

Sports Betting among Young Adults in Massachusetts:

Views, Behaviors, Impacts, and Recommendations



Overview

The Massachusetts Gaming Commission (MGC) funded NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC), in partnership with Gemini Research, in 2023 to increase understanding of sports betting among young adults in Massachusetts.

The study used a community-engaged research approach to understand the social and public health impacts of legalized sports betting among young adults, ages 18 to 25, in Massachusetts.

Research Questions

- 1 What are the **social, economic, and health** impacts of the legalization of sports betting on young adults in Massachusetts?
- 2 How has legalized sports betting affected young adults' **awareness, attitudes, and perceptions** of gambling?
- 3 What **policies** or **programs** may mitigate negative effects and/or support the well-being of young adults who sports bet?

Research Methods



Qualitative Data Collection (2024-2025):

- **12** interviews with experts
- **39** interviews with young adults



Community engagement:

- Engaged young adults, advocates, and others to serve as collaborators as part of a Community Advisory Board (CAB).
- Trained two young adults from the community to serve as interviewers.
- Collaborated with CAB members and community interviewers to interpret and validate key findings.

Of the **39 young adults** who participated in interviews:

- **69%** previously bet on sports.
- **51%** ages 21-25; **49%** 18-20.
- **56%** identify as female, **41%** as male, **3%** preferred not to answer.
- **62%** identify as White, **18%** as Asian, **8%** as Black or African American, **8%** as Hispanic or Latino, **5%** as multiracial.

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Young Adult Sports Betting Views and Behaviors

VIEWS



Young adults hold both positive and negative views on sports betting, depending on the circumstance.

Sports betting is okay in moderation.

- ✓ Increases social connectedness
- ✓ Increases engagement with sports
- ✓ Can generate income

Sports betting is harmful in excess.

- x Promotes addiction
- x Can lead to mental health challenges
- x Can cause financial loss

"It's sinking a lot more money into a black hole than [young adults] would normally... that being said, it definitely does offer some interesting entertainment and social interactions, especially around watch parties for sports games."



Many participants believe that sports betting attracts individuals who identify as male, young adults, college students, and college athletes.

BEHAVIORS



Most participants engage in sports betting infrequently, wagering less than \$10. A few engage more frequently and wager large amounts.

Most bet casually.

- From "every few months" to 1x/year.
- Standard bets range from \$0.50 - \$10.
- Only during championship games.

Some bet more often based on sport seasons.

- More consistently during the NFL and NBA.
- More frequent betting was not tied to increases in the amount they bet.

A few bet frequently.

- From every day to at least 1x/week.
- Standard bets range from \$50 - \$100.

"Right now, it's slowed down, but once March Madness starts...the bigger events, around those times, you tend to bet more."



The majority of young adults who bet on sports use online platforms and bet on a range of sports, most commonly football and basketball.

- Most use DraftKings, FanDuel, and BetMGM.
- Many choose apps based on promotions and usability.
- Some use bookies or informal channels via third parties, including "informal bets" with friends and families.

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Young Adult Sports Betting Impacts and Recommendations

IMPACTS



Advertising targets young adults primarily through social media, mobile app, podcasts, and streaming services.

- All participants suggested ads target young adults, “*sports enthusiasts*,” and men.
- Campus “*culture*” and word of mouth facilitate betting on university campuses.
- “*Free money*,” bonus bets promotions, and incorporating gambling into watching sports has “*normalized*” gambling and betting on sports.
- Mobile apps make it “*easy to gamble*.”



Legalization of sports betting and advertisements have increased young adult awareness, access, and participation in sports betting.

- Changed engagement and social interaction around sports through legal channels.
- Increased risk of problem gambling and young adult financial risk.
- Enhanced state revenue from taxable gambling.



Awareness of efforts to address the negative effects of sports betting are limited to the Massachusetts Problem Gambling Helpline and disclaimers.

- Vendor initiatives and changes to sports betting policies and regulations are needed to protect people from sports betting harms.

Young Adult and Expert Recommendations



Implement **responsible gambling initiatives** tailored to young adults to shift conversations towards responsible sports betting.



Increase **number and promotion of resources** to support sports betters and young adults experiencing problem gambling.



Launch **public educational campaigns** to increase awareness of problem gambling.



Restrict or regulate vendor advertisements that promote sports betting.