

*Shifting the Focus:
An Interdisciplinary Approach to Advancing
Violence Prevention in California*

**From the Margins to the Middle
A Violence Prevention Strategy to Achieve
Safe, Healthy, Sustainable Communities in California**

Prepared by Rachel Davis and Larry Cohen
Prevention Institute
Oakland, California
June 2001

Shifting the Focus: From the Margins to the Middle Executive Summary

Crime is not prevented and children are not nurtured at the state level... The State's role is to support community-based efforts helping children and families who are at risk of inflicting harm or being harmed.

Michael Alpert, Chairman
Little Hoover Commission

Violence affects every community in California. Locally-owned violence prevention efforts are having success in reducing the threat and prevalence of violence. The State must work intentionally to support them, as well as to expand this success to every community in California. Numerous state programs and staff are dedicated to this goal. Yet too often the programs and efforts at the state level are fragmented, creating barriers for local efforts. This is not surprising. Given the size of California — a length equal to much of the Eastern Seaboard, a population representing 10% of the United States, and the 5th largest economy in the world — it is natural that government departments with somewhat different intents would not always be aware of one another's activities.

There are efforts within State government to address this fragmentation and *Shifting the Focus*, a voluntary partnership among State departments and agencies, was established to do just that. Nevertheless, strategic coordination and collaboration happens too often around the margins — small or short-term programs, ad hoc in nature or voluntary — instead of 'in the middle.' California's violence prevention efforts are often too uncoordinated to maximize effectiveness and require a system purposively designed to manage the collaboration process. This document lays out a strategy for *Shifting the Focus* to get to the 'middle' to more effectively support local efforts and provide needed leadership on the *prevention* of violence.

Shifting the Focus is a state partnership designed to coordinate interagency violence prevention efforts. The group's membership, leaders from more than 30 departments, recognizes that effective violence prevention requires a new way of doing business. This new way of operation will ensure that California communities are well-served through practice at the state level that supports success at the local level and promotes the vision of safe, healthy, sustainable communities in California supported by effective state and local collaboration.

History

Since its initial retreat in 1997 and the subsequent development of an interdisciplinary framework for advancing violence prevention, *Shifting the Focus* members have been meeting and working to advance an interdisciplinary approach within State government. The partnership has developed several subcommittees to address high priority needs including an inventory of violence prevention programs, collection and dissemination of data, and strengthening training and technical assistance. As new initiatives emerged in various departments, members have been deliberate in their efforts to ensure participation across departments and agencies. The partnership participates in a national initiative to embed prevention in state policy and practice,

coordinated by the National Crime Prevention Council, and has launched new initiatives such as the *From Evidence to Policy* forums. Members of the collaborative have participated in conferences across the state and at the American Public Health Association's annual conference to train others on this approach. As part of its fundamental commitment to serving California communities, *Shifting the Focus* held a series of local hearings in Spring 2001 to learn about more effectively supporting local efforts. Critical to moving *Shifting the Focus* from rhetoric to reality has been the sponsorship of the Secretary of Health and Human Services Grantland Johnson and the Attorney General Bill Lockyer.

The goals of *Shifting the Focus* are to:

- 1) Facilitate the state's violence prevention efforts to significantly reduce the incidence of violence over time
- 2) Build community infrastructure to help achieve and preserve this improvement

Strategy Development: Building from Existing Efforts

Achieving the *Shifting the Focus* vision, core principles, and ultimate outcomes requires an agreed upon strategy to serve as a roadmap as State government implements changes in policy, practice, and programs to better support local efforts across the state. This document delineates such a strategy. The strategy is based on ongoing work of the collaborative and other government processes. These include: recommendations from the initial *Shifting the Focus* retreat, findings from local hearings conducted on behalf of *Shifting the Focus* in Spring 2001, findings from the Little Hoover Commission's study on youth crime and violence prevention, *Safe from the Start: Preventing Children's Exposure to Violence* community forums, learning from other efforts and reports such as *Embedding Prevention in State Policy and Practice* and *Violence Prevention: A Vision of Hope*, and ongoing strategy development and work of the *Shifting the Focus* collaborative, its steering committee, and subcommittees.

Chart A details the strategy development process beginning with development of *Shifting the Focus* and ongoing State violence prevention activities. These resulted in findings, synthesis, and conclusions that are the basis of four strategy objectives.

As indicated in Chart A, the overarching goal of these objectives is to better support local violence prevention efforts. The underlying assumption of this approach is that the most effective violence prevention efforts are locally owned and locally controlled. As these efforts benefit from a broader service orientation from State government, greater outcomes for safe, healthy, and sustainable communities will be achieved.

Key Strategy Objectives: Shifting the Focus from the Margins to the Middle

Shifting the Focus is committed to improving its service to communities to advance violence prevention in California. To accomplish this, it must achieve four objectives. The first two relate to provisions to support local efforts and prevention more generally and the second two are methodologies to achieve them. (Please see attached chart for specific recommendations under each objective.)

Shifting the Focus to Advance Violence Prevention in California

Objective #1: Support Local Efforts

State government better supports local violence prevention efforts in order to achieve improved outcomes.

Objective #2: Prevention Leadership

State government demonstrates increased leadership and more emphasis on the *prevention* of violence.

Methodology to Achieve a “Shift in Focus”

Objective #3: Integration

State government achieves strategic collaboration and coordination on violence prevention within and across departments and agencies.

Objective #4: Skill Development

State government develops leadership and violence prevention skills.

Prioritization

On June 5, 2001, the *Shifting the Focus* steering committee held an extended strategy meeting to delineate and refine recommendations contained in this document and to prioritize items for action. They brainstormed the following list of criteria to prioritize recommendations:

- Builds on existing work
- Proven/evaluated
- Draws legislators’ interest
- Easily achievable
- Visible for locals
- Passes “public square” test
- Demonstrates a “shift” in State practices
- Has impact/achieves results
- Strengthens *Shifting the Focus* approach
- Will engage many members and a willingness to commit resources
- Can be accomplished in 2-3 years
- Priority issue for local constituency
- Responsive to the Little Hoover Commission’s recommendations
- Can be done with minimal administrative costs

Based on these criteria, the steering committee members selected the following recommendations as high priority areas:

- Braid funding sources to enable flexibility for communities in implementing violence prevention programs.
- Develop an integrated ‘one-stop’ web-site with key violence prevention information, including information about best and promising practices.
- Provide in-depth information about effective violence prevention policy options to policy makers in California.
- Develop a set of Common Principles for adoption by state agencies and departments to develop and/or respond to violence and violence-related prevention legislation.
- Advance a strengths/asset-based approach to violence prevention.

- Determine what State level partnerships and coordination will strengthen service to California communities through assessing new and existing State programs.

Next Steps

The *Shifting the Focus* partnership must engage in some immediate next steps to build on the momentum achieved in the strategy development process and to achieve the recommendations laid out. Some immediate next steps include:

- Refining prioritization criteria
- Prioritizing recommendations for *Shifting the Focus* membership based on criteria
- Developing a work plan detailing activities to implement the recommendations and who is responsible for each activity
- Establishing any additional needed subcommittees to address priority recommendations and activities
- Delineating specific outcomes to be achieved for high priority recommendations

Conclusion

Since its inception, *Shifting the Focus* has represented both a group of committed people and an approach dedicated to improving California's State government service to communities to ensure improved violence prevention outcomes. This strategy represents a synthesis of the partnership's efforts, community input, and conclusions from other State activities such as the Little Hoover Commission's report.

Well-coordinated and conceptually sound state leadership is essential for effectively supporting local violence prevention initiatives and preventing and reducing the violence faced by California communities. Given the commitment implied to local practitioners by the hearings process — that the *Shifting the Focus* group would respond to community concerns by making appropriate changes — concerted *Shifting the Focus* efforts are essential. To date, these actions have been sustained through ongoing commitment of individual members and more recently year by year funding has furthered this initiative. While there have been significant accomplishments to date, the stage is set for major improvements in the way the State prevents violence. Institutionalization is critical. At its core, this requires the embedding of strategic collaboration and coordination within State government and transcending the individual members of the partnership.

The *Shifting the Focus* membership has always recognized that the kinds of efforts needed to achieve these recommendations will not make it easier for State staff to do their jobs. But this has never been the goal of this partnership. The goal, rather, has been to better fulfill the State's obligation to the public to offer the broadest service orientation to support local efforts that are working to achieve safe, healthy, and sustainable communities in California.

Chart A. *Shifting the Focus* from the Margins to the Middle:
Strategy Development Process

