



**BIG CITIES
HEALTH COALITION**

COMMUNITY SAFETY | A Public Health Approach to Preventing Violence

We all want to live in safe communities where everyone can thrive without fear of violence or harm.

Homicides and violent crimes are dropping in cities across the country, thanks in no small part to the work of local public health departments. Investing in local public health solutions ensures this important work can make our communities even safer.

Violence is still the leading cause of injury and death for young people. Each year, more than 700,000 children and young adults in the US visit emergency departments for injuries resulting from violence. Meanwhile, 46 million of the nation's 76 million children (about 60%) each year experience violence, crime, and abuse. Research shows that exposure to violence at a young age can have a lasting impact on physical and mental health.

Some communities experience the harmful effects of violence more than others, and policies can either help or hinder this. For example, policies that lead to discrimination and disinvestment make everyone less safe. People made these systems and we can make them better.

Communities become safer and healthier when they have ample well-paying jobs, affordable housing, and strong educational opportunities. Similarly, replacing vacant buildings and lots with playgrounds and gardens, has reduced crime and improved public health.

Local health departments prevent violence in our communities in many ways, including by working both with those who are most at risk for violent behavior and with victims of violence, to provide services and education to ultimately interrupt the cycle. Below are just a few examples of the short- and long-term programmatic and policy solutions that local health departments employ to improve their communities' well being.

Many big cities across the US – including **Columbus, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Philadelphia, and Seattle** – distribute free gun locks and lock boxes to increase firearm safety. For example, Seattle/King County started the [Lock It Up program](#) to encourage safe firearm storage. Residents can receive a 10–15% discount on select storage devices or lock boxes at participating firearm retailers.

In 2024, **Boston's** homicide rate dropped by 50% from an already record low the previous year. City leadership attributes much of this success to its public health approach to violence prevention. For example, one program empowers resident coalitions in six neighborhoods to engage young people in positive activities, create a physical environment that encourages outdoor activity and social connection.

In neighborhoods with high crime rates, **Los Angeles County's** Parks After Dark (PAD) program turns parks into vibrant community centers. Thirty-four county parks stay open late and offer free activities during summer evening hours, when crime rates are highest and youth have fewer recreational opportunities.

Recommended actions to promote community safety

FUNDING/INFRASTRUCTURE

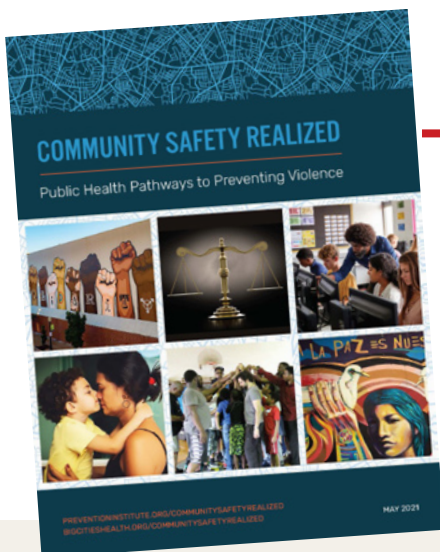
- ▶ **Maintain funding for CDC's Injury Center's Division of Violence Prevention**, which supports communities in implementing evidence-based, hyperlocal interventions that address root causes. Currently, at least 80% of the Injury Center's budget goes to state and local communities.
- ▶ **Maintain CDC's firearm violence prevention research** on screening tools and interventions to prevent future violence and suicide among those at risk.
- ▶ **Increase resources for Community Violence Intervention (CVI) programs** to support training, trauma support, and fair compensation for the workforce.

DATA

- ▶ Support the ability of local jurisdictions, not just states, to **collect key community violence indicators** and identify indicators that measure community resilience. To do this, we should:
 - Expand the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) and Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) to collect local data from, at minimum, the largest 50 U.S. cities.
 - Implement and fund a nationwide infrastructure to collect data and monitor trends to inform local decision-making. Building on existing data sets, identify and collect a set of clearly defined, community-level safety and resilience metrics.

FEDERAL POLICY ACTIONS

- ▶ **Reduce access to firearms and prevent further harm** – especially among youth and those most at risk of harming themselves or others.
 - Provide federal resources to facilitate additional safe and secure firearm storage among those who own guns.
 - Adopt a federal Extreme Risk Protection Order, also called a Red Flag law, to ensure all Americans are protected by short-term emergency orders to remove the guns of a person deemed to be in crisis.
 - Continue to move toward comprehensive background checks wherever guns are purchased.
 - Ban sale, transfer, import, and manufacture of assault weapons and large-capacity ammunition magazines.



REPORT: COMMUNITY SAFETY REALIZED

With Prevention Institute, BCHC developed a framework for violence prevention in local communities. This framework draws from the groundbreaking work of our member health departments, who have instituted novel programs that provide wraparound services to those most at risk of gun violence, trauma services to those affected by gun violence, safe gun storage campaigns, and more.

- ▶ Visit bit.ly/bchc-violence

The Big Cities Health Coalition (BCHC) is a forum for the leaders of America's largest metropolitan health departments to exchange strategies and jointly address issues to promote and protect the health and safety of their residents. Collectively, BCHC's member jurisdictions directly impact more than 61 million people, or one in five Americans. bigcitieshealth.org

- ▶ For more information, contact Chrissie Juliano at juliano@bigcitieshealth.org

