

DPH Office of Problem Gambling Services: Data to Action Framework



Background

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), Office of Problem Gambling Services (OPGS) is committed to promoting the optimal health and well-being of all residents in the Commonwealth and to ensuring they are provided with healthy and equitable communities to work and live in. In support of this mission, OPGS works to prevent and mitigate the potential harms and negative consequences associated with gambling on individuals, families, and communities.

Decades of research has demonstrated that gambling is a complex behavior that is intertwined with myriad individual, social, and structural factors. Large-scale epidemiological studies have also revealed that some groups and communities bear a disproportionate burden of gambling-related harms and consequences – including individuals with mental health disorders, substance use disorders, and communities of color.

Historically, efforts to mitigate gambling-related harm have centered on the promotion of individual responsibility and have ignored the broader life and community contexts in which these behaviors, harms, and consequences occur. To directly and proactively address this disconnect, OPGS has adopted a public health approach that promotes the examination of health-related phenomena through a population-based lens, and explores the relationship between individuals, their environments, and gambling behavior. Fundamental to this approach is active consideration and exploration of root causes, structural factors, social determinants of health, intersectionality, and community context – including authentic community engagement and approaching these issues from a strengths-based rather than deficit-based perspective.



OPGS Data To Action Framework

Guided by the public health principles of engagement, empowerment, and equity, the OPGS Data to Action Framework was developed to illustrate the process through which public health data and community experience can be leveraged to inform and support each other in a mutually reinforcing feedback loop. **Respecting community members as authentic partners, building partnerships,**

maintaining transparency, and promoting accountability are at the core of the OPGS Data to Action Framework. Centering community within this framework serves as an ongoing reminder that community stakeholders have a critical role to play in helping to: (1) contextualize and interpret public health epidemiological data; (2) inform the design of relevant, culturally responsive, equitable services; and (3) assist in monitoring whether policies and services are producing the desired results and progressing toward overarching goals.

The OPGS Data to Action Framework consists of:

- 1. Monitoring and Surveillance:** Examining public health monitoring and surveillance data to characterize and describe the issue, identify risk and protective factors, and explore driving forces (root causes).
- 2. Contextualizing Data:** Conducting community needs assessments and regional planning processes to engage community stakeholders and solicit their assistance in contextualizing and interpreting public health data.
- 3. Comprehensive and Responsive Services:** Using community insight and evidence-informed principles to develop and implement comprehensive and responsive programs and policies that center root cause, equity, intersectionality, and different levels of risk.
- 4. Evaluation and Quality Improvement:** Evaluating programs, policies, and practices and engaging communities in ongoing discussions to ensure that their perspectives and feedback remain centered in the process.
- 5. Community Engagement and Feedback:** Using ongoing community feedback to inform future monitoring and surveillance efforts, programming, and policy.

OPGS Data To Action Framework – Core Components

Monitoring and Surveillance

Public health surveillance is the systematic and ongoing collection of health-related information on populations to monitor trends; identify risk and protective factors; and inform policies, practices, and investments designed to improve health outcomes. Surveillance is central to the public health approach and to data-driven planning. DPH supports two large-scale surveillance surveys – the **Youth Health Survey (YHS)** and the **Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)**. The YHS is conducted every two years with youth in grades 6-12 across Massachusetts and the BRFSS is implemented every year with adults ages 18 and older. The YHS provides estimates of the frequency of four different types of gambling among youth in the past 12 months: lottery or scratch tickets; gambling in a casino; participating in fantasy sports; and sports betting, card playing, gambling online. The BRFSS is being updated with new questions related to gambling behaviors among adults.

Administrative datasets maintained by DPH serve as another rich source of information for data-driven planning and policymaking – including data from the **Problem Gambling Helpline (gamblinghelplinema.org)** and the **treatment system**. These datasets provide detailed,

de-identified information on demographic characteristics; social determinants of health; gambling history and severity; co-occurring substance use and mental health concerns; and treatment service provision.

Contextualizing Data

Contextualizing data by directly engaging community members in its interpretation is crucial to properly understand and interpret its meaning. Data without context can be misleading and misinterpreted, leading to incorrect conclusions and decisions. By understanding the context, we can ensure that we are using the data appropriately and drawing valid conclusions. OPGS has also initiated a series of regional planning processes and needs assessments. The purpose of these processes is to help community members contextualize surveillance data and engage communities in the identification and development of culturally appropriate prevention strategies grounded in health equity principles.

Comprehensive and Responsive Services

OPGS supports a comprehensive array of community-driven, data-informed programs and services across Massachusetts to address gambling-related harms. Programs and services are implemented across the continuum of care (prevention, intervention, treatment, recovery) and focus on the social determinants of health and equity. Efforts include: (a) direct service programs such as the Ambassadors Project, a peer-to-peer program for men of color with a history of substance misuse; (b) workforce training and supports for Community Health Workers; and (c) public awareness campaigns and resources for prioritized groups. OPGS also supports the Massachusetts Technical Assistance Center for Problem Gambling Treatment (M-TAC) and Massachusetts Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling Prevention (MCOE-PGP) to provide training, technical assistance, and capacity building support to service providers and local communities. Reports on each of the programs, policies, and capacity-building efforts supported by OPGS are issued annually.

Evaluation and Quality Improvement

OPGS and its contractors routinely conduct mixed method evaluations of the programs and services being implemented in Massachusetts communities – including consideration of inputs, outputs, and outcomes at the individual, peer, organization, and/or community levels. Central to these evaluations are whether services have adequate reach and effectiveness. All evaluations adopt a collaborative, participatory approach that seeks to actively engage stakeholders in evaluation planning, design, implementation, data collection, and interpretation of results. Reports of evaluation findings are routinely issued by OPGS and made publicly available to stakeholders.

Community Engagement and Feedback

OPGS brings together a variety of community partners, community members, and advocacy groups to participate in annual Stakeholder Listening Sessions (SLS). These sessions are critical opportunities to foster and maintain community engagement, receive feedback, and ensure that cultural and community perspectives remain centered in the work.

To learn more about the Office of Problem Gambling Services please visit mass.gov/opgs