**CAP**

# Frequently Asked Questions About Community-Based Violence Intervention Programs

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# Introduction and summary

States, cities, and rural communities across the United States are grappling with rising gun violence.[1] While overall crime rates dropped from 2019 to 2020,[2] the COVID-19 pandemic has produced a spike in firearm sales and gun homicides, growing mistrust between police and the communities they serve, and great economic and social instability.[3] Black and Hispanic communities disproportionately bear the brunt of this instability: They are not only experiencing increased gun violence to a greater degree but also have been hardest hit by the economic impacts of the pandemic and have had resources divested from them for generations.[4]

In order to respond to gun violence and address its root causes, communities most affected are banding together to advocate for greater investments in resources outside the criminal legal system that increase safety. Community stakeholders are also working together with their local governments in new and innovative ways to respond to instances of violence and protect their neighborhoods. These include supporting community reinvestment initiatives and building new violence prevention and intervention programs. One tool that is gaining popularity and has proved to be effective is community-based violence interventions (CVI).[5] CVI programs serve as a vital way to connect community resources to the people who need them most, addressing the root causes of gun violence in a holistic way that cannot be done by law enforcement or local government alone.

This report addresses some of the most frequent questions around CVI programs. It provides guidance not only to community leaders but also to policymakers seeking to engage with and support these programs.

# What is a community-based violence intervention program?

CVI programs focus on partnerships with those most affected by gun violence, especially from Black and Hispanic communities.[6] The collaborations between government and community stakeholders give CVI programs credibility, making people feel safer and more likely to engage in combating the spread of gun violence. CVI programs focus on reaching the small number of people who are most connected to local cycles of violence and have proved to reduce homicides by as much as 60 percent where they are implemented.[7] These programs are staffed by culturally competent community members who have lived experiences with violence, as well as social service providers such as therapists and job counselors. They provide support and access to services by investing in opportunities for people to pursue alternative avenues for addressing and resolving conflicts.

There are a variety of different evidence-based CVI models, and a growing number of innovative approaches that are responsive to the changing ways in which young adults in particular interact with one another, their communities, and their local governments. All of these models center "trusted messengers" as a core part of their service design, recognizing that those with proximity to community violence have a critical role to play in designing and implementing solutions.

Below is a list of the defining characteristics of some of the best-known CVI models.[8] It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list but rather aims to illustrate the various evidence-based models that are being implemented and adapted across the country.

### Advance Peace

- **Model type:** Violence interruption models (also known as street outreach programs)
- **Model description:** Street outreach programs rely on violence interrupters to engage and support community members and mediate conflicts to prevent escalation to violence. Violence interrupters are typically individuals from the community and people directly affected by community violence. As such, they are seen as "credible messengers"—people whose voice and support can be trusted.

- **Program description:** Advance Peace "is dedicated to ending cyclical and retaliatory gun violence in American urban neighborhoods" by investing "in the development, health, and wellbeing of those at the center of this crisis." Advance Peace delivers anti-violence programming to hard-to-reach individuals driving urban gun violence in the neighborhoods in which they operate. One of the key program components is the 18-month Peacemaker Fellowship, which provides mentoring and social supports through street outreach workers. Advance Peace also provides financial assistance, internship opportunities, and social services navigation support, among other services. Advance Peace has demonstrated its impact in decreasing gun violence in Richmond, Oakland, and Sacramento, California.[9]
- **Key stakeholders:** Violence interrupters and community members

## Cure Violence Global

- **Model type:** Violence interruption models (also known as street outreach programs)
- **Model description:** Street outreach programs rely on "violence interrupters" to engage and support community members and mediate conflicts to prevent escalation to violence. Violence interrupters are typically individuals from the target community and people directly affected by community violence. As such, they are seen as "credible messengers," people whose voice and support can be trusted.
- **Program description:** Based on the World Health Organization's approach to reversing the spread of infectious diseases, Cure Violence relies on a network of violence interrupters and outreach workers to implement its three-pronged approach. Violence interrupters identify and mediate potential conflicts to prevent violence and retaliation. Outreach workers provide case management support and help individuals access social services. Other Cure Violence workers engage diverse community stakeholders to change norms around violence in the community.[10]
- **Key stakeholders:** Violence interrupters and community members

## Ceasefire, Focused Deterrence, and Project Longevity

- **Model type:** Group violence intervention (GVI) programs
- **Model description:** GVI programs recognize that a small number of people are responsible for the majority of violence in a given community and offer a collaborative approach to community violence that engages the people most connected to cycles of violence, as well as diverse community stakeholders. GVI programs replace enforcement with deterrence and foster stronger relationships between law enforcement and the people they serve.

- **Program description:** The central method of intervention in a GVI program is a call-in, a face-to-face meeting between those most connected to violence and community partners such as community leaders, social service providers, and law enforcement. Together, these partners study violent incidents and trends to identify individuals with the greatest connection to the violent incidents. Once identified, individuals are invited to participate in the call-in. At the call-in, individuals with credible moral authority in the community deliver a message against violence, police put participants on notice about the consequences of further violence on them as an individual and on the group as a whole, and support and outreach providers make a genuine offer of help.[11]
- **Key stakeholders:** Community leaders, social service providers, criminal legal stakeholders, law enforcement, and community members

### LandCare program (Philadelphia, PA)

- **Model type:** Community-driven Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)
- **Model description:** CPTED programs focus on improving conditions of the built environment where violent crime occurs in order to reduce opportunity and motive for future crime in the area. Infrastructure improvements allow people to feel safe and a sense of community in their neighborhoods.
- **Program description:** LandCare works with local government as well as with a network of contractors and community groups to transform vacant lots into publicly accessible green spaces. These spaces provide long-term benefits to the neighborhood, including reduced gun crime and improved public health and wellness.[12]
- **Key stakeholders:** Local and state governments, urban planners, and community members

### Violence Intervention Program (Baltimore, MD)

- **Model type:** Hospital-based violence intervention program (HVIP)
- **Model description:** Operating out of emergency departments and trauma centers, HVIPs engage survivors of violence immediately after injury occurs. Case managers ensure that survivors have access to the resources necessary to facilitate their immediate recovery, such as trauma support, counseling, and safety planning, while also supporting survivors' long-term stability by ensuring their basic needs are met and providing ongoing case management. Support and stability during this critical time decreases the likelihood of retaliatory violence.

- **Program description:** The Violence Intervention Program is an intensive program that assists survivors of intentional violent injury in the hospital setting. Once an individual agrees to participate, they are paired with a case manager or outreach worker to develop an individualized action plan. Strong partnerships between the hospital and community providers connect people with the support needed to address their goals, including those mandated by parole/probation or through a court order. The program also provides participants with peer support groups.[13]
- **Key stakeholders:** Hospital staff, case managers, and survivors of community violence

### READI Chicago
- **Model type:** Cognitive behavioral intervention (CBI)
- **Model description:** Based on evidence that combining cognitive behavioral interventions and access to economic opportunity can help individuals stay safer, these programs work through community-based organizations to directly engage individuals at the highest risk of experiencing violence and connect them with mental health supports, paid transitional jobs and professional development, and support services.
- **Program description:** READI Chicago's yearlong program connects people "most affected by gun violence to cognitive behavioral interventions, paid transitional jobs, and wraparound support services to help them create a path for a different future and to reduce violence in the city's most impacted neighborhoods." CBI helps participants respond less reflexively to stressors in their lives. READI Chicago relies on the expertise of community partners and those in the criminal legal system as well as the predictive analytics of a risk assessment to identify participants for the program.[14]
- **Key stakeholders:** CBI specialists, outreach workers, and criminal legal system partners

The models listed above are just a few in a long list of successful programs that can serve as a basis for stakeholders looking to bring new ideas to their communities. It is vital that communities continue to innovate and test new solutions. No two neighborhoods are the same from one year to the next, and the interventions needed to stem gun violence must evolve as well.

# Where have these programs been successful?

Rigorous evaluation in cities across the country has proved that many CVI programs are successful. It is critically important that stakeholders continue to push for investments in research and evaluation of these programs to ensure they will grow and develop in ways that continue to serve communities affected by gun violence.

## CVI programs have seen success across the country

Prior to COVID-19 restrictions shuttering CVI programs in Oakland, California, they helped reduce shootings and homicides for seven consecutive years, culminating in a 50 percent reduction.[15] Advance Peace has been effective at reducing gun violence in several cities that have implemented its innovative community-based approach.[16] Baltimore, Chicago, New York City, and Philadelphia have each seen a more than 30 percent reduction in shootings and killings after adopting the Cure Violence model.[17] Chicago CRED saw a 50 percent reduction in gunshot injuries among its participants 18 months after implementation.[18] Eight Communities Partnering 4 Peace (CP4P) in the city of Chicago saw a 20 percent reduction in nonfatal gunshot injuries among program participants overall 18 months after implementation.[19]

Project Longevity, implemented in three cities in Connecticut that suffered 70 percent of the state's gun homicides before the implementation of the program, showed a 50 percent decline in gun homicides from 2011 to 2016. Since Richmond, California, launched its Office of Neighborhood Safety in 2007, the city saw a 71 percent reduction in gun violence leading to injuries or death.[20] The Violence Intervention Program in Baltimore's University of Maryland Medical Center showed a 75 percent reduction in violent criminal activity among program participants over a three-year period.[21]

# What types of crime do CVI programs aim to mitigate?

Overall, community-based violence intervention programs look specifically to reduce the rates of serious gun-related crimes in the United States. These include gun homicides, nonfatal gun injuries, and other gun-related crimes. It is important that programs have clear goals when it comes to crime reduction and that those goals are tracked, as well as that results are broadly shared.

## Types of gun-related crimes that saw reductions under CVI

- **Gun homicides:** A primary objective of CVI programs is the reduction of gun homicides. Every day, approximately 42 people are murdered with a gun in the United States.[22] The gun homicide rate in this country is 25 times higher than the average of other developed nations.[23] The costs to communities of fatal shootings are immense, especially in Black communities. Not only are lives lost, but families and loved ones bear the steep emotional and economic toll for years to come.

- **Nonfatal shootings:** CVI programs also seek to reduce nonfatal shootings. For every gun homicide in the country, there are two nonfatal gunshot injuries. Reports show that close to 43 percent of these injuries are the result of interpersonal violence.[24] Unfortunately, survivors of nonfatal gunshot injuries often experience lifelong physical, mental, and emotional health effects as well as social consequences related to their injuries. These consequences include chronic pain, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and unemployment.[25]

- **Threats of gun violence during crimes:** Guns are frequently used to threaten and coerce victims during robberies and assaults. An analysis by the Center for American Progress found that from 2009 to 2018, there were more than 3.6 million nonfatal crimes that involved a threat with a firearm.[26] Even when shots are not fired, the threat of gun violence can have major impacts on the lives of survivors. Studies have shown that gun victimization is linked to victims reporting higher levels of distress as well as emotional and physical symptoms months after the violent event.[27]

While most of these programs address violent crimes, some also contribute to reducing other issues such as environmental conditions and property crime. Cities are increasingly investing in vacant lot and building remediation, enhanced street lighting, and engagement strategies grounded in public art.[28] Other efforts have worked toward reducing property crime. For example, a 2017 study analyzed 264 cities and found that community involvement in partnership with nonprofits was associated with a 4 percent reduction in property crime.[29]

# Who benefits from CVI programs?

The communities that most benefit from these programs are those that have historically suffered from segregation and discrimination and those where access to education and employment opportunities is insufficient. Communities of color, particularly Black and Hispanic communities, have experienced decades of underinvestment and overpolicing, which has led to many people being removed from their communities due to incarceration, as well as to limited access to stabilizing resources such as affordable housing, health care, education, and employment opportunities.[30] As a result of these conditions, gun violence is prevalent, disproportionately affecting young people and Black and Hispanic communities. For example, while young people ages 15 to 29 represented 20 percent of the population from 2016 to 2020, they suffered 48 percent of gun homicides.[31] Similarly, while Black people represented 13 percent of the U.S. population during the same period, they suffered 59 percent of gun homicides.[32] Similarly, while young Hispanics represent 4 percent of the population, they suffered 8 percent of gun homicides from 2016 to 2020. Unfortunately, young people and people of color such as Black and Hispanic people suffer similar disparities when looking at nonfatal gunshot injuries and other gun-related crimes such as robberies and assaults.[33] Though part of the violence that is being experienced throughout cities in the United States is the product of this underinvestment, many responses to crime have emphasized carceral measures that have ultimately undermined rather than promoted community safety.[34] In contrast, CVI programs focus resources in underinvested communities in an attempt to address the root causes of violence.

The greatest cost of the gun violence crisis in America is the loss of human life. Families, friends, and communities experience the loss or injury of their loved ones in countless ways, but the economic toll is staggering. On average, gun violence costs the country $280 billion per year across multiple systems including health care, criminal legal response, and lost future earnings.[35]

CVI programs save community resources across systems and do the difficult work of saving lives. Cities that have implemented Cure Violence models have saved up to $18 in medical and criminal legal expenses for every $1 invested in the program.[36] The city of Sacramento saved $18 to $41 for every $1 invested in its Advanced Peace program across its emergency response, health care, and criminal legal systems.[37]

# What are some of the challenges of building successful CVI programs?

Though support for CVI programs is growing across the political and ideological spectrum, ensuring program success is not without its challenges. These challenges are detailed in the menus below.

## Inadequate funding

While political support and funding for CVI programs are growing, both are still lacking in many respects. While the president has proposed hundreds of millions of dollars for CVI programs,[38] Congress has failed to act on a more comprehensive funding measure, such as the Build Back Better Act or the Break the Cycle of Violence Act.[39] These bills would provide up to $5 billion over eight years for CVI programs and create an Office of Community Violence Intervention in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. At the state and local levels, support for CVI has been growing to varying degrees, and there are coalitions across the country working to increase funding for affected communities.[40]

## Gun proliferation and firearm trafficking

The United States is the country with the highest level of gun ownership in the world, and the volume of firearms continues to grow, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.[41] Moreover, ghost guns have grown to be a major threat and are frequently used in shootings across U.S. cities.[42] The ease with which firearms are trafficked represents a major challenge to the effectiveness of CVI programs. Data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives show that from 2010 to 2020, more than 638,000 firearms crossed state lines before being used in a crime—a major sign of gun trafficking.[43] Cities such as New York, Chicago, and Baltimore are often the recipients of these guns, which usually originate in states with much weaker gun laws.[44] The accessibility and availability of guns is widely considered to be one of the factors contributing to the recent rise in shootings.[45] While CVI programs have a holistic, public-health-based view of reducing violence that does not address gun laws, efforts to complement these programs should include actions to ban ghost guns, the passage of misdemeanor prohibition laws, strong conceal carry requirements, regulations for assault weapons,[46] universal background checks, and extreme risk protection orders.

While the Biden administration has taken action to address the threat of ghost guns,[47] federal and state legislatures should similarly work to pass legislation that reduces gun trafficking. Federal and state legislatures should similarly work to pass legislation that reduces gun trafficking.

## Public trust

Successful CVI programs rely on trusted relationships between local governments, community-based service providers, and those who have been personally affected by gun violence. The service providers who have the most credibility in communities are often apprehensive about working with local governments due to historical underinvestment and lack of community inclusion in decision-making. Organizations have concerns that involvement with law enforcement or a government agency would damage their credibility in the communities they serve. To combat these tensions, government officials should consider a thoughtful and inclusive program development process that centers the experiences of community stakeholders. Rather than investing in existing government infrastructure, government should equitably invest funding in community-based programs and services, with priority given to organizations led and staffed by people who are or have been directly affected by violence and the criminal legal system. Moreover, in many communities, law enforcement agencies have publicly recognized the importance of CVI in addressing the root causes of gun violence and giving individuals meaningful opportunities to change their lives.[48] Lastly, the governance structure for CVI programs should include real power-sharing between government and community decision-makers.

# How do these programs get started?

CVI programs get started in a variety of ways. In some instances, programs stem from vocal community organizing and advocacy. In other instances, programs result from recommendations associated with a collaborative violence prevention planning body or task force. Other times, existing government offices build on or modify existing programming to increase effectiveness. It is important to understand where opportunities exist for innovation and meaningful engagement between government and community stakeholders in building CVI programs.

Regardless of the circumstances that catalyze CVI efforts, there are three key components needed in every community for CVI programs to be successful. First, government stakeholders need to be committed to working with community-based organizations and credible messengers in new ways, sharing power and funding. Second, community organizations and leaders need to dedicate their expertise to working with people who are most connected to local cycles of violence, delivering services and supports that have proved successful and tracking outcomes over time. Finally, adequate funding needs to be dedicated to CVI programs to ensure that they can offer meaningful alternatives to program participants.

## Examples of CVI program origination

- Some programs begin as responses to tragedies within communities. For example, Not Another Child[49] was founded in 2006 by the family of Andrell Daron Napper, who was shot by a stray bullet in Brooklyn, New York. Andrell's mother and brother founded the group to ensure that his death was not in vain. Not Another Child hosts mental health support sessions, runs a mentorship program for children and young adults, and hosts workshops to help young people finish high school and build their lives. The group is one of many CVI programs started by survivors; another is Mothers/Men Against Senseless Killing (MASK)[50] in Chicago.

- Other programs develop as responses to sustained and coordinated community advocacy. In Oakland, California,[51] the Oakland Ceasefire Partnership launched in 2021 after years of community activism. The lengthy development process

saw funding shortfalls, local political instability, and a tenuous relationship with local law enforcement. Eventually, however, the community and local leaders were able to come together after many meetings around a shared vision for the program.

Whether efforts to start CVI programs are initiated by local authorities and community leaders or in response to community tragedies, there is no right or wrong way to build community-based violence intervention programs.

# How are these programs funded?

Despite evidence of success, CVI programs have been grossly underfunded in most places across the country. Instead, taxpayer resources have been more focused on responding to gun violence after the fact. Federal, state, and local governments have slowly recognized the need to fund community-centered efforts and are increasing resources for CVI programs. However, more needs to be done to create real access for everyone who has been harmed by gun violence. Funding for CVI programs tends to come from the federal government, state governments, local governments, and philanthropic organizations.

## Federal government

At the federal level, the Biden administration and Congress have both acted to expand funding for CVI programs.

- **Executive action:** In April, the Biden administration enacted changes to 26 federal grant programs across five departments to allow for increased funding and technical assistance for CVI implementation.[52] For fiscal year 2023, the administration included $150 million in funding in the U.S. Department of Justice's budget for CVI development, implementation, and evaluation.[53] President Biden also announced that states are permitted to use Medicaid funding to support CVI programs.[54] While this increased funding is a step in the right direction, much more is needed.

- **Legislative action:** Recognizing the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on gun violence, the White House announced that local jurisdictions were permitted to devote a portion of their $350 billion American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to CVI programs.[55] The information currently available across the country about the overall investment in CVI is limited due to the facts that states and counties are still allocating these funds and aggregated reporting of this information is not yet fully developed. However, the Biden administration recently announced that $10 billion in American Rescue Plan funds have been dedicated to public safety and violence prevention, which includes CVI programs.[56] Congress is also considering the Break the Cycle of Violence Act[57] this session. If passed, this bill would dedicate close to $5 billion to CVI programs over the next decade.[58]

## State governments

Because of the limited availability of federal funding, some states have stepped up to fill funding gaps. In 2021, at least 15 states collectively committed $690 million in funding to CVI.[59] For example, Illinois[60] has pledged $250 million over three years to reduce gun violence, including direct investments in CVI programs.[61] In 2021, Pennsylvania pooled $24 million in state resources, with $15 million in ARPA funding, for its Violence Intervention and Prevention Grant Program, which has served as a major source of funding for its CVI programs.[62] States such as Connecticut and Illinois are devoting Medicaid resources to CVI programs, specifically hospital-based interventions.[63]

## City and county governments

City and county governments also devote significant resources to CVI programs. This includes directly funding government-run CVI programs or those run by service providers that contract directly with the government. For example, Chicago is devoting $85 million to CVI programs over three years as part of a larger package of public safety measures.[64] Increasingly, cities and counties are also establishing community violence grant-making programs, where funding is dedicated directly to community-based organizations through grant awards to support their operations.

## Philanthropic organizations

Philanthropic organizations have started increasing their investments in community-led CVI programs. The White House has brought together 15 national philanthropic partners to invest in its Community Violence Intervention Collaborative, a cohort of 16 cities across the country committed to using ARPA funding or other resources to increase investment in CVI programs and infrastructure.[65] Local community foundations and corporate partners are also investing in CVI in their home cities. For example, the Newark Community Street Team received $1 million in funding from local grant-maker the Victoria Foundation, as well as Prudential Financial, which is headquartered in Newark.[66]

The growing commitment to funding CVI programs is promising. However, these financial commitments are still out of sync with the scope of the problem of gun violence. More long-term and sustainable resources are needed to support the growth of the field, the development of program staff, and the availability of meaningful support services for clients.

# Conclusion

As cities across the country experience increases in gun violence, community stakeholders are calling on government officials to invest in evidence-based strategies that work. Community-based violence intervention models that have been developed for more than two decades are being deployed nationwide to engage those who are at the greatest risk of being involved in gun violence. CVI programs are a unique opportunity for partnerships between governments and people who have been directly affected by violence, dedicating resources to address the root causes of gun violence and working in tandem to change lives and keep communities safe.

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