

## Community Perspectives on Encore Boston Harbor Casino

October 2022

### What Providers Need to Know

This report presents community perspectives on the introduction of the Encore Boston Harbor Casino and how it has affected the day-to-day quality of life in its surrounding communities. Participants expressed concerns about the effects of Encore on health. This included participants who expressed beliefs about negative mental health effects on community members and some who expressed beliefs that Encore has contributed to more problem gambling and gambling-related financial and relationship harms.

Recommendations include reinvesting money into nearby communities, support and resources for people who experience problem gambling, and engaging more actively with community members. Key points for providers are bolded/italicized throughout this snapshot.

### What is this research about?

- Despite overall support, fewer than half of American adults believe that casinos help their local communities.
- **Research shows that communities of color are often disproportionately impacted by gambling. The introduction of casinos might disproportionately increase crime, discrimination, and problem gambling which is characterized by frequent negative consequences and possible loss of control over behavior.**
- It is important that research on the effects of casinos includes the people who live and work in the communities surrounding the casinos.
- This study is about one of the three casinos operating in Massachusetts—Encore Boston Harbor (Encore), which opened in June 2019.
- An estimated 5.6 million people of legal gambling age live within a 90-minute drive of Encore.
- The Massachusetts Gaming Commission (MGC) funded NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC) and the Institute for Community Health (ICH) to engage with community members to design and conduct a research study that captured perspectives on the introduction of Encore and how it has affected the day-to-day quality of life of people in the casino's surrounding communities.

### What did the study team do?

- The study team consisted of NORC, ICH, and a Community Advisory Board of community members living and working around Encore.
- The Community Advisory Board ensured that the community's needs and perspectives were represented throughout the study (e.g., in the study's research design, data collection, analysis, and sharing of findings).
- The study team recruited four community members to serve as interviewers along with one ICH team member.

- These interviewers conducted 47 virtual interviews with community members living in eight communities around Encore.
- Participants had diverse racial and ethnic identities, represented diverse communities, and spoke five different languages: English, Chinese [Mandarin or Cantonese], Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Spanish.
- Half of participants identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/e.
- A majority were women and were between 25 and 54 years of age.
- Almost half of participants had lived in their community for over 10 years.
- The study team analyzed interview transcripts and notes to identify themes, shared sentiments, and differences across participants' perspectives.
- Working with the Community Advisory Board, interviewers, and a subset of participants, the study team interpreted the findings.

### What perspectives did community members have on Encore?

**Participants expressed concerns about the effects of Encore on health.** Participants believed:

- **Encore has negatively affected the mental health of community members, due to increased stress.**
- Encore's atmosphere and environment encourages alcohol consumption.
- **Encore has contributed to more problem gambling.**
- That many community members who would never have gambled only did so because of Encore's proximity.

Additionally, several participants shared personal or anecdotal stories about community members losing friends or familial relationships due to problem gambling.



The findings and recommendations in the Snapshot are those of the study team and do not necessarily reflect the position of the MGC.



As well, some participants suggested that Encore has contributed to personal financial loss, which for some has led to difficulty affording groceries, utilities, and rent.

#### **Participants had mixed views on legalized gambling.**

Some participants shared negative views, some had positive views, and a few participants had neutral views on legalized gambling including both ambivalent and mixed perspectives.

#### **Participants had mixed views on the effects of Encore on the local economy, including employment, housing, and small businesses.** Participants believed:

- Encore created jobs, however several anticipated more job development and have not yet seen it happen.
- Encore has seen job loss and negative financial impacts on employees due to COVID-19.
- That there has been a trend of increasing rent and home prices in Encore’s surrounding communities, but limited growth of affordable housing. Some participants noted this may reflect broader market trends rather than Encore’s impact.
- Encore has crowded out small businesses, however several participants shared that Encore may have helped increase foot traffic to local small businesses.

Many participants who identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/e and/or who had lived in the communities surrounding Encore for more than 10 years often had negative views of the casino’s effects on jobs, including the quality of jobs.

#### **Participants had mixed views on the effects of Encore on various social and environmental factors.** Participants believed:

- Encore has led to more green spaces and better road conditions around the casino but changes to the skyline as well as more construction and traffic.
- Encore has not improved local infrastructure enough beyond the casino.
- Encore has increased local presence of police, ambulances, and criminal activity.
- Encore is a good place to gather, strengthening community relationships, however several shared that Encore and gambling may strain relationships with family and friends.
- ***That ease of access to a nearby casino normalizes gambling behavior for young people.***

#### **Recommendations from community members:**

##### **Reinvest money in nearby communities:**

Several participants believed Encore should fund community programs and the development of more parks and green spaces. They recommended that Encore fund walking bridges and public transportation beyond the casino grounds. Several participants described the need for Encore to develop or invest in community programs for families and youth. Other recommendations included investing in the environment (e.g., clean energy), providing more local job opportunities, and supporting local small businesses and immigrant communities.

## **About the study team**

This research was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago in partnership with the Institute for Community Health and a Community Advisory Board. Jenna T. Sirkin, Petry S. Ubri, Jared Sawyer, Christina Drymon, and Meghan Woo are with NORC. Sofia Ladner, Danielle Chun, and Sarah Jalbert are with ICH. Community Advisory Board members included Diego Nascimento, Hugo Rengifo, James Eliscar, Jessica Thai, Linh Ho, Veronica Monserrat, and Wil Renderos. Community interviewers included Tatiana Antoine, Yanqing Huang, Milla Maia, and Josh Zhu. For more information, contact Jenna Sirkin at [Sirkin-Jenna@norc.org](mailto:Sirkin-Jenna@norc.org).

#### **Support and resources for people who experience problem gambling:**

***Some participants described a need for Encore to bolster efforts at providing educational materials and resources for people who experience or are at risk of gambling-related harms. This could involve sharing pamphlets, posting visible signage, establishing programs that restrict entry to people with a history of problem gambling, and/or providing resources for loved ones of people who experience problem gambling.***

#### **More actively engage with community members:**

A few participants wanted Encore to engage with community members directly, participate in community meetings, and listen to community needs. This would allow Encore to develop programs and opportunities based on those needs.

#### **Conclusion**

It is challenging to disentangle Encore’s impact from broader factors like the COVID-19 public health emergency and rising inflation. However, participants shared specific concerns and perceptions about Encore’s community impact on health, the economy, and social and environmental factors. ***Participants also highlighted concerns about “Encore for whom?” noting Encore’s disproportionate effects on the surrounding communities based on socioeconomic status and cultural background.*** Encore and local governments should recognize these potential impacts and engage with the community for input on their needs and how resources should be allocated.

## **Citation and About This Snapshot**

NORC, ICH, and Community Advisory Board (2022). [Community Perspectives on Encore Boston Harbor Casino](#). Massachusetts: NORC at the University of Chicago; Institute for Community Health; Community Advisory Board.

MGC Snapshots are intended to translate lengthy and sometimes technical reports into an easily understandable overview of the research. This snapshot was tailored for a clinical audience. This snapshot was adapted from the [Research Snapshot](#) prepared by the Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO).

**Published: October 2022**

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

