The UNITY Policy Platform

What cities need to prevent violence before it occurs

URBAN NETWORKS TO INCREASE THRIVING YOUTH

UNITY

through Violence Prevention

The evidence is clear: Violence is preventable

We know how to prevent violence. There is a strong and growing evidence base grounded in research and practitioner and community wisdom. Cities with more coordination and collaboration have lower rates of violence.[1]

Violence is a terrible burden on young people, families, neighborhoods, cities and taxpayers. People living in urban areas are disproportionately affected by community violence.
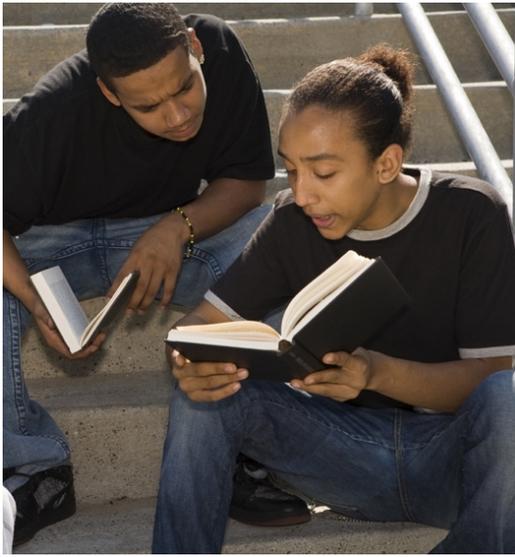
Investments in preventing violence pay off. Reducing violence is an effective way to stimulate economic development in communities.[2,3] It also saves lives and money.

A growing science base confirms that it is possible to prevent shootings and killings and to prevent violence in the long term. Yet violence endures as a major concern in U.S. cities.

Violence undermines the community experience and is a terrible burden on young people, families, neighborhoods, cities and taxpayers. Nearly one in 10 students in urban schools does not feel safe enough to go to school,[4] more than 650,000 young people ages 10 to 24 are treated annually in emergency departments for injuries sustained from violence,[5] and homicide is the second leading cause of death among youth between the ages of 10 and 24.[6] In addition to serious physical injury and death, violence exacts a considerable emotional and social toll.

Investments in preventing violence pay off. Violence is extremely costly due to emergency medical care costs, criminal justice expenses, school absences, and the economic divestment and loss of employment opportunities when local businesses deem an area too dangerous and move elsewhere.[7,8] Investing in effective prevention will improve safety and health in urban communities, and research shows that reducing violence is a powerful way to stimulate economic development in communities.[2,3]

Cities need support to prevent violence. The UNITY Policy Platform describes what needs to be in place on the ground in cities to prevent violence and the supports cities need for their efforts to be successful and sustainable.

U.S. cities can have peaceful streets and thriving youth

What cities need on the ground to prevent violence

In order to prevent violence, cities need strategic plans and coordinated efforts across multiple sectors. The following strategies should be part of a balanced approach and include high-level leadership and community engagement in planning and implementation. Efforts should be driven by local data and evaluation.

I. This strategy can reduce shootings and homicides by up to 70 percent in neighborhoods highly impacted by violence.

Strategy 1: Street outreach and interruption in neighborhoods highly impacted by violence.

Street outreach strategies have reduced shootings and killings by 40 to 70 percent and retaliation murders by as much as 100 percent.[9] Street outreach workers can detect and interrupt violence,

and prevent imminent death and injury. They can also begin changing community norms about violence to create favorable conditions for long-term prevention strategies. First year impacts include the return of businesses in focus neighborhoods.[3] *Examples: Chicago CeaseFire and Urban Peace Academy.*

II: These core strategies can reduce community and school violence by 50 percent within two to five years in neighborhoods highly impacted by violence.

Strategy 2: Implement universal, school-based violence prevention at all schools in neighborhoods highly impacted by violence.

Schools can reduce violence by 15 percent in six months.[10] This will promote a safe climate for children to learn and foster positive social and emotional development. *Examples: The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, The Incredible Years, and Second Step.*

Strategy 3: Treat mental health problems and substance abuse, and enhance protective factors among youth in neighborhoods highly impacted by violence to prevent mental illness and substance abuse. Effective mental health services reduce the rate of re-offending by more than 40 percent,[11] and alcohol and drug recovery programs for youth and their caregivers reduces children's exposure to violence at home and in neighborhoods. Prevention in the first place can reduce the need for services. *Examples: Functional Family Therapy; Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care; Multisystemic Cognitive Behavioral Therapy; community-based mental health services; youth and young adults having connections with non-judgmental, interested adults; access to physical releases for stress; connections to friends, siblings and peers who have a positive outlook; and a strong community safety net and support system.*

Strategy 4: Reduce young children's exposure to violence in homes and communities in neighborhoods highly impacted by violence, and reduce family violence. Reducing young children's exposure to violence can prevent harm to the part of the brain responsible for impulse control, problem solving and empathy, which are factors that often play a role in violence and a rewiring of the brain where survival skills are preferentially developed at the expense of learning and social skills.[12,13,14] *Examples: The Nurse Family Partnership; The Infant-Family Resource Program; Safe Start/Safe from the Start, including multidisciplinary crisis response teams; and Triple P parenting program.*

Strategy 5: Build community capacity in neighborhoods highly impacted by violence. Enhancing the sense of community in a neighborhood and building people's capacity and skills enables a community to more effectively address current and future problems, and helps sustain positive outcomes.[15] Strengthening existing social networks by involving people in community projects will develop residential leadership, including youth leadership. Connecting youth and young adults to friends and mentors with a positive outlook can have powerful effects.

We know in cities all across America that there are families that don't let their children play because there's no safe place to play. They want to keep their kids in the house for the basic human need of security.

Newark Mayor Cory Booker
April 1, 2010 Press Conference

III. These strategies can be prioritized at the local level to sustain reductions in violence over the long term. Cities prioritized these to prevent violence before it occurs and reduce the impact of risk factors.

Strategy 6: Social connections in neighborhoods. Strengthen ties among neighbors and community members. Relationships should be characterized by trust and concern for one another, and residents' willingness to take collective action for the community good and socially sanction violent behavior.

Strategy 7: Economic development, including youth employment. Improve economic conditions and viable non-criminal economic opportunities with training and support for communities, families and youth most at risk for violence. Foster youth employment skills and employment opportunities.

Strategy 8: Conflict resolution. Enhance the skills of young people to resolve conflicts without violence and create proactive dispute resolution structures and support at the neighborhood level.

Strategy 9: Youth leadership. Support and engage young people in decision-making, and grant age-appropriate authority.

Strategy 10: Quality after-school and out-of-school programming. Provide safe and enriching activities with structure and supervision during non-school hours, including weekends.

Strategy 11: Mentoring. Provide positive, supportive, non-judgmental role models who can form a strong and enduring bond with young people who are at risk.

Strategy 12: Quality early care and education. Foster age-appropriate social, emotional and cognitive skill development within the context of strong attachments.

Strategy 13: Positive social and emotional development. Support growing self-awareness and self-regulation, often measured by an ability to pay attention, make transitions from one activity to another, control impulses, and cooperate with others.

Strategy 14: Parenting skills. Train parents and other caregivers on developmental milestones and culturally appropriate parenting practices to support a nurturing, safe and structured environment.

Strategy 15: Family Support Services: Provide integrated family services (e.g., therapy, case management, home visiting, income support, employment services and support) to families in need to promote self-sufficiency, and foster nurturing and trusting relationships within the family.

IV: This strategy can reduce recidivism and prevent the reoccurrence of violence.

Strategy 16: Successful Reentry: Support a successful transition from incarceration/detention to the community, and reduce recidivism with services during incarceration and post-release.

What cities need at the state and national levels to maximize their local efforts to prevent violence and promote peaceful streets and thriving youth

Faced with fragmented and inadequate funding streams, a lack of coordination across supporting agencies, and hit hard by the nation's economic downturn, cities need support to achieve and sustain measurable outcomes. Supporting cities to prevent violence is an investment that will pay off, saving dollars at the federal, state and local levels in the long term.

✓ **Allocate and align resources.** Whether through allocation of existing resources or the development of new revenue sources, cities need adequate, flexible financial resources to implement effective strategies on the ground, bring them to scale and coordinate them.

✓ **Create a high-level focal point for preventing violence in federal and state governments.** Given that responsibility for preventing violence spans multiple agencies, a high-level focal point could foster accountability and support coordination.
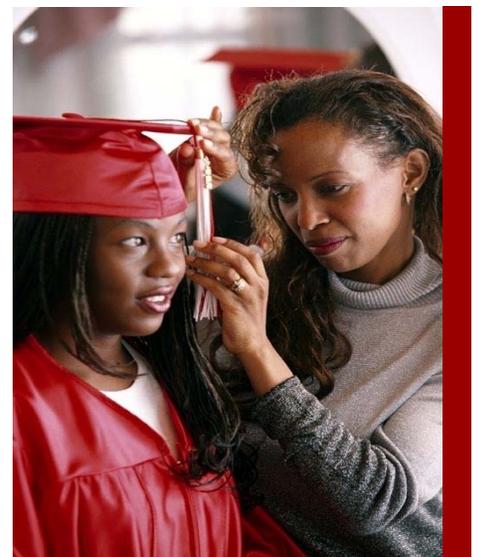
✓ **Establish a mechanism for multi-sector collaboration in federal and state governments.** This would provide a vehicle to align federal funding initiatives, establish joint funding streams or blended and braided funding, coordinate data systems, and share evaluation strategies.

✓ **Equip people with the necessary skills through high-quality training.** Cross-sector training can build a common language and foster understanding about one's own role each sector's contribution.

This makes economic sense. We didn't use all new monies. This model engages multiple agencies. They all contribute to it, and it requires multidisciplinary collaboration.
UNITY City Network Member

✓ **Establish supportive data, research and evaluation systems.** A national research agenda on effective prevention and disseminating multi-sector surveillance data on key risk and protective factors would inform and enhance local efforts. This information could be used to establish national baseline measures and standards.

✓ **Develop a communications campaign.** A national campaign would lend local efforts heightened visibility and added credibility. Conveying positive messages about youth and making the case for prevention can foster buy-in.

✓ **Enhance public health's capacity and infrastructure at the federal, state and local levels to address violence.** Versed in prevention and charged with protecting the public's health, public health has a track record and proven methodology for changing behaviors that contribute to poor health and safety outcomes.

City-Driven Principles

In shaping The UNITY Policy Platform, UNITY City Network members expressed a shared set of principles to be taken into account in guiding practice and policy.

LOCAL It is vital that solutions are locally driven. Cities need to develop their own plans, based on their own needs. Community members, including youth, must be engaged in every facet including setting priorities and shaping solutions.

PREVENTION Intervention, suppression and enforcement are necessary but not sufficient. Cities need a balanced approach that includes prevention. Prevention includes universal prevention before violence has occurred as well as reducing the impact of risk factors of violence and reducing the reoccurrence of violence.

STRATEGY Although single programs have been shown to reduce violence, there is a continuous need for comprehensive approaches to ensure sustainability. Cities need a strategy that clarifies priorities and roles, and aligns existing efforts with shared goals.

MULTI-SECTOR No sector alone can prevent violence. Coming together and owning the solutions across multiple sectors—education; health and human services, including public health, substance abuse and mental health, and children and families; criminal justice; early childhood development; and labor—is key.

IMPACT Resources should be directed to urban areas in order to prevent violence and cities should prioritize efforts in neighborhoods most impacted by violence, and among youth who are at the greatest risk of violence and their families.

CULTURE Urban initiatives to prevent violence must meet young people, their families and their communities where they are and take into account their culture and values. All strategies should be culturally relevant, appropriate and competent in order to be useful for the young people and neighborhoods in the greatest need.

SUSTAINABILITY Preventing violence requires a long-term commitment. While many strategies—community building, policy change, staff training—are all opportunities for achieving impact that outlasts a particular funding stream, it's also critical to understand effective prevention as a long-term effort that requires sustained commitment, including resource commitment. We can expect that investments in prevention will result in lower rates of violence; success should not be a signal to disinvest from urban efforts to prevent violence, as there is a need for sustained multi-sector prevention efforts, just as enforcement and suppression is continuously supported.

> We know violence is preventable. We reached out following a tragedy. Now we have multi-jurisdictional coordination and it's working.
> *UNITY City Network Member*

Prevention means addressing the factors that contribute to violence in the first place, such as the following contributors to gang violence:[16]

- Lack of social opportunities,
- The degree of social disorganization present in a community,
- Poverty,
- Institutional racism,
- Deficiencies in social policies, and
- A lack of or misdirected social controls.

UNITY builds support for effective, scalable, sustainable efforts to *prevent violence before it occurs* so that urban youth can thrive in safe environments with ample opportunities and supportive relationships.

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The UNITY Policy Platform, released in December 2010, is a summary of *The UNITY Urban Agenda for Preventing Violence Before it Occurs: Bringing a Multi-sector Prevention Approach to Scale in U.S. Cities*, developed in partnership with the UNITY City Network.
The UNITY Urban Agenda was endorsed by representatives from 13 U.S. cities in April 2010 and is available at www.preventioninstitute.org.

For more information or to sign on, contact the UNITY team at Prevention Institute by calling (510) 444-7738 or e-mailing unity@preventioninstitute.org.