Safety in All Policies

A Brief on Engaging the Housing and Community Development Sector in Preventing Violence in California

Prevention Institute is a nonprofit, national center dedicated to improving community health and wellbeing by building momentum for effective primary prevention. Primary prevention means taking action to build resilience and to prevent problems before they occur. The Institute's work is characterized by a strong commitment to community participation and promotion of equitable health outcomes among all social and economic groups. Since its founding in 1997, the organization has focused on community prevention, injury and violence prevention, health equity, healthy eating and active living, positive youth development, health system transformation and mental health and wellbeing.

Authors:
Lisa Fujie Parks
Rachel Davis

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SUMMARY

Violence is preventable. Multiple sectors – including early childhood development, education, business, transportation, and more – have a role in addressing the underlying contributors to violence to prevent it from occurring in the first place. The State's crime rate has in fact decreased, in large measure due to interventions across multiple sectors. The housing and community development sector can play an important role in preventing violence in California.[1] A window of opportunity is opening for this sector to perform an even more significant role in creating safer communities while improving housing and community development outcomes – through *Safety in All Policies*, a multi-sector approach.

The notion of *Safety in All Policies* (SiAP) comes from *Health in All Policies* (HiAP), a collaborative, multi-sector policymaking approach gaining national momentum.[1] By Executive Order of the Governor in 2010, California established a Health in All Policies Task Force in 2010 to bring together 22 state agencies, departments, and offices to work together to support a healthier and more sustainable California. Growing momentum notwithstanding, the term – HiAP or SiAP – can be misleading, as it can imply a focus on policy only. Indeed, considerations for health and safety can be embedded in policies as well as in organizational practices and in broader decision-making. The term also doesn't explicitly emphasize that a multi-sector approach fosters win-wins that prevent violence while advancing sector outcomes. For example, since violence impacts school attendance and educational outcomes, the education sector has a vested interest in further reducing its occurrence.

This brief focuses on the housing and community development sector and recommends the following seven actions for implementation at the local level:

1. Promote housing and community design strategies that reduce crime and violence and support mental and social well-being;

2. Reduce alcohol density and youth access to alcohol through the use of the law of Public Convenience or Necessity and other strategies;

3. Engage community residents, especially young people, through input, dialogue and participation to incorporate safety considerations in neighborhood improvement efforts;

4. Promote stable and affordable housing with linkages to supportive services for people returning from incarceration as a pathway for stable education and employment and reduced risk for recidivism;

5. Promote partnerships with the business sector to expand education and employment opportunities for youth and formerly incarcerated individuals;

6. Promote banking opportunities and alternatives to payday lending for people who face barriers to opening and maintaining a bank account; and,

7. Recommend changes to licensing and training of professionals to engage professionals in preventing violence.

This brief makes the case for these recommendations and suggests actions that could be taken by the California Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency and some of the Departments it oversees, and the California State Legislature, in support of local efforts.[2]

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1 For complete guidance on the roles and contributions of multiple sectors and maximizing multi-sector collaboration to prevent violence, see Prevention Institute's *Multi-Sector Partnerships for Preventing Violence: A Guide for Using Collaboration Multiplier to Improve Safety Outcomes for Young People, Communities and Cities.* For a closer look at the role of housing and community development sector and other sectors, based on Prevention Institute's Collaboration Multiplier tool, see *Part 3: Roles and Contributions of Sectors, Agencies and Departments*.

2 For a more detailed discussion of the roles of a variety of State governmental entities in California, see Prevention Institute's *Safety in All Policies: A Brief to Advance Multi-Sector Actions for a Safer California.*

Violence is prevented through the activities of multiple sectors.[3] Through their policies and practices, mental health, education, business, transportation, planning and others influence risk and resilience factors for violence.[4] These sectors and others are positioned to contribute to a safer California through building safety considerations more prominently into their policies and practices. Violence also impacts the outcomes of multiple sectors, and as such, these sectors also have an inherent interest in reducing its occurrence. A window of opportunity is opening for the housing and community development sector to prevent violence while advancing its own outcomes – through *Safety in All Policies*, a multi-sector approach to fostering safer communities in California.

The notion of *Safety in All Policies* (SiAP) comes from *Health in All Policies* (HiAP), a collaborative, multi-sector policymaking approach gaining national momentum.[2] HiAP is a strategy to include health considerations across different sectors that influence health, such as transportation, agriculture, land use, housing, public safety, and education. HiAP was first used in 2006, with the aim of collaborating across sectors to achieve common goals, which can enhance outcomes. For example, a national assessment of large cities and violence prevention found that communities with more coordination and communication across multiple sectors have lower violence rates.[3]

In 2010, by Executive Order of the Governor, a Health in All Policies Task Force was created in California to bring together 22 state agencies, departments, and offices to work together to support a healthier and more sustainable California.[4] Growing momentum notwithstanding, the term – HiAP or SiAP – can be misleading as it can imply a focus on policy only. In fact, considerations for health and safety can be embedded in policies, as well as in organizational practices, and in broader decision-making. The term also doesn't explicitly acknowledge the win-win nature of such an approach. For example, safe communities promote stable housing and community investment.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

Almost every sector can contribute to the reduction of violence. The housing and community development sector has abundant opportunities to prevent violence by fostering safe environments and norms in communities across California. In order to understand the valuable roles the housing and community development sectors can play in preventing violence, it's first important to understand the connections between violence and the housing community development sector.

The housing and community development sector works to preserve and expand safe and affordable housing opportunities, ensure there is adequate affordable housing to meet future workforce needs, and promote strong communities. The housing and community development sector has a vested interest in safety: violence decreases residential stability, can contribute to homelessness, and deters community investment. The housing and community development sector enhances resilience factors and reduces risk factors associated with violence, in particular by promoting community stability and well-being, which enhances feelings of safety and reduces conflict.[5] [6] Stable, secure housing promotes mental well-being and feelings of safety and control,[7] while sub-standard housing can increase the risk of community violence. Residential instability is associated with emotional and behavioral problems among children,[8] and gang violence and other forms of street violence often spill over into public housing.

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3 For complete guidance on the roles and contributions of multiple sectors and maximizing multi-sector collaboration to prevent violence, see Prevention Institute's *Multi-Sector Partnerships for Preventing Violence: A Guide for Using Collaboration Multiplier to Improve Safety Outcomes for Young People, Communities and Cities.*

4 Risk factors are conditions or characteristics in individuals, families, communities and society that increase the likelihood that violence will occur. Resilience factors are conditions or characteristics in individuals, families, communities and society that are protective, thus reducing the likelihood that violence will occur, even in the presence of risk factors.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The following seven actions are recommended for implementation at the local level, particularly in neighborhoods and communities highly impacted by violence. Most of the recommendations bring together the housing and community development sector with at least one additional sector to achieve greater impact. This is important because beyond individual sector contributions, it's also critical that the contributions of multiple sectors be coordinated; communities with more coordination and communication across multiple sectors also have lower violence rates.[9] For most recommendations, suggestions are offered for how state entities can support local efforts.

1. **Promote housing and community design strategies that reduce crime and violence and support mental and social well-being.**

    The design of physical spaces in communities, including housing, open space and green space, can help lower rates of violence. For example, residents of buildings with access to green space report a stronger sense of community, better relationships with neighbors, decreased rates of depression, and less violence related to domestic disputes.[10] Local communities can engage multiple sectors, including the planning department, to implement housing and community design strategies such as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). Through maximizing the visibility of a space, promoting social interactions, and creating a sense of belonging within a space through parklets, seating, etc., design strategies can promote clarity around what is acceptable behavior in particular areas and encourage people to be active bystanders to potentially dangerous behavior.

    While the housing and community development sector typically does not directly address the aesthetic aspects of design, it interfaces with sectors such as planning, and can encourage design decisions that increase social interactions, decrease violence, and promote safety. BCHSA could provide guidance to local communities on housing and community design approaches to reduce violence.

2. **Reduce alcohol density and youth access to alcohol through the use of the law of Public Convenience or Necessity and other strategies.**
High neighborhood alcohol outlet density and youth access to alcohol are significant risk factors for violence. For example, neighborhoods with a higher density of bars and alcohol outlets, such as convenience and liquor stores, have higher rates of physical abuse.[11] [12]

Local communities can engage multiple sectors, including planning and zoning and the business sector, to employ multiple strategies to reduce neighborhood alcohol density, including through the use of the law of Public Convenience or Necessity. California's law of Public Convenience or Necessity gives local governments the exclusive opportunity to determine whether certain types of licenses, including licenses for selling alcoholic beverages in certain areas serve the public benefit. BCSHA could work with the Department of Alcohol and Beverage Control to support local use of the law of Public Convenience or Necessity by providing information and tips to communities on the utility of the law to reduce neighborhood alcohol density.

3. **Engage community residents, especially young people through input, dialogue and participation to incorporate safety considerations in neighborhood improvement efforts.**
A broad body of research indicates that meaningful participation is protective against violence and can counteract the impact of risk factors.[13] This is especially the case for engagement of young people. Youth engagement reduces the likelihood of violence and delinquency, while promoting community membership and the development of positive youth competencies and emotional well-being.[14] [15] Resident engagement can help to ensure that community redevelopment and neighborhood revitalization efforts address community safety concerns, and are carried out in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner.

The housing and community development sector can engage neighborhood residents in decisions about community redevelopment and neighborhood revitalization efforts, and encourage other sectors to do the same. For example, Parks and Recreation Departments can promote opportunities for meaningful participation in a variety of neighborhood activities. BCSHA could provide guidance to encourage effective community engagement, including best practices for youth engagement, and the Housing and Community Development Department could incentivize community engagement in their grant programs through awarding points for proposals that include evidence-informed resident and youth engagement practices. The California State Legislature could develop mandates and incentives for resident engagement and participation in community redevelopment and neighborhood revitalization projects.

4. **Promote stable and affordable housing with linkages to supportive services for people returning from incarceration as a pathway for stable education and employment and reduced risk for recidivism.**
Without appropriate supports, people returning from incarceration are at a higher risk for recidivism, including violence and other crime. Stable and affordable housing is important in its own right, and can also be the foundation for successful re-entry and reintegration, as well as a pathway for other opportunities, such as stable education, job training and employment.[16] Supportive services for individuals returning from incarceration, especially young people, can help further reduce risk for recidivism by enhancing outcomes related to family reunification, social support, and physical and mental health. These services can be established onsite or nearby through partnerships with the health and human services and education sectors. Yet, there are policies that bar people from public housing options, such as Section 8 vouchers.

Local communities could prioritize mixed-income housing that includes allocations for formerly incarcerated people and request waivers from the State and federal government to reduce barriers to housing for formerly

incarcerated people. BCSHA could partner with the Health and Human Services Agency to develop and disseminate a best practices guide for housing for formerly incarcerated individuals. Building off of California's Proposition 41, the California Veterans Housing and Homeless Prevention Bond Act that created bonds to provide multifamily housing to low-income veterans and supportive housing for homeless veterans, the California State Legislature could create a mechanism to develop housing for formerly incarcerated people, with a goal of promoting community safety.

5. **Promote partnerships with the business sector to expand education and employment opportunities for youth and formerly incarcerated individuals.**
Diminished economic opportunities and high unemployment rates are significant risk factors for violence, particularly in areas with high concentrations of disadvantage. Economic opportunity, on the other hand, protects against violence.[17]

The housing and community development sector can engage multiple sectors, including the education and economic sectors, to promote education programs, job training, employment programs, and other practices to support education and employment, especially of youth and formerly incarcerated individuals. A network of businesses, community organizations, and city and county agencies can develop employment programs for youth and formerly incarcerated people that support business needs and provide the scaffolding for successful employment. BCSHA could develop materials that help businesses understand the role that they can play and how to address challenges that may occur in implementing programs. The California State Legislature could create incentives for employment of youth and formerly incarcerated individuals in housing and community development efforts.

6. **Promote banking opportunities and alternatives to payday lending for people who face barriers to opening and maintaining a bank account.**
Many people from marginalized communities, including people without documented immigration status, young people, and others, face barriers to opening and maintaining a bank account. Conventional lenders such as commercial banks and savings institutions are concentrated in outlying urban and suburban areas, while fringe bankers such as check-cashers and payday lenders are more highly concentrated in central-city neighborhoods.[18] This has significance for a number of reasons, including the fact that many people don't have a safe place to keep their wages and this can make them a target for violence. Further, check cashing services are far more costly than services offered at a bank. Local communities can share the stories of the challenges of having a high density of check cashing services and payday lenders to better inform policy development in this area. California's Legislature can identify options for state controlled banks to better support communities, and explore other alternatives to payday lending services that minimize unintended consequences of restricting payday lending, such as driving an underground market and economy.

7. **Recommend changes to licensing and training of professionals to engage professionals in preventing violence.**
There are a number of professions in California that are positioned in their roles to be able to influence risk and resilience factors related to violence. For example, barbers and cosmetologists interact with large numbers of community members and can be a natural conduit for sharing of resources and referrals and strategies for health and safety. Therapists can support recovery from trauma and teach skills to reduce conflict in relationships and families.

As communities undertake efforts to prevent violence and promote safety, numerous professionals can be engaged in the implementation of multiple strategies. BCSHA and the Department of Consumer Affairs can identify key professions across the state that can have a role in the prevention of violence and can partner with the California State Legislature to identify recommendations for any appropriate changes in professional training and licensing processes to support a safer California.

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ENDNOTES

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