



Credit: Youth Guidance

Investing in Evidence-Based Alternatives to Policing: Community Violence Intervention

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Gun violence is rising in communities that have experienced decades of disinvestment and systemic racism. But more policing isn't the answer. Community Violence Interventions effectively reduce gun violence while saving cities millions.

The human toll of gun violence is tragic. It's also, at its heart, a racial justice and public health issue. Gun violence is the leading cause of death for Black men ages 15–34, and the homicide rate for young Black men is nearly 20 times the national average.¹ Latinx men are more than twice as likely as white men to be fatally shot.² Gun violence spreads socially like an epidemic, and its costs spiral out into communities, costing the United States an estimated \$229 billion every year.³ Each homicide costs an estimated \$4 million to \$17 million in cascading fiscal consequences like medical and insurance bills, lost income, and depressed property values.⁴

To address gun violence, we must focus on supporting the small number of people who are at the highest risk of involvement through behavior change, healing, and services to meet their basic needs and those of their loved ones.⁵ Community Violence Interventions (CVI) do just this—and are cost-effective and evidence-based strategies for change.

CVI programs that engage those at highest risk of gun violence and narrow the role of police show promising results and save money

CVIs are highly individualized and targeted violence reduction strategies that recognize how relationships, social norms, and peer networks influence behavior. They use outreach, direct communication, and supportive relationships to engage those at greatest risk of gun violence. These relationship-based outreach models can take multiple forms.

1 Public health-centered approaches like Cure Violence or Advance Peace interrupt further violence, reduce risk, and change norms, providing transformational opportunities to young men involved in lethal firearm offenses.⁶ They employ violence interrupters or neighborhood change associates who have credibility in the communities where they intervene and reach out to those involved in violence. Neighborhoods in cities including Baltimore, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia that have adopted the Cure Violence model have seen shootings and killings decrease by more than 30 percent.⁷ For every dollar invested in Cure Violence, cities can save up to \$18 in reduced medical and criminal legal system costs.⁸

2 Hospital-Based Violence Interruption Programs (HVIP) use gun violence as a window of opportunity to reach the survivors of violent injuries and connect them directly with case managers and social services. HVIPs take a trauma-informed approach, recognizing that the psychological toll of surviving a violent injury, combined with histories of trauma, can lead to substance use or further violence and must be addressed so people can recover. One cost-benefit analysis found that every dollar invested in an HVIP program returned between \$10.07 and \$15.11 worth of benefits through reduced hospitalizations, reinjury, and convictions.⁹

3 Group Violence Intervention is a data-driven approach that requires a partnership among community leaders, social service providers, and law enforcement. With community input, law enforcement identifies those at highest risk of violence, and the intervention partners talk to them respectfully about harm reduction and consequences for continued violent behavior while also providing social service supports. This strategy can reduce gun violence while increasing police accountability and building trust between police and communities disproportionately harmed by the criminal legal system.¹⁰ Cities that have invested in this strategy, including Boston, Chicago, Indianapolis, New Orleans, and Oakland and Stockton, California, have experienced declines of more than 30 percent in shootings that result in injuries.¹¹

4 Integrating Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) into violence prevention programs that offer connection to services shows great promise. Multiple randomized control trials of CBT programs in Chicago found that Youth Guidance's Becoming A Man program and a program run by Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center reduced violence-related arrest rates among young adults by 45 to 50 percent. The studies also found that for every dollar spent, there were \$5 to \$30 in benefits, including increased school enrollment and reduced criminal justice system costs.¹² Sacramento's Advance Peace program combines CBT with a healing-based and trauma-informed approach to intensive mentoring, life coaching, and street outreach. The two-year cost of the program was \$1,384,836, while Sacramento has spent approximately \$290 million on police in the past two years.¹³ By reducing homicides and nonfatal injury shootings by 20 percent, for every dollar spent on Advance Peace, Sacramento saved between \$18 and \$41 across emergency response, health care, and law enforcement, as well as other parts of the criminal legal system.¹⁴ Past investments in gun violence prevention and intervention also demonstrate the importance of expanding these programs. In 2018, the United States spent \$364 per capita on policing.¹⁵ Where localities have invested in community-based solutions to crime—like violence interruption and prevention—even an investment of \$1–\$2 per capita has led to a decline of 16 percent to 35 percent in gun violence in states including Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York.¹⁶ These declines occurred from 2010 to 2015, even as the national gun homicide rate rose by 14 percent.¹⁷



71%

There is broad public support for community-based violence prevention services: 71 percent of voters believe that community-led violence prevention and interruption strategies can be an effective method to reduce gun violence and may be more cost-effective than increased policing.¹⁸

Recommendations

- **Jurisdictions should create offices of violence prevention or neighborhood safety**, independent city agencies staffed by civilians who coordinate gun violence prevention efforts citywide and democratize public safety decision-making by allowing community members to set budgetary priorities and program goals.¹⁹
- **States should create gun violence intervention and prevention grantmaking programs, as states like California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia have**, to fund evidence-based approaches to prevent violence at the local level and encourage innovation to fit the needs of different jurisdictions.²⁰ But funding must be permanent and sustainable. In Maryland, for example, the Violence Intervention and Prevention Program has received state funding in only one out of three fiscal years since its creation. In May 2021, California added \$200 million in one-time general fund dollars to the \$9 million baseline funding for its Violence Intervention and Prevention (CalVIP) Grant Program, but this decision was discretionary rather than permanent.²¹ This funding variability underscores the need for strong legislative commitments. Illinois, for example, earmarked revenue from cannabis sales to fund these efforts.²²
- **The federal government and foundations can support research action centers, technical assistance providers, and multi-partner coalitions that work with communities on community violence intervention efforts.** The American Jobs Plan includes a proposed \$5 billion investment in grant funding for local violence prevention efforts, and the Biden administration plans to revive funding for gun violence research through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.²³ The U.S. Department of Justice is also expanding grant funding for local community violence intervention.²⁴

Changing the physical environment of cities can also decrease violence

Developing community-level, place-based strategies to improve the design of physical environments, including **CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) methods** like greening vacant lots and improving street lighting, can reduce violence and improve community well-being. One study of street lighting estimated that it saved communities \$770,000 per year.^o

^o Aaron Chaffin, Benjamin Hansen, Jason Lerner et al., *Reducing Crime Through Environmental Design: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment of Street Lighting in New York City* (New York: Crime Lab New York, 2019), 21, <https://perma.cc/F7BA-KL95>.

Endnotes

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For more information

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