



Community Violence Intervention as a Targeted Response to Enduring Harm

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The United States has and continues to experience **significantly higher rates of violent death** than its global counterparts. While lethal violence trends have declined steadily since the late 1990s, a **marked increase followed in 2020** – driven in part by the societal disruptions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Community Violence Intervention (CVI) strategies have expanded gradually over time but their adoption as a comprehensive, public-health informed approach to confront enduring violence problems **accelerated from that point**.

CVI models employ multidisciplinary, evidence-based strategies that prioritize the lived experiences of individuals and acumen of communities most impacted by violence. These initiatives have played an important part in reversing violent crime back below pre-pandemic levels.

Despite their effectiveness, recent federal grant **funding cuts threaten the stability, reach, and impact of these programs**. Curtailing support for CVI initiatives risks undoing progress and re-exposing communities to preventable cycles of harm.

The Growth of Community Violence Intervention

Community Violence Intervention strategies offer a grounded, evidence-based response to the persistent challenge of violent crime. CVIs acknowledge that crime and violence are byproducts of layered and interwoven influences—including individual experiences and actions, familial dynamics, neighborhood conditions, institutional failures, and systemic inequalities. Scalable and sustainable responses to violence must touch all pieces of the problem. Addressing such a complex issue demands equally complex, coordinated, and sustainable responses. CVI models leverage a range of community resources, often in partnership with government agencies, to produce a wide-ranging, “all of the above” response tailored to the communities they serve. Such approaches are rooted in both place and practice: some are locally-developed and nurtured, such as the **Newark Public Safety Collaborative**, while others like **CURE Violence** were designed, scaled, and evaluated across multiple settings.

The promise of CVI—especially as an effective measure to mitigate the surge in violence in 2020 and 2021—led local, state, and federal agencies to invest in such strategies. Recognizing their dual contributions towards promoting both public safety *and* public health, policymakers increased funding and expanded resources for CVI efforts. This momentum culminated in the creation of Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiatives, or CVIPI. The 2022 **Bipartisan Safer Communities Act** codified increased funding for both CVIPI programming and independent evaluation. CVIPI appropriations, along with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, have helped expand their capacity and infrastructure. That growth has been driven in part by

the development of local and state **Offices of Violence Prevention (OVPs)** to coordinate key community leaders and organizations around shared goals, which has coincided with **large declines in violent crime across American cities**. Crime trends observers **have attributed those declines, at least in part, to investment in local communities**.

After introducing its Gun Violence Reduction Strategy in 2022, Indianapolis (IN) has had **consistent year-over-year declines in non-fatal shootings and homicides**. The **National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform estimated** that each fatal shooting costs the city of Columbus (OH) \$2.1 million and non-fatal shootings cost the city \$738k. The **development of its OVP in 2023** has coincided with **a double digit decline in homicides** –saving lives and public resources.

CVI Does What It Is Supposed To...

While the full impact of CVI initiatives is still being evaluated, early results are promising both in reducing violence and strengthening local systems and partnerships. Notably, CVI efforts demonstrate the potential to deliver broad, complementary benefits including enhanced human service capacity, government-community collaboration, and networked problem solving. In St. Louis, for example, the city has seen substantial declines in violent crimes like homicide between 2022 and 2024. The eleven neighborhoods targeted by its CVI efforts have experienced even greater declines, suggesting that these community-centered strategies are making a measurable difference.

Continued evaluation is necessary, but preliminary findings reflect **existing research on coordinated community-based responses** to violence. Nonpolice, public-health based interventions, like Cure Violence, and other youth and community engagement efforts, have positive effects. The John Jay Research and Evaluation Center **studied Cure Violence** in two New York (NY) neighborhoods across several years. They found that the intervention sites had significantly fewer shooting victims and gun-related injuries than the comparison sites. These types of findings have since been reinforced through a **study of NY shooting data from 2006 to 2023**.

Community violence intervention **frequently draws on elements of other successful programs**, but places a focused emphasis on individuals and communities most impacted by violence. For example, ROCA Inc. has trained violence interrupters, police, and service providers in cities across the U.S. in **ReWire CBT (Cognitive Behavior Theory)**. This approach is part of ROCA's "relentless engagement" strategy, which draws on evidence-based behavioral change techniques to meet high-risk youth where they are developmentally, socially, and emotionally. By combining consistent outreach with cognitive-behavioral tools, this model has proven effective in building trust, engaging high-risk youth, and reducing recidivism rates. In St. Louis, ReWire CBT is part of a second wave of CVI implementation aimed at intensifying efforts to reach the city's most violence-involved and violence-impacted. Pairing violence interruption with improved decision-making and emotional regulation strategies reflects a growing understanding that many **violent incidents often stem from interpersonal disputes**.

...And Adds Value by Amplifying the Impact of Community Residents and Institutions

Policing is generally the response to violent crime. Law enforcement without robust community engagement makes for a unitary solution to a multifaceted problem. Even when that approach is effective, it can have

unintended consequences by eroding citizens' trust in police. Police have also raised concerns about having sole ownership over violence crime problems. Research has found that even evidence-based policing strategies like "focused deterrence" are difficult to sustain without engaging local service providers, community leaders, and residents in an authentic, mutually beneficial way. When done well, CVI can broaden the scope of responsibility and ownership over crime and violence by empowering citizens and non-governmental organizations to implement effective strategies tailored to community needs. A growing number of police executives recognize CVI's value and are open to collaboration.

Street outreach workers previously involved in violence are often used in CVI as credible messengers. This addresses violence through multiple mechanisms, and police often see its value in preventing violence. First, street outreach workers can have a positive impact in helping resolve disputes. They can draw individuals out of patterns of violence and towards something more constructive. Second, violence interrupters' work also plays a role in sustaining their own desistance from crime and violence. Leaders of street outreach organizations acknowledge that their workforce might be among those involved in violence if not for their commitment to their jobs—and its constructive impact on their communities.

Breaking down silos to violence response creates additional benefits. Those living in high-violence areas—especially youths—experience resulting trauma, even when not directly involved in violence. This trauma radiates to the larger community. Acknowledging this reality helps communities respond more effectively to violence's wide-ranging impacts. CVI also employs place-based prevention strategies tailored to high-violence locations. In St. Louis, for example, community-driven data usage identified places at high risk for violent crime. The information is used to guide residents in taking direct action and aids them in seeking city government support.

Community Violence Intervention is Promising, but Requires Sustained Support

Coupling community empowerment and engagement with enforcement, when needed, is part of an effective response to immediate violence problems. Long-term, these approaches help communities move toward an affirmative mission of building peace and safety. In recent years, cities, states, and the federal government supported community violence intervention on a bipartisan basis, which is evident in Republican votes for the 2022 Safer Communities Act, despite its gun restriction provisions. CVI has the power to leverage complementary strengths of law enforcement and community organizations—even harnessing the desire of people who have done harm in the past to make things better. The recent loss of federal support for Community Violence Intervention is already causing massive reductions in the workforce and diminished ability to serve especially vulnerable populations.

Federal resources geared toward violence reduction should be restored so that CVI-funded organizations can continue their promising work at a level that will produce maximum impact on people and communities. If not, state and local governments, and philanthropic organizations should prioritize filling that resource gap. These investments will produce lasting dividends as continued support of well-implemented CVI improves conditions that lead to violent crime and foster better health and livability in communities impacted by violence.