

## Community-Based Collaboration

### Introduction

From schoolyards to neighborhoods, youth violence has dominated the list of community concerns for more than two decades. Even as the rates of juvenile violence start to decline, communities continue to search for answers and to seek funding for effective programs that work to prevent further incidents.

Once youth violence was perceived as an inner city problem, but recent shootings in suburban and rural schools have elicited broad concern, even among those who previously felt immune. With each new tragedy, there is a growing sense of urgency to find solutions that will protect all U.S. communities.

---

### Overview

Because violence reaches across diverse communities and affects families everywhere, communities have responded with a variety of solutions to the increasing levels of violence. A cross-section of institutions and disciplines has also been involved in developing effective responses to this crisis: hospitals and public health practitioners set up emergency and domestic violence protocols; law enforcement instituted community policing policies; and legislators enacted stiffer penalties for assault and weapons offenses. At the same time, government agencies and non-profit organizations provided support services for victims and, ultimately, created programs that they hoped would prevent violence before it occurred.

When the [Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act](#) was enacted in 1974, it marked the beginning of the federal government's efforts to create a comprehensive juvenile justice system that included community-based programs, diversion and de-institutionalization. By the 1990s, as understanding of the complex nature of juvenile crime and its relationship to social, psychological and environmental factors grew, an approach balancing enforcement and prevention evolved. As a result, comprehensive community-based initiatives emerged as a key national strategy to address persistent, complex social problems like delinquency, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy.

### Coalitions, Collaboration and Guiding Principles

A host of local, state and national entities are involved in efforts to create safe and healthy neighborhoods. To increase the efficacy of delinquency prevention efforts and reduce duplication of services, collaboration has emerged as one of the most important components of community violence prevention. The federal government reflects this commitment to collaboration through inter-departmental cooperation, joint program funding, and data sharing. In 1999, for example, the Office

*Stop youth violence before it starts*

of Justice Programs announced more than \$100 million in community grants to prevent violence among youth. These grants funded joint efforts involving the U.S. Departments of [Education](#), [Health and Human Services](#) and [Justice](#).

In another example of collaboration, U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services and Justice funded "[Partnerships for Preventing Violence](#)" ([www.hsph.harvard.edu/php/VPP/partnerships/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/php/VPP/partnerships/)). This six-part satellite forum produced by Harvard University, Prevention Institute and the Education Development Center featured community prevention experts Deborah Prothrow-Stith, M.D. of the Harvard School of Public Health and Larry Cohen, director of Prevention Institute. A number of shared principles and approaches have emerged from a field that was once crowded with conflicting agendas. In general, recent grant funding emphasizes strengthening communities by building capacity among individuals and institutions to prevent and respond to violence. These newer initiatives reflect a growing consensus in the field, including the understanding that:

- Violence is a learned behavior and as such it can be unlearned.
- Everybody can contribute to violence prevention; youth are part of the solution.
- Violence is a complex problem that requires a comprehensive, multifaceted response.
- Partnerships and collaboration are more effective than isolated individual efforts.

Because the problem of youth violence is far too complex for one agency or one sector of the community to solve by itself, new coalitions have emerged. Most federally-funded community violence prevention initiatives now require the participation of broad-based coalitions of community stakeholders. Not only is such a diverse group better able to develop an effective strategy for the community, but such cooperation among agencies and organizations brings more resources to the issue, while eliminating the duplication of services. Public-private partnerships are another form of collaboration encouraged by the U.S. government to integrate and maximize the resources of government, communities and private enterprise to reduce and prevent violence.

#### The [Community Prevention Grant Program](#)

(<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/annualreport98/chapter5b.html>) requires every program it funds to establish a Prevention Policy Board. Like a community coalition, a Prevention Policy Board is a multi-disciplinary group with representation from social service, child welfare, and health and mental health agencies, as well as law enforcement, private industry, religious institutions, and civic organizations. Such a broad-based approach encourages the commitment and participation of the entire community in developing and implementing a local prevention strategy. It also fosters coordination, so that a comprehensive system of strategies can be implemented to best meet the needs of each community's children, youth, and families.

#### **The Spectrum of Prevention**

One of the tools used widely in the western United States to develop and evaluate effective prevention strategies is the "Spectrum of Prevention."<sup>1</sup> Developed in 1983 by Larry Cohen, the spectrum provides a framework for addressing the complex issue of youth violence with a comprehensive, multi-level prevention strategy. When implemented together, programs that include

activities spanning the spectrum of prevention have a greater likelihood of producing significant and lasting change.

1. Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills	Enhancing an individual's capability of preventing injury or crime
2. Promoting Community Education	Reaching groups of people with information and resources to promote health and safety
3. Educating Providers	Informing providers who will transmit skills and knowledge to others
4. Fostering Coalitions and Networks	Bringing together groups and individuals for broader goals and greater impact
5. Changing Organizational Practices	Adopting regulations and norms to improve health and safety and creating new models
6. Influencing Policy and Legislation	Promoting laws and policies that influence the creation of safer and healthier environments

The Spectrum of Prevention has been used as a format for RFPs (Requests for Proposals), as a template in the formulation of program design, and as tool for evaluating program effectiveness. Examples of activities and where they would fit in such a model are:

1. *Strengthening Individual Skills* could include mentoring programs for youth or school conflict-resolution programs.
2. *Promoting Community Education activities* include public forums, educational films, and the distribution of trigger locks, etc.
3. *Educating Providers* includes such training programs as the recently concluded satellite broadcast series "[Partnerships for Preventing Violence](#)" aimed at violence prevention practitioners in health, education and law enforcement.
4. *Fostering Coalitions and Networks* is a critical aspect of effective community violence prevention because it draws upon the knowledge and resources of diverse people.
5. *Changing Organizational Practices* refers to the internal policies of an organization or institution, such as employee programs to reduce workplace stress or an office that enforces a "no tolerance" policy for harassment.
6. *Influencing Policy and Legislation* is the type of activity that leads to laws that govern the public; for example, laws requiring background checks for gun purchases and penalties for hate crimes.

## **Best Practices: Research & Evaluation**

As the field of community violence prevention evolves, and the disciplines of public health, education, juvenile justice, law enforcement and psychology continue sharing best practices, more successful models emerge. Many programs are structured to assist those young people identified as "at-risk."<sup>2</sup> While it is possible to identify risk factors that might predispose an individual or a community to violence, they are still not predictive.

Recent advances in the field are taking into account "protective" and resiliency" factors to determine how certain individuals escape the violence around them. Prevention efforts that reduce risk factors, or employ protective factors to buffer children against the risks, maximize the chances of reducing juvenile delinquency and other related problems. After more than 15 years of pilot-testing and evaluating local and regional initiatives, the relatively new field of community violence prevention has been able to identify best practices. However, in such an environment, it is rarely possible to credit a single program or agency with lowering the rate of violence by itself.

The federal government supports data collection and shares program evaluation through a number of grant-funded initiatives that monitor and measure program success. Requisite program evaluation activities enable local stakeholders to assess progress, refine their programs, and optimize effectiveness over time. Through government-sponsored training and technical assistance, community members develop local capacity to assess program outcomes and monitor long-term changes in the prevalence of risk factors and adolescent problem behaviors in the community.

---

## **Federal Responses**

### **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

[www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)

A partner in a variety of community programs that help reduce violence through capacity-building and youth engagement strategies, the USDA also hosts PAVNET Online on its Web server. Among the many the programs under the USDA aegis that are building community capacity and engaging youth are: the Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES) Fellows, 4-H, youth leadership and entrepreneurship, parent education and teacher training, and community development.

- **Partners Against Violence Network (PAVNET)**

[www.pavnet.org](http://www.pavnet.org)

A partnership of the U.S. Departments of Education, Agriculture, Justice, Defense, Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Labor, PAVNET Online is a virtual library of information about violence and youth at risk, representing data these seven different federal agencies.

### **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

[www.dhhs.gov](http://www.dhhs.gov)

- **Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control**

[www.cdc.gov/ncipc](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc)

For access to grant information, data and government publications focused on the prevention

of violent and unintentional injuries. CDC funds a variety of initiatives relating to the demonstration and evaluation of effective violence prevention programs including the Community Demonstration Projects.

These cooperative agreements were undertaken to evaluate specific interventions that may reduce injuries and deaths related to interpersonal violence among adolescents and young adults. The interventions may influence one or more of the factors in the causal chain that leads to violence. The interventions have theoretical and empirical foundations and were designed to produce measurable behavioral or health (i.e., injuries or deaths) improvements. Twelve projects were funded in 1993, of which four projects successfully competed for cooperative agreements to extend data collection and analyses for an additional three-year period in order to assess long-term effects of their interventions.

For extension of the cooperative agreements, CDC gave preference to those communities that had established meaningful collaboration among community representatives, health departments, and academic institutions.

- **[Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau](#)**

[www.mchb.hrsa.gov](http://www.mchb.hrsa.gov)

The Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCH) is involved a wide array of programs that benefit youth and contribute to community violence prevention, including the Children's Safety Network (CSN).

The Children's Safety Network is a unique group of resource centers working to assist states, communities, and others to prevent child and adolescent injuries. CSN's four national centers provide information, training and technical assistance to facilitate the development of new injury and violence prevention programs and to enhance and support existing efforts. CSN works closely with state and local public health departments, especially maternal and child health agencies, helping them analyze injury data, implement and evaluate prevention programs, and collaborate with others in the field.

## **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

[www.usdoj.gov](http://www.usdoj.gov)

- **[Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention \(OJJDP\)](#)**

[www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org)

Comprehensive gateway site for programs, funding and publications relating to juvenile justice. A sample of listings includes:

- [Safe From the Start: Taking Action on Children Exposed to Violence](http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/summary_safefromstart/index.html)  
[www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/summary\\_safefromstart/index.html](http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/summary_safefromstart/index.html)
- [Highlights of the 1999 National Youth Gang Survey](http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/fs200020.pdf)  
[www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/fs200020.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/fs200020.pdf)
- [Law Enforcement Referral of At-Risk Youth: The SHIELD Program](http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2000_11_2/contents.html)  
[www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2000\\_11\\_2/contents.html](http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2000_11_2/contents.html)

- o [Involving Youth in Civic Life](http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/yfs00005.pdf)  
www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/yfs00005.pdf
- o [Teen Courts: A Focus on Research](http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2000_10_2/page2.html)  
www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2000\_10\_2/page2.html

---

## References

<sup>1</sup> "The spectrum of prevention: developing a comprehensive approach to injury prevention" by Larry Cohen and Susan Swift in *Injury Prevention* 1999; 5:203-207. Also see "A public health approach to the violence epidemic in the United States" by Larry Cohen and Susan Swift in *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 5, No.2 October 1993.

<sup>2</sup> (Tolan & Guerra, 1994; Yoshikawa, 1994; American Psychological Association, 1993; Hawkins, Catalano & Miller, 1992).

*Date of Publication: 2001*