

DPH Office of Problem Gambling Services

Introduction to the FY23 Massachusetts Problem Gambling Helpline Data Report



FY23 Problem Gambling Helpline Data Report

The Massachusetts Problem Gambling Helpline, funded by the Department of Public Health, serves as a key resource for individuals seeking help for gambling and related harms. Since its integration with the Substance Use Helpline in 2020, the Helpline has operationalized its goals of improving the consumer experience for those seeking problem gambling treatment and support, increasing reach, and achieving greater efficiency and alignment — all while access to gambling venues and activities continues to grow in Massachusetts. The key findings from the data report include:

- From July 2022 through June 2023, the Problem Gambling Helpline saw an increase in overall call volume and referrals from the previous year. The driving force behind the increase in call volume and referrals may be the result of improvement in helpline services combined with the increased visibility of the helpline through public awareness campaigns, community efforts to provide individuals and families with education and resources, and sports wagering advertisements. It is important to note that there is no supporting evidence that the increase in call volume and referrals is a direct result of an increase in problem gambling in the Commonwealth.
- Specific data findings include:
 - Call volume increased by 121% from the previous year, a third of which included non-helpline calls from those looking for technical assistance for their sports wagering mobile platforms;
 - Calls resulting in referrals to treatment services increased by 41%;
 - Calls from individuals and loved ones saw a significant increase (26% and 40%, respectively); and
 - Calls from individuals in recovery increased by 230%.

Ongoing Prevention Efforts

Since 2016, the DPH's Office of Problem Gambling Services (OPGS) has engaged over 2,000 individuals at the community level along with 40 community-based partners to inform over 23 initiatives. As part of ongoing prevention efforts, the Office has:

- Launched the Massachusetts Photovoice Project, a \$1 million youth initiative led by 7 community organizations. This program uses photography to explore the impacts of gambling on youth and their communities.
- Launched the Massachusetts Ambassador Project, a \$600,000 initiative that is an innovative, peer-to-peer approach that trains men of color with a history of substance misuse to lead conversations, small group sessions, presentations, and events about the relationship between problem gambling and substance misuse in communities disproportionately impacted by problem gambling.

- Established a public awareness platform called Let's Get Real About Gambling, which uses diverse media to increase awareness of problem gambling and to provide residents with the resources needed to access help. Since 2018, OPGS' campaigns have garnered over 364 million impressions across the Commonwealth.
- Developed the Massachusetts Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling Prevention (MCOE PGP) to provide capacity building, training, and resource development services to address the prevention of problem gambling and related health issues. Focusing on shared risk and protective factors (substance abuse, mental health, and problem gambling) allows MCOE PGP to address multiple issues simultaneously and achieve a higher level of impact.
- Established the Data to Action framework in order to better understand the impacts of problem gambling in the Commonwealth. Guided by the public health principles of engagement, empowerment, and equity, the Framework illustrates the process through which public health data and community experience can be leveraged to inform and support one another in a mutually reinforcing feedback loop to support community needs.

Upcoming Initiatives

The data highlighted in the report indicate that over 2,000 individuals in the Commonwealth have concerns about problem gambling and that those in recovery are particularly impacted by the legalization of sports wagering. In addition, the 2023 MA Youth Health Survey demonstrates that 48.4% of middle school students and 43.6% of high school students gambled in the past year. Problem gambling is an ongoing concern that requires both prevention and treatment strategies to mitigate harms. In the coming year, the OPGS will implement new initiatives, including the following:

- Launch the Youth Leaders in Problem Gambling Prevention, a \$2.1 million initiative which will empower youth to raise awareness about problem gambling. The program will fund 3 sites to implement a peer-to-peer youth program focused on exploring the impacts of youth gambling.
- Launch the Community Wellness Project, which employs Community Health Workers to provide information and resources about problem gambling at the community level. The program will prioritize screening of problem gambling as a mechanism for early detection in order to reduce harm.
- Launch an initiative with Community Health Centers for a total of \$1.9 million that will explore telehealth services for problem gambling and invest in problem gambling screening.
- Invest \$7.5 million in existing campaigns as well as new public awareness campaigns centered on youth, college students, and young men aged 20 to 29 years.
- Expand the Project Build Up initiative to provide \$750,000 in grant funding to treatment providers for training, capacity building, and workforce development.

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About the Helpline

In July 2020, the Office of Problem Gambling Services (OPGS) integrated the Massachusetts Problem Gambling Helpline to better serve people experiencing problem gambling and related issues in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The overall goal was to improve the **consumer experience** for those seeking treatment and support, **increase reach**, and achieve greater **efficiency and alignment** – all while access to gambling expands in Massachusetts. The Helpline serves as the key safety net and central hub for problem gambling education, information, treatment referrals, and support for individuals, families, and the professional community. The FY23 report captures the following: **Overview, Referrals to Services, Demographics for Referral Calls, and Quality Assurance/Follow-Up Services** with key outcomes for each section.

Helpline Report Summary

In FY23, the Problem Gambling Helpline saw increases in both overall call volume and referrals from the previous year, all the while making continued improvements to quality assurance. Call volume increased by 121%, which includes calls from those seeking support and information, as well as non-helpline related calls. Calls from those seeking support and information that resulted in a referral increased by 41%. This increase in referrals is further explored in the tables below. The total call volume was the highest from February through June 2023 (2,069 calls), potentially due to the launch of sports wagering in Massachusetts. Of the 2,069 calls in that time, 1,043 were non-helpline calls. In general, non-helpline calls were callers looking for technical support for their sports wagering mobile applications and platforms. These types of calls may be driven by the increase in sports wagering advertisements, which promote the helpline. These calls may be reduced by improving the clarity and visibility of the Problem Gambling Helpline on disclaimers for all sports wagering advertisements. Despite multiple problem gambling Helplines being operated and promoted in MA, there continues to be a significant increase in calls to the official Problem Gambling Helpline of the Commonwealth.

Of note, calls from individuals and loved ones saw a significant increase (26% and 40%, respectively). This increase could be attributed to the growing visibility of the Problem Gambling Helpline phone number and website, rather than to an increase in the number of individuals experiencing concerns with problem gambling. Ongoing monitoring is being conducted for confirmation. Calls from individuals in recovery increased by 230%. The surge in gambling advertisements and expanded access to gambling may be a significant risk to the recovery community. As a result, OPGS will conduct further analysis with the recovery community. Lastly, referrals by gambling type for sports wagering increased 1,117%. Due to the significance of this increase, OPGS will conduct an in-depth review for a future report.

As part of the integration of the Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Helpline and the Problem Gambling Helpline, all calls to the SUD Helpline are screened for gambling concerns; any calls where gambling concerns were identified are included in this report. This demonstrates the importance of an integrated format for Helpline services and reaffirms OPGS' goal of improving consumer experience and expanding access for those seeking support or treatment. This integrative approach allows for callers to get support without delay.

Key Notes on Report Data

The Problem Gambling Helpline makes an ongoing and continuous effort to capture data from callers. However, due to the nature of the calls, there are instances where data collection may be impacted. Please note:

- Calls to the Helpline can be received from an individual seeking help for themselves, from a loved one, and/or from a professional and therefore a single call may result in multiple searches for services. For this reason, the number of searches in the charts below may be higher than the number of calls received.
- The ability to fully capture demographic information, including race and ethnicity, may be impacted by the nature and severity of calls and by the prioritization of client needs.
- The demographic data includes suppressed numbers for counts fewer than 5. This is consistent with public health data reporting practices on other sensitive or stigmatized topics.

Section I - Overview

The overview section provides data related to total call volume and includes a month-by-month breakdown for the period between July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023. As part of the integrated Helplines, all calls to the Substance Use Disorder Helpline are screened for gambling concerns. As a result, 62 calls in FY23 reported a gambling concern through the SUD Helpline. These calls are included in the charts below.

Total Calls To Helpline

	FY21	FY22	FY23
Total Calls to Problem Gambling Helpline	564	1,378	3,050
Total Gambling Calls to Substance Use Disorder Helpline	37	88	62
Total Calls to Helplines	601	1,466	3,112

Total Calls to Problem Gambling Helpline by Month

	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB*	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	TOTAL
FY21	10	22	23	23	17	20	47	39	87	102	78	96	564
FY22	197	131	68	95	100	97	98	128	118	109	146	91	1,378
FY23	148	181	136	141	127	122	126	228	656	528	391	266	3,050

* Note: Sports wagering in Massachusetts launched in casinos on January 31, 2023. Online sports wagering launched on March 10, 2023.

Total Calls to Substance Use Disorder Helpline for Gambling by Month

	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	TOTAL
FY21	1	2	2	1	0	1	4	3	7	8	4	4	37
FY22	6	4	6	8	14	4	9	8	4	10	5	10	88
FY23	4	4	6	2	4	6	8	9	6	5	5	3	62

“
[Calltaker] was a great help and he gave me the resources that I need - thank you.
 – HELPLINE CALLER
 ”

Caller Type

	FY21	FY22	FY23
Calls from an Individual Seeking Help	155	301	380
Calls from a Loved One	57	106	148
Calls from a Person in Recovery	5	27	89
Calls from a Professional*	5	16	16
Unknown	0	2	3

*Note: Professionals can include treatment providers, court officers, police officers, and others serving in official capacities.

Helpline Website Visits and Chats

	FY21	FY22	FY23
Total Chats on Problem Gambling Website	12	128	259
Total Chats on Substance Use Disorder Website for Gambling	7	5	2
Website Sessions	14,863	56,455	125,433
Website Visitors	12,823	85,150	110,416

“

[Calltaker] was excellent and I thank you for having her on today. thank you, I appreciate how you are answering the phone. — HELPLINE CALLER

”

Section I - Key Outcomes

- Total calls to the Problem Gambling Helpline increased **121%** from **1,378 (FY22)** to **3,050 (FY23)**.
- In FY23 the total call volume for the Problem Gambling Helpline was the highest from **February through June (2,069)**, which may be a result of the sports wagering launch.
- Calls from individuals seeking help increased from **301 (FY22)** to **380 (FY23)**, while calls from loved ones increased from **106 (FY22)** to **148 (FY23)**.
- Calls from individuals in recovery increased from **27 (FY22)** to **89 (FY23)**, an increase of **230%**.

Section II - Calls Resulting in Referral to Service

This section provides additional information on a subset of the 3,112 total calls to the helpline, the 636 calls that resulted in referrals. Of these 636 referral calls, 62 were captured via the Substance Use Helpline. This demonstrates the importance of an integrative format for the Substance Use and Problem Gambling Helplines. Please note, individuals who call the helpline may receive multiple referrals depending on their needs. Similarly, the referrals based on gambling type includes callers who may have concerns with multiple forms of gambling.

Number of Referrals to Services

	FY21	FY22	FY23
Problem Gambling Helpline – Referral Calls	185	364	574
Substance Use Disorder Helpline – Referral Calls for Gambling	37	88	62
Total Referral Calls for Gambling	222	452	636

Note: This data reflects outcomes of the 636 calls that resulted in referrals. These calls represent 20% of the total 3,112 call received by the helpline.

Type of Referrals Provided

	FY21	FY22	FY23
Gambling Self-Help & Recovery Support	74	147	235
Outpatient Counseling for Problem Gambling	73	185	362
Voluntary Self-Exclusion	2	89	74

Note: This data reflects outcomes of the 636 calls that resulted in referrals. These calls represent 20% of the total 3,112 call received by the helpline.

Referrals Based on Gambling Type

	FY21	FY22	FY23
Casino	0	45	170
Lottery	6	18	89
Sports Betting	1	6	73
Pari-Mutuel Betting	0	2	11
Other Forms of Gambling	166	341	229
Non-Specified Types of Gambling	23	55	105

Note: This data reflects outcomes of the 636 calls that resulted in referrals. These calls represent 20% of the total 3,112 call received by the helpline.

Section II - Key Outcomes

- Referrals for outpatient treatment services increased from **185 (FY22)** to **362 (FY23)**, an increase of **96%**.
- Referrals by gambling type for casinos increased from **45 (FY22)** to **170 (FY23)**, an increase of **278%**.
- Referrals by gambling type for sports betting increased **1,117%**, from **6 (FY22)** to **73 (FY23)**.

Section III - Demographics for Referral Calls

The demographic section captures gender, age group, race/ethnicity, and region for referral calls. Please note, the demographic details may include multiple searches for treatment/services on a single call. Numbers in this section may be higher than the total number of referral calls due to callers who requested help for multiple people. Additionally, the acute nature of the calls may impact the ability to fully capture demographic information. Lastly, there is suppressed column data for counts fewer than 5. This is consistent with public health data reporting practices on sensitive topics.

Gender

	FY21	FY22	FY23
Male	171	321	500
Female	51	131	137
Transgender Male	0	<5	0

Note: This data reflects outcomes of the 636 calls that resulted in referrals. These calls represent 20% of the total 3,112 call received by the helpline.

Age groups

	0-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
FY21	9	37	61	42	45	18	10
FY22	18	97	43	84	83	40	25
FY23	19	126	169	137	96	65	27

Note: This data reflects outcomes of the 636 calls that resulted in referrals. These calls represent 20% of the total 3,112 call received by the helpline.

Race/Ethnicity

	Unknown	White	Black	Latino	Asian	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander
FY22	308	43	7	12	<5	<5
FY23	519	45	8	10	0	0

Note: Race/Ethnicity was added in FY22. This data reflects outcomes of the 636 calls that resulted in referrals. These calls represent 20% of the total 3,112 call received by the helpline.

Regions

	R1: Western	R2: Central	R3: Northeast	R4: Metro West	R5: Southeast	R6: Boston	Unknown / Not Collected
FY21	23	25	46	41	28	45	17
FY22	47	64	76	83	68	84	43
FY23	72	67	123	105	95	108	76

Note: This data reflects outcomes of the 636 calls that resulted in referrals. These calls represent 20% of the total 3,112 call received by the helpline.

Section III - Key Outcomes

- There was a **56%** increase in male callers from **321 (FY22)** to **500 (FY23)** while the number of female callers remained about the same.
- In FY23, there was an increase in referral calls across all age groups. Those 30–39 year-old represented a **293%** increase, from **43 (FY22)** to **169 (FY23)**.
- There is a demonstrated increase in referral calls across all regions. The Northeast region had the largest increase of **62%** from **76 (FY22)** to **123 (FY23)**.

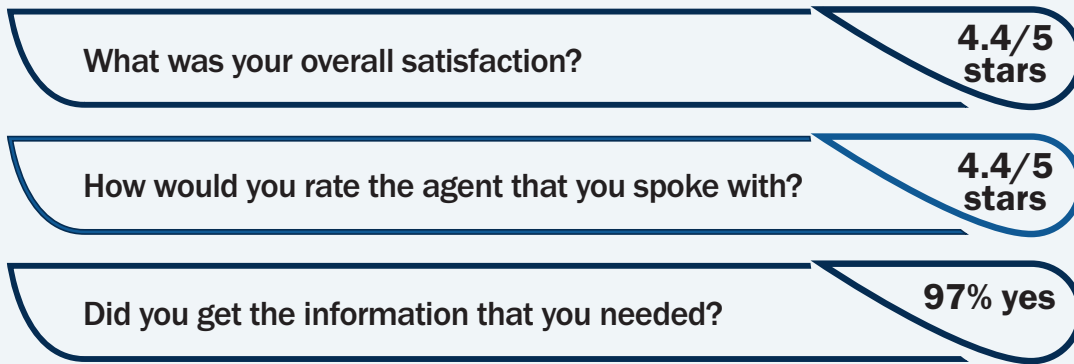
Section IV - Quality Assurance and Follow-Up Services

This section describes quality assurance and follow-up services. These two areas are part of the comprehensive redesign and integration of the Problem Gambling Helpline. Individuals experiencing problems related to gambling may also experience severe mental health disorders and/or suicidal ideations. It is therefore imperative to ensure accessible and comprehensive services that have robust quality assurance metrics.



“
I just wanted to say thank you to [calltaker]. He – you know – walked me through very calmly the options that I have for my 18 year old son. He seems to have a gambling problem so I appreciate that. I will try it, and I have good information now. So, thank you very much. – HELPLINE CALLER
 ”

Feedback Rating for the Problem Gambling Helpline



Section IV - Key Outcomes

- In FY23, access to service improved to **36 seconds** from **39 seconds** in the previous year.
- In FY23, **97%** of callers received the information that they needed, further demonstrating the importance of Helpline services in connecting Massachusetts residents to care.

“

The person I spoke to - [calltaker] - was very nice, informative, helpful... I called some help line before and I never got all these referrals including regarding insurance issues and so forth. I'm just hoping one of them turns out to be the right one. Thank you so much, and thank you again to [calltaker]. Goodbye.

— HELPLINE CALLER

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If you or a loved one is seeking help with problem gambling, **call 1-800-327-5050** or **text: "GAMB" to 800327** or **visit <https://gamblinghelplinema.org/>** to speak with a trained Specialist. Specialists are available 24/7 and services are free, confidential, and available in multiple languages.

