



PREVENTIONEd

A Global Substance Use Prevention Organization

Same Playbook, New Platform

Gambling, Youth Marketing & the Big Tobacco Parallel

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Prevention Ed's Mission

Empowering students to take an informed approach to substance use and to promote a safe, healthy community by:

- Determining risks
- Promoting protective factors
- Reducing harm



WHY THIS MATTERS

A generation placing its first bet before it's legally allowed to

65%

of U.S. adults report gambling in some form before age 21

33%

of 21–44 year-olds placed a sports bet before turning 21 — vs. 11% of adults 55+

66%

of Americans are concerned about underage exposure to gambling advertising

Source: NCPG / Harris Poll national survey, February 2026

Grounded in prevention frameworks aligned with the National Council on Problem Gambling's priorities — education, policy, and strategy to reduce underage gambling harms.

SESSION OVERVIEW

Learning Objectives

01

Identify regulatory gaps & marketing practices

Recognize the key regulatory gaps and marketing practices associated with increased youth exposure to sports betting and related risks.

02

Apply protective, non-stigmatizing strategies

Learn evidence-informed, non-stigmatizing communication strategies to educate youth and adults while strengthening protective factors against problem gambling harms.

THE LANDSCAPE

The New Gambling Environment

Sports betting no longer lives in a sportsbook — it lives wherever young people already are.



Sports Betting

Legal in 38+ states since the 2018 repeal of PASPA



Gaming & Loot Boxes

Gambling-like mechanics embedded in games youth already play



Influencer Marketing

Creators promote betting apps as everyday entertainment



Livestreaming

Real-time wagering content on Twitch, YouTube, and TikTok



Fantasy Sports

Daily fantasy blurs the line with wagering for younger users

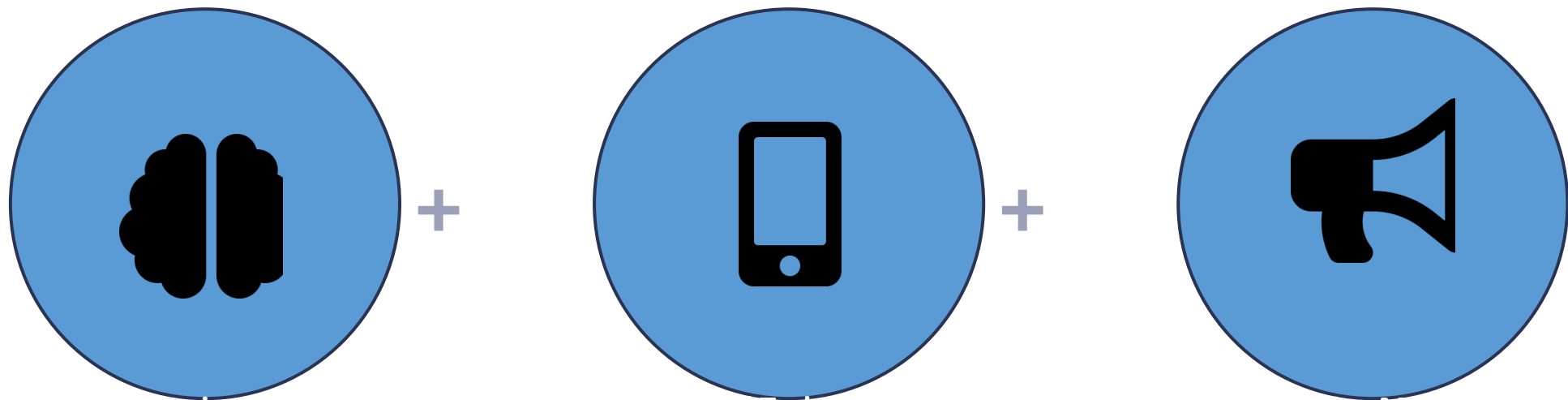


Social Media Feeds

Betting content native to platforms youth use every day



The Perfect Storm



Reward systems mature before impulse control

Always-on access, frictionless deposits

Saturation advertising and inducements

= INCREASED RISK OF EARLY, HARMFUL GAMBLING

Why Adolescents Are Different



Reward Sensitivity

The adolescent brain's reward circuitry is highly responsive to wins, near-misses, and novelty — exactly what betting products are engineered to deliver.



Impulse Control

The prefrontal cortex, which governs planning and self-regulation, continues developing into a person's mid-twenties, lagging behind reward sensitivity.



Identity Development

Adolescence is a critical period for identity formation, making status-, belonging-, and masculinity-based marketing appeals especially persuasive.

Gambling Is an Engineered Experience

Modern betting apps are built on the same behavioral-design principles as slot machines — delivered through a phone.



Variable Rewards

Unpredictable win timing keeps engagement high, mirroring slot-machine reinforcement schedules



Near-Misses

“Almost won” outcomes (a parlay decided by one leg) drive continued play



Micro-Betting

In-play and player-prop markets create constant, low-stakes betting opportunities



Dopamine Reinforcement

Rapid win/loss cycles condition compulsive, habitual checking and betting

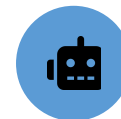
Parlay betting nearly doubled from 17% to 30% of sports bettors between 2018 and 2024 — a marker of escalating, loss-chasing play.

Silicon Valley Meets Las Vegas

Betting apps have adopted the same growth and engagement playbook as social media and gaming platforms — now aimed at keeping users betting.

“Responsible gambling” tools sit inside the same interface designed to maximize time-on-app and spend.

The tension: engagement-optimized design and harm-reduction features are built by the same product teams, for the same platform.



AI-Driven Personalization

Machine learning tailors odds, promotions, and content to individual behavior patterns



Push Notifications

Real-time alerts re-engage lapsed users at moments of vulnerability



Behavioral Data Profiles

Deposit history, session length, and bet type build predictive engagement models

HISTORICAL PARALLEL

The Big Tobacco Playbook

Two industries, a half-century apart, selling risk to young people using the same core tactics.

TACTIC	TOBACCO INDUSTRY	GAMBLING INDUSTRY
Sponsor sports & culture	Stadium ads, athlete endorsements, team sponsorships	Jersey patches, broadcast integration, league partnerships
Sell identity, not the product	Glamour, adventure, rugged masculinity	Status, insider knowledge, competitive edge
Target young men specifically	“Young adult male smokers” as a defined market segment	Sports fandom + masculinity-coded ad creative
Exploit ad-ban loopholes	Sponsorship after direct-advertising bans	Unregulated platforms (social, influencers, prediction markets)
Normalize through saturation	Product placement in film & TV	Embedded in every broadcast, feed, and score alert

IDENTITY-BASED APPEALS

Identity Marketing

Researchers describe this as “symbolic consumption” — marketing that sells social identity, not just a wager.



Masculinity

Ad creative links betting confidence and risk-taking to being “a real fan” or “in the know”



Sports Identity

Betting reframed as the ultimate expression of fandom and sports knowledge



Influencer Culture

Creators model betting as a normal, exciting part of watching sports with friends



Belonging

Group betting pools and shared promo codes turn wagering into a social activity

It's Not About Gambling.

Gambling companies sell identity, excitement, and status — the bet is just the transaction that delivers it.

Excitement

Status

Belonging

Confidence

Control

For prevention messaging, this means the counter-message can't just be “the odds are against you.” It has to address the identity need the marketing is exploiting.

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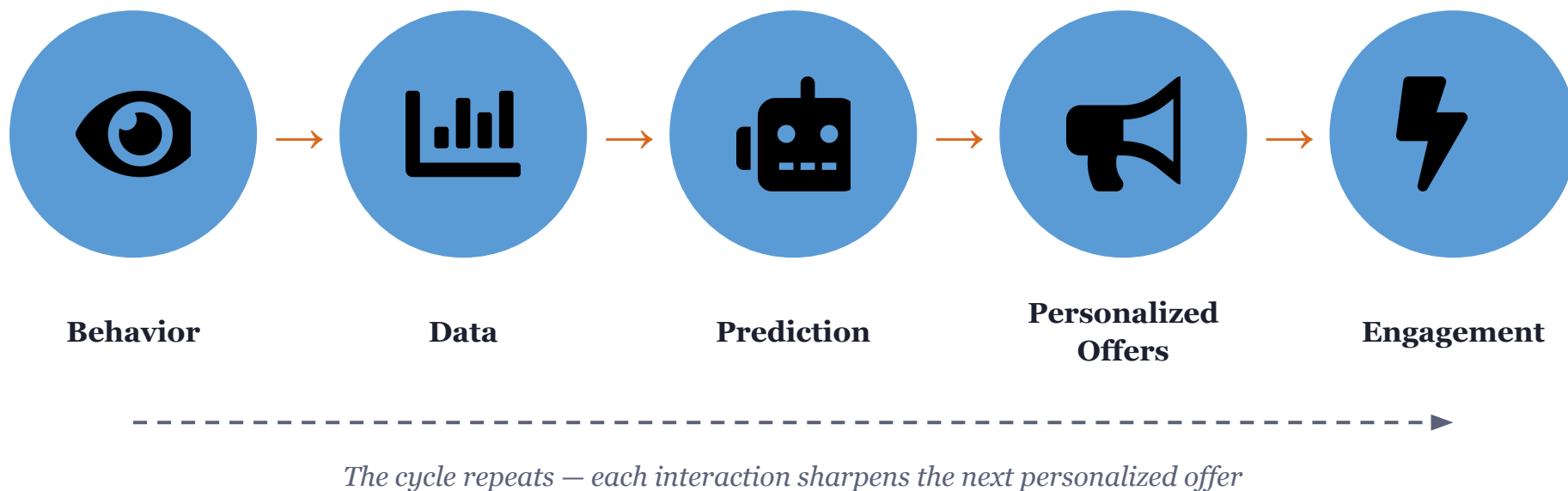
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How Algorithms Keep People Playing



Research finding: susceptibility to betting inducements is the strongest predictor of problem-gambling severity among young bettors.

WHERE EXPOSURE HAPPENS

Youth Exposure

Betting content reaches minors through channels with no age gate at the point of exposure.



Gaming & Loot Boxes



Livestreams



TikTok & Social Feeds



Podcasts



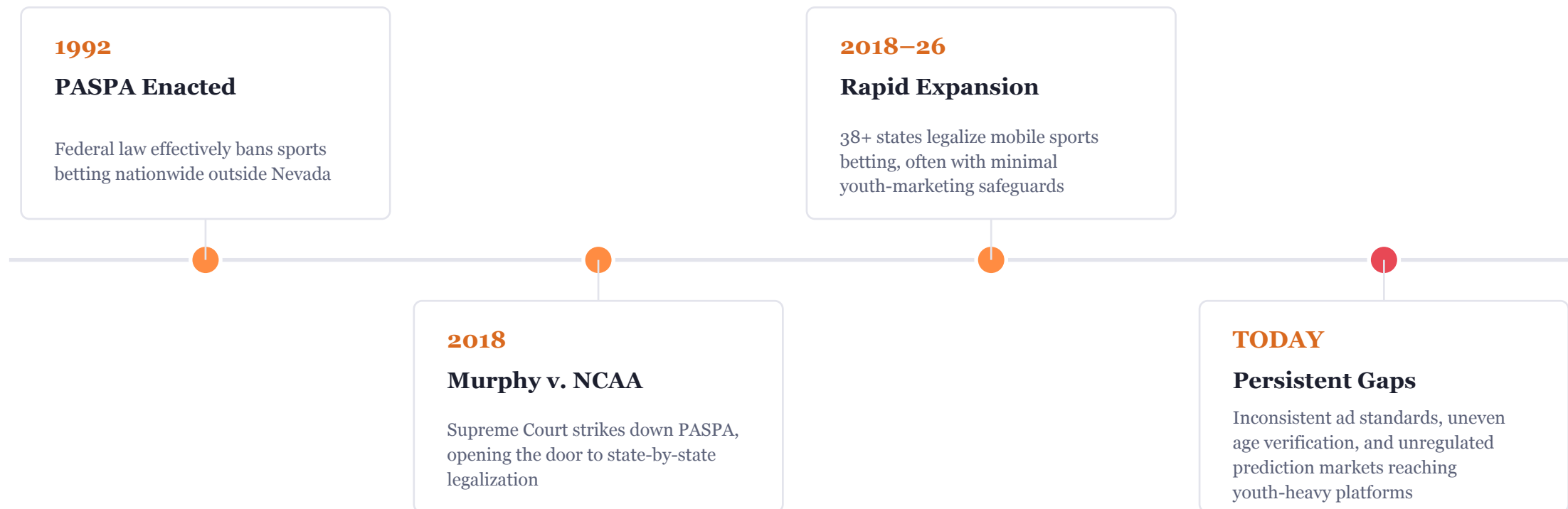
Sports Broadcasts



Fantasy Sports Apps



Regulatory Gaps



What Tobacco Taught Us

The 1998 Master Settlement Agreement offers a tested playbook for reducing youth-targeted marketing.



Advertising Restrictions

Banned cartoon mascots, billboard ads near schools, and youth-targeted media placements



School-Based Education

Funded sustained, curriculum-based prevention education for adolescents



Policy Accountability

Directed industry settlement funds toward public health and counter-marketing



Counter-Marketing

The Truth campaign used industry tactics against itself — exposing manipulation rather than moralizing

Prevention Framework

A coordinated public health strategy — no single lever closes the gap alone.



Education

Media & financial literacy for youth and families



Policy

Advertising standards & age verification



Treatment

Accessible, stigma-free clinical care



Responsible Gambling

Operator-level safeguards and limits



Research

Longitudinal data on youth risk & harm



Recovery

Sustained peer and community support



WHAT WORKS

Evidence-Based Prevention



Media Literacy

Teach youth to decode marketing tactics — inducements, near-miss framing, identity appeals — so they recognize persuasion in real time.



Financial Literacy

Build concrete understanding of odds, house edge, and loss-chasing to counter the “skill narrative” betting apps promote.



Protective Factors

Strengthen family communication, school connectedness, and healthy coping skills that buffer against early risky gambling.



Resilience Building

Curricula that is research-based and up-to-date with technological advances that build decision-making skills applicable beyond gambling alone.



Talking With Youth

Person-first, non-stigmatizing language keeps young people receptive instead of defensive.

INSTEAD OF

- ✗ “Addicts” or “gambling junkies”
- ✗ Scare tactics & shame-based warnings
- ✗ Framing all betting as moral failure
- ✗ Assuming only “troubled” kids are at risk

TRY

- ✓ “Person experiencing gambling harm”
- ✓ Curiosity-driven, fact-based conversation
- ✓ Naming marketing tactics, not judging choices
- ✓ Recognizing risk applies broadly — not just to “troubled” youth

Policy Opportunities



Advertising Standards

Restrict inducement language, in-broadcast betting content, and youth-reachable platform ad placements



Age Verification

Require robust, consistent verification at account creation and deposit — not self-attestation



School-Based Prevention

Fund curricula that is up-to-date with research informed strategies like Stacked Deck as standard health education, not optional add-ons



Dedicated Revenue

Direct a share of sports-betting tax revenue to prevention, treatment, and research

Three Ways to Act, Starting Today



Reduce Exposure

Advocate for advertising standards that keep betting marketing out of youth-heavy media and platforms.



Strengthen Environments

Bring media-literacy and prevention curricula into schools, sports programs, and community spaces.



Build Protective Factors

Equip families and educators with non-stigmatizing tools to talk with youth before risk becomes harm.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Marketing has changed.

Brains haven't.

Prevention works.

Gambling marketing has adopted a well-documented industry playbook — and adolescent development hasn't changed to keep pace. Evidence-based, non-stigmatizing prevention is the lever we know works.

Thank You

Questions & Discussion



PreventionEd Blog



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National Problem Gambling Helpline

Call or text 1-800-MY-RESET • 180omyreset.org • Free & confidential, 24/7