



INVEST MORE TO SAVE MORE

Why a \$100 million annual investment will save more lives and more money in Pennsylvania



Invest More to Save More:

Why a \$100 Million Investment for CVI in FY 2025-2026 Will Save More Lives and More Money in Pennsylvania

March 2025

by Allison Anderman, CeaseFirePA

Acknowledgments

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CeaseFirePA Education Fund is a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to ensuring not another life is lost to gun violence. We build awareness about the impacts of gun violence in the Commonwealth by lifting up the voices of survivors and analyzing data on the drivers of violence in the Commonwealth. We run public education campaigns to foster civic engagement and build diverse coalitions that reflect the full toll of this public health crisis. And, we help decision-makers understand the real-world impacts of their actions and inaction.

Layout: Alec Meltzer, meltzerdesign.net

Cover photos (left) Courtesy of Bench Mark Program; (right, top) Courtesy of CeaseFirePA; (right, bottom) Courtesy of Public Source

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS, the average rate of gun deaths in the United States and Pennsylvania has steadily climbed. The toll of this increase is measured not only in lives lost, families devastated, and opportunities destroyed, but also in economic terms. This crisis in Pennsylvania costs taxpayers an astonishing \$470.7 million out of \$21.7 billion in total costs each year.¹

This crisis worsened during the pandemic years of 2020 - 2022. Gun deaths increased substantially around the country including in Pennsylvania. Although gun suicides make up a majority of gun deaths each year, the pandemic-related increase in overall gun deaths was driven primarily by a spike in gun homicides. But when the pandemic began to recede, gun suicides remained high and even rose while gun homicides started to decline. In Pennsylvania, gun homicides decreased faster than the national average. In fact, they fell to numbers not seen in over a decade in Philadelphia.

This significant decline in gun homicides began two years after Pennsylvania launched its new Violence Intervention and Prevention (VIP) Grants program through state and federal funds in FY2021-2022, and a year after the Commonwealth leveraged a significant infusion of federal aid in FY2022-2023, making the largest investment in community violence intervention (CVI) programs in its history. Fortunately, even after that historic investment, the state continued

to allocate funds to violence reduction, though at half of the FY2022-2023 amount.

It remains to be seen whether the reductions in gun homicides seen in 2023 and sustained in 2024 are the latent effect of the greatest amount of funding ever received by CVI programs in the state during FY2022-2023. There is evidence that when state funding is reduced, violence increases. We may not know whether that holds true for Pennsylvania for another year or more.

What is clear, however, is that meaningful investments in CVI programs reduce gun homicides and, until that number gets to zero, Pennsylvania cannot stop. Lawmakers cannot pull back on their commitment to saving lives.

This report will examine Pennsylvania's trends in gun homicides before, during, and after the pandemic and the historic state funding for targeted violence reduction (CVI) programs that save both lives and money. It will then examine some of these data-informed programs and their successes and argue that Pennsylvania must invest \$8 per resident to sustain this progress. Doing so will save the state \$40 per resident or more. Finally, the report suggests an allocation structure to maximize the benefit of this investment.

Pennsylvania is on the right path. Investment in CVI now and in the future will save both lives and money.

INTRODUCTION

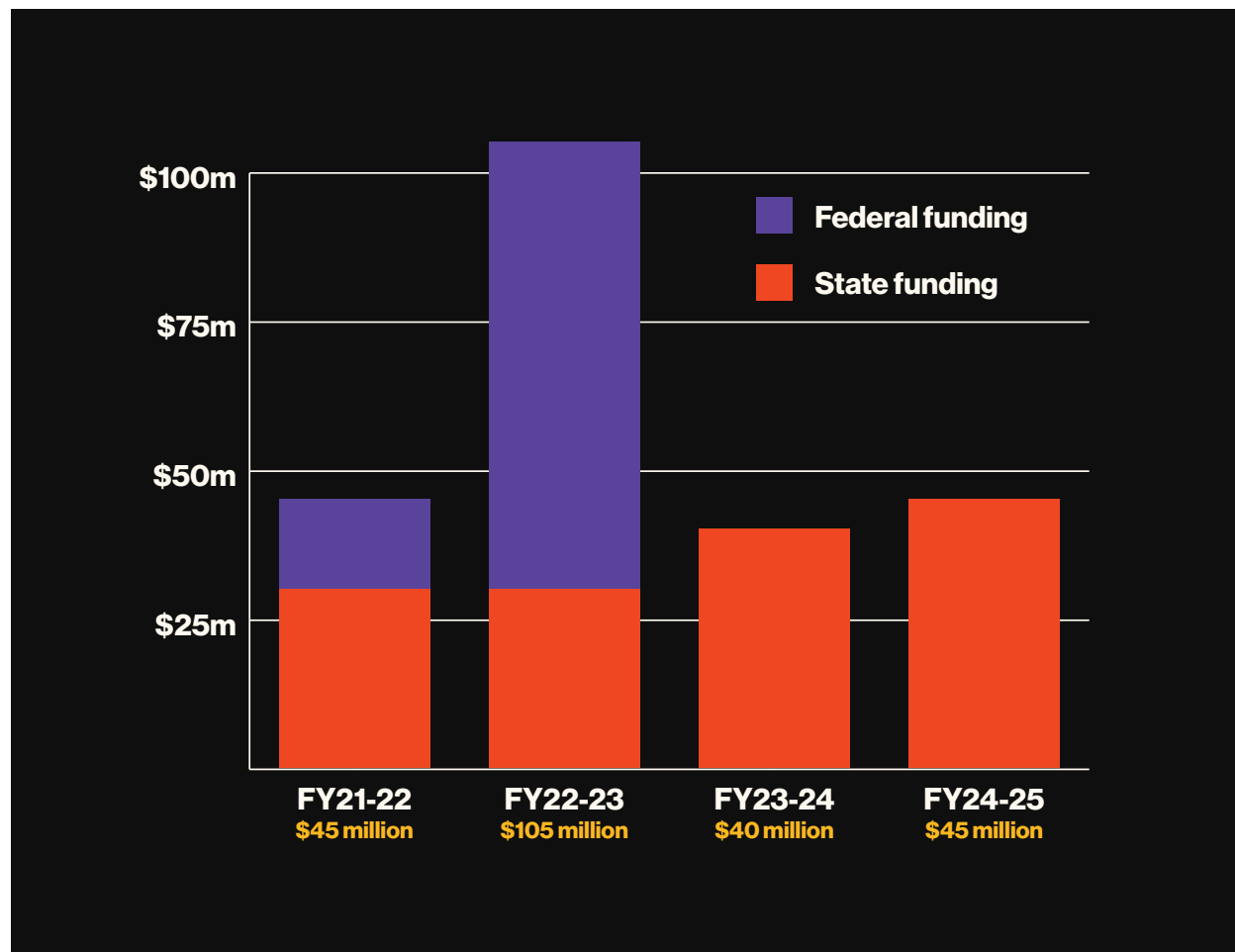
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAD WIDESPREAD IMPACTS on all aspects of American life including gun violence. Between 2020 and 2022, rates of both gun homicide and suicide increased across the nation. Researchers have theorized that social isolation, closed schools, shuttered community services, increased gun buying, and higher levels of stress were largely responsible for the increases in gun deaths around the country.² Accordingly, when lockdowns were lifted and people were able to go back to school and resume services, gun deaths should have slowed or returned to pre-pandemic levels. Yet in 2023, rates of gun suicide remained elevated or even increased³ while rates of homicides—the majority of which are gun-related⁴—declined. In Pennsylvania in 2023, homicides fell faster than the national average.⁵ In 2024, they fell to a low not seen in over a decade in Philadelphia.⁶

To understand why gun homicides decreased following the pandemic while gun suicides remained the same or increased, it's necessary to understand how they impact demographic groups. Gun homicides take a disproportionate toll on predominantly underserved Black and Latino communities.⁷ Conversely, gun suicides—which on average account for about 3 out of 5 gun deaths—are more prevalent in mostly white, suburban, and rural areas.⁸ During the pandemic years, gun homicides among Black Americans increased more significantly than among whites.⁹

While most laws that keep guns out of the hands of people who are likely to use them to harm themselves or others will lower rates of both suicides and homicides, Pennsylvania has not enacted any such laws since 2018.¹⁰ What the state has done, however, is pass legislation to direct unprecedented funding to the types of community-led violence intervention programs that have been shown to greatly reduce gun homicides in predominantly Black and Latino underserved communities. Known as community violence intervention or CVI, these programs disrupt violence and the conditions that cause violence. Many CVI programs are community-based and run by trusted individuals with similar lived experiences (“credible messengers”) who go into the community and meet the highest-risk people where they are.

During the pandemic, community violence drove the increases in gun homicides,¹¹ so in FY2021-2022 and subsequent years, the state directed millions in state dollars and federal pandemic-related assistance to CVI programs. In FY2021-2022, the Violence Intervention & Prevention (VIP) Grant program was launched with an initial \$30 million state appropriation,¹² augmented by another \$15 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.¹³ To meet the growing demand for these resources and increasing levels of violence in many Pennsylvania communities, the Commonwealth

FIGURE 1. VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROGRAM (VIP) FUNDING BY YEAR



invested a total of \$105 million in state and federal funds for the VIP Grant program in FY2022-2023 (including \$75 million in federal ARPA funds).¹⁴ Despite the loss of ARPA funding in FY2023-2024, Pennsylvania legislators continued to invest state dollars in the VIP programs—\$40¹⁵ and \$45¹⁶ million over the next two years. These wise investments have not only saved thousands of lives, but also likely state funds. As discussed in detail later in this report, for every dollar invested in evidence-based CVI programs, the state could save \$5 to \$7 in costs associated with violence

such as criminal justice expenditures, short and long-term medical care, victim services, and more.

To sustain these remarkable gains, Pennsylvania must not only continue to fund CVI programs but also increase funding so more programs can be developed and build capacity. Furthermore, by following a model that prioritizes funding to programs most likely to reduce violence in the short to medium term (one to 10 years), Pennsylvania can reap the greatest benefit from its investments in lives *and* dollars saved.

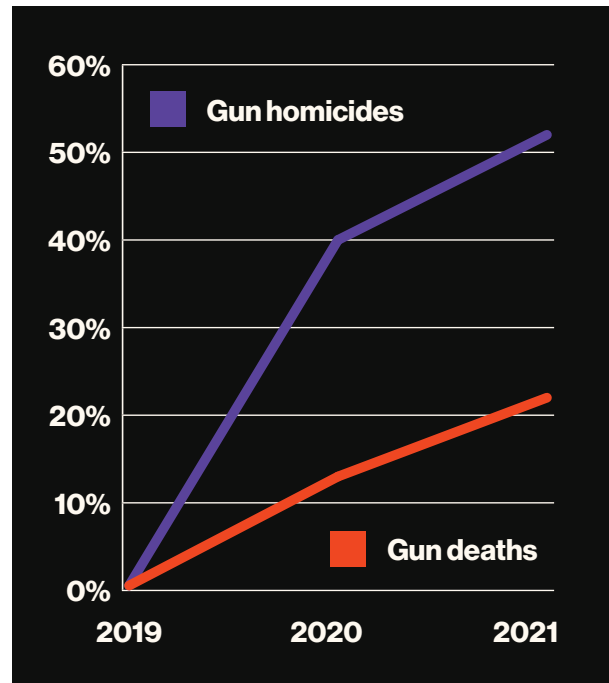
Community violence in PA during the pandemic

COMMUNITY GUN VIOLENCE REFERS TO SHOOTINGS between unrelated people in under-resourced neighborhoods that usually share some or all of the following characteristics: blight, significant racial segregation, high incarceration rates, poorly performing schools, high concentrations of liquor stores, and easy access to illegal drugs and firearms.¹⁷ Research consistently shows that community violence is the result of a long history of disinvestment in predominantly Black and Latino communities¹⁸ that consists of a lack of economic and educational opportunity, evictions, poverty, and government-sanctioned discrimination.¹⁹ Accordingly, community violence disproportionately impacts communities with high concentrations of Black residents and, to a lesser extent, Latino residents.²⁰

Another feature of community violence is that, even in places with relatively high numbers of shootings, most are committed by only a few people²¹ who are both perpetrators and victims. These individuals are often associated with each other in loosely formed groups and neighborhoods, contrary to the belief that most gun violence is committed by members of highly organized criminal enterprises known as “gangs.”²²

Community violence skyrocketed during the pandemic in nearly all major American cities.²³ A study by researchers at Penn State College of Medicine found that gun violence increased by 30% across the U.S. during the initial phases of the pandemic, between February 2019 and March 2021.²⁴ This increase was primarily driven by increases in gun homicides.²⁵ According to data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Pennsylvania experienced a 22% increase in overall gun deaths between 2019 and 2021 but a 52% increase in gun homicides. CDC data also shows that gun homicides had been increasing nationwide and in Pennsylvania

FIGURE 2. PA GUN VIOLENCE, 2019 - 2021



between 2014 and 2019, but their rate accelerated during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021 and continued through 2022.²⁶

The pandemic-induced spike in gun homicides did not affect all Pennsylvanians equally. Cities with higher percentages of poverty, unemployment, and racial segregation experienced the highest increase in gun death rates in 2021.²⁷ Philadelphia saw the 9th greatest increase among large American cities.²⁸ During the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021, the increase in shootings in Philadelphia was greatest for Black and Latino victims versus white victims.²⁹ In other words, when gun homicides increased statewide due to pandemic-related factors, they increased even more in Black and Latino communities already experiencing disproportionate rates of violence, trauma, poverty, unemployment, and discrimination.

A dramatic reversal

STARTING IN 2023, GUN HOMICIDES BEGAN DECLINING in cities around the country, reversing the pandemic-era trend.³⁰ Most major American cities had fewer gun homicides in 2023 than in each of the preceding two years,³¹ and although nationwide data is not yet available for all of 2024, the trend appears to have continued.³² Local data is available for 2024, however, and the data is compelling. Philadelphia's gun homicides decreased an astonishing 52% from their pandemic peak in 2021.³³ Pittsburgh also experienced a significant gun homicide decline in 2024 with a 41% reduction from its pandemic peak in 2022.³⁴

Gun homicides have also declined over the past two years outside of Pennsylvania's two largest cities. Looking at a sample of cities, the City of York, a jurisdiction with high rates of gun violence relative to other Pennsylvania cities,³⁵ had fewer gun

homicides in 2024³⁶ than any year since 2015.³⁷ Allentown also had its lowest rate of homicides since 1989.³⁸ In 2024,³⁹ homicides in Montgomery County fell 35% from a high in 2023.⁴⁰

This trend is also evident statewide. The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) reported that in 2023 nearly half of Pennsylvania counties saw a decrease in gun homicides.⁴¹ According to an analysis by CeaseFirePA Education Fund of data from the Gun Violence Archive, in 2024 gun deaths not including suicides fell 38% statewide since 2022.⁴²

While many Pennsylvania cities and communities experienced a decline in violence, some cities, notably Harrisburg,⁴³ experienced a rise in homicides in 2024—suggesting that the fight to address this issue is far from over.



Photo courtesy of Penn Injury Science Center

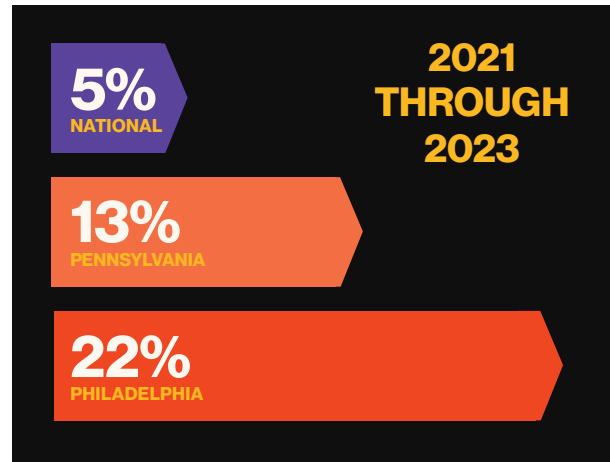
Increased clearance rates are more evidence of CVI success

ANOTHER INDICATION OF IMPROVEMENT IN COMMUNITY VIOLENCE is the homicide clearance rate—the percentage of homicides solved by law enforcement. Most homicides in Philadelphia are concentrated in low-income, under-resourced, and predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods.⁴⁴ Clearance rates are significantly lower when the victim is Black or Latino.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, in Philadelphia, the city’s homicide clearance rate increased 22% between 2021 and 2023.⁴⁶ Statewide during that time, the clearance rate increased 13%.⁴⁷ The homicide clearance rate improved nationally as well, but the increase was much larger in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania.⁴⁸

Clearance rates can be indicative of success in tackling community violence. While clearance rates depend on many factors, including law enforcement’s capacity to solve crimes, cooperation from community members is key.⁴⁹ There is a strong correlation between the relationships local police have with the community and violence in that community. Following high-profile incidents of police violence, community member distrust of law enforcement increases, along with violent crime.⁵⁰ Conversely, when community members trust the police to protect them and their safety, they are more likely to cooperate with law enforcement who, in turn, are better able to solve crimes. Circularly, solving more crimes increases community trust and decreases violence, which in turn helps law enforcement solve more crimes.⁵¹

In addition to leveraging federal funding to support CVI efforts through the VIP Grants Program, the Commonwealth also directed

FIGURE 2. INCREASE IN HOMICIDE CLEARANCE RATES



\$50 million in federal ARPA funds to support the Gun Violence Investigation and Prosecution (GVIP) grant program, focused on increasing clearance rates for violent crimes involving firearms, including gun homicides.⁵² An additional \$135 million in ARPA funding was dedicated to Local Law Enforcement Support Grants, with an emphasis on reaching law enforcement agencies with low clearance rates.⁵³

The exceptional gun homicide decline in Pennsylvania and several of its cities, and the significant increase in Philadelphia’s clearance rate, follows on the heels of the Commonwealth’s FY2022-2023 historic investment in CVI programs—evidence-based, community-centered programs directed towards individuals at the highest risk of committing violence.⁵⁴ Some flagship CVI programs involve cooperation and partnership with local law enforcement agencies in ways that build community trust and participation.

Historic investments in evidence-based CVI drives gun violence down

RESPONDING TO CLIMBING GUN HOMICIDES IN 2020 AND 2021, the federal government allocated billions of dollars in state aid in 2021 and 2022.⁵⁵ Accordingly, in FY 2022-2023, Pennsylvania was able to leverage \$105 million⁵⁶ in state and federal dollars to PCCD's violence prevention grant programs. This represented an increase of \$60 million from the previous year (\$45 million in FY2021-2022).⁵⁷ This substantial allocation of funding allowed many CVI programs to flourish by increasing the number of people served, improving their staff and program offerings, and much more. Even without federal funding, legislators allocated more state funding to the VIP program in FYs 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 when it invested an additional \$40 million

and \$45 million respectively (\$30 million in state funding was appropriated for VIP in FY2021-2022⁵⁸ and FY2022-2023⁵⁹).

The way CVI programs reduce violence is by relying on trusted community partners and outreach workers to provide an array of social and emotional services to the people most at risk of committing violence. These programs utilize law enforcement, medical workers, and community members to provide these services which, in turn, increases trust in these institutions. Others work to reduce violence by improving neighborhood blight and infrastructure or providing after-school activities for the most at-risk youth.



Photo courtesy of Promise Neighborhoods of the Lehigh Valley

Program Successes and Data in Support

What follows are explanations of the major types of CVI programs, examples from these programs that have received PCCD funding between FYs 2022-2023 and 2024-2025, and evidence in support of these types of programs:

Street Outreach and Violence Interruption

Street outreach and violence interruption programs utilize trained outreach workers to monitor their community for conflicts and intervene before disputes become deadly. Outreach workers are integrated and respected members of the community who are often survivors of gun violence themselves. In addition to resolving conflicts and changing norms around the use of guns in conflicts, these workers also help community members access social services.⁶⁰



VIP Funded Program and Success Story

PCCD's VIP Grants program has invested in several street outreach and violence interruption programs since its inception. One such program is Making a Change Group (MACG) which runs a street outreach program in partnership with Delaware County. One day, it received information from the local police department that individuals from rival neighborhoods were planning a "shoot up" at a popular Chester City pizzeria during a baby shower. The police wanted MACG's help to prevent the violence. MACG quickly engaged credible messengers who notified two community leaders that an

attack was imminent. The community leaders and credible messengers swiftly deployed to the location to meet with the individuals planning the attack. Using their experience, mediating skills, and reputations, the team was able to avert this mass shooting.

Evidence in Support of Street Outreach and Violence Interruption

A 2017 evaluation of a street outreach program in Philadelphia run by Temple University was associated with a statistically significant reduction in shootings.⁶¹ The same street outreach model has also been used successfully in Chicago⁶² and New York.⁶³ Baltimore's outreach program known as Cure Violence was associated with 22% fewer homicides and 23% fewer nonfatal shootings during a 14-year study period.⁶⁴

Photo courtesy of Making a Change Group

Group Violence Intervention (GVI)

Group Violence Intervention programs often involve a partnership between law enforcement and community leaders. These groups collaborate to bring the most frequent offenders and high-risk individuals to a meeting where they are offered social services, community support, and more in exchange for not being involved in shootings. If they violate the agreement, they are warned that there will be strict legal consequences.



VIP Funded Program and Success Story

Tiff Lowe⁶⁵ grew up on the streets of York and suffered sexual abuse as a child and homelessness in her teens. She spent time in jail where she felt safe, but when her mother died incarcerated, Tiff decided to turn her life around. Now Tiff directs the City of York's GVI program. The program takes high-risk students from different parts of York on various trips to bridge divides between opposing groups. During a trip to New York City, two students from opposing sides of town were placed in the same group. The tension was palpable but the group leaders trusted their training to handle the situation and

ensure a positive experience. Eventually, the two young men had an ice-breaking moment and began sitting next to each other, talking, sharing meals, and laughing together. They even stood next to each other for a group photo—something very unusual for members of opposing groups. Today, these young men remain in contact. One is now participating in the federal Job Corps program and the other is successfully working full-time.

**On February 17, 2025
York celebrated 100
days with no shootings**

Importantly, York's GVI team also includes law enforcement officers who, along with community members and service providers, conduct unexpected weekly visits to the homes of individuals associated with violence. Thanks to officers' focus on providing support and less on investigating participants for low-level crimes, the community has grown to trust the officers and

recognize that they are there to help. They also understand that the officers will take necessary action if they commit a violent act.

Evidence in Support of Group Violence Intervention

Programs like the one in York have been proven to reduce violence. A study published in 2023 evaluating Philadelphia's GVI project—also funded by PCCD—found that it was responsible for significant reductions in shootings during the study period, January 2020 to May 2022.⁶⁶ Some of these programs have not only reduced violent crime by nearly a third but have also healed relationships between law enforcement and communities like in York.⁶⁷

Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs (HVIPs)

Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs are collaborations between medical staff in hospitals and community partners to provide trauma-informed care and services to shooting victims to break the cycle of violent retaliation.



VIP Funded Program and Success Story

The Lehigh Valley Hospital partners with the community-based organization Promise Neighborhoods of the Lehigh Valley to run a hospital-linked violence intervention program and Cure Violence strategy in Allentown and other communities in the Lehigh Valley. One day, a credible messenger from the HVIP team went to visit a young man in the hospital who had been shot by his former friend. Although these two men grew up and went to school together, they eventually became rivals from opposing groups. When the team member visited the young man in the hospital, many of his group associates were

present and talking angrily about retaliation. The credible messenger from the team had similar lived experience and training to deal with these situations. She negotiated with both sides and ended up preventing retaliation and further bloodshed. While the young man had rehabilitation therapy, another credible messenger mentored him and helped him change his mindset. He has since stopped associating with his former crowd, joined Promise Neighborhood's workforce development program, and is currently employed. He is also coaching community football.

Evidence in Support of Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs

Arrests for violent crimes among people treated through Philadelphia's HVIP Coalition—also supported by VIP funding—were three times less likely. Program participants were six times less likely to require future hospitalization for a crime.⁶⁸ Some of the services provided by coalition programs include counseling, support groups, relocation and housing support, legal services, childcare, mediation and reconciliation services, and help navigating the healthcare system.

Photo courtesy of Lehigh Valley Health Network

Trauma-informed Cognitive Therapy

Trauma-informed cognitive therapy programs provide cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for individuals who have experienced and are at high risk for committing violence. CBT trains individuals to deal with and heal trauma and better manage conflict.



VIP Funded Program and Success Story

The Lincoln Center for Family and Youth in partnership with Trinity Health Mid-Atlantic- St. Mary Medical Center⁶⁹ provides trauma-informed CBT to gunshot survivors.

Dave was recovering from his second gunshot wound. The first shooting, which occurred ten years prior, had already taken a deep emotional and physical toll on him. A trauma-informed clinician was able to meet with him at his most vulnerable moment—not just to acknowledge his physical wounds, but to help him process

the emotional trauma that came with them. For the first time, he felt comfortable expressing his emotions in a way he never had before.

Dave's work with the clinician led him to a critical realization: the violence he had endured was deeply connected to his environment and the dangers he faced every day. With the program's support, he began considering relocation as a means of breaking free from the cycle of violence. Dave left the hospital feeling mentally stronger, knowing that there were people in the community and within the hospital who genuinely cared about his well-being. That support gave him a renewed sense of purpose—the will to continue living and to take steps toward a safer, more peaceful life.

Evidence in Support of Trauma-informed Cognitive Therapy

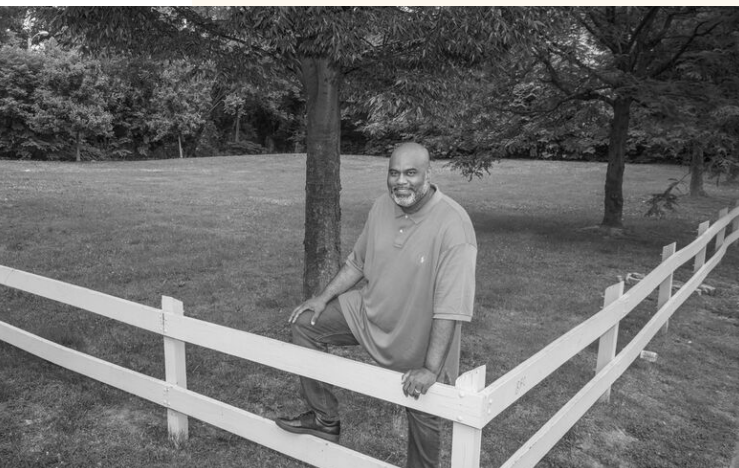
This type of program in Chicago was associated with a 50% reduction in arrests of youth for violent crime.⁷⁰ Another program initiated in Chicago—READI (the Rapid Employment and Development Initiative) Chicago—combines CBT, job opportunities, and social support. A study of READI Chicago found that for every dollar invested in the program, between \$4 and \$18 were saved in medical, legal, and other costs associated with shootings.⁷¹

Photo courtesy of The University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy

Community-driven Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Community-driven Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) programs clean up neighborhood blight and improve community infrastructure to reduce the opportunities for crimes to be committed and to allow people to feel a sense of pride and ownership in where they live.⁷²

Turning abandoned lots into green and well-lit spaces can reduce gun violence because people who rob and deal drugs often look for abandoned lots or areas with poor lighting in which to operate. Often these people rob other people who deal drugs in these locations leading to retaliation and more shootings.



VIP Funded Program and Success Story

Through collaboration and innovation, the Tri County Community Action team, in partnership with the PCCD Harrisburg Safety Project, addressed two long-standing issues voiced by residents of South Allison Hill: broken overhead lighting and illegal dumping. By restoring overhead lights and distributing LED porchlights using Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies, the community became brighter and safer. These efforts not only enhanced security but also discouraged illegal activities. Analyzing crime data from

2021 to 2024 revealed a measurable reduction in crime, highlighting the impact of thoughtful environmental design.

Evidence in Support of Community-driven Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's (PHS) Philadelphia LandCare Program works with local government, builders, and community organizations to create publicly accessible green spaces from vacant lots. One study found that areas with LandCare lots experienced reductions in gun violence of nearly 30%.⁷³

Photo courtesy of Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

Additional Evidence-Informed Violence Prevention Programs

In FY2024-2025, PCCD allocated violence prevention funding to 67 organizations. Many grantees fall into the CVI buckets described above, yet other successful CVI programs do not. Nevertheless, these programs share important guiding principles articulated by the Department of Justice under the Biden Administration that make them successful:⁷⁴ they are community-centered, evidenced-informed, equitable and inclusive, and effective and sustainable.

One such program is run by Bench Mark in Lancaster County. The program is an intensive, one-on-one mentoring program for the highest-risk juveniles who have committed gun crimes. Community-based mentors with similar lived experiences work with youth during their incarceration, immediately upon their release—the period when they are most likely to re-offend—and throughout their time on juvenile probation. The goal of the program is to prevent these individuals from recidivating.

At 17, Brian was incarcerated for two robberies with a gun. He was failing remote school and had a baby on the way. Brian grew up economically disadvantaged and did not know how to earn money legally. He fell in with the wrong crowd and engaged in high-risk behaviors.

Bench Mark made contact with Brian and paired him with a mentor, Adam, who had grown up in the same Lancaster neighborhood, had common acquaintances, and experienced many of the same challenges as Brian. After

Brian was released from jail, he and Adam built rapport through basketball. Adam helped Brian raise his grades, write a resume, and interview for jobs. They spent 15-20 hours together each week building healthy habits and distancing from negative peers. Adam also guided Brian through his juvenile probation requirements.

Now a graduate of Bench Mark, Brian works full-time at a local warehouse which allows him to support his family. He is still in touch with Adam weekly and is on track to graduate high school in May 2025. Most importantly, he has not engaged in criminal activity since the program ended. Thanks to Adam, and the support provided by Bench Mark, Brian turned his life around.

Another evidence-informed program is “Prison Customs,” run by Tiff Lowe in York County. Credible messengers visit locally incarcerated members of street groups. Her team focuses on helping these individuals develop life skills, accountability, and personal change. Initially, the incarcerated group members hesitated to participate in Prison Customs because they were not accustomed to discussing their feelings—anger was the predominant emotion. Today, over a year since the program began, inmates actively request these sessions with Tiff’s team. The team has documented significant positive changes in participants, such as improved behavior, fewer write-ups, and a more positive life outlook. The participants actively journal and eagerly share their progress with the team.

Effective Implementation Critical to Success

These successful programs have properly implemented CVI approaches like many similar programs around the country and Commonwealth. Like all programs, however, implementation issues can impact the success of a program. Early findings from an evaluation of Pennsylvania’s community violence intervention programs conducted by NORC/ Temple University in 2024 suggest widespread challenges stemming from position vacancies and turnover; over one-third of VIP grantees surveyed indicated not having enough staff and too little funding.⁷⁵ These were the biggest barriers for meeting programming demands. The solution to these challenges is more innovation and funding, not less.

In 2023, PCCD launched a new program to provide technical assistance, training, and

capacity-building support to organizations working to end gun violence. The Technical Assistance Project (TAP) is a VIP grant-funded partnership with WestEd’s Justice & Prevention Research Center in collaboration with Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC).⁷⁶ In collaboration with community partners, TAP launched PAPeaceAlliance.org to provide “free, comprehensive training and technical assistance resources for groups working to address violence and promote peace in their communities.”

On the whole, however, CVI programs are broadly successful at reducing interpersonal community violence because rather than criminal laws that simply address violence through incarceration, these programs interrupt cycles of violence and heal hurt people to prevent future violence.



Photo courtesy of State Senator Vincent Hughes

RECOMMENDATIONS

PENNSYLVANIA LEGISLATORS HAVE TAKEN CRITICAL STEPS in recent years to reduce gun homicides in the state and their efforts are yielding results. These efforts must be sustained and expanded. The more the state invests in CVI the more it will save, as the costs associated with a gun homicide are much greater than the amount needed to prevent one. The state can reap the maximum benefits of its investment by directing resources to the programs that interrupt and prevent imminent and near-term violence.

Invest more money to save more money. And lives.

In addition to the tragic loss of life, gun violence is expensive. A 2024 Philadelphia study examining the cost of gun violence in the city found that gun homicides cost an average of \$1.4 million *each* in medical treatment, property damages, and criminal justice expenses as well as costs related to lost earnings and productivity.⁷⁷ Overall, Pennsylvania taxpayers pay almost half a billion dollars due to gun violence in the state.⁷⁸ Gun violence also takes economic tolls that are harder to measure, driving the departure of residents and negatively impacting local businesses and tourism. Given the costs, the economic argument for CVI programs is compelling. Numerous studies have found that when public dollars are used for CVI programs, governments save much more than they invest.⁷⁹

Massachusetts consistently has one of the lowest gun homicide rates in the country.⁸⁰ It has also made the greatest per capita financial investment in CVI and has the most developed infrastructure to support CVI programs.⁸¹ In 2022, Massachusetts invested \$8 per resident for a total investment of approximately \$55 million.⁸²

An evaluation of Massachusetts' largest CVI program, the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI), found its cost-to-benefit ratio was between 1:5 and 1:7.⁸³ In other words, for every \$8 Massachusetts invested, the state saved \$40 to \$56 from this program. Studies of other CVI programs have found similar or greater savings.⁸⁴

If Pennsylvania spent the same amount per resident as Massachusetts on CVI, it would make a \$104.8 million investment for its 13,100,000⁸⁵ residents. If the state attained a similar cost-to-benefit ratio as Massachusetts' SSYI program, it could realize savings of \$733 million. Even if a lower ratio was attained statewide, Pennsylvania would undoubtedly save significantly more than it invested. Very few investments provide such a sizable return.

These investments must also be sustained over several years and allocated, ideally, for a multiyear period. Pennsylvania can learn from other states what happens when funding is not sustained. Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York have all made multiyear, significant per-capita investments in community

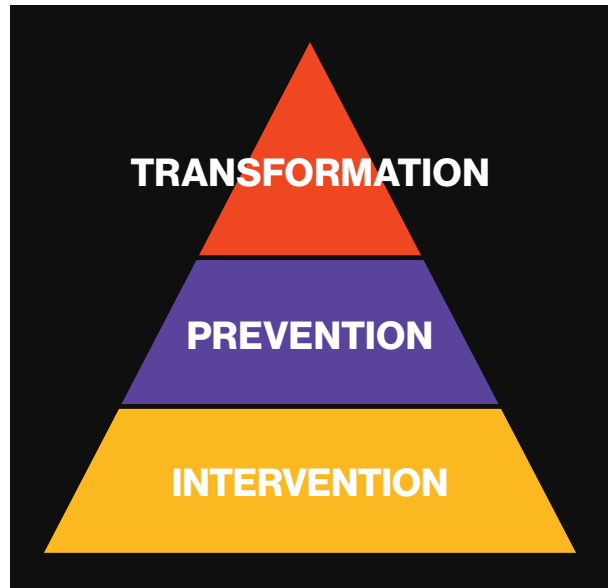
violence reduction. Their homicide rates have fallen even while the national homicide rate increased.⁸⁶ In Illinois, however, where the first Cure Violence program was established in 1995,⁸⁷ rates of serious violence increased when program sites were forced to shut down due to state funding cuts.⁸⁸

Year-to-year fluctuations in state funding can prevent programs from being able to hire and retain qualified staff, engage in meaningful strategic planning, and continue providing services to communities that have come to rely on them. Pennsylvania must not make this mistake and should invest at least \$300 million in CVI over the next three fiscal years beginning with \$100 million in FY2025-2026.

Prioritize funding to programs that will reduce violence in the near to mid-term

Public health experts have long used the “primary, secondary, tertiary”⁸⁹ model for targeting interventions to battle disease. Primary interventions prevent diseases before they occur through lifestyle change or resistance development. Secondary interventions address diseases or injuries that have already occurred but aim to slow their impact or progress and prevent recurrence. Tertiary care focuses on improving the quality of life while individuals live with a chronic disease or permanent injury.

Gun violence prevention has long been approached from a public health standpoint and viewed as a contagious disease that can be prevented before it starts or spreads.⁹⁰ Community violence programs can also be viewed through this lens. David Muhammad, Executive Director of the National Institute of Criminal Justice Reform, has conceptualized a model for separating CVI programs into



intervention (primary), prevention (secondary), and transformation (tertiary).⁹¹ As Muhammad describes them:

- Intervention programs prevent imminent violence and can reduce violence overall in a community in one to three years. Street outreach programs that utilize credible messengers to mediate and diffuse potentially violent conflicts are good examples of an intervention approach.
- Prevention programs are longer-term reduction strategies that are likely to reduce violence over a longer period of time, generally three to five years. These include programs that provide CBT, mentoring, and job training to the highest-risk individuals.
- Transformational programs have the potential to prevent violence in 15 to 20 years by removing the conditions that make violence more likely. These include programs that revitalize the infrastructure of a neighborhood and remove blight. They invest financially in communities to provide more economic opportunities.

CVI funders can use this model to better direct funding to programs.

- Intervention programs stop imminent violence and are the most acutely needed programs to save lives and reduce the public costs associated with violence. Accordingly, the bulk of violence prevention funding should be allocated to intervention programs.
- Prevention programs are also quite important for sustaining violence reduction and preventing further violence in the longer, but still relatively near, term. Accordingly,

prevention programs should receive the next largest allocation.

- Transformational programs keep communities safe over the long term and prevent future violence. Transformational programs should also receive long-term funding but in proportion to intervention and prevention programs.

The overall funding amount and proportionate allocations may change if gun homicides continue to decrease. In the near term, however, this is the structure for the most effective use of funding.

Conclusion

CITIES AROUND PENNSYLVANIA SPENT YEARS PLAGUED BY GUN VIOLENCE. While the state has made substantial gains, there are still far too many people being killed with guns in the Commonwealth. These shootings impact every single Pennsylvanian. Even in neighborhoods where community violence isn't a daily problem, violence can affect property values and suppress business growth and tourism.

Furthermore, every Pennsylvanian is paying for gun homicides. To make substantial and lasting change in this crisis, and reduce the economic burden on our state, Pennsylvania legislators must take courageous and bold action and invest in the programs required to alleviate this problem.



Photo courtesy of Promise Neighborhoods of the Lehigh Valley

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Learn more about CeaseFirePA's efforts to end gun violence at www.ceasefirepa.org.