

PROBLEM GAMBLING AND EXPANDED GAMBLING IN MASSACHUSETTS

Policy guidelines for the development of responsible state supported gambling

The Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling (The Council) proposes that Massachusetts policy makers enter into an expansion of gambling availability carefully, acknowledging that putting responsible gambling policies and practices in place at the outset is essential for mitigating the potential negative impact of expanded gambling on Massachusetts' residents.

Cost of Doing Business

The Council is neither anti-gambling nor pro-gambling. We realize that most people gamble for entertainment, and do so with minimal disruption to their lives. However, we also realize that there are those for whom gambling becomes extremely problematic with devastating emotional and financial consequences. The Council believes it is the responsibility of Massachusetts, as a state that supports and sponsors gambling, to address the downside as a cost of doing business. It is both ethically and fiscally responsible to do so, since the costs of problem gambling extend far beyond the individual to society.

Massachusetts has Opportunity to Lead Nation

Massachusetts has the opportunity to maintain its standing as a leader in providing responsible public policy related to gambling by ensuring a safety net for those at risk for gambling problems and by establishing regulations and responsible gambling practices. The Council requests that the Commonwealth invest as fully in minimizing the harm of expanded gambling as it does in maximizing the revenues and set aside *no less than 2.5% of gross gambling revenue toward funding a public health response.*

Our State Currently Not on Par with Other States

Currently, services for addressing gambling problems in Massachusetts are not on par with other states. Massachusetts has one of the most successful lotteries in the nation, yet in a 2008 national survey of publicly funded problem gambling services in the United States, the Commonwealth ranked 18 in per capita expenditures to address problem gambling. The Massachusetts per capita expenditure of \$0.18 compares poorly to the \$0.25 per capita average spent nationally and worse to the \$1.65 per capita committed by the state ranked number one, Oregon.

Problem Gambling Affects Massachusetts

- Nearly 80% of the U.S. population has gambled in their lifetime, and 1- 3% of the population are problem or pathological gamblers (Kessler, RC., et al, 2008; Petry, NH., et al, 2009). *Pathological gambling* is classified as an impulse control disorder and defined as "persistent and recurrent maladaptive gambling behavior that disrupts personal, family or vocational pursuits." *Problem gambling* is characterized as behavior that does not necessarily meet the criteria for pathological gambling but results in harmful effects to a gambler, his or her family, significant others, friends, co-workers, and others.
- Based on national estimates, between 85,000 and 185,000 Massachusetts residents have experienced gambling problems in their lifetimes (Kessler, RC., et al, 2008; Petry, NH., et al, 2009; US Census Bureau. Massachusetts Quick Facts from the U.S. Census, 2009).
- The cities and towns of Massachusetts experience the costs of problem gambling in human services agencies serving the homeless, seniors, children, handicapped, victims of domestic violence, and those struggling with substance abuse and other mental health disorders.

- Pathological gamblers are significantly more likely to also have substance abuse problems. These gamblers are 4½ times more likely to abuse alcohol or drugs and 6 times more likely to be dependent on alcohol or drugs (Kessler, RC., et al., 2008).
- Pathological gamblers are significantly more likely to also have mental health disorders (Kessler, RC., et al., 2008).
- Nearly 70% of U.S. adolescents between 14 and 21 gambled in the past year. The societal costs of problem gambling are felt in school systems and colleges (Welte, JW., et al., 2008; Barnes, G., et al., 2009).
- Problem gambling costs are felt in the criminal justice system, where 33% of offenders meet the criteria for having a gambling problem (Williams, R., et al., 2005) and in the welfare and unemployment offices due to lost jobs and careers.

A Comprehensive Public Health Response

Responsible Steps for Massachusetts to Take

- In order to minimize the harm of expanded gambling in the Commonwealth, a responsible gambling plan would need to provide for a comprehensive public health response that will include a full array of social services:
 - **Prevention** of problem gambling to assure those that presently gamble safely continue to gamble problem-free. Strategies target vulnerable, high risk groups that include adolescents, young adults, seniors, ethnic and linguistic minorities, prison populations and those with substance use and mental health disorders.
 - **Intervention** for those with gambling problems so that those who gamble with adverse consequences do not progress to develop further problems, but rather return to problem-free gambling or no gambling. Interventions include public awareness and information dissemination, community education and professional training, and, information and referral services, including helpline and website.
 - **Treatment** for those with severe gambling problems, services similar to those found in substance abuse treatment programs, that include a continuum of care aimed at recovery. These include: crisis care, outpatient treatment, residential treatment, after care and relapse prevention.
 - **Research** to explore the public health consequences of gambling in Massachusetts through ongoing surveillance and evaluation to measure the impact of expanded gambling
 - **Cross Systems Services and Workforce Development** so that all state agencies who serve consumers at risk for gambling problems will be provided with resources and trained to incorporate services for preventing, intervening and treating gambling problems into their services.

Regulation and Responsible Gambling Practices

An aggressive regulatory structure will be needed to require that any potential gambling operator assert proactively its plans to guarantee compliance with the highest standards of responsible gambling programs. These policies and practices would lead Massachusetts to optimize the benefits and mitigate any negative impact of the gambling.

- The development of an industry oversight authority, an essential component of a responsible gambling plan, includes, but is not limited to, the following recommended best practices:
 - The membership of the authority includes individuals with expertise in public health and experts in the field of gambling addiction.
 - The authority regulates and monitors the advertising to ensure that any marketing does not target minors or other vulnerable populations and does not suggest gambling as a way of investing, and does not misrepresent the odds of winning.

- The authority continuously studies and investigates the efficacy of gaming law and regulations and the public health-related impact, and may formulate recommendations.
- Gambling facilities in the Commonwealth must agree, as a requirement of operation, to promote responsible gambling practices. These practices could include, but are not limited to:
 - Provide free space for independent on-site intervention and counseling services and a certified trained compulsive gambling counselor on site during all open hours.
 - Provide employer training at Massachusetts gambling facilities so workers can recognize problem gambling and refer problem gamblers for help, much like alcohol server training.
 - Prominently display education materials on compulsive gambling on websites and at their facilities within easy reach of gamblers.
 - Establish a plan whereby anyone can remove themselves from receiving any promotional materials of the facility – a “do not call” list.
 - Establish a “statewide self-exclusion list” in which admitted compulsive gamblers give their names to gambling outlets and agree they are legally barred from the facility.
 - Provide the Commonwealth with aggregate demographic information of its customers to allow the state to appropriately target its prevention and intervention efforts. One option for capturing this information is to establish a statewide card-based player enrollment and tracking system to encourage responsible gambling, similar to a system developed in Nova Scotia in 2005 (www.nsgc.ca).
 - Operate smoke-free facilities, as tobacco use is a public health concern related to problem gambling.
 - Institute other responsible gambling strategies, as developed by an industry oversight authority.

The Council's Continued Vision and Role

The Mass Council on Compulsive Gambling will continue to take a leadership role in developing and connecting policy makers to information and materials to inform responsible public policy related to state supported gambling. The Council encourages the Commonwealth, if it chooses to enter into expanded gambling, to do so in a manner that takes responsibility for assuring that adequate services are available to prevent, intervene and treat gambling problems and that serves as a national model for responsible gambling policies and practices. The Mass Council on Compulsive Gambling is available and prepared to serve as a resource for planning and implementation.

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