

PREVENTING VIOLENCE BEFORE IT OCCURS:
**DIRECTIONS FOR IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, OUR CITIES, AND OUR
ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND GROWTH**

*Prepared by Prevention Institute**

With a new administration comes the opportunity to realize a different future for our children, youth, families, and communities – one that reduces the chances they will be impacted by violence. Violence affects where we walk and shop, where we live, where businesses open and thrive, and whether or not we are healthy. Cities around the country are grappling with the challenges violence creates. Based on their needs and what's known about preventing violence *before it occurs*, Prevention Institute has identified opportunities for improving safety and well-being in our nation's urban areas while saving money and stimulating the economy.

This memo begins with background information, followed by a set of recommendations. More detailed action steps and information can be made available upon request.

Background

Young people, families, and communities across the country are seriously impacted by violence

- 5.5% of high school students feel too unsafe to go to school, 18% report carrying a weapon, 35.5% were in a physical fight, 12% report having been forced to have sex and 14.5% report having seriously considered attempting suicide.¹
- More than 720,000 young people ages 10 to 24 were treated in emergency departments for injuries sustained from violence in 2006.²
- Homicide is the second leading cause of death among youth between the ages of 10 and 24³ and for each such homicide; there are approximately 1,000 nonfatal violent assaults.⁴
- The consequences of violence for victims and those exposed are severe, including serious physical injuries, post traumatic stress syndrome, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and other longer term health problems associated with the bio-psycho-social effects of such exposure.⁵
- 1 in 3 African American males and 1 in 6 Latino males will enter the criminal justice system if we don't take action.⁶

* **Prevention Institute** is a nonprofit, national center dedicated to improving community health and well-being by building momentum for effective primary prevention. Primary prevention means taking action to build resilience and prevent problems *before* they occur. The Institute's strong commitment to quality prevention is characterized by community participation and promotion of equitable health outcomes among all social and economic groups. Since its founding in 1997, Prevention Institute has focused on injury and violence prevention, traffic safety, nutrition and physical activity promotion, youth development, community health, and health equity. This Institute runs a national violence prevention initiative, **UNITY [Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth]**, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The California Wellness Foundation. Through tools, training, consultation, and information about the problem and solutions, UNITY supports US cities in advancing more effective, sustainable efforts to prevent violence that affects young people. While this memo emphasizes some core concepts of and lessons from the UNITY initiative, it has not been endorsed by UNITY representatives and does not imply an endorsement by our partners or funders.

Violence is costly to individuals, families, communities, businesses, and government, and preventing violence can contribute to economic recovery and growth

- Medical and lost productivity costs associated with violence range from more than \$70 billion⁷ to \$158 billion a year.⁸ Criminal justice costs account for more. For example, criminal justice costs related to gang violence in Los Angeles County alone total \$1.15 billion annually.⁹
- Violence is a factor in the development of chronic diseases¹⁰ which account for a majority of premature US deaths, lost productivity and the majority and fastest growing percentage of our healthcare spending¹¹
- Violence inhibits economic recovery and growth in cities around the country.¹² Youth violence affects communities by increasing the cost of health care, reducing productivity, decreasing property values, disrupting social services,¹³ and can deter tourism, business relocation, and other investments.

Leaders are calling for action

- Mayors, police chiefs, school superintendents and public health directors have stated that violence is a serious issue and responses are inadequate¹⁴
- The US Conference of Mayors declared youth violence to be a public health crisis. They called for cities to work with a broad range of stakeholders to develop a sustained multi-faceted approach focused on *prevention* and for the federal government to support investments in youth development throughout US cities.¹⁵
- Enforcement, suppression, and intervention efforts alone do not address the underlying reasons violence occurs and therefore cannot prevent violence before it occurs. Police chiefs and other enforcement leaders are increasingly saying, *we can not arrest our way out of this problem.*

Violence is preventable

- Cities with more coordination, communication, and attention to preventing violence have achieved lower violence rates.^{16 17 18}
- Violence is a learned behavior that can be unlearned or not learned in the first place; it is preventable.¹⁹
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We need a national commitment to and action on *preventing violence before it occurs* in order to:

- **Support and complement enforcement and suppression,**
- **Improve outcomes for young people, families and communities, and**
- **Strengthen our economic recovery and growth.**

Recommendations on Taking Action to Prevent Violence *Before* it Occurs

1. **Employ people from highly impacted neighborhoods in rebuilding our infrastructure as part of our economic stimulus priorities.** Leaders throughout the nation are turning to the green economy as a way to revitalize and rebuild our dwindling economy. Investing money in local, sustainable and high-skill jobs that focus on renewable energy and energy efficiency will move us toward energy independence. The labor shortage in this new green economy provides a key opportunity to invest in the development of a new workforce from highly impacted neighborhoods that can contribute to the green economy and build new pathways out of poverty. Reducing poverty in inner-cities has been noted as an important strategy to prevent violence.²²
2. **Expand youth service corps programs, particularly to engage young people in our nation's inner cities, and include them in rebuilding our communities.** Institute youth corps programs

in highly impacted communities to train and employ local youth in rebuilding local infrastructure. Expand existing service corps programs to support physical and social infrastructure development.

3. **Invest in street outreach programs with a proven track record in reducing violence and contributing to economic development, such as CeaseFire Chicago.**²³ CeaseFire Chicago uses behavior change, outreach, and education methods to detect and interrupt conflicts, trains outreach workers to support and effectively change the thinking of the highest risk persons, and transforms communities into safer places through full scale community involvement. The CeaseFire Chicago model has been replicated 16 times and validated by a 3 year U.S. Department of Justice study conducted by 4 universities, showing 41-73% drops in shootings and killings, and 100% drops in retaliation murders. The first year of impact regularly shows 25 - 45% drops in shootings and killings, and the beginnings of return of businesses have been noted. An investment in such efforts will not only reduce the immediate risk of death and injury but also contributes to local jobs and builds community capacity to change norms about the use of violence.
4. **Support cities in developing, implementing, and evaluating effective and sustainable approaches to preventing community and gang violence, such as the CDC-funded UNITY project (Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth through Violence Prevention).**²⁴ Specifically, invest \$48M in a pilot program to support at least 10 – 15 cities in the UNITY City Network, supporting coordinated prevention services and programs in highly impacted neighborhoods. The resources would support administration through CDC’s National Center for Injury Prevention (NCIPC), training and technical assistance to cities, convening costs for the Network, evaluation, and money for cities (initially \$2M/city) to accelerate adoption of effective and sustainable approaches and to cover staffing, planning, and programming in specific highly-impacted neighborhoods. Further, this pilot network will provide cities with the opportunity to mentor each other in reducing and preventing violence. Based on successes, expand support to additional cities. Consider the use of existing mechanisms such as expanding NCIPC’s UNITY cooperative agreement in order to provide direct and immediate support to cities to address violence.
5. **Invest in prevention programs and strategies in highly impacted neighborhoods that will reduce the risk of violence and foster resilience in young people, families, and communities.** Prevention programs and strategies have a demonstrated track record in reducing violence. Investments should be made in specific neighborhoods highly impacted by violence and the programs and strategies should be coordinated and at a level of saturation to achieve outcomes, modeled after such successful initiatives as the Harlem Children’s Zone.²⁵ To ensure maximum impact at the local level, establish waivers and other mechanisms to allow locales flexible use of federal resources to address local needs and priorities. City representatives²⁶ and proposed federal legislation such as the Youth PROMISE Act and the Gang Abatement and Prevention Act, have identified multiple strategies that can prevent violence, particularly as part of a coordinated, strategic effort, including: positive early care and education; positive social and emotional development; parenting skills; mentoring; quality after school programming; youth centers; youth development programs; youth leadership; providing youth in high crime communities with nonviolent and constructive activities; fostering social connections in neighborhoods; quality housing; quality education (including universal school-based violence and bullying prevention) and alternative education; economic development with an eye to investment in highly impacted neighborhoods and for those at risk for violence; health and mental health services; substance abuse counseling and services; family support services, including child protection and safety services; conflict resolution; street outreach; bystander empowerment; targeted gang prevention, intervention and exit services;

alternative penalties for first-time offenders; and successful reentry support. Finally, given the relationship between street violence and violence in the home, support efforts to reduce family violence and its impact, such as those recommended by the Family Violence Prevention Fund,²⁷ The National Plan to Prevent the Sexual Exploitation of Children,²⁸ and the Safe from the Start²⁹ initiative, initiated by the US Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and implemented in multiple states, to take action for young people exposed to violence.

6. **Reduce the lethality of violence.** Adopt law enforcement recommendations on surveillance and the control of illegal weapons and policies that allow law enforcement to share data across jurisdictions on weapons that have been used in illegal activities.³⁰
7. **Support CDC's development of a national agenda to address violence, including the prevention of youth violence in large cities.** The National Center for Injury Prevention (NCIPC) at CDC has initiated this process to develop a national strategy that builds on existing initiatives, such as UNITY. For success in implementation, it is critical that a mandate for prevention be validated at the highest levels of government and that multiple stakeholders and agencies are involved in planning and implementation of various components. Having a multiagency prevention strategy will support locales in achieving results. Key partners to include in the development of national agenda also include the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), and the Department of Education. Community input should be incorporated into the planning process, including from survivors. The national agenda should include supporting a comprehensive approach to preventing youth violence that includes at least an equitable distribution of prevention, intervention and suppression/enforcement strategies and resources and focus, at least in part, on changing the norms or expectations about accepting incarceration as part of urban life or even as a rite of passage.
8. **Increase the authority and capacity of governmental agencies and departments to address violence prevention.** The focus should encourage partnerships between agencies including health and human services, including CDC, education, and justice. Further, given the breadth of factors that contribute to violence, it would be valuable to identify other agencies that can contribute to long-term solutions, such as the Office of Homeland Security (to explore the relationship to community preparedness and overlapping risk factors, such as the international drug trade and its impact on domestic violence rates) and the newly created Office of Urban Affairs.
9. **Establish a national youth commission or cabinet.** Young people, including formerly incarcerated youth, can inform national priorities and actions in support of prevention outcomes.
10. **Enhance public health's capacity and infrastructure at the federal, state, and local levels to address the ongoing public health crisis of violence.** Establish an HHS appropriations line item for youth violence to go to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the US Centers for Disease Prevention and Control to support states and local public health departments in building infrastructure, capacity and systems to develop adequate data and surveillance systems and to support development of coordinated prevention planning, program implementation, and evaluation efforts in the most needed locales, including incentives and opportunities to participate in city-wide efforts. Public health departments and staff should receive training about their role in preventing violence and training on preventing violence should be instituted in all public health graduate school curricula. In addition, standards for violence prevention should be developed and

integrated into appropriate credentialing and certification programs for the nation's public health system.

11. **Synthesize emerging research and practice models.** Request that the Surgeon General issue an updated report addressing the need for comprehensive, population-based violence prevention and commission the Institute of Medicine to research the relationship between preventing violence and chronic disease prevention as well as the linkages between multiple forms of violence (e.g. street and community violence, sexual assault; child and elder abuse; intimate partner violence; and suicide) and the most promising shared solutions.
12. **Establish a visionary research agenda.** Research should address risk and protective/resilience factors, targeted prevention activities, and how to effectively mobilize comprehensive community efforts to promote positive youth development and prevent violence. It should be grounded in community practice and change, establishing emerging models for what is most effective in communities and for youth and include attention to translational research that adapts the evidence base to real life situations and diverse communities. Further research should explore the linkages between violence affecting youth and other forms of violence, including intimate partner violence, child abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation and suicide.

Contact Information

Larry Cohen, Executive Director
Prevention Institute
221 Oak Street
Oakland, CA 94607
t 510 444-7738
larry@preventioninstitute.org
www.preventioninstitute.org

Rachel Davis, Managing Director
Prevention Institute
221 Oak Street
Oakland, CA 94607
t 510 444-7738
rachel@preventioninstitute.org
www.preventioninstitute.org

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- ²⁴ Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth through Violence Prevention (UNITY) is designed to strengthen and support cities in preventing violence before it occurs and to help sustain these efforts, <http://www.preventioninstitute.org/UNITY.html>
- ²⁵ The Harlem Children's Zone is a community based organization that has been offering education, social-service and community-building programs to children and families since 1970. <http://www.hcz.org/>
- ²⁶ In August 2007, city representatives and youth prioritized strategies that would help reduce and prevent violence as part of a UNITY convening.

²⁷ The Family Violence Prevention: For more than two decades, the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) has worked to end violence against women and children around the world. Instrumental in developing the landmark Violence Against Women Act passed by Congress in 1994, the FVPF has continued to break new ground by reaching new audiences including men and youth, promoting leadership within communities to ensure that violence prevention efforts become self-sustaining, and transforming the way health care providers, police, judges, employers and others address violence. www.endabuse.org

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