

Violence Prevention Works

The Case for a Public Health Approach to Preventing Violence

Cities throughout the country are using a public health approach to prevent violence and seeing positive results:

- Milwaukee has seen a three-year decline in homicides and non-fatal shootings since it began developing the comprehensive Milwaukee Blueprint for Peace.
- In Minneapolis, there was a significant reduction in youth violence involving guns for eight years after the city developed the Minneapolis Blueprint for Action to Prevent Violence.
- New York City has achieved its lowest murder rate since the early 1950s, becoming the safest big city in the US.

Comprehensive violence prevention plans that are co-developed with community residents and involve many different city agencies and nonprofit organizations have also reduced violence and improved community wellbeing in Oakland, Houston, New Orleans, and other cities.

Preventing violence up front can instigate a cascade of community-wide benefits that allow people to thrive and live fulfilling lives. These include:

- Fewer physical health problems like chronic diseases.
- Fewer and less severe mental health challenges like anxiety, depression, and trauma.
- Reduced domestic violence, child abuse, and community violence, because different types of violence are interconnected.
- Safer working conditions and less trauma for law-enforcement and other first responders.
- Improved community morale and engagement.

Why a public health approach?

It works: Cities like New York, Oakland, and others have seen a dramatic reduction in violent crime when they take a comprehensive, multi-sector approach to preventing violence.

It gets to the root of the problem: Community violence, child maltreatment, and domestic violence, share the same roots. When communities have weak ties between neighbors, lack trust with government officials, or have limited equitable employment opportunities, many forms of violence are more likely to happen. However, when communities' strengths and resilience are reinforced, communities themselves can prevent many forms of violence together.

It's cost effective: It costs less to prevent violence than to respond to it after the fact. Think about the costs involved in a shooting—police response, EMT transport, trauma care and other medical costs, police investigation, district attorney and public defender costs, and more. And how can we put a price tag on a life that's needlessly lost? Until we reduce the homicides in our communities to zero, we should do whatever it takes to save peoples' lives.

The resources are available: The resources for investments in a public health approach to preventing violence are available when we search out new partners—like philanthropies and the local business community—and consider shifting existing resources from response to prevention.

Focusing on the most impacted communities benefits everyone. It's time to stop looking at communities or neighborhoods with high levels of violence through the lens of blame and start recognizing that past and current policies, laws, and practices created the situation we find ourselves in now. When government agencies partner with the most impacted communities to implement solutions, it reverberates far beyond the community itself. It improves what happens in schools, in our emergency rooms, on our public transit, in our workplaces, and more.

What a public health approach looks like

A public health approach is data driven. That means looking at the specific profile of violence in the community, who is most affected, what's contributing, and what's helping to create safety. When strategies are being developed, they are designed specifically to influence the conditions that are increasing the risk of violence, according to the data.

A public health approach looks at community conditions. Our surroundings shape our experiences and behaviors, so successful prevention plans cultivate safety in streets, parks, jobs, schools, places of worship, and elsewhere. Possible solutions to prevent violence can involve any and all of the tools at the disposal of the government agencies, economic sectors, and community organizations that are engaged in the process.

A public health approach is collaborative. It brings together community members from all corners of the city, including faith leaders, youth, grassroots organizers, political leaders, business owners, and people who represent many types of organizations and agencies. These might include healthcare, public health, schools, parks, housing, law enforcement, social services, foundations, nonprofits, and others. All of these representatives come to the table as equals to create and implement a citywide plan. A city agency can serve as the coordinating body for the work.

A public health approach puts community members in the lead. The people who are most impacted by violence have some of the best and most creative ideas about how to prevent it. For a comprehensive violence prevention plan to succeed, it must involve community members in setting priorities for what can be done to improve community conditions to prevent violence and create safety. And it must support community members in leading the implementation.

A public health approach includes healing from trauma as a key component. Trauma is a serious ailment in communities with high levels of violence. It can cause a breakdown of the community's social networks, relationships, trust, and positive social norms—all of which could otherwise help *protect* the community from violence and trauma. Healing from historical and systemic trauma as a community and cultivating community strengths are essential to successful violence prevention efforts.

Violence is not just a problem for police, courts, and some community members. Every one of us needs to work together to heal and create safe homes and communities.

[Prevention Institute](#) and [Cities United](#) are collaborating to support learning and action across cities on what works to prevent violence. [Preventioninstitute.org](https://www.preventioninstitute.org) [CitiesUnited.org](https://www.citiesunited.org)