

FACT SHEET

Public Health Contributions to Preventing Violence



We know how to prevent violence before it occurs. There is a strong and growing evidence base, grounded in research and practitioner and community wisdom, that prevention works. Investments in preventing violence pay off, and reducing violence is an effective way to stimulate economic development in communities. The public health field complements criminal justice approaches and brings an important perspective to addressing the problem of violence that affects young people. This fact sheet summarizes important contributions made by the public health field.

A public health approach to preventing violence:

- **Researches and implements effective models.** The public health-based CeaseFire Chicago model has reduced shootings and killings by 41 to 73 percent, dropped retaliation murders by 100 percent, and promotes norms change in communities.(1) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funded a study of Baltimore's Safe Streets program, which showed that the program not only reduced overall gun violence, but also reduced non-fatal shootings by up to 44 percent and homicides by up to 56 percent.(2) Research from the CDC demonstrates that schools can reduce violence by 15 percent in as little as six months through universal school-based violence prevention efforts.(3) Public health research has documented a 44-percent reduction in overall crime, including an 18-percent reduction in violent crimes, in neighborhoods that created Business Improvement Districts.(4)
- **Reduces juvenile crime and homicides.** Minneapolis documented a 40-percent drop in juvenile crime in its most violent neighborhoods in just two years after implementing its four-point, public health-based approach.(5) Homicides of youth decreased by 77 percent between 2006 and 2009 and the decline in juvenile crime was accompanied by a decline in arrest rates.(6) The number of youth suspects has dropped by 60 percent from 2006 to 2010, and the number of youth arrested for violent crime for 2011 is down by one-third of what it was four years ago.(7)
- **Promotes return on investment.** The Nurse Family Partnership trains public health nurses to make regular home visits to low-income, first-time mothers. Children who did not participate were up to twice as likely to be arrested by age 15, compared to children involved in the program, and a RAND study demonstrated that the program saves at least \$4 for every \$1 spent.(8,9) The Triple P Parenting program has demonstrated a \$47 benefit to society for every \$1 invested in the program.(10)

MAKING THE CASE

- **Ensures that prevention is part of the solution.** A UNITY assessment of one-third of the largest U.S. cities found that prevention was the most overlooked strategy for cities addressing violence.(11) A five-year evaluation in 2010 demonstrated that UNITY shapes the approach that cities are taking to violence and increases their focus on prevention.(12)
- **Provides data to inform action.** The CDC's surveillance systems provide invaluable information to help law enforcement, policymakers and practitioners direct funding and other assets where resources will have the greatest impact.
- **Engages community in transformational solutions.** The Boston Public Health Commission employs neighborhood residents to organize, lead and implement community-based solutions that prevent violence.(13) In the Sobrante Park neighborhood of Oakland, California, the public health department helped design initiatives to strengthen community, such as bartering among neighbors and youth economic development programs.(14) Evaluation data from 2007 shows that violent crime in Sobrante Park has dropped by more than 40 percent since the initiative began in 2004, even as overall rates of violent crime in Oakland increased. Communities That Care has demonstrated reductions in rates of violence and its risk factors through a public health approach emphasizing a coalition-based system.(15)
- **Identifies what contributes to violence in the first place.** Public health research and analyses clarify the factors that increase the risk of violence

and those that are protective against it. This research uncovers information that enables communities to put effective, money- and life-saving strategies in place.

- **Reduces the frequency and severity of other health issues.** Public health approaches to youth violence help us understand the connections between violence and the development of chronic disease. Early exposure to trauma is a risk factor for chronic disease later in life, and violence and fear of violence in the community are barriers to healthy eating and active living.(16, 17) UNITY has informed efforts to address violence as it relates to chronic illness, which make up the most costly and fastest growing portion of health care costs for individuals, business and government. A community coalition in Detroit, for example, is planning a transportation system for residents that simultaneously promotes safety and community reinvestment, increases access to safe places to play and healthy food, and creates job training and employment opportunities.

What Does This All Mean?

Violence is a terrible burden on young people, families, neighborhoods and taxpayers, and cities need help achieving sustainable results. Public health tools, methodology and expertise support communities in preventing violence before it occurs. These contributions underscore the added value that the public health field brings to balanced approaches that address violence.

TO LEARN MORE

- Visit the UNITY homepage: www.preventioninstitute.org/unity. Access strategies, tools and resources at the Prevention Institute website's Preventing Violence & Reducing Injury focus area: www.preventioninstitute.org/focus-area/preventing-violence-and-reducing-injury
- Read other publications in the Making the Case publication series: www.preventioninstitute.org/unity-making-the-case
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website on Violence Prevention: www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention

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Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth (UNITY) builds support for effective, sustainable efforts to prevent violence before it occurs, so that urban youth can thrive in safe environments with ample opportunities and supportive relationships. A Prevention Institute initiative, UNITY is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as part of the CDC’s national youth violence prevention initiative, Striving to Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere (STRYVE), and in part by The Kresge Foundation and The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF). Created in 1992 as an independent, private foundation, TCWF’s mission is to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness, education, and disease prevention programs.

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