

DPH Office of Problem Gambling Services

Introduction to the FY24 Massachusetts Problem Gambling Helpline Report



Overview of the Massachusetts Problem Gambling Helpline Data Report

The Massachusetts Problem Gambling Helpline, funded by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), serves as a key resource for individuals seeking help for problem gambling and related harms. Since its integration with the substance use disorder (SUD) Helpline in 2020, the Problem Gambling 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.

Throughout July 2023 to June 2024 (FY24), the Problem Gambling Helpline continued to support and provide resources to thousands of individuals and their loved ones. Key findings from this report are highlighted below.

- From July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024, the Problem Gambling Helpline received 3,228 calls and the SUD Helpline screened and supported 52 gambling-related calls, resulting in 3,280 total calls. This is a 5% increase from the previous year's 3,112 total calls, 3,050 of which were received by the Problem Gambling Helpline and 62 by the SUD Helpline.
- The total number of gambling-related calls to the SUD Helpline decreased from 62 in FY23 to 52 in FY24 which represents a decrease of 16%.
- Sports wagering was legalized in Massachusetts in March 2023. Referral service for sports wagering increased 11% from 73 in FY23 to 81 in FY24.

Ongoing Prevention Efforts

Since 2016, the Office of Problem Gambling Services (OPGS) has engaged over 3,000 individuals at the community level along with 40 community-based partners to inform more than 25 initiatives. OPGS remains committed to reducing and preventing gambling related harms and deploys multiple prevention strategies at the community level. As part of ongoing prevention efforts, the Office has:

- Continued to implement the Massachusetts Photovoice Project across seven community-based organizations. In FY24, more than 100 young people developed leadership and advocacy skills to become change agents in their communities and to lead efforts highlighting the impacts of underage gambling.
- Continued to implement the Massachusetts Ambassador Project across three community-based organizations, where men of color with a history of substance misuse lead conversations, small group sessions, presentations, and events that elevate the co-occurrence between problem gambling and substance misuse. In FY24, ambassadors facilitated more than 2,349 one-on-one

discussions and small group work sessions and successfully engaged more than 153 organizations including treatment, recovery, and faith-based organizations.

- Implemented the Data to Action Framework to continue analyzing the impacts of problem gambling across the Commonwealth, including monitoring ongoing surveillance activities such as the Massachusetts Youth Health Survey, the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, and the Massachusetts Problem Gambling Helpline data.
- Enhanced public awareness through the **Let's Get Real About Gambling** platform, which is a key component of OPGS' prevention framework aimed at promoting conversations about gambling. The communication campaigns included priority populations such as youth and parents, Asian Americans, older adults, men of color, and college-aged youth. Impressions captured by campaigns over the past year nearly doubled with 291,322,000, compared to 148,090,000 in the previous year.

Upcoming Initiatives

Problem gambling is an ongoing public health concern that requires comprehensive strategies across the continuum of care, including surveillance, prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery to mitigate its harm. In the upcoming year, OPGS will implement new initiatives informed by data and community engagement activities, which are described in detail below.

- Launch a new, enhanced MA Problem Gambling Helpline website that will improve chat and text services and overall online experience. The new website will better engage and support people who are struggling with problem gambling and whose experience with gambling is primarily through mobile applications and other emerging technologies.

- Launch Community Connections, a \$2.5 million program designed to increase collaboration between state and local municipalities with the goal of increasing awareness of problem gambling through education and the distribution of resources, including self-help tools and informational brochures.

- Launch the Bridge Initiative, a comprehensive and innovative set of strategies for the enhancement of gambling treatment engagement, awareness, and support. Informed by evidence that is centered on the multiple pathways to wellness (including prevention and treatment), the Bridge Initiative strives to strengthen opportunities for individuals, families, and communities to gain a path to wellness. This is an annual investment of \$2.5 million in problem gambling treatment services.

- Launch the Community Health Workers (CHWs) Training, an annual investment of \$350,000, to increase the capacity of CHWs to provide education, screening, and delivery of services to individuals living in communities across Massachusetts, especially those near the casinos in Everett, Plainville, and Springfield. As a result of this effort, CHWs will become better equipped to address problem gambling and related issues.

About the Helpline

In July 2020, the Office of Problem Gambling Services (OPGS) integrated the Massachusetts Problem Gambling Helpline with the Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Helpline to better serve people experiencing problem gambling and related issues in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The overall goal was to improve 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 FY24 report captures the following: Overview, Referrals to Services, Demographics for Referral Calls, and Quality Assurance/Follow-Up Services with key outcomes for each section. Unless otherwise noted, "Helpline" refers to the Problem Gambling Helpline in this report.

Helpline Report Summary

Between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024 (FY24), the Helpline saw an increase in overall call volume from the previous year, while maintaining quality assurance measures such as average wait time and average time talking with a helpline staff member. Call volume increased by 5% (from 3,112 in FY23 to 3,280 in FY24), including calls from those seeking support and information, as well as non-helpline related calls. The total call volume remained steady with an average of 273 calls per month, demonstrating a consistent need for problem gambling support and resources throughout the year.

Of the 3,280 calls regarding gambling, 881 were related to a technical issue with a sports betting mobile application or platform. The high volume of calls due to technical support for sports betting mobile applications continues to be of concern, as it places an additional burden on helpline staff who are helping those in need or crisis. These calls may be reduced by improving the clarity and visibility of the Helpline on disclaimers for all sports wagering advertisements. As a result of this ongoing concern, OPGS is currently conducting a research study of disclaimer language on sports betting advertisement to better understand its impact and its clarity on consumers. A final report will be shared with the Massachusetts Gaming Commission and Legislators to inform policy and regulations on sports betting advertisement.

In FY24, there were 578 total referral calls ("referrals" are defined as a call that results in a referral to treatment or services), indicating that 18% of the total 3,280 calls resulted in a referral to service. Of note, referrals to treatment for those engaged in sports wagering increased by 11% in FY24 (from 73 referrals in FY23 to 81 referrals in FY24). Due to the significant increase, OPGS will conduct an in-depth review for a future research report and continue its efforts to promote awareness of the risks of gambling among populations more likely to engage in sports wagering.

In addition to providing guidance over the phone, the Helpline also offers text conversations, and a website that hosts additional resources and information as well as an online chatting function that allows individuals to converse with helpline staff. Text message conversations increased by 1,350% from only six in FY23 to 87 in FY24. In addition, the number of interactions with the Helpline website has significantly increased in the last year. Both website visitors (unique users) and sessions had an increase of users by 23% and 22% respectively, from FY23 to FY24. The observed increases could be attributed to the growing visibility of the Helpline and website. Ongoing monitoring is being conducted for confirmation.

As part of the integration of the Helpline and the Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Helpline, all calls to the SUD Helpline are screened for gambling concerns; therefore, any calls where gambling concerns were identified are included in this report. This emphasizes 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 callers to get support without delay.

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, 2023, through June 30, 2024. As part of the integrated helplines, all calls to the SUD Helpline are screened for gambling concerns. As a result, 52 calls in FY24 reported a gambling concern through the SUD Helpline. These calls are included in the tables below.

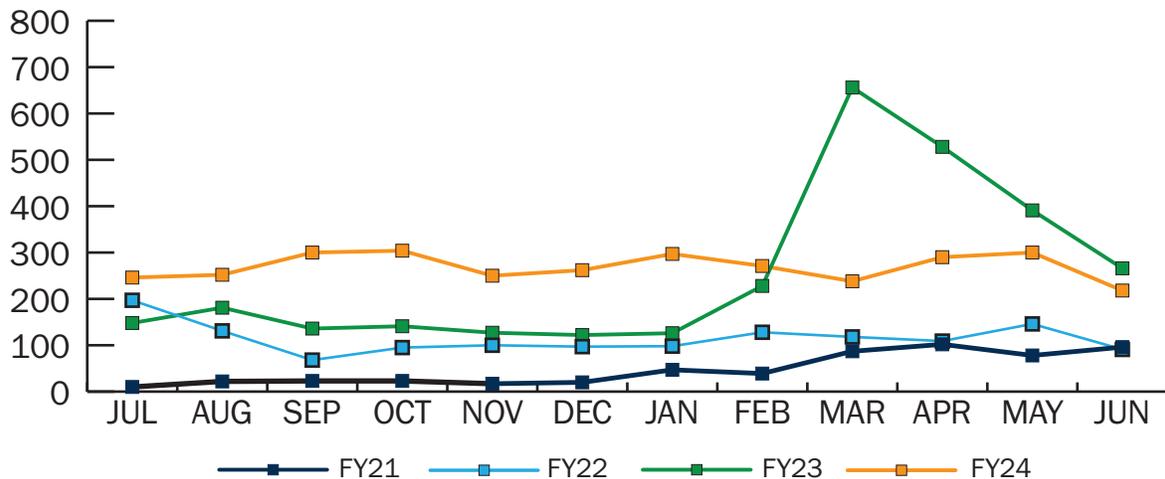
Total Calls to Helplines

	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Total Calls to Problem Gambling Helpline	564	1,378	3,050	3,228
Total Gambling Calls to Substance Use Disorder Helpline	37	88	62	52
Total Calls to Helplines	601	1,466	3,112	3,280

Note: Of the 3,280 total calls to the Helplines, 881 were related to a technical issue with a sports betting mobile application or platform, which is categorized as a call to the wrong number.

Total Calls to Problem Gambling Helpline by Month

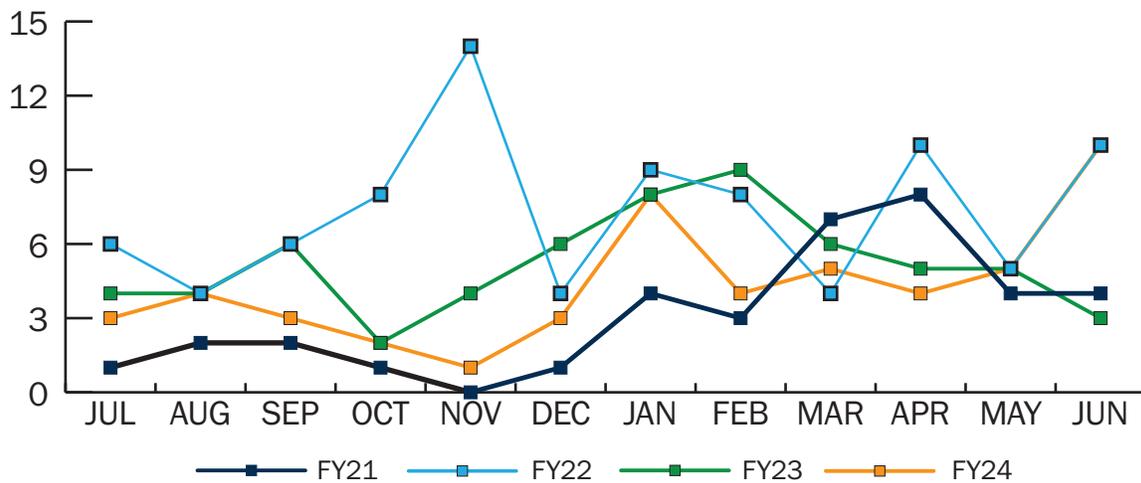
	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	TOTAL
FY21	10	22	23	23	17	20	47	39	87	102	78	96	564
FY22	197	131	68	95	100	97	98	128	118	109	146	91	1,378
FY23	148	181	136	141	127	122	126	228	656	528	391	266	3,050
FY24	246	252	300	304	250	262	297	271	238	290	300	218	3,228



Note: Sports wagering was legalized in Massachusetts in March 2023 and may account for the spike we see during FY23.

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
FY24	3	4	3	2	1	3	8	4	5	4	5	10	52



Caller Type for Referral Calls

	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Calls from an Individual Seeking Help	155	301	380	370
Calls from a Loved One	57	106	148	131
Calls from a Person in Recovery	5	27	89	54
Calls from a Professional*	5	16	16	20
Unknown	0	2	3	5

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

Helpline Website Visits and Chats

	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Total Chats on Problem Gambling Helpline Website	12	128	259	554
Total Chats on Substance Use Disorder Helpline Website for Gambling	7	5	2	8
Website Sessions	14,863	56,455	125,433	153,551
Website Visitors (unique users, non-repeat)	12,823	85,150	110,416	135,792

Text Message Conversations

	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Total Text Message Conversations	N/A	N/A	6	87

*Note: Text message capabilities were launched in FY23.

Section I - Key Outcomes

- Total calls to the helplines regarding gambling increased **5%** from **3,112 (FY23)** to **3,280 (FY24)**.
- In FY24, the greatest volume of calls to the Helpline occurred in **May (300)**, **September (300)**, and **October (304)**, while the greatest volume of calls to the SUD Helpline for gambling occurred in **January (8)** and **June (10)**.
- Similar to previous years, the most common caller type for calls that resulted in referrals was individuals seeking help **(370)**.
- Total chats to the Helpline website more than doubled from **259 (FY23)** to **554 (FY24)** and total chats on the SUD Helpline website for gambling increased from **2 (FY23)** to **8 (FY24)**.

Section II - Calls Resulting in Referral to Service

This section provides additional information on a subset of the 3,280 calls, which resulted in 578 referrals. This is defined as calls resulting in a referral to problem gambling treatment or services. Of the 578 referral calls, 52 were captured via the SUD Helpline. This continues to demonstrate the importance of an integrated approach using the SUD Helpline and Helpline. 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	FY24
Problem Gambling Helpline – Referral Calls	185	364	574	526
Substance Use Disorder Helpline – Referral Calls for Gambling	37	88	62	52
Total Referral Calls for Gambling	222	452	636	578

Note: This data reflects outcomes of the 578 calls that resulted in referrals. These calls represent 18% of the total 3,280 calls received by the Helplines.

Type of Referrals Provided

	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Gambling Self-Help & Recovery Support	74	147	235	221
Outpatient Counseling for Problem Gambling	73	185	362	347
Voluntary Self-Exclusion	2	89	74	97

Referrals Based on Gambling Type

	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Casino	0	45	170	133
Lottery	6	18	89	51
Sports Betting	1	6	73	81
Pari-Mutuel Betting	0	2	11	5
Other Forms of Gambling	166	341	229	224
Non-Specified Types of Gambling	23	55	105	110

Section II - Key Outcomes

- Of the **578** calls that resulted in referrals to services, **52** were captured via the SUD Helpline reinforcing the importance of integrated Helplines.
- In FY24, the most common referral type was for Outpatient Counseling for Problem Gambling.
- Referrals for sports betting increased **11%** from **73 (FY23)** to **81 (FY24)**.

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	FY24
Male	171	321	500	449
Female	51	131	137	128
Transgender Male	0	<5	0	<5
Transgender Female	0	0	0	0

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
FY24	17	140	160	96	83	56	28

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
FY24	554	17	<5	<5	<5	0

Note: Race/Ethnicity was added in FY22. The data are mutually inclusive.

Regions of Helpline

	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
FY24	55	49	98	104	104	108	66

Section III - Key Outcomes

- In FY24, males made up **78%** or **449** of the **578** referral calls; this is consistent with FY23.
- In FY24, individuals ages **20–39** made up **52%** of referral calls; this is a **6%** increase from **46%** in FY23.
- The total number of calls in FY24 increased **9%** in the Southeast when compared to FY23.
- In FY24, Boston made up the highest proportion of referral calls at **21%**, this is a **2%** increase from **19%** in FY23.
- The total number of calls in FY24 increased **9%**. **14%** in the MetroWest from **105** to **120**, **13%** in the Southeast from **95** to **107**, and **6%** in the Boston regions from **108** to **114** when compared to 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 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. Currently, two quantitative measures are used for quality assurance, average wait time and average talk time.



Testimonials

Callers to the Helpline are provided with an opportunity to leave a voice message following completion of a feedback survey. Voice messages include the following:

“

“I just wanted to say that the person I spoke to was compassionate and kind and he made me feel hopeful so thank you.” – HELPLINE CALLER

”

“

“The person I was talking to on the line was very helpful and I appreciate all the information that was given to me and she was very nice.”

– HELPLINE CALLER

”

“

“Yes, it was my first time calling and I was made to feel that I’ve reached the right line, so I appreciate her time and the compassion.

Thank you very much.” – HELPLINE CALLER

”

Section IV - Key Outcomes

- In FY24, callers experienced wait times and calls times similar to the previous year, demonstrating they received the information needed in a timely manner.
- Callers provided testimonials to express their satisfaction with and appreciation for the helpline service and staff.

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://gamblinghelpline.ma.org/>** to speak with a trained Specialist. Specialists are available 24/7 and services are free, confidential, and available in multiple languages.

