

# MGC Research Snapshot

## Evaluation of GameSense in Massachusetts Casinos

May 2024

### What you need to know

This study provides insights into the awareness, perceptions, and engagement with the GameSense program in Massachusetts. Findings show a high level of GameSense awareness among regular patrons and casino employees, and that patrons benefit from interacting with GameSense Advisors. Insights from the survey and focus groups with GameSense Advisors emphasize the dynamic nature of player-GameSense Advisors interactions and the need for adaptability in navigating the evolving gambling landscape. Further efforts are needed to increase understanding of the program's comprehensive purpose and target audience.

### What is this research about?

Introduced by the British Columbia Lottery Corporation (BCLC) in 2009, [GameSense](#) is a responsible gaming (RG) program that encourages casino patrons to adopt and/or maintain positive behaviors and attitudes that reduce the risk of gambling-related harm. The program offers engaging tools, tips on RG, and advice and referrals to reduce harm. GameSense Information Centers (GSICs) are located on-site at all Massachusetts casinos and staffed by trained GameSense Advisors (GSAs) during casino operating hours. Guests can also access 24-hour RG tips, tricks, and information at [GameSenseMA.com](#).

This evaluation of the GameSense program was intended to provide the MGC with an understanding of the extent to which the program in Massachusetts is contributing to the overall goal of creating an effective, sustainable, measurable, socially responsible, and accountable approach to gambling, through assessing awareness, perceptions, and engagement with GameSense.

### What did the researchers do?

Researchers from Carleton University conducted the GameSense evaluation in four parts:

- An assessment of awareness, perceptions, and engagement with the GameSense program from the **players' perspective**. A survey was completed by 1109 **regular casino patrons** (i.e., people who visited one of the three casinos at least three times in the last three months and spent at least \$100) recruited through email invitations sent to patrons enrolled in the rewards program;
- A survey of 303 **casino patrons who recently had an exchange or demonstration (i.e., more in-depth) interaction with a GSA**. This research captured patrons actively seeking RG education and support, thus providing valuable insights into user engagement and its predictors. This recruitment strategy allowed for exploration of motivations and outcomes of these interactions and their implications for RG practices within the casino environment;
- A survey of 280 **player-facing casino employees** to evaluate their awareness, perceptions, and engagement with GameSense, along with their referrals of patrons to GameSense resources. The purpose of this piece of the evaluation was to gain insights into employee interactions with GameSense, improve training and communication strategies, and enhance RG initiatives within the casino environment;
- An online survey and focus groups with **GSAs and GameSense Managers (GSMs)**. Among other things, GSAs and GSMs talk to patrons about how to gamble responsibly and about support services should their gambling become problematic (e.g., voluntary self-exclusion). They also offer demonstrations to patrons about how games work and how to minimize the risks associated with gambling. The purpose of this piece of the evaluation was to better understand the experiences of GSAs and GSMs and obtain their input in the ongoing evaluation and evolution of GameSense in Massachusetts.



## What did the researchers find?

### General Players Survey:

- Most respondents (73.1%) were aware of GameSense, with a clear majority of these respondents reporting that GameSense helps educate players about RG (84.2%), provides RG tools (70.4%), and offers support for gambling-related problems (70.4%).
- 17.6% of respondents had visited a GSIC. Reasons for not visiting included already having knowledge about how games work (50.9%), familiarity with PlayMyWay (50.5%), a budget-setting tool available on slot machines, and not being explicitly asked to visit (58.4%). A large proportion of respondents who did not visit expressed interest in visiting a GSIC to learn more about RG (48.2%), PlayMyWay (42.7%), and supports for problem gaming (40.7%).
- Among respondents who had interacted with a GSA (16.3%), most reported having simple interactions, while fewer reported demonstration or exchange interactions. Notably, respondents who had demonstrations or exchanges felt more informed about RG compared to those who had only simple interactions.
- Respondents who had engaged with GameSense through a visit to a GSICs or interaction with a GSA scored higher on a measure of disordered gambling and visited a casino in Massachusetts more frequently compared to those who had no interaction. It is possible that players who engage with GameSense are doing so to help them gamble more responsibly or to seek assistance with a gambling problem.

### Survey of Patrons Who Had a Recent, More Involved Interaction with a GSA

- A high proportion of respondents interacted with a GSA to learn about RG (72%), suggesting that there is prevention utility in having GSAs present at the casinos in Massachusetts. Approximately half of all respondents noted that they interacted with a GSA about supports for problem gambling (53.6%), and 43.3% noted interacting with a GSA about voluntary self-exclusion. Furthermore, a high proportion of respondents (74.7%) engaged with GSAs to obtain promotional items and swag. This extrinsic motivation suggests that incentives play a vital role in driving interactions. Thus, GSAs appear to be having meaningful conversations with patrons about both prevention (i.e., RG) and intervention (i.e., disordered gambling).
- Patron interactions with GSAs overwhelmingly yielded positive outcomes. A significant proportion (74.2%) reported feeling more informed about RG practices, indicating the effectiveness of GSA interactions in imparting knowledge. Additionally, over three-quarters (78.8%) reported that they would engage others to speak to a GSA.

- The study revealed patrons had reasonably accurate perceptions of GameSense's purpose and target audience. Notably, 93.5% of respondents correctly recognized GameSense as a resource for RG education, and 93.5% correctly understood GameSense provides support for gambling-related issues. 69.5% of patrons perceived GameSense as a lounge, indicating the potential for GSICs to serve as spaces for players to take a break from play -- a known RG strategy.

### Survey of Player-Facing Casino Employees

- Nearly all respondents (96.1%) were aware of GameSense, with the primary source of awareness being employee training (84.0%), closely followed by interaction with GSAs (74.3%). The majority correctly identified its role in educating players about RG (92.6%), providing RG tools (84.4%), supporting those facing gambling problems (89.6%), and facilitating voluntary self-exclusion (87.7%).
- More than half (58.9%) of all respondents reported having visited a GSIC. Comparing visitors and non-visitors, those who visited GSICs demonstrated a better understanding of GameSense's purpose compared to non-visitors, indicating the value of engaging with GSICs in enhancing RG comprehension.
- Among all respondents, 68.8% reported having interacted with a GSA. Most (85.6%) also agreed that they left their interaction feeling more informed about RG.
- Among all respondents, 64.9% reported having referred patrons to GSAs. Those who indicated that they had visited a GSIC and spoke to a GSA were 1.62 times more likely to refer a player to GameSense than those who had not visited a GSIC or spoke to a GSA (i.e., 70.9% vs. 43.5%). The primary explanation for not referring patrons to a GSA centered around employees not perceiving a pressing "need" to recommend patrons to the program or from difficulties approaching players about GameSense.

### Online Survey and Focus Groups with GSAs and GSMs

- GSAs underscored the success of relationship-building and the voluntary self-exclusion program while facing challenges in overcoming negative perceptions and streamlining operational processes. Survey feedback suggests the need for destigmatizing GameSense, improving tools like PlayMyWay, and enhancing community engagement.
- GSMs emphasized the success of the voluntary self-exclusion program, positive transformations in the casino's perception of GameSense, and the diverse makeup of the GameSense team. However, they encounter challenges with guest skepticism, staffing issues, and communication with MACGH. Their recommendations for the MGC include prioritizing educational efforts, streamlining operational processes, increasing community engagement, fostering collaboration, and ensuring robust support for both GSAs and GSMs. These measures collectively aim to enhance the effectiveness of the GameSense program, making it more player-friendly and impactful in promoting RG.



## Recommendations

Recommendations from this evaluation include considerations for the areas of messaging, patron engagement, the physical space and environment, and further research and evaluation. Recommendations coming from GSAs/GSMs are in *italics*.

### Messaging:

- Increase awareness about the benefits of GameSense;
- Clarify program messaging to communicate that it is a resource for all casino patrons, and not only for individuals with gambling problems;
- Destigmatize GameSense by normalizing its use, increasing understanding that GameSense is for all players, *educational campaigns*, and *innovation* to combat stigma;
- Develop and implement comprehensive training programs (including refresher training) for player-facing employees that transcend basic awareness and address misperceptions.

### Patron engagement:

- Target patrons who do not have a gambling problem;
- Attract patrons through tailored RG messages, as well as specific motivations to visit GameSense;
- Invest in ongoing training for GSAs to adapt to patrons' diverse motivations effectively;
- Encourage GSAs to initiate conversations with patrons, even with those who may not be actively seeking assistance;
- Implement a referral program to reward patrons for referring others to GameSense;
- Provide clear guidelines on approaching patrons about RG in a respectful manner. Encourage player-facing employees to seamlessly integrate references to GameSense into their interactions with players;
- Emphasize value of employee interactions with GSAs. Motivate employees to engage with GSAs to enhance their continuous learning and improve their ability to provide accurate information to players;
- *Enhance community outreach efforts* and form partnerships with local organizations. Integrate multilingual support for diverse communities to improve communication and accessibility.

### Physical space and environment:

- Add a designated, GameSense branded, "Play Break" sitting area inside the GSIC;
- Cultivate a supportive atmosphere that encourages employees to comfortably discuss RG with patrons;
- *Optimize tools and accessibility* by improving existing tools like PlayMyWay for better accessibility. Consider strategic placement of GSICs on gaming floors to enhance visibility and accessibility.

## About the researchers

Michael J. A. Wohl, Gray E. Gaudett, Christopher G. Davis, S. Nima Orazani, and Nassim Tabri are with Carleton University in Ottawa, ON, CA. For more information about this study, please contact Michael Wohl at michael.wohl@carleton.ca.

### Further research and evaluation

- Implement systems to gather information on employee interactions with patrons regarding RG to develop and refine training programs and assess impact of interventions;
- Recommendations for future research and evaluation include research to better understand the short and long-term effects of interacting with GameSense on players' beliefs and behaviors, as well as an *annual third-party evaluation*.

### Citation

Wohl, M. J. A., Gaudett, G. E., Davis, C. G., Orazani, S. N., & Tabri, N. (2024). Player-facing Employees' awareness of and engagement with GameSense in Massachusetts Casinos [Report]. Massachusetts Gaming Commission.

Wohl, M. J. A., Gaudett, G. E., Davis, C. G., & Tabri, N. (2023). Players' awareness of and engagement with GameSense in Massachusetts casinos [Report]. Massachusetts Gaming Commission.

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Wohl, M. J. A., Gaudett, G. E., Orazani, N., Davis, C. G., & Tabri, N. (2023). Informing responsible gambling education in Massachusetts casinos: An examination of patrons who engaged with GameSense Advisors [Report]. Massachusetts Gaming Commission.

### Key Words

GameSense; Program Evaluation

### Acknowledgments

Financial support for this study comes from the Massachusetts Gaming Commission through the Public Health Trust Fund.

### About this Snapshot

MGC Snapshots are intended to translate lengthy and sometimes technical reports into an easily understandable overview of the research. The findings and recommendations in the Snapshot are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the position of the MGC.

