, especially those that are undocumented and other immigrant families who can't enjoy [Encore] because they can't spend money but are still affected by it." – Hispanic or Latino/a/e-identifying Somerville resident*

## Small Businesses. Participants had mixed views on the effects of Encore on local and small businesses.

Some participants noted that small businesses in the surrounding community closed or lost employees and clientele after Encore opened. Businesses closed because they could not compete with Encore for clients or business, could not afford to pay rising real estate taxes, or lost employees who went to work at the Casino. One Malden resident noted, “When [Encore] first recruited a lot of employees, local businesses faced some shortages of labor force. A lot of people quit their local business job or reduced their hours there to work for Encore Casino.” A few described businesses that were either demolished or closed to build Encore. However, a few focus group and small group discussion participants noted that Encore is commonly not in direct competition with the local small businesses.

*“The changes to the area, Broadway specifically, have brought in more money into the community... It’s brought more people to the area and tourists that come and visit... People come for [Encore] from other states, they come to play at the casino, but they also come to eat and enjoy the place. It’s an entertainment attraction. They like to come. It’s like a mini Vegas on this side.” – Hispanic or Latino/a/e-identifying Everett resident*

Some participants stated that the presence of Encore made Everett a “destination,” attracting people who might otherwise not have visited the area, with some noting that this boosted the local economy. Encore’s presence boosted the local economy and attracted tourists and people to the area, according to some participants. The additional casino tourism increased business and clientele for the surrounding restaurants and businesses. A few participants described that the increase in tourism helped increase their income because they were able to rent out their homes to visitors.

## Social and Environmental Factors

### Summary of Community Perspectives on Social and Environmental Factors

- **Infrastructure:** Participants described their communities as calm and diverse but underdeveloped before Encore’s opening. The casino increased automobile traffic in the immediately surrounding area, making commutes more difficult. Participants described improvements in roads and the neighborhood, although some believed more can be done to improve roads and buildings beyond the casino property.
- **Socioeconomic Effects:** Participants described Encore as a popular entertainment destination, attracting tourists and increasing business activity in the area. However, they also noted the casino added to noise and light pollution in the area, as well as increased crime and police presence, and they were concerned about the influence on youth.
- **Social Connectivity:** Participants believed that Encore increases social connectivity among patrons, while others were concerned that easy access to gambling strained family relationships.

**Infrastructure. Encore increased traffic in the immediate area but also improved roads and other infrastructure in surrounding neighborhoods.**

**Some participants described their communities as calm, safe, and multicultural prior to Encore's opening.**

Some participants noted that Encore's surrounding communities have always been safe, calm, and diverse. Several others noted that their communities used to not be as busy and previously had less activity and traffic. One participant who had lived in both Everett and Malden noted, "I remember that back in the day, when I was living there before the Casino was built... there was nothing there, so, it used to be a very calm place." A few participants characterized their communities prior to Encore as needing repair and development. They described the Everett area particularly as mostly "industrial," with many noticeable potholes in the roads as they would bike or drive through. During the English language focus group, a community member shared an image of the aerial view of the Encore site before construction and noted how different the area was before the Casino and associated development.

*"Part of Somerville... was very diverse. A lot of the families on the street that I grew up in were 2nd or 3rd generation American. Over the years... East Somerville became extremely diverse, with a lot of families that were migrating from other parts of the world or first-generation students that I would meet like playing soccer, going to high school in the area." – White-identifying Medford resident*

**Many participants who reported driving past Encore on Route 99 to get to work or who live nearby reported that Encore's presence increased traffic in the area.** Participants described longer commute times and increased congestion, especially in Everett's and Somerville's Broadway and Sullivan Station areas, respectively. A few participants said that using public transportation has grown more difficult because of increased traffic in the area, especially for people relying on buses to commute. Several participants noted that traffic issues were most evident during the Casino's construction, and it has since become less congested. Several also stated that Encore did not contribute to traffic because the area had always been poorly designed and congested.

**Encore brought other new construction and development to the area, resulting in mixed reactions from community members.** Some participants discussed improvements to the area that transformed the "empty lot" from being a "wasteland" and a "dumping ground for chemicals" to the landscaped Casino site. Many participants discussed that roads surrounding Encore are now easier to traverse. Several participants discussed that although the infrastructure around Encore's immediate area improved, other parts of Everett and surrounding communities have not benefitted from these improvements. These participants thought that Encore could do more to improve local infrastructure outside beyond the immediate Casino grounds. As one participant described,

**Exhibit 8.** Construction Truck on Casino Grounds



Source: Photograph of truck described by participant

"There's only one street in Everett that they care about, and it's Broadway. The rest of us will not be saved." A few participants noted that some construction equipment and trucks have not been removed, even though the Casino opened three years ago (**Exhibit 8**). A few participants talked about how many businesses and homes were demolished for Encore to be built, which was not positive for the community.

**Several participants noted that Encore brought more beautiful landscapes, parks, and recreational spaces to the area, but there were mixed views on the skyline.** Several participants stated that the Encore's opening has made the city of Everett cleaner, especially on the waterfront, and more beautiful with the addition of landscaping (**Exhibit 9**). They noted that the new parks provided recreational spaces for adults and children to play, walk, and bike. However, a few participants did not see the Casino as a positive addition to the community. They shared that there are now fewer parks in the

**Exhibit 9.** Encore Landscaping



Source: Photograph of area described by participant

area because Encore took over so much land. A few participants noted the area has a nice skyline because of Encore, while a few discussed that they do not like the building itself and think that Encore dominates the skyline with its "intense" and "enormous presence."

### **Socioeconomic Effects. The influx of tourists and others due to Encore increased noise and light pollution in the area.**

**For several participants, the influx of Encore tourists contributed to a general increase in noise and activity.** Participants described noise and light pollution from traffic and the building itself. Several participants believed that Encore has introduced more crime into the area, with a few participants describing an increased presence of police and ambulances in the surrounding neighborhoods, as well as more general criminal activity. For example, a few participants described more "conflicts" and "calls for police during disturbances." A few participants suggested that the rise in crime could be linked to increased drug or alcohol use.<sup>iv</sup> A 2019 article noted that a large number of arrests were made within Casino walls during a short period of time, but the arrests are comparable to other venues of similar size and capacity.<sup>28</sup> A few participants also expressed concern about Encore's effect on young people, noting that exposure to gambling is a bad influence on young people because it normalizes gambling behaviors.

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<sup>iv</sup> Not everyone interviewed was probed about crime if they did not raise it as a concern in response to open-ended questions in the interviews.

**Social Connectivity. Participants had mixed feelings about Encore’s effects on social connectivity and relationships in their community.**

**Several participants believed that Encore increased social connectivity among patrons while others noted it strained relationships with friends and family and did not build a sense of community.**

For several participants, the Casino enables patrons to make social connections, even if they are brief. Encore has become a new, fun place in town to gather with friends and host events, including a vibrant place to bring out-of-town family and friends. These participants also noted that Encore strengthened relationships in the community as people shared employment opportunities with friends and others looking for work. However, a few participants noted that problem gambling associated with the Casino’s presence has strained family relationships. One participant shared the specific example about how Encore’s reopening during the pandemic

caused strains in family relationships due to it being one of the few places in the area to get out of the house. Increased housing rents due in part to increased development in the area has caused families to look for homes further out of the city, which has also affected relationships. One participant discussed how although Encore is a place to go out and meet with friends, it does not necessarily build community.

One participant believed that Encore intentionally targeted advertisements toward the Asian community. This Malden resident shared that “during Chinese New Year, [Encore] would give out gifts and these are specifically targeted toward Asian communities. They want to attract the Asian population to come.” The same participant shared photos of an English and Chinese advertisement for daily shuttles from Boston’s Chinatown neighborhood to the Casino (**Exhibit 10**). In addition, a few participants shared that while they did not feel that Encore had been targeting advertisements, that they had received bilingual advertisements for Encore, in both English and Spanish.

*“I really feel that [Encore] is making young people more interested in gambling than before. Because I really feel that when children are in an environment that they can see more of these things, for example, drugs around the casino, alcohol and also gambling, I feel that they are more interested... to try. And I really don’t feel that that is something that is really helping the community because the idea is that they avoid all of these things. But now they’re very interested. They are thinking that it is something that should be normalized. And I really feel worried about how future generations will be more prompted to continue with this.” –  
**Hispanic or Latino/a/e and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islander-identifying Revere resident***

## Exhibit 10. Encore Advertisement in Boston Chinatown Neighborhood



Source: Photograph submitted by participant

## Health

### Summary of Community Perspectives on Health

- **Mental Health:** Participants believed that Encore and legalized gambling have contributed to increased stress and worsened mental health in surrounding communities, and that Encore provides a place to relax.
- **Alcohol Use:** Participants reported that Encore has contributed to an increase in alcohol consumption, including potentially more drunk or impaired driving in the surrounding area.
- **Gambling-Related Harm:** Participants expressed concerns that Encore has contributed to gambling-related harms such as problem gambling, failing personal relationships, and personal financial loss.

### **Mental Health. Participants believed that Encore has contributed negatively to mental health.**

**Some participants believed that Encore has negatively affected the mental health of community members.** They discussed linkages between gambling, increased stress, and worsening mental health, particularly among community members, with one Malden resident noting *“many [Encore patrons] end up losing more than they can afford.”* In addition to gambling losses, one participant noted that living near Encore might be stressful, noting they were *“getting very stressed with the amount of people that were constantly there all the time. And then cars all the time, and then people honking and beeping all the time and driving up and down the street all the time. And then people would leave [Encore] drunk...like, there were no limits, there were no boundaries.”*

**A few participants noted that Encore is a place where people go to relax.** These participants viewed Encore as a place for entertainment and relaxation. One Boston resident shared that, *“Casino gambling...it is a form of entertainment. When I gamble, it gives me a relaxing sensation. However, it depends on the individual. If you can’t control yourself, well, it can have a negative impact on your family and community.”* Nonetheless, several participants worried that potential harms may outweigh the potential positives resulting from stress reduction. When discussing findings about community perspectives of Encore as a source of relaxation for some, CAB members, focus group, and small group

discussion participants discussed that the source of relaxation was likely only for those who could afford to stay and play at Encore, as well as could afford potential gambling losses.

### **Alcohol Use. Participants believed that Encore has led to increased alcohol consumption.**

**Some participants expressed concern that Encore contributed to higher alcohol consumption.** These participants believed that the atmosphere and environment that Encore creates are core contributors to increased alcohol consumption. One participant noted that regardless of winning or losing during gambling, patrons will often drink more at Encore than they normally would. A few participants noted that Encore’s ambience is intentionally designed so that patrons are constantly offered opportunities to drink while being unable to identify the time of day. Similarly, a few participants noted Encore is one of the few places in the surrounding communities where they can drink late into the night. One Medford resident shared that *“I know that Encore, if you are participating, like playing, you’re able to drink until 4 a.m., and I know that for a lot of Boston cities, once it’s 2 a.m., a lot of bars and clubs are closed.”* A few participants noted both personally and anecdotally that there have been more instances of drunk and impaired driving since the introduction of Encore.

### **Problem Gambling and Other Gambling-Related Harms. Participants discussed ways that Encore contributed to increased gambling-related harms (Exhibit 11), such as problem gambling, relationship and family conflicts, and financial loss and debt.**

**Some participants believed that Encore has contributed to more problem gambling.** Participants noted Encore is fundamentally a business that wants to profit from people’s loss of money. One Malden resident described Encore as *“a business, they don’t care if you are addicted or not, they just want you to go there and lose your money.”* Similarly, a few participants noted that they believed that it is likely that many community members who would never have gambled or become addicted to gambling did so only because of Encore’s proximity to their communities.

Exhibit 11. Defining Gambling-related Harms



Source: <https://gamblingguidelines.ca/app/uploads/2021/01/LRGG-Gambling-Harms-Poster-2021-en.pdf>

**Several participants shared personal or anecdotal stories of community members having relationship conflicts due to gambling.** These participants noted that losing money while gambling can lead to fights and deteriorating personal relationships. One participant outlined that while gamblers may share big wins with everyone, they tend to only keep losses to themselves, leading to increased tensions in their personal relationships when they do lose.

*“Another thing is that when my relatives win money, they would tell everyone about the win, but when they lose money, they kept everything to themselves and don’t tell anyone. This is a very bad habit. With the exception of going all-in [gambling to the point of losing all money], they won’t tell anyone. My relatives ended up having to sell their house. These are real stories that happened in Malden. Whenever I mention this, I feel very angry.” – Asian-identifying Malden resident*

**Some participants believed that Encore has contributed to personal financial loss.** Participants shared stories of community members gambling, losing money, accruing debt, and eventually losing houses, jobs, and money needed for everyday things like groceries, utilities, and rent. As one Boston resident described, *“From my own experience, my husband sometimes can get a bit too much into gambling. He sometimes gambles more often and also places bigger bets. It does have a certain impact on the family. He is more impulsive when he gambles. The amount that he gambles could exceed the expenses that the family can afford. Sometimes he would win, but if you gamble often, there’ll definitely be a time that you lose.”* A few participants shared personal beliefs that many community members go to Encore with the false belief that gambling is an easy way to make quick money but only end up gambling more to chase losses.

## Participant Recommendations

### Summary of Participant Recommendations

- Participants believed Encore should **reinvest money in the community** through community programs, investment in infrastructure, and development of more parks and green spaces.
- Participants noted that Encore should offer **more support and resources for people experiencing problem gambling**, including educational materials and access to mental health counseling and support.
- Participants described that they wanted Encore to **more actively engage with community** members to understand and address their needs.

Participants were asked about what they would like to see Encore do to improve their or other community members’ quality of life. The following section describes recommendations from participants.

**Many participants believed Encore should reinvest money in nearby communities through community programs, investment in infrastructure, and development of more parks and green spaces.**

**Several participants described the need for Encore to develop or invest in programs for local families in the surrounding communities.** They recommended that the Casino provide or support social services and programs that support families and young people in surrounding communities. There was an interest in more programming, after-school programs, recreation centers, scholarships, and sports opportunities particularly for young people. Participants noted that Encore should also support nonprofit organizations and programming that address inequality and social needs of families in the surrounding communities, including rental assistance programs and housing grants to help families offset higher housing costs, and sponsoring financial literacy, budget management, and career development courses. Participants also described opportunities for community festivals and activities, such as a free concert series. However, a few focus group and small group discussion participants expressed concern about casinos engaging with young people and the potentially harmful effect of normalizing gambling among impressionable youth.

**Several participants recommended that Encore increase investment in infrastructure, including bridges and public transportation and more parks and green spaces beyond the Casino grounds.** For example, participants suggested building a pedestrian bridge that connects Encore to Assembly Square in East Somerville so that more people can visit the area. While the governor has already committed to the development of the Mystic River Bicycle and Pedestrian Bridge, starting construction in 2024, it is not yet clear how the bridge will be funded.<sup>29</sup> Participants described a need for improvements in infrastructure that alleviate traffic, such as repairing roads and installing stoplights and stop signs; they also suggested developing additional transportation options like more bus lines and routes. A few described a need for improved access to the area via public transportation. Participants were also interested in more parks, green spaces, and recreational areas, including playing fields for young people. One focus group participant gave the example of aging baseball diamonds near Encore as a potential avenue for investment in the community.

*“Overall, [Encore] should invest more in the community, including investing in more parks and public spaces. They could also open more streets in the area on the weekends for people to go biking or do recreational activities, so that the casino’s impact isn’t only to bring people into the casino indoors, which can be unhealthy.” – Hispanic or Latino/a/e-identifying Revere resident*

Other ways that a few participants believed Encore could reinvest in the community include addressing environmental issues like clean energy, providing more local job opportunities, supporting small businesses, and supporting immigrant communities in the area.

**Some participants noted Encore should offer more support and resources for people experiencing problem gambling.**

**Participants would like to see more involvement from Encore in offering support and resources for people experiencing problem gambling.** They described a need for Encore to provide educational materials and resources for people experiencing or at risk of gambling-related harms including pamphlets, post visible problem gambling warning signage, establish programs that restrict people

with a history of problem gambling from entering Encore, and offer resources to help loved ones of individuals experiencing problem gambling. CAB members noted that such resources and programs already exist, including voluntary self-exclusion and signage in Encore about where to get resources. GameSense, a nonprofit organization with a presence at Encore, offers support and resources for people experiencing problem gambling. Focus group and small group discussion participants agreed that if participants are highlighting this recommendation, that there may be a need for broader outreach or better signage about these services and resources. In addition, participants described a need for Encore to provide mental health counseling and support. However, a few focus group and small group discussion participants expressed the concern of “*trusting the Casino to police itself*”—i.e., for Encore itself to provide problem gambling and mental health supports and services. They suggested instead that the city or state, a foundation, or some other third-party entity may be more suited and equipped to provide these resources.

*“[Encore] themselves, and not just the state or the community... carries the burden of providing educational material, as well as support material for people who either knowingly have addiction problems or who might not realize that they could be prone to problems... it's not the responsibility of the state to then provide what I think the casino should for those resources.” – White-identifying Boston resident*

*“I haven't heard anything about any supports they may have for people with addiction. I know some people have substance use, opioid use, and mental health supports. But not for gambling; I haven't seen that support or rehab. That would be a good opportunity to collaborate and support those with gambling addiction.” – Hispanic or Latino/a/e-identifying Somerville resident*

### **A few participants described a need for Encore to conduct more community outreach and engagement.**

**Participants would like to see Encore more actively engage with community members to understand their needs.** They noted that beyond Encore providing money via tax revenue to the city, they wanted Encore to participate more actively in the community, engage with community members directly, participate in community meetings, listen to community needs, and develop programs and opportunities based on those needs. One focus group participant hoped that local governments would solicit the opinions of community members and value “*dissent*,” adding that, when making decisions about the Casino or additional projects, they should “*take into account the overall impact to the people and not just the city*,” and consider effects on rent, gas, and other day-to-day quality of life indicators.

*“I would like to see administration of [Encore] be more hands-on in community meetings and advocating for the funds that they provide to be used directly with the community... I would just like to see staff, their administration participate more, advocate more on that end, and not just giving a check to the city and saying here you go, here's your five million bucks, use them as you want. We would like them a bit more involved... if they want to be in Everett, they should try to put a bit more effort into being known in the community and knowing what the community issues are, in order to be seen as an advocate and not just someone who's there, taking up space to make money off of the property in Everett.” – Hispanic or Latino/a/e-identifying Everett resident*

# Discussion

## **Community perspectives on Encore are difficult to disentangle from broader factors like the COVID-19 pandemic and rising inflation.**

Encore opened shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns and restrictions were put in place. In addition, data collection for this study occurred in early 2022 as the COVID-19 pandemic continued and broader economic trends, including high prices and rising inflation, took hold. Participants, CAB members, focus group, and small group discussion participants highlighted that job losses, rent and housing affordability, and rising prices reflect broader trends in the communities directly around Encore and in those throughout the Commonwealth and country, making it difficult to attribute community perspectives on these issues to Encore. That said, participants still perceived Encore as having a direct effect on their lives and community, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and rising inflation, and that it likely contributed to some of these issues.

## **Participants highlighted the perspective of “Encore for whom?” noting casinos likely have disproportionate effects on communities based on socioeconomic status and cultural background.**

This thematic framing of “*Encore for whom?*” permeated most findings. Our findings echo prior research,<sup>6</sup> showing that opinions about casinos and gambling are mixed. Mixed perspectives emerged in viewpoints around legalized gambling and during discussions about the effects of Encore on the local economy, social and environmental factors, and health. Participants noted that mixed perspectives on casinos and legalized gambling are likely the result of differing personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and other factors. For example, participants suggested that the negative financial implications of problem gambling are likely more acute for people with lower incomes.

In addition, other research shows that communities of color are often disproportionately impacted negatively by casinos and that the introduction of a casino to their communities raises concerns about increased crime, problem gambling, and racial discrimination.<sup>7-9</sup> During Encore’s layoffs and furloughs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, young people, low-wage workers, women, and people of color experienced most of the job losses and reduction in hours.<sup>27</sup> Industries with high concentrations of workers of color, including food and beverage, gaming and recreation, and hotels, were heavily impacted by Encore’s layoffs.<sup>27</sup> In this study, Hispanic or Latino/a/e participants often had negative views about the effects of the casino. Both Haitian/Haitian American participants felt as if Encore was more beneficial to other community members, specifically that opportunities were more likely to go toward Latino/a/e groups. Thus, researchers and policymakers should continue to ensure a broad perspective of views and identities are represented in gambling-related research to capture the full range of perspectives and experiences of community members. Gambling-related research should continue to consider what groups of community members may be disproportionately benefiting from or being harmed by the introduction of casinos to ensure these large enterprises do not further exacerbate existing inequities.

## **Both Encore and local governments should more actively engage community members in decision making to account for community needs.**

CAB members, focus group, and small group discussion participants noted that there needs to be a clear delineation between the perceived effects of legalized gambling and casinos on the city of Everett versus individuals living in surrounding communities. One focus group participant noted that Encore is a *“source of income for the city but not for the community.”* Participants applauded Encore for investing in the development of parks and green spaces for community members, including non-Encore patrons, to enjoy. However, participants also pointed out that these investments were often conditional and immediate to Encore’s grounds, ultimately benefiting the Casino, not the community. Participants called for more equitable investment in people, infrastructure, and services that will have wider reach.

To do so, participants expressed an interest in ensuring that Encore reinvests profits in local communities via jobs, educational programs and other supports, infrastructure, and parks and green spaces. However, they also highlighted that these decisions and investments should be made with community input and noted a need for Encore and local governments to more actively engage with community members to understand their needs. One participant noted that, when making decisions about Encore or additional projects, the city of Everett should *“take into account the overall impact to the people and not just the city.”* This includes understanding factors that affect community members’ lives like housing costs, job opportunities, and other day-to-day quality of life indicators. Participants expressed interest in Encore and local governments soliciting thoughts and opinions from community members, as well as valuing perspectives and opinions that could be viewed as *“dissent.”*

# Conclusion

Through a rigorous research agenda, MGC aims to fill research gaps on gambling, casinos, and related community impacts. In partnership with a CAB comprised of individuals who live and work in the communities around Encore, NORC-ICH conducted 47 interviews with individuals of diverse backgrounds; a subset of six took part in participatory analysis and sensemaking. This qualitative study grounded in community-engaged research principles sought to capture community perspectives on Encore's effects on the day-to-day quality of life of people living in nearby communities.

Though difficult to disentangle Encore's effects from those of the broader COVID-19 pandemic on the local economy, social and environmental factors, and community health, this study found that community perspectives on Encore and legalized gambling are mixed and nuanced. There were participants who supported having a casino in their neighborhood, while others believed that casinos normalized gambling and promoted problem gambling behaviors; there were also participants who held neutral or had both positive and negative views of legalized gambling.

Participants described some positive effects from Encore that included: creating jobs and employment opportunities; boosting the local economy; improving roads and other infrastructure; bringing more beautiful landscapes, parks, and recreational spaces; serving as a place for entertainment and relaxation; and offering a new, fun place in town to gather with friends and host events, strengthening relationships in the community. The negative effects described by participants included concerns that Encore did not fulfill its promise of bringing jobs and money to local communities; increased rent and home prices in the surrounding areas; caused small businesses in the area to close or lose employees and clientele; increased traffic and level of crime; strained relationships with friends and family; negatively affected the mental health of community members; and contributed to higher alcohol consumption, problem gambling, and personal financial loss. Participants also noted that market trends in the economy may not be directly attributable to Encore or that they saw little or no economic impact from Encore.

Participants recommended that Encore should engage with and invest in the local community by reinvesting money through community programs; investing in infrastructure and development of more parks and green spaces; offering more support and resources for people experiencing problem gambling; and more actively engaging with community members to understand and respond to their needs. They noted that both Encore and local governments should consider more actively engaging community members in decision making to account for community needs.

Finally, researchers and policymakers should continue assessing the disproportionate effects of casinos on communities of varying socio-demographics and cultures in gambling research.<sup>30-35</sup> It is important to expand local knowledge of the community benefits or harms of casino enterprises on individuals living in surrounding communities beyond that of the hosting municipal government.

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# Appendices

# Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer - English



**GET \$25 TO TALK TO US ABOUT  
YOUR COMMUNITY AND THE IMPACT  
OF THE ENCORE CASINO!**

**We are looking for people who live in the communities surrounding the Encore Boston Harbor Casino to share their perspectives about the impacts of the introduction of casino gambling in your community.**

**Participate in a 30-minute phone or Zoom interview and receive a \$25 gift card.**

### **Are you eligible?**

- 18 years or older
- Live in Everett, Cambridge, Chelsea, Malden, Medford, Revere, Somerville, Winthrop, or Boston
- Can comfortably communicate in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Mandarin Chinese, or Cantonese

### **Who are we?**

**This study is funded by the Massachusetts Gaming Commission and is being carried out by NORC and the Institute for Community Health (ICH).**

**Want to participate? Contact us in any of these ways!**

**Leave us a voice message with your contact information: 781-591-0575**

**Send us an email: [masscommunitystudy@norc.org](mailto:masscommunitystudy@norc.org)**

**Scan the QR code below:**



# Appendix B: Interview Guide

1. To start, please tell me a little bit about your community before the Encore Casino was introduced.
2. Please tell me about changes to your community (if any) since the Encore Casino opened in June 2019.
  - a. How has the Encore Casino affected your day-to-day life?
3. How has the Encore Casino affected the economy in your community?
  - a. *[Prompts, if needed]* What types of changes have you seen to...
    - i. local small businesses?
    - ii. employment? the quality of jobs?
    - iii. the local housing or rental market?
    - iv. personal finances?
4. How has the presence of the Encore Casino affected your overall health or that of people in your community?
  - a. *[Prompts, if needed, for those who identify an impact]* What type of changes have you noticed with...
    - i. your physical health or that of people in your community?
    - ii. your mental or emotional health or that of people in your community?
    - iii. your use of alcohol or other substances or that of people in your community?
5. Has the Encore Casino affected the availability of outdoor spaces in the community or other changes to infrastructure, for example, roads, bridges, parks, or other public places? *[If it has]* How?
  - a. *[Prompts, if needed]* What about changes related to traffic?
6. Has the Encore Casino affected social networks or connectivity between community members? *[If it has]* How?
  - a. Have you or other people in your community experienced changes to relationships with friends or family because of gambling at the Casino? *[If it has]* What are those changes?
7. Has the Encore Casino advertised directly to specific members or groups in your community? For example, advertisements aimed at specific groups of people based on the language they speak, their age, their race/ethnicity, or other characteristic.
  - a. *[If so]* Which specific community members or groups have the advertisements targeted?
  - b. *[If applicable]* What are some ways in which the Casino has advertised to these specific community members or groups?
  - c. *[If applicable]* What has been the effect of this advertising on your community?
8. The Encore Casino closed for a few months and laid off some workers in 2020 because of COVID-19. How did this closure affect you or people in your community?
  - a. *[Prompts, if needed]* How did the closure of the Encore Casino affect...
    - i. where and how you or other community members gambled?
    - ii. the local economy?
    - iii. health or wellbeing of you or community members?
    - iv. ties and relationships between community members?
    - v. access to outdoor space or other changes to surrounding physical infrastructure?
9. What are your views of legalized casino gambling within your community?
10. What would you like to see the Casino do in your community to improve your or other community members' quality of life?
11. Do you have any final thoughts to share with me before we end?