

## Mass. Prepares To Confront Gambling Addiction, Ahead Of Encore Casino Opening

Written by Administrator  
Thursday, 20 June 2019 05:23 -

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Israel Rosario worked as a craps dealer at Mohegan Sun for more than a decade. It was a fun job, he said, but concerns about some of the regulars gnawed at him.

"They would just keep digging their own grave, losing more and more," he recalled.

Sometimes, Rosario would talk to players about their gambling habits, "which would get me in trouble with the management, because I'm not supposed to tell them, 'Oh, no, take a break,' or 'Go do something else because you're losing too much.' This program didn't exist back then."

"This program" is called [GameSense](#), run by the nonprofit Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling. Rosario is now a GameSense adviser.

As Massachusetts basks in anticipation of a [\\$98 million](#) tax windfall from Wynn Resorts' Everett casino, which [opens this weekend](#), the state is also preparing for a possible downside: a new temptation for people with gambling addictions.

The state is charging casinos fees to pay for the GameSense program, which was developed in Canada to help gamblers set budgets, understand their odds, and know when to stop. GameSense advisers roam gaming floors, dispensing advice and looking for gamblers who might be headed for trouble.

The presence of advisers who encourage some people to gamble less might seem like the kind of thing that would chafe casino operators, but Encore general counsel Jacqui Krum said that's not the case.

"We're pleased to have the GameSense advisers on the floor," she said. "We want our guests to come and enjoy our facilities — the gaming, the restaurants and our beautiful harborwalk — and to leave feeling like they've had a truly exceptional experience. For those ones that need

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help, we want to make sure that they get the help. Those are not the customers that we want in our building."

In recent days, GameSense's Rosario, who is stationed at MGM Springfield, has been helping train the team of 12 advisers who will work at Encore, starting Sunday.

"They've been shadowing me so they can kind of get the feel of how it is on the floor before they have to go in the Encore casino," he said.

The job isn't to conduct on-the-spot therapy, but it can involve referring gamblers to other programs, like Gamblers Anonymous.

Last week, the council hosted a conference for people recovering from gambling addictions. One of the panelists was a man named Steve H., who described himself as "a happy, grateful, lovable, recovering, compulsive gambler addict."

WBUR agreed not to use Steve's full name because of the stigma often attached to problem gambling.

Steve worries that a new casino in Greater Boston could be an all-too-convenient enticement for people with the potential to develop addictions, who have previously had to drive long distances to access a casino. He wants these people to know that a gambling addiction can have devastating consequences.

"I have a son," Steve said in an interview. "His name is Michael. And I've never met him. 'Cause he was born when I was in prison. And the judge said, 'You would've bet him in a poker game, so I'm taking him away from you.' "

Steve said he was addicted to drugs before he got hooked on gambling. Substance abuse and compulsive gambling is a common combination, according to Mary Hafey, a former social

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worker who is helping train GameSense advisers to staff the new Encore casino.

"The bulk of the training is around mental health issues," she said. "People who have difficulty with gambling, and who potentially can develop a gambling addiction, often have co-occurring disorders."

Researchers from UMass Amherst have [found](#) the vast majority of gamblers can play with no problem, but about 2% gamble compulsively. Another 8% have the potential to develop gambling addictions, their study found.

To help deter problem gambling, GameSense advisers can assist gamblers who want to cut themselves off through a voluntary casino self-exclusion program, "which is when someone says, 'I don't want to be here. I want to be excluded, so I cannot come back here,'" Hafey explained.

In the past three months, 38 people voluntarily banned themselves from Massachusetts casinos, according to the Council on Compulsive Gambling.

The council's executive director, Marlene Warner, said even people with no gambling compulsions can ask GameSense advisers for a little help.

She offered an example: "'Will you come tell me when two hours is up? 'Cause there are no clocks in the casino. I'm not paying attention.' Our GameSense adviser will go by and say, 'Hey, Joe, two hours is up. What do you think? You wanna leave now?' So, they're kind of there to meet them where they're at and provide the services that they need."

GameSense advisers will offer gentle reminders and other guidance at Encore every day from 9 a.m. to 1 a.m.

**Read more** <https://www.wbur.org/bostonmix/2019/06/20/gamesense-wynn-everett>