2023 STAKEHOLDER LISTENING SESSIONS REPORT

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Office of Problem Gambling Services

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Executive Summary

The 2023 Stakeholder and Community Listening Sessions Report was conducted as part of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Office of Problem Gambling Services (OPGS) annual engagement activities. It captures insights from 61 stakeholders from 18 communities, organizations, service providers, and academic institutions across two Stakeholder Listening Sessions (SLSs) and two Community Listening Sessions (CLSs). The findings shape OGPS' strategic priorities and programming for problem gambling.

Key Themes

Five key themes emerged, which are highlighted below:

1. **The Role of Media and Advertising**: Participants expressed concern about the overwhelming presence of gambling advertisements, which seemingly glamorize and normalize the behavior.

2. **The Expansion of Sports Wagering**: Increased access to sports wagering via legalization of online platforms has made sports betting feel like an integral part of following sports.

3. **Gambling and Co-occurring Disorders**: Plan comprehensive evaluations of campaigns to reduce gambling-related harm, and identify successful strategies for addressing risks, especially for high-risk groups.

4. **Socio-economic Determinants of Problem Gambling**: People facing economic hardship, social isolation, or other stressors were seen as more likely to turn to gambling for money, despite greater personal risk.

5. **Vulnerable Populations**: Youth, older adults, and racial and ethnic minorities are especially vulnerable to gambling harms and are often targets of advertisements and may lack support to lessen the risks.

Recommendations

Outlined below are five recommendations to shape future programming and policy initiatives:

1. **Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement**: Continue actively engaging diverse stakeholders, emphasizing community members and behavioral health providers, to ensure responsive and relevant programs.

2. **Strengthening Data Collection and Evaluation**: Enhance data collection and analysis capabilities to support ongoing monitoring of gambling behaviors and help assess the impact of interventions.

3. **Evaluating Media and Educational Campaigns**: Plan comprehensive evaluations of campaigns to reduce gambling-related harm, and identify successful strategies for addressing risks, especially for high-risk groups.

4. **Integrating Treatment and Prevention**: Integrate gambling prevention and treatment services with those for co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders, to increase comprehensiveness.

5. **Targeted Educational Programs**: Create gambling risk awareness programs to be used in educational settings.

6. **Grow Support for Stricter Advertising Protections:** Lead awareness campaigns for parents/guardians about gambling advertising risks, to grow support for stricter regulations on youth-targeted ads.

Conclusion

There is an urgent need for a comprehensive, culturally responsive public health approach to mitigate the harms associated with problem gambling. Key steps to achieve these goals will include incorporating community voices, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and prioritizing collaboration. The recommendations outlined in this report provide a roadmap for addressing the multifaceted challenges of problem gambling through tailored programs and services, enhanced data collection efforts, and improved public awareness activities.

Introduction

This report summarizes the 2023 Stakeholder and Community Listening Sessions (SLS and CLS) conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Office of Problem Gambling Services (OPGS), with support from JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. It begins with a historical and policy overview to contextualize the issue, followed by a description of the qualitative methods used to collect and analyze participant input. The results section highlights key themes and patterns, supported by participant quotes. The discussion explores the broader implications of the findings, and the report concludes with recommendations to inform policy, practice, and future research.

Background

Legal and Policy Changes
In 2011, the Massachusetts Act Establishing Expanded Gaming in the Commonwealth authorized three resort-style casinos and one single-slot facility. It also established the Public Health Trust Fund (PHTF) to mitigate gambling's health consequences via resources for prevention, intervention, treatment, and research. The PHTF is overseen by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and implemented by the Massachusetts Gaming Commission (MGC) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). In August 2022, The Act to Regulate Sports Wagering legalized sports betting in Massachusetts, and both in-person and online sports betting was fully operational by March 2023.

Public Health Response and OPGS Strategic Plan
Recognizing gambling is linked to adverse health conditions disproportionately impacting people of color and those with mental health and/or substance use disorders,[1] the MDPH established the OPGS in 2016 to lead data-driven, culturally relevant, multilevel, and community-informed problem gambling initiatives. In January 2023, OPGS released its [Strategic Plan 2022-2026: Working Together to Mitigate Harms Associated with Problem Gambling](#).[1] The plan, which is stakeholder-informed and aligns with government partner priorities, details initiatives to develop a strong public health response to problem gambling, including efforts to better understand how problem gambling overlaps with other health concerns".

Listening Sessions Overview
Community engagement, including listening sessions as described in this report, is one of the key strategies OPGS uses to strengthen the public health response to problem gambling. The goal is for communities to be active partners with shared ownership in identifying problems and designing and implementing solutions.

OPGS first began engaging community members in listening sessions in Everett and Springfield in 2017, where the Encore and MGM casinos are located. These listening sessions have continued to see increased participation from residents statewide since moving to a virtual format during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, OPGS has engaged more than 2,000 community members and 40+ community-based organizations across Massachusetts to inform priority development and anchor their work in community perspectives. OPGS is committed to sustained engagement over time to respond to evolving challenges. This report summarizes the findings of the 2023 listening sessions where OPGS elicited input for its revised strategic planning process.

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[1] Massachusetts Department of Public Health. 2022. "Strategic Plan: Working Together to Mitigate Harms Associated with Problem Gambling." Boston, MA: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Office of Problem Gambling Services

Community Profiles for 2023 Listening Sessions[2]

Everett, MA	Springfield, MA
● **Population:** 49,075 (2020 Census) ● **Race/Ethnicity:** 40% White (non-Hispanic or Latino), 29.1% Hispanic or Latino, 13.7% Black or African American, 8.9% Asian or Asian American, 20.7% identify as two or more races ● **Origin and Language:** 45.0% born outside U.S. and 61.6% speak a language other than English at home ● **Poverty rate:** 14.4% (vs. 10.4% statewide) ● **Broadband access:** 92.0% (vs. 89.6% statewide)	● **Population:** 155,929 (2020 Census) ● **Race/Ethnicity:** 28.2% White (non-Hispanic or Latino), 48.3% Hispanic or Latino, 20.5% Black or African American, 2.9% Asian or Asian American, 18.5% identify as two or more races ● **Origin and Language:** 10.5% born outside U.S. and 41.2% speak a language other than English at home ● **Poverty rate:** 26.3% (vs. 10.4% statewide) ● **Broadband access:** 78.0% (vs. 89.6% statewide)

Methods

Listening Sessions Recruitment and Outreach

Previous years' SLS and CLS participants were invited, and JSI further partnered with community organizations in Everett and Springfield to conduct community outreach, which included attendance at community-based and OPGS-affiliated events where staff distributed promotional flyers. Outreach also took place online via social media platforms. All CLS participants were compensated for their participation. A total of 61 participants were recruited to participate in the SLS and CLS sessions. They represented 18 distinct communities, organizations, academic institutions, and service providers.

Listening Session Structure

The table below contains high-level details on elements of the 2023 SLS and CLS sessions.

2023 Stakeholder Listening Sessions (SLS)	2023 Community Listening Sessions (CLS)
● **Format:** Zoom ● **Participants:** 35 ● **Groups:** 4 groups of 8-10 people ● **Dates:** June 20 (Everett, English), June 21 (Springfield, English) ● **Main session Format:** OPGS Director Victor Ortiz shared purpose of sessions, reviewed OPGS vision, shared findings of 2022 sessions, provided overview of initiatives, and presented strategic plan ● **Subgroup Discussions:** 3 for Everett, 4 for Springfield ● **Subgroup Discussion Format:** 30-minutes, led by JSI facilitator, driven by engagement questions (below), ended with brief group presentation of salient points	● **Format:** Zoom ● **Participants:** 26 ● **Groups:** One in English, one in Spanish ● **Dates:** June 27th (English), June 29 (Spanish) ● **Main session Format:** JSI team member presented shorter presentation sharing purpose of sessions, reviewed OPGS vision, shared 2022 session findings sessions, and shared initiatives and strategic plan ● **Subgroup Discussions:** Two total ● **Subgroup Discussion Format:** 30 minutes, led by JSI facilitator, driven by engagement questions (below), ended with brief group presentation of salient points ● **No OPGS staff were present at the CLS.** This is done to help community members feel more comfortable providing feedback.

[2] U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Retrieved from https://data.census.gov/

Subgroup Discussion Engagement Questions:

1. Based on the work you do, your experiences, and/or observations within and outside your community, what are some strategies and initiatives that have been effective in addressing the impact of problem gambling in people's lives?

2. In which communities should the Office of Problem Gambling Services prioritize its efforts?

3. Now that sports wagering is legal in Massachusetts, what concerns do you have about its impact on the lives of MA residents?

4. What areas should the Office of Problem Gambling Services prioritize when allocating resources to mitigate the impact of gambling in people's lives?

Data Analysis

The nine subgroup discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate analysis. All texts were analyzed at an aggregate level, and analyzed jointly regardless of location because the SLS sessions ultimately included participants from both cities. Data analysis was conducted using MAXQDA, a web-based software that facilitates qualitative data analysis. Throughout the analysis process, research team members remained mindful of their own perspectives and potential biases through regular discussions and by keeping a detailed research journal documenting decisions, insights, and reflections that emerged during the analysis. JSI analyzed the data in two main steps using standard qualitative methods. First, JSI applied a grounded theory approach to identify key themes, carefully reviewing the transcripts multiple times and developing an initial codebook. This allowed for data to be organized by recurring topics and capture new ideas raised by participants. In the second step, related codes were grouped and linked to uncover patterns and relationships among themes. This step provided a clearer picture of how different ideas connected and deepened the understanding of participants' experiences. The chosen method was well-suited for managing large volumes of text and supported a systematic and detailed analysis.

A note on quoted material

All participant quotes presented in this paper are reproduced verbatim to preserve the authenticity and integrity of the speaker's voice. In line with qualitative research standards and ethical guidance (Lingard, 2019), JSI chose not to correct every instance of nonstandard grammar or syntax, recognizing that such features can convey important nuances and reflect participants' lived experiences. Out of respect for participants, JSI has exercised restraint in the use of "[sic]." This editorial marker is used only when necessary to prevent confusion or misinterpretation, rather than to draw undue attention to language variation. The intention is to maintain the authenticity of participants' narratives while ensuring clarity for the reader.

Lingard, L. Beyond the default colon: Effective use of quotes in qualitative research. Perspect Med Educ 8, 360–364 (2019)

Results

Several key themes emerged, including: (1) the role of media and advertising, (2) the expansion of sports betting, (3) gambling and co-occurring disorders, (4) socio-economic determinants of problem gambling, and (5) vulnerable populations. The findings for each of these themes as well as participants' suggestions are outlined below.

The Role of Media and Advertising

The influence of media and advertising, particularly for sports betting, was a significant concern for participants. They described an overwhelming influx of advertisements across various platforms, including social media sites like TikTok and Instagram, and during television broadcasts of sporting events. One participant mentioned:

> "…But with the commercials, it's just a constant bombardment. I mean, you watch football, you watch basketball, you watch any sport, and every commercial is for DraftKings, FanDuel, BetMGM, Barstool Sportsbook."

Using celebrities, athletes, or comedians in advertisements was mentioned as a particularly influential tactic. Participants felt their presence in sports betting ads could make sports betting seem glamorous and enticing. One participant said, "…when the young people are just looking at the phone, listen[ing] to music, and then see a famous… player advertising… sport betting," illustrating the omnipresence of these ads in the young people's daily lives.

> "Parents might not know how to navigate the mainstream platform. But I hear some parents say that their children's, one of their favorite basketball players do lots of advertisement about sport betting."

This quote highlights parents may be unaware how often their children see gambling ads featuring admired athletes, making it harder to mitigate the influence these figures have on normalizing gambling behaviors among impressionable youth. Participants expressed alarm at advertisements targeting young people, even though it is illegal for people under 18 years of age to gamble in Massachusetts. One participant said, "a lot of parents [are] really concerned because…advertisement gets into very young-age children." Some participants called for regulatory measures like those on addictive substances like marijuana and alcohol, given the sheer amount of advertising for gambling.

The Expansion of Sports Betting

Sports wagering, or betting, was the most prominent listening session topic. One mentioned the easy accessibility of and quick monetary losses linked to sports betting, noting the ease of "… people…lose large amounts of money in quick amounts of time and also the way that it could be hidden from other family members until all the money's gone."

Additionally, there was confusion about new state laws and the rapid expansion of sports betting.

> "That's definitely a big element of confusion out in the community. I think finally, there's just general confusion about what the new law is, what the difference is between sports wagering and how it's different from gambling at the casino."

Participants were concerned about how sports betting is increasingly viewed as integral and ubiquitous to the sports experience, particularly among youth, and that the nature and variety of sports betting has significantly increased beyond even betting on the outcomes of the events themselves. All of this, and the easy access for youth including those who may be underage, was seen as facilitated by easy access to sports betting including

on mobile devices including tablets, and amplification by social media that all created easy "pathways" to sports betting that were available 24/7.

> "I think one of the concerns for me is just the cultural shift in how we relate to sports, and in particular for young people, and their exposure to gambling and that becoming the paramount interest in the sport and not the sport itself."

> "You...[can]...gamble on what color of the shoes the player is going to wear and how many people are going to bet on this."

> "The ease of the apps, whether it's FanDuel or DraftKings, that it's just so simple... you don't have to go anywhere, and again, the fact that you can bet on a lot of things."

> "This gentleman stating that his son grabbed his wallet, grabbed his ID, and put his father's information inside the computer, and also with the credit card, and gambled $1,000."

Sports betting evoked a range of compelling emotions from participants, who are drawn to the practice for different reasons. For some, sports betting is a possible way to get "fast money," despite the risks involved, including the overwhelming odds they will spend far more than they win. Many participants also said it felt "exciting" and "seductive," creating an allure that was difficult to resist. They noted incentives such as free bets and sign-on bonuses, which add to its' allure, and other aspects that contribute to feelings of immediate gratification. For some individuals, sports betting is a way to "make themselves feel better" or to cope with underlying emotional needs as a form of escapism.

> "They say if you could put down $5 and you have the opportunity to win $100."

"People are just going to develop problems real easily because the way that they suck them in with the first-time bet, you bet $5. Then you bet another $5. You get 200 free bets. So that's $200 worth of action that you're using trying to gamble and getting used to doing something so quick that it's just going to take hold of you and just take all your money."

> "I think sometimes people convince themselves that they're approaching it recreationally, when in reality what they're looking for is an outlet."

Gambling and Co-Occurring Disorders

Several participants linked gambling and other addictive behaviors like substance use, both in terms of its effects and its potential to cause harm. The potent allure of gambling was compared to the effects of drugs, with participants emphasizing its capacity to exert a powerful influence without the need for ingestion. Participants were also concerned with co-occurring gambling, substance use, and mental health disorders, noting these issues often exacerbate each other. The dual occurrence was particularly troubling for youth and individuals in substance use recovery who may be more vulnerable to the addictive nature of gambling.

> "Even though it's behavioral, it does the same thing to your brain."

> "Youth may not understand that gambling is an addictive behavior, while those in recovery may be susceptible to relapse."

Socio-Economic Determinants of Problem Gambling

Participants identified various social factors (e.g., financial security, housing, unemployment) as contributing to the risk of problem gambling and making it difficult to access treatment, particularly for low-income individuals or those facing financial hardship who may view gambling as a way to financial stability. Racism and inequities were also mentioned as contributing factors, with gambling being used as a coping mechanism to "delay the feeling that they're feeling," as described by one participant. This numbing effect was seen as creating a cycle of dependence on gambling for emotional relief. The loss of benefits post-pandemic may have led more individuals to see gambling as a way to financial recovery. One participant said,

> "Especially in the post-COVID era, people are facing different kinds of economic hardships and might see gambling as a way to get out of that situation."

Vulnerable Populations

Youth Vulnerability to Gambling Exposure

Youth were the most frequently mentioned by participants as vulnerable to the risks of gambling. Concerns centered on the pervasiveness of advertising, the unlimited access provided by mobile devices, and the perception that sports betting is lucrative. The influence of advertisements, especially those featuring celebrities, was highlighted, with participants noting these ads make sports betting more enticing and normalized for youth. The ease with which youth can access sports betting was another significant concern. Participants noted the familiarity with and constant use of devices among young people is a gateway to sports betting. Additionally, there were concerns about youth not understanding gambling as an addictive behavior.

> "A lot of parents are really concerned because that advertisement gets into very young age children. They don't have that cognitive level to mitigate the harm."

> "I think they maybe are at an age where they're more vulnerable and they don't have the toolkit to discern how this could potentially be dangerous."

Older Adults: Social Isolation and Gambling Participation

Older adults, particularly those who are widowed or experiencing loneliness, were also seen as vulnerable to the harms of problem gambling. Participants described how some older adults may turn to casinos as a way to socialize and combat feelings of isolation.

> "Briefly on the other end of the spectrum, I have been hearing that seniors, most especially widowed seniors, a population that is also increasing due in large part to the loss of a spouse, the loneliness"

Impact of Gambling on Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups

Participants frequently mentioned people of color, particularly Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous populations, as heavily targeted and susceptible to the harms of gambling. There was also a focus on individuals with intersectional identities, such as those who are male, incarcerated, immigrants, youth, and in recovery. The creation of cultural communities within casinos, particularly among older Asian immigrants, was another area of concern. Participants described how casinos can become social hubs for these individuals, offering a sense of community but also increasing the risk of problem gambling.

> "[In] one of the conversations, I learned that…her entire family worked for the casino 30 years ago up to now. Then, when we talk about the cultural stigma, she kind of opened up to share pros and cons."

Current Strategies and Initiatives in Gambling Prevention and Intervention

Aside from the key themes summarized above, participants highlighted strategies that have shown promise for mitigating problem gambling and supporting individuals in recovery. Notable strategies included public campaigns intended to shift public perceptions of gambling from a matter of personal responsibility to a public health problem. Additionally, the use of Helplines and services through familiar settings such as faith- and community-based organizations were highlighted as successful. The Massachusetts Technical Assistance Center (M-TAC) was also mentioned as a critical resource.

> "...One of the most comprehensive communications campaign frameworks in the country."
> (Participant description of the Let's Get Real About Gambling campaign)

The use of peers as gambling ambassadors[3] to build trust and accountability among individuals in recovery was seen as critical in the public health efforts to mitigate the harm of problem gambling. Language accessibility and incorporating the voices of those with lived experience were also identified as crucial to effective interventions.

> "...Finding people who look like you, who share similar backgrounds and experiences..."
> (Participant account of who they looked to for conveying information about the dangers of gambling and the
> resources available to help.)

> "I found the most effective work that I've done is when I'm doing individual engagements, letting people know that Massachusetts cares about people of color. People seem to give me more attention once I explain to them that this initiative that I work for is a special grant for men of color, [that] would assist men of color with a history of substance misuse."

> "I think language is very critical when we are trying to reach a different community."

Participant Suggestions for Mitigating Gambling Harms

Listening session participants provided several recommendations related to government efforts, data use, and program oversight. They emphasized the government's role as the custodian of public trust and the need for "data-driven procurement, informed service delivery, vigilant oversight, and assertive action," reflecting a broader call for transparency and accountability in government actions.

Schools, including colleges and universities, were identified as a critical space to provide information on sports betting:
> "... I think there needs to be a conversation around the online betting and problem gambling.
> ..... Not just high school, also college level, especially if that's a huge market for college sports

For older adults, participants recommended the creation of community spaces and activities, such as ping pong and karaoke, as alternatives to gambling. A participant gave an example of culturally relevant programming, stating, "One of our community partners...wrote a song in Chinese, incorporating problem gambling prevention messages...when he goes to all different events, he just shares the song and engages the community."

Across all priority populations, participants emphasized the need for interventions to be linguistically and culturally relevant. As one noted,

> "I think language is very critical when we are trying to reach a different community. So we would like to provide language access on the [problem gambling] brochure."

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[3] The MA DPH OPGS funds the Gambling Ambassador Program comprised of men of color with lived experience of substance use and recovery, who are trained to lead outreach, education, and engagement in their communities.

Discussion

The Stakeholder Listening Sessions Report provides a nuanced understanding of the issues and concerns related to problem gambling in Massachusetts. The report offers a detailed analysis of the perspectives shared by stakeholders and community members, emphasizing key themes such as the influence of media and advertising, the expansion of sports betting in the Commonwealth, the intersection of gambling with other addictive behaviors, and the impact of social determinants on gambling patterns. These findings underscore the need for a multifaceted and culturally responsive approach to problem gambling prevention, one that integrates stakeholder feedback into program development/planning, policy development, and research initiatives. This discussion synthesizes the key findings and offers insights into their broader implications for OPGS and the community at large.

Media and Advertising: Mitigating the Influence of Gambling Promotion

The report highlights the significant concern regarding the pervasive role of media and advertising in normalizing gambling behaviors, particularly in the context of sports betting. Participants described a constant bombardment of gambling-related advertisements across television, social media, and other digital platforms. These advertisements, which often feature high-profile celebrities and athletes, were seen as problematic because they glamorize gambling and create a false perception as a risk-free, socially acceptable activity.

The potential impact of these advertisements on youth and other vulnerable populations is a critical issue that warrants immediate attention. Many participants noted young people are exposed to these advertisements frequently, despite the legal restrictions on underage gambling. This exposure, coupled with the use of celebrities as spokespersons, can lead to the normalization of gambling and increase the likelihood of youth engagement in gambling activities.

Sports Wagering: Navigating the Challenges of a Rapidly Expanding Market

The legalization and rapid expansion of sports wagering in Massachusetts have brought challenges. Participants in the listening sessions expressed concerns about the accessibility of sports betting through mobile applications and online platforms, which have made gambling more convenient and widespread than ever before. The ease of placing bets, coupled with the allure of potential financial gain, has led to impulsive betting behaviors, particularly among young adults and individuals predisposed to addictive tendencies.

One notable observation from the sessions was the cultural shift in how sports are perceived, particularly among young people. Sports are increasingly viewed through the lens of betting, with many young people becoming more invested in the outcomes of their wagers than in the sports themselves. This shift is concerning as it may contribute to the normalization of gambling and undermine the traditional role of sports as a source of entertainment and physical activity.

Intersection of Gambling and Other Addictive Behaviors: A Public Health Perspective

A recurring theme from the listening sessions was the recognition of gambling as an addictive behavior with similar neurological and psychological effects to substance use disorders. Participants emphasized that gambling, like other forms of addiction, can lead to significant harm and requires a comprehensive public health response. This perspective suggests problem gambling should be integrated into broader behavioral health frameworks to provide holistic support for individuals experiencing multiple co-occurring disorders.

The co-occurrence of gambling addiction with mental health and substance use disorders was frequently mentioned, with participants noting that individuals in recovery from substance use may be particularly vulnerable to developing gambling problems. This is due to the shared behavioral patterns and the potential for one addiction to trigger another. Youth were also identified as being at risk of developing gambling problems without fully understanding the addictive nature of the behavior.

Social Determinants of Health: Addressing the Root Causes of Problem Gambling

Findings from the listening sessions highlight the complex relationship between problem gambling and social determinants of health, such as economic hardship, social isolation, and systemic inequities. Participants noted that individuals facing financial difficulties may view gambling as a potential solution to their problems, only to fall deeper into debt and financial distress. Similarly, older adults experiencing loneliness may turn to casinos as social spaces, increasing their risk of developing gambling problems.

Recommendations for Future Programs and Evaluation

Based on the insights gathered, several recommendations have been identified to guide future program development and evaluation efforts.

1. Enhance Stakeholder Engagement:

- Engage diverse stakeholders, including community members and behavioral health providers, in the design and implementation of problem gambling programs. This inclusive approach will ensure that programs remain culturally relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the community.

2. Strengthen Data Collection and Evaluation:

- Develop a robust surveillance system essential for tracking trends, assessing program outcomes, and making data-informed decisions. OPGS should enhance its data collection and analysis capabilities to monitor gambling behaviors and continuously evaluate the impact of its initiatives. This data-driven approach will optimize program effectiveness and help identify areas for improvement.

3. Evaluate Media and Educational Campaigns:

- Inform future program planning by evaluating the effectiveness of its media campaigns, educational initiatives, and community partnerships. This will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of what works in mitigating gambling-related harms and highlight successful strategies for broader implementation.

4. Integrate Treatment and Prevention:

- Collaborate with behavioral health providers, addiction specialists, and mental health professionals to assist OPGS in developing integrative treatment and prevention programs. This integrative approach will ensure that individuals struggling with co-occurring disorders receive comprehensive care that addresses all aspects of their health and well-being. Framing gambling as an addiction with similar risks and consequences as substance use can also help reduce stigma and encourage earlier access to support services

5. Target Educational Programs:

- Implement tailored educational programs focusing on youth and young adults. These programs could be integrated into school curricula, community centers, and youth sports organizations. Collaborate with local sports teams, universities, and youth organizations can also help disseminate information and foster a cultural shift towards appreciating sports for its intrinsic value, rather than as a means for financial gain.

6. Enhance Support for Stricter Advertising Protections

- Lead awareness campaigns for parents and guardians about the risks of gambling advertising. These campaigns educate parents and guardians about the impact of these advertisements and provide guidance on engaging in meaningful conversations with their children about gambling risks. They should also be designed to enhance support for increased intervention by regulatory bodies to implement stricter advertising guidelines that limit the exposure of gambling-related content to minors.

Conclusion: Enhancing the Public Health Response to Problem Gambling

The 2023 Stakeholder Listening Sessions Report offers a comprehensive overview of the current landscape of problem gambling in Massachusetts and underscores the urgent need for tailored, culturally relevant programs and services. Moving forward, OPGS should leverage these findings to strengthen its efforts in preventing and mitigating the harms associated with problem gambling. By fostering collaborations and enhancing community engagement, OPGS can continue to promote a healthier, more equitable public health landscape for all residents of the Commonwealth.

The integration of community voices into public health strategies is essential for developing effective and sustainable solutions to the complex issue of problem gambling. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of programs, informed by ongoing community input, will ensure that OPGS remains responsive to emerging challenges and well-positioned to support the health and well-being of all Massachusetts residents.