

**GameSense**

**THE  
PROGRAM**

**& THE  
IMPACT**



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# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

## The Massachusetts Legislature legalized casino gaming in 2011 to produce broad-based economic development, including jobs and revenue—but not at any cost.

A key feature of the gaming law established a **first-of-its-kind research plan** to comprehensively assess the social and economic impacts of casino gambling in Massachusetts. A data-driven understanding of casino impacts provides the Massachusetts Gaming Commission (MGC) with the ability to design evidence-based programming, particularly in the area of responsible gaming and problem gambling.

A baseline study concluded that, in Massachusetts, approximately **2% (110,000) of the adult population meet the criteria for problem gambling**, and another **8.4% (440,000) experience harm to a lesser degree**. In response to these findings, the MGC launched GameSense, an innovative, player-focused responsible gaming program that encourages players to adopt positive play behaviors and attitudes that promote safe levels of play and reduce the risk of gambling-related harm.

It is also worth noting that Massachusetts is the only gaming jurisdiction in the country to require such responsible gaming resources (GameSense Info Centers and GameSense Advisors) at each casino property.

As the commonwealth's casino industry continues to grow and mature, the MGC, in partnership with our many stakeholders, looks forward to continued research-driven innovation to meet the needs of Massachusetts' diverse casino patrons.



*Cathy Judd-Stein*

**Cathy Judd-Stein**  
Massachusetts Gaming Chair

A photograph of two men in a conversation. The man on the right is wearing glasses and a light pink shirt, looking towards the man on the left. The man on the left is partially visible, smiling.

## WHAT IS GAMESENSE?

**GameSense is an innovative responsible gaming program** that encourages players to adopt and/or maintain positive behaviors and attitudes that reduce the risk of gambling-related harm.

In fulfillment of the legislation, which called for an on-site player protection program staffed by a third party, the MGC licensed GameSense from the British Columbia Lottery Corporation in 2015 and drew upon the experience and expertise of the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling (MCCG) to staff and operate the program at each Massachusetts casino—Encore Boston Harbor (EBH), MGM Springfield (MGM), and Plainridge Park Casino (PPC).

**The GameSense program captures  
four essential pillars of engagement:**

**1**

**Relevant**

Tips and tools help players play smarter

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**2**

**Supportive**

Informative instead of judgmental

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**3**

**Approachable**

Messaging is welcoming and lighthearted

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**4**

**Relatable**

Adopts a fun and occasionally humorous style



# WHO DOES GAMESENSE SERVE?

## CASINO PATRONS

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**GameSense encourages casino patrons to engage in positive play promoting informed player choice.**

Most people who visit Massachusetts casinos engage in “positive play,” or gambling behavior that is nonproblematic. Research shows that players who engage in positive play focus on “playing for fun, being entertained, and/or winning a prize” (Wood & Griffiths, 2015).

GameSense Advisors engage patrons at the GameSense Info Center and on the casino floor through innovative games, quizzes, and other demonstrations, presenting information to:

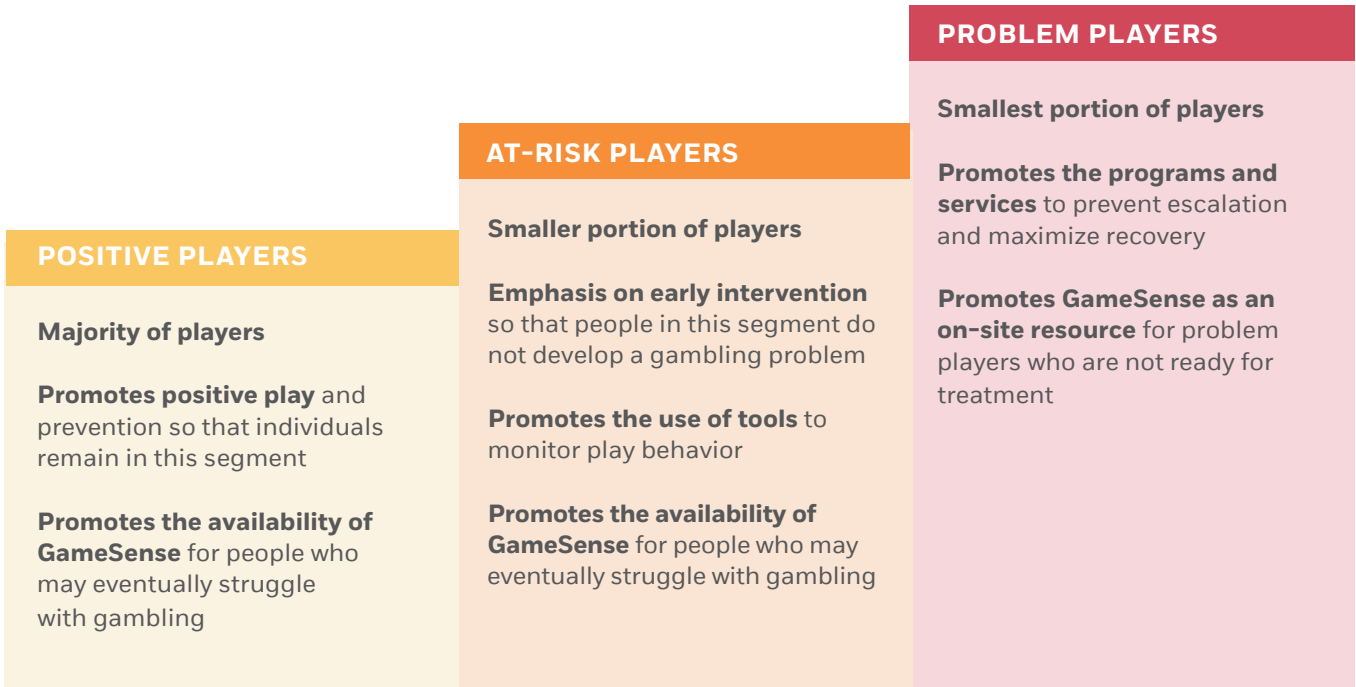
- › Debunk common gambling myths and misconceptions
- › Educate on how games work, and educate on odds and probabilities of slots and table games
- › Discuss informed decision-making options





**By using a stepped-care approach, GameSense provides casino patrons with information relevant to their specific needs.**

According to the baseline general population survey of Social and Economic Impacts of Gaming in Massachusetts, approximately one in every five patrons may be at risk for, or has, a gambling problem (Volberg, Williams, Stanek, et al., 2017). Recognizing that all players are not the same.





## CASINO EMPLOYEES

**GameSense builds the capacity of casino employees, including management, through education and interactions designed to promote responsible gaming and mitigate problem gambling.**

In partnership with the three casino licensees, GameSense has provided both new-hire orientations and advanced responsible gaming trainings to well over 5,000 Massachusetts casino employees. Evaluations show that 88% of casino employees have rated the training as “very good” or “excellent” (Gray, Shaffer, LaPlante, 2018).

**GameSense empowers and supports casino employees to take action to support patrons in need of assistance.**

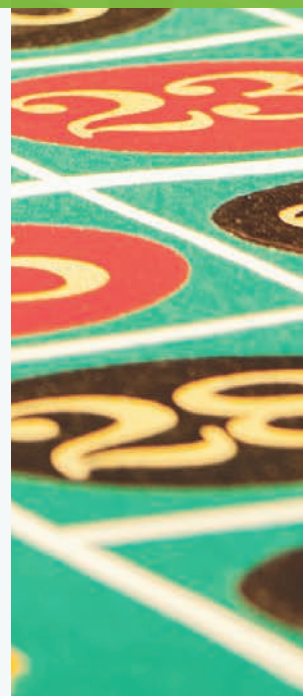
In fiscal year 2019, GameSense Advisors engaged 2,994 casino employees with conversations about responsible and problem gambling. Additionally, on 266 occasions, casino employees, gaming agents, and state police officers have referred patrons or requested assistance from an on-site advisor.



88%

OF CASINO  
EMPLOYEES

have rated the  
responsible gaming  
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good” or “excellent”







## THE COMMUNITY

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GameSense provides responsible gaming and **problem gambling education** to service providers and community groups in casino host and surrounding communities. They specifically target and engage community partners that serve persons who may have a gambling problem or are at risk of developing one.



# WHAT RESOURCES & TOOLS DOES GAMESENSE HAVE AVAILABLE?



Within the **GameSense toolkit** are programs, resources, and educational activities designed to engage patrons at Massachusetts casinos.





## GAMESENSE INFO CENTERS

**GameSense Info Centers are located on-site at all Massachusetts casinos** and operate 16 hours a day, 7 days a week. Strategically located in high-traffic areas, each GameSense Info Center has a welcoming, visitor-friendly space, as well as a private office for more sensitive conversations.

Visitors to the GameSense Info Center can learn about myths associated with gambling, find out the odds of the games, take a break, or seek support from a GameSense Advisor.



## GAMESENSE ADVISORS

**GameSense Advisors are the heart of the program.** Nearly all GameSense Advisors possess a gaming background, but also bring to the position a diverse range of educational and other work experiences. One thing that they have in common is a passion for the work they do in order to make a difference in the lives of casino patrons and staff.

In addition to extensive training on responsible gaming and problem gambling, GameSense Advisors receive training in Mental Health First Aid, behavioral health, counseling skills, and community resources.

The GameSense team is made up of advisors who represent diverse cultural and ethnic groups and ages, and who possess various linguistic backgrounds. Diversity is an integral part of the GameSense team, as it aids in reaching players from different backgrounds, including those who have historically suffered from health disparities.

## PlayMyWay

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# PlayMyWay

### **PlayMyWay (PMW) is a first-of-its-kind budgeting tool**

designed to allow players the ability to monitor the amount of money they spend on electronic gaming machines. PMW is now available at Plainridge Park Casino, and a 2021 launch is planned at MGM Springfield and Encore Boston Harbor. GameSense Advisors play a critical role in PMW, as they serve as the primary customer service representation when it comes to program-related questions.

- › Once enrolled, **a player receives automatic notifications** as he or she approach 50%, 75%, and 100% of their daily, weekly, or monthly budget.
- › A player can choose to **stop at any point or keep playing**.
- › Players can **enroll, adjust their budget, or un-enroll** in PlayMyWay at any time.

The program is completely voluntary and provides players with real-time data so that they stay in control of their gambling. Between the launch of PMW in June 2015 through December 2019, there were **24,587 players actively enrolled** in the program, with **an average un-enrollment rate of 14%**. An evaluation of the program found that typical PlayMyWay users wagered less money at PPC during the study period, made fewer visits to PPC, and tended to lose less money at PPC (Tom, Singh, Edson, et al., 2017).



## VOLUNTARY SELF-EXCLUSION

**The Voluntary Self-Exclusion (VSE) program allows participants to voluntarily prohibit themselves from accessing the gaming floor** at all Massachusetts casinos for a predetermined length of time of one year, three years, five years, or their lifetime.

**Over 85% of all enrollments are conducted by a GameSense Advisor** and most commonly take place at a GameSense Info Center.

The VSE program is designed to engage participants in order to support their decision and to offer to connect them with additional help. Between June 2015 and December 2019, **779 individuals** enrolled in the VSE program; **80% of enrollees** who completed a follow-up survey reported that they were gambling less at follow-up than prior to MA-VSEP enrollment (Nelson, Kleschinsky, LaPlante, et al., 2018).



**Between June 2015  
and December 2019,**

# 779

**INDIVIDUALS**

**enrolled in the  
VSE program**

“Research has shown that the Massachusetts VSE program is an effective intervention to help persons struggling to control their gambling. Participants reported reduced gambling-related problems, including improved mental health and relationship quality. Participants who had previously enrolled in other VSE programs reported a significantly more positive enrollment experience with a GameSense Advisor.”

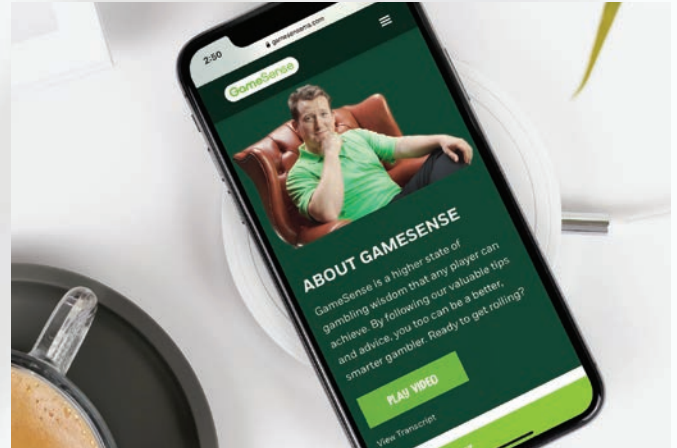
- **Mark Vander Linden**  
MGC Director of Research and Responsible Gambling



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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GameSense community engagement initiatives are designed to **bring responsible gaming and problem gambling information and resources out into the community**. Engagement efforts focus on groups and communities identified by research as being at higher risk for experiencing gambling-related harm, including blacks, Asian populations, immigrants, veterans, seniors, and those with an annual household income of less than \$15,000.



## GAMESENSEMA.COM

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**The mobile-friendly website GameSenseMA.com is accessible and user friendly.** The website is populated with entertaining videos, featuring a fictional GameSense Advisor, created to dispel popular gambling myths and offer “pearls of wisdom” or practical tips about responsible play.

The website also offers extensive recommendations for responsible gaming techniques, interactive tools, myth-busting games, and valuable information about how to access support resources and services such as the VSE program.







# GAMESENSE METRICS & EVALUATION

Data collected by **GameSense Advisors** between June 2019 and April 2020, when all three Massachusetts casinos were operational, shows:

## >275,000

### GENERAL INTERACTIONS

with casino patrons and employees



## >56,000

### CONVERSATIONS

pertaining to responsible gaming and problem gambling

WITH

## 77,081

CASINO PATRONS  
AND EMPLOYEES



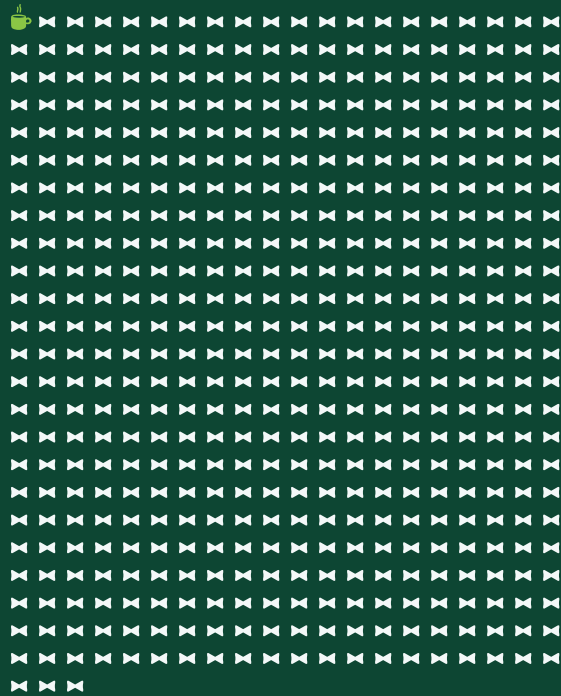


GameSense Advisors work to **create a casino culture that values responsible gaming** and is sensitive to problem gambling by providing tailored trainings based on job function to all newly hired casino staff.

These trainings are critical to furthering the mission of GameSense, as the number of casino staff at each Massachusetts casino far exceeds the number of GameSense Advisors at each property.

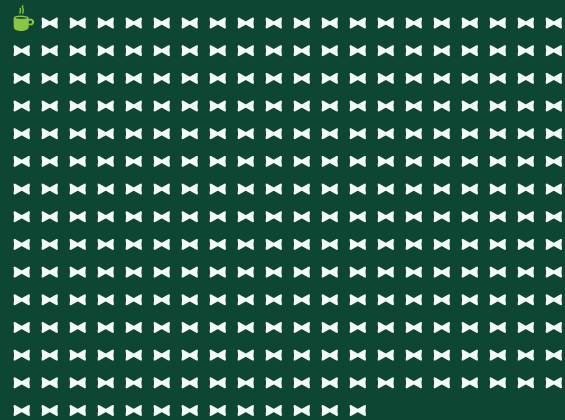
**1:483**

**EBH GameSense Advisor to EBH staff**



**1:293**

**MGM GameSense Advisor to MGM staff**



**1:76**

**PPC GameSense Advisor to PPC staff**



= GameSense Advisor     = Casino Staff

# WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

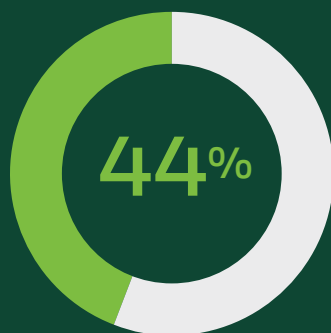
An early evaluation of the PPC GameSense program, which collected data between 2015 and 2017, offers an encouraging outlook on its impact and effectiveness. **Research findings indicate:**



of surveyed patrons had a **high degree of program awareness**



of patrons surveyed were **satisfied with the information** provided by GameSense Advisors



went on to say that the program **changed the way they think** about their gambling behavior

# SPREADING THE WORD

The MGC, in conjunction with the MCCG, has developed and mobilized **a comprehensive communications strategy** to educate casino patrons, staff, and the general public about the importance of safe play and the availability of the program, in an effort to:



## INCREASE

overall brand awareness



## DRIVE

traffic to GameSenseMA.com



## HIGHLIGHT

the resources and tools available



## EDUCATE

the public with helpful responsible gambling tips and support resources



## PROMOTE

informed player choice about their gambling



## MAXIMIZE

community engagement efforts



## REACH

special populations to educate about responsible gaming and resources that are available



## REINFORCE

the commonwealth's commitment to a robust responsible gaming strategy

# ADVERTISING & MARKETING



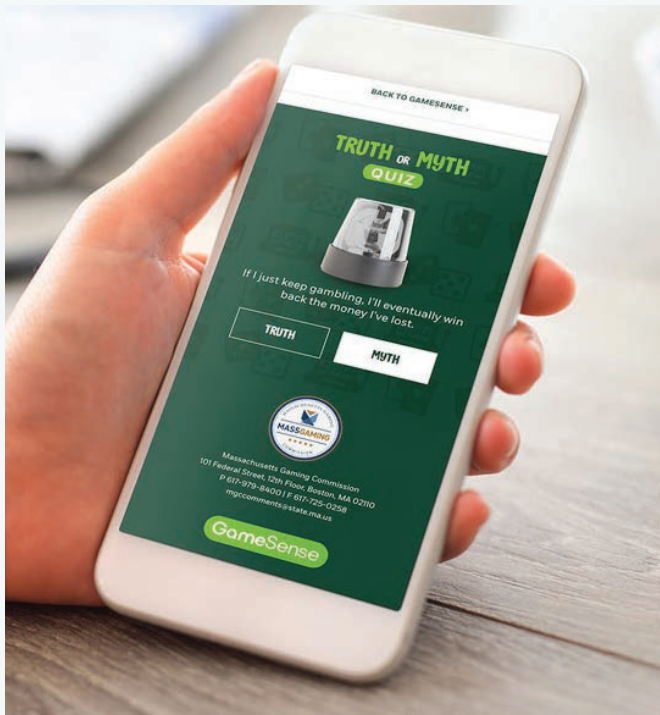
## **In-casino Signage**

On-site casino marketing strategies are deployed in cooperation with casino operators and include in-casino signage, multilingual collateral, staff newsletters, and other specialized campaigns.



## Paid Advertising

Paid advertising includes mobile, display, social (Facebook and Instagram), and search engine marketing. Online ads are distributed according to web-browsing behavior to maximize the campaign's impact and target people who are recreational, at-risk, and problem gamblers.

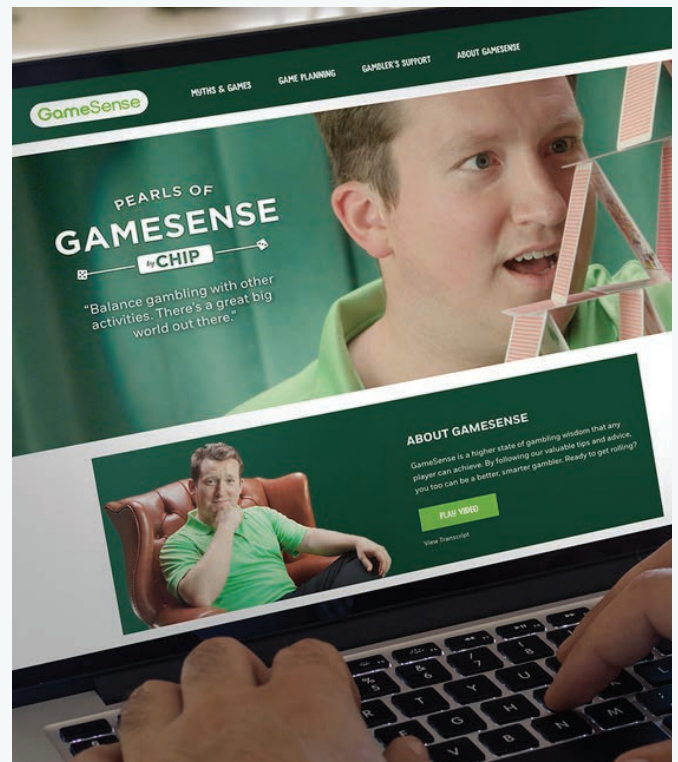


## Digital Strategy

Social media platforms are used to communicate relevant, organic content. Social media platforms are powerful communication vehicles, as they allow for timely and relevant content based on current events or industry trends as well as collaboration with casino operators and other responsible gaming stakeholders.

## Website

GameSenseMA.com offers practical responsible gaming tips, interactive tools, myth-busting games, and valuable information about how to access support resources and services such as the VSE program.





## GAMESENSE IN THE NEWS

GameSense has been highlighted by both local and national news sources spanning **radio, TV, digital, and newsprint.**



## MGM host referred ‘top-tier player’ for problem gaming help

State House News Service | March 28, 2019

As problem gambling awareness month draws to a close, a longtime responsible gaming advisor who works with the Gaming Commission said Massachusetts’s efforts to educate players are working and having an influence on the casino industry.

Amy Gabrila, a senior advisor with the commission’s GameSense program, told regulators Thursday that a recent interaction with an executive host from MGM Springfield—whose job is to cater to high rollers and to cultivate regular players—moved her to tears.

She said she recently led a “grueling” training session on responsible gaming and the resources GameSense makes available to all players with MGM Springfield officials, including this particular executive host. Shortly after the session, the executive host referred a client—a top-tier player—to Gabrila for assistance with potentially problematic gambling.

“Honestly, I cried,” Gabrila told the Gaming Commission. “Never in my 22 years in this business would I have ever believed that an executive host—a guy who lives off getting people to play, that’s his business—was willing to drop off one of his best accounts to me because he felt it was the right thing to do.”

“

**THE FACT IS THAT WE ARE NOW IN THIS SPACE WHERE WE’RE CHANGING THE NARRATIVE OF RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING IN THE INDUSTRY FROM THE INSIDE OUT.**

The commission adopted GameSense as its “comprehensive responsible gaming strategy,” and the program includes information centers in each of the state’s gaming facilities and advisors like Gabrila whose interventions range from casual conversations about things like betting odds to more in-depth assistance.

Gabrila said the state’s efforts to promote responsible gaming have rubbed off on staff at MGM Springfield, which opened in August. She said 10 of the last 15 people who have added themselves to the state’s voluntary gaming exclusion list did so after an MGM Springfield staff member referred them to GameSense.

“The fact is that we are now in this space where we’re changing the narrative of responsible gambling in the industry from the inside out,” Gabrila said. She added, “It blows my mind... It’s something I never thought would happen.”



**Amy Gabrila**  
Senior Advisor,  
GameSense

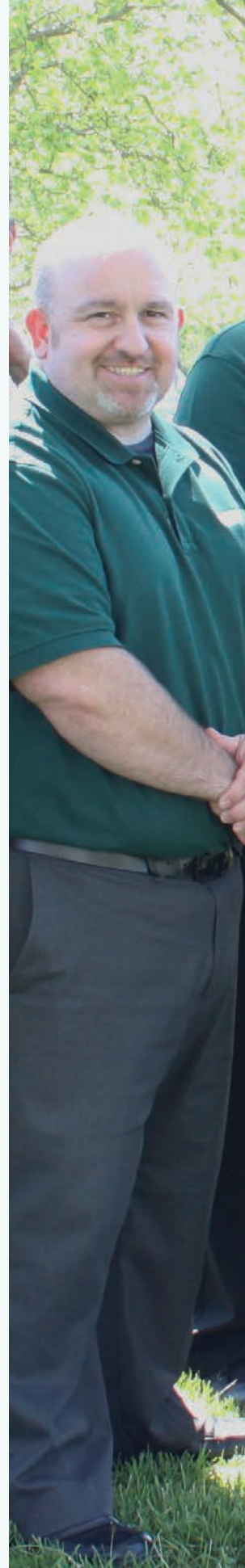
# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

## Closing Message from Mark Vander Linden, MGC Director of Research and Responsible Gaming



The Massachusetts Legislature laid out **a vision for casino gaming** that would bring jobs and the greatest possible economic benefit to the commonwealth. They understood that in order to achieve this vision there must also be a plan to mitigate the negative consequences, because for every person who is harmed by gambling, the benefits begin to erode. As outlined in this report, GameSense has quickly become an effective frontline response, working both inside the casino and out in the community to meet this challenge and advance the MGC's objectives of providing accurate and balanced information to promote positive play; providing patrons experiencing gambling-related harm with timely and appropriate information; and creating a shared understanding of responsible gaming among individuals, communities, the gaming industry, and government.

I'm thrilled by the early success of this program, but we remain committed to finding new and innovative ways to meet the needs of the commonwealth. As gambling changes, **we will continue to adapt our strategies while remaining true to core objectives.**







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5. Wood, R.T.A. & Griffiths, M.D. (2015). Understanding positive play: an exploration of playing experiences and responsible gambling practices. *J Gambli Stud.* 31(4):1715-34.







To learn more about our program,  
visit us at [GameSenseMA.com](http://GameSenseMA.com).