

# Problem gambling may be on the rise among monthly gamblers in Massachusetts, online surveys suggest

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In the latest of three online gambling surveys conducted by the University of Massachusetts Amherst, monthly gamblers in

Massachusetts reported an increase in gambling intensity and gambling harms. In addition, their attitudes toward gambling have grown more negative.

The online surveys—conducted in 2014, 2022 and 2023—can't be generalized to the overall population but give the Social and Economic Impacts of Gambling in Massachusetts (SEIGMA) research team a picture of changing behaviors and [attitudes](#) over time among regular gamblers, defined as those who gamble monthly or more frequently.

Gambling behavior expert Rachel Volberg, SEIGMA's principal investigator and research professor of epidemiology in the School of Public Health and Health Sciences, [reported the findings](#) today, Aug. 29, to the Massachusetts Gaming Commission.

Among monthly gamblers in the online surveys, those experiencing gambling problems jumped from 12.7% in 2014 to 20.9% in 2022 to 25.6% in 2023. This compares to a 2% prevalence of problem gambling that held steady in general population surveys conducted before and after casinos were introduced in Massachusetts.

"It's pretty startling, to be honest," Volberg says. "While the online panels were not representative of the population, they were very informative in regards to people with gambling difficulties. It's very helpful from a surveillance and monitoring perspective."

The [survey](#) found increases among monthly gamblers in the online panels in lottery games, sports betting, private wagering, [horse racing](#), bingo and [online gambling](#). This suggests the impact of the pandemic, which deterred gambling behavior, may be diminishing, Volberg says—and also that the pandemic "probably suppressed the gambling behavior of people who were gambling recreationally more than the behavior of people who were at risk for a gambling problem."

The latest of the three online surveys was carried out shortly after sports betting began in Massachusetts. According to the online surveys, monthly gamblers who said they did not participate in sports betting in the previous 12 months dropped from 78.2% in 2014 to 45.7% in 2023, the year that legal sports betting became fully operational in Massachusetts. In 2023, 28.3% of monthly gamblers said they did sports betting at least weekly, up from 18.8% in 2022 and 7% in 2013.

Volberg hypothesizes that the spate of advertising and news coverage of the legalization of sports betting in Massachusetts may have affected some monthly gamblers in a negative way. "I think it has led people who are already vulnerable to engage or re-engage with this particular type of gambling that's now getting lots of media attention," she says.

The latest online survey also showed increases in the proportion of monthly gamblers who believe both that the harm of gambling outweighs the benefits and that gambling addiction is the most important negative impact of casinos. There was a decline in the proportion who believe that employment is the most important positive impact of casinos and that all types of gambling should be legal.

"Based on the general population survey that was done in 2021, I didn't expect that we would see a big change in attitudes toward gambling, but we do seem to be seeing that, especially among the people betting on sports," Volberg says.

Volberg says that while online panels are not representative of the population, it is reasonable to assume that the changes in [behavior](#) and attitudes of the monthly gamblers in the online panels are likely to reflect changes in how monthly gamblers in the general population might be behaving.

"I think it's definitely a cause for concern about what the population

impacts of sports betting are going to be, because these indicators from the monthly gamblers in the online panel are not going in a direction that says there's going to be less gambling harm in Massachusetts in the future."

[Gambling and Problem Gambling in Massachusetts: Results of Three Online Panel Surveys \(2024\)](#)

Provided by University of Massachusetts Amherst

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