

A POLICYMAKER'S PLAYBOOK

TO REDUCE GUN VIOLENCE
WITHOUT POLICING COMMUNITIES



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GUN VIOLENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AMERICA'S CONFLICT RESOLUTION METHOD. GUN VIOLENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A RESPONSE TO POVERTY AND DESPERATION. SHOOTINGS ARE UP AND ELECTED LEADERS NEED NEW TOOLS AND NEW APPROACHES TO DIAGNOSE THE PROBLEM.

- JAVIER LOPEZ,
PUBLIC HEALTH ADVOCATE

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A MISSION TO HEAL

The Deadly Mix of COVID-19, Gun Violence, and Racism

[Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities are disproportionately impacted by gun violence.](#)

It is critical that policy makers avoid using over-policing as a method to reduce gun violence. Harsher punishments, longer sentencing, and constant over-policing will lead to increased mass incarceration, less services, and more pain. From the federal level to municipalities, [the country spends roughly double on police, prisons, and courts than it spends on programs that support low-income individuals.](#) Instead of using traditional crime control methods, lawmakers should invest in community-led policy interventions and support both proven methods to reduce violence.

In the midst of COVID-19 and summertime upticks of gun violence and police violence, policy makers must listen to communities on the front lines of the public health epidemic of gun violence. In cities across the country, gun violence numbers are on the rise. The [Elsevier Public Health Emergency Collection is tracking gun data during the era of COVID-19, and noted](#) “Multiple factors likely influence the rising number of gun incidents, unemployment, increased alcohol consumption, and increased firearm purchases are possible contributing factors.” [In Washington, D.C. there have been 93 homicide cases, which is a 19% increase from 2019.](#) In Milwaukee, there have been [86 homicides in 2020, double the rate from 2019, and the total from the entire year of 2014.](#) The number of non-fatal shootings has gone from 182 to 273 over the years, a 50 percent increase. In Austin, Texas, local authorities reported that in 2020 there was an [increase in murders and non-familial](#)

[aggravated assaults with guns over the last five years first-quarter numbers.](#) While we do not know the exact factors behind upticks in violence, guns can be a contributing factor to the ongoing violence associated with the pandemic.

Policy makers must take immediate action to support the organizers, survivors, and communities closest to the pain of everyday gun violence, and not just by adding more money to police budgets. In June 2020, [the Action Center on Race and the Economy released a tool that calculates the percentage of police budgets](#) to the total respective budget of the 300 largest U.S. cities. In many of these cities, there is inadequate or no funding specifically directed to support strategies to invest in gun violence prevention. Law enforcement agencies control the data, the media, and the policy responses that support their narrative that punishment is the goal to keeping communities safe from gun violence.

We join with calls from community leaders to change the systems of oppressive policing while also continuing to keep our neighborhoods safe. We need short and long term options to get to community-led solutions. Community leaders from across the country are organizing for change on many issues, including gun violence. In cities from Seattle to New York, and everywhere in between, community leaders are demanding policy makers on all levels of government hear their urgent calls for investments in local communities. [Texas social justice groups developed a tool](#) for collecting citizen input on how to restructure the city’s general fund and propose new programs that would support the reallocation of the over 40 percent of the city budget the police department currently holds. We believe we can both support the growing need to reallocate funds, while also meeting the immediate and continuing needs of survivors and victims of crimes. Scholars Tracey Mearns, Philip Atiba Goff and Tom R. Tyler recently [wrote on defunding the police](#), “the long-term goal is fundamentally to reimagine how the state serves its citizens in the project of public safety.”

Public Health, Education, and Healing is the Answer

The deadly public health crisis of gun violence has impacted communities across America for decades. [Black men in America make up 6 percent of the population, and are more than half of all gun homicide victims each year.](#) Black women are disproportionately impacted by gun violence, and are [nearly three times as likely to be murdered with a gun than white women.](#) Transgender women of color are [four times more likely to experience gun violence than cisgender women.](#) Violence prevention efforts that only use that only employ a criminal response model to this crisis have left thousands of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color living in conditions filled with violence, in prison, and with no [support from policy makers.](#) [Yet, many people within our communities support funding community-led proven policy solutions to help reduce gun violence.](#) A first-of-its kind 2019 national survey with Lake Research Partners found that over 70 percent of community respondents felt that elected leaders do not care enough to solve the everyday gun violence issues in Black and Latinx communities.

GOALS & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

A Holistic Policy Pathway - Paved with Justice

The Community Justice Action Fund has one of the largest networks of activists in America, with over 30,000 identified supporters. We are joining with our partners and frontline activists across the country to demand policy makers invest in our communities. At every level of government, elected officials should introduce policy plans that are rooted in community-led solutions. As an organization, we continue to be led by the voices of the people on the front lines. We stand with the Black, Indigenous, and non-Black People of Color continuing to march and say Black Lives Matter, and mourn the deaths of our brothers and sisters who are killed that we will never hear about in the media. We are asking for policy makers to do the same, and invest in us.



THE THREE STEP POLICY PLAYBOOK

Invest in Us: Short term goals for long term success

1. Investment: Policy makers can support stabilizing the employment of violence interrupters, outreach workers, and credible messengers on the frontlines. Policy makers must pass local policies to fund and work with frontline activists and technical assistance providers to:

Conduct a culturally competent, [community-wide risk assessment](#) — just as you would for any disease - identifying the most salient risk factors and environmental root causes of gun violence among the communities and individuals most harmed. Identify or acknowledge the need for [safe space initiatives led by lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirit, trans and gender non-forming people](#) who are left out of many violence prevention efforts but at the highest risk of being harmed. Develop a triage and long-term strategic plan to treat those risk factors and environmental root causes as a means to prevent the spread of gun violence.

Technical Assistance (TA) is a critical component of violence intervention work that provides subject matter expertise in the entire process of forming an evidence base program from ideation to implementation. The TA support continues after implementation with assistance in hiring of key staff, initial new staff training, and planning and developing strategies. In addition, the TA helps the program set up and maintain a database management system with the key indicators to help capture the program's impact and effectiveness. The TA scope of work varies based upon the unique needs of the community, the mission of the organization, and the

needs of the staff. Other support the TA may provide is the following:

- Site visits throughout the year,
- Booster training,
- Bi-weekly or monthly calls with staff to aid in development and problem solving,
- Ongoing staff professional development,
- Hands-on training on community engagement,
- Program development,
- Assistance in Evaluation

2. Investment: Policy makers can use their budget power and/or legislation to fund a permanent Office of Violence Prevention and Crisis Management System with a full-time staff to coordinate gun violence prevention and intervention services. This central office can be housed in another department such as the Health Department, County Commissioner Court, or Governor's office, but should have autonomous power and budget authority. **The goal of investing in violence prevention should not be to defund other essential services that are currently meeting the needs of survivors or victims.** We believe another world is possible where we can provide our communities what they need, not just what we are given.

3. Investment: Policy makers can make investments in programs to work with violence interrupters, outreach workers, and credible messengers on the frontlines. Policy makers must invest in programs designed to promote healing, prevent further trauma, and lay the groundwork for economic growth. Policy makers have the opportunity to learn from organizers in New York City where community-based efforts have reduced gun violence. These evidence-based strategies will focus on prevention, intervention, and healing. In New York City, [CMS](#) was developed by Erica Ford, and From 2010 to 2019, [data shows the Crisis Management System has contributed to an average 40% reduction in shootings across program areas compared to 31% decline in shootings](#)

[in the 17 highest violence precincts in New York City.](#)

Community-led solutions should include proven strategies to reduce gun violence such as Cure Violence ([Life Camp, Inc](#) and the New York City Crisis Management System), Advance Peace (example: [Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety](#)), and Hospital Based Interventions (examples: [The HAVI](#), [The University Hospital Violence Intervention Program](#)). Funding for innovation and new program that can address unmet needs in our communities should also be allocated to organizations on the frontlines.

If there is existing funding for the critical solutions we have listed in our playbook, we ask policy makers to give more, additional, and a surplus of funding to fund the efforts already taking place on the front lines. The money to support these steps should be reallocated, divested, and defunded from police departments with the primary goal of not disrupting services for victims, survivors, and communities.

What We Know About Gun Violence

[Gun violence claims tens of thousands of American lives each year, and another 100,000 Americans are shot and injured annually.](#) Mass violence is a small part of the problem. No aspect of the gun policy debate draws more attention than mass shootings in mostly white areas of the country. [Mass killings account for less than one percent of American gun deaths each year,](#) yet the majority of news cycles and funding goes to responding to mass violence in white neighborhoods. The majority of American gun violence, and in particular homicides are concentrated in Black/Indigenous People of Color communities. Extensive research shows that even in the neighborhoods with the most gun violence in America, an [incredibly small and readily identifiable segment of the community is responsible for the vast majority of gun violence.](#)

Barriers We Must Overcome

For decades, many police departments have traumatized residents, and the neighborhoods where they live through a destructive cycle of racist over-policing and under-protection. [One of the glaring gaps in the current system is that criminal justice data excludes police shootings.](#) Far too many policies support and protect police violence. Reforms alone cannot fix a policing system that is broken.

Statistically, being a young Black man in America is more dangerous than being in law enforcement: [Black men and children ages 15 to 24 are more than 11 times more likely to be shot to death than officers are to be shot and killed in the line of duty.](#)

Policing also has a disparate impact on survivors of domestic violence. Much of the female prison population are survivors of sexual and domestic violence, with [79% of women in federal and state prisons reporting that they've experienced physical abuse and over 60% reporting sexual abuse prior to being incarcerated.](#) Survivors are often criminalized for trying to keep themselves safe from abuse, and this fact has resulted in a staggering rate of survivors being arrested and incarcerated. According to Survived and Punished, ["survivors are criminalized for self-defense, failing to control abusers' violence, migration, removing children from abusive people, being coerced into criminalized activities, and securing resources needed to live day to day while suffering economic abuse.](#) Female prison populations have grown exponentially in the past few decades, in fact, there are 8 times as many women in federal and state prisons as there were in 1980. And, women of color make up the majority of these populations - [nearly two-thirds](#) of women in prison are Black, Indigenous, or non-Black people of color.

[In a 2015 study](#), The National Domestic Violence Hotline found that both women who called the police and women who hadn't called the police in response to domestic violence shared a strong reluctance to turn to law enforcement for help. In fact, 80% of those who had never called the police were somewhat or extremely afraid to call them in the future. For those who did call, 43% felt police had discriminated against them for, among other reasons: not being a "perfect" victim, their gender identity, a lack of understanding of their experience by the police, their race or ethnicity or immigration status, their politics, or a connection to the offender by the police. Domestic violence has always been a public health crisis. Even prior to the pandemic, survivors did not have adequate access to the economic support needed to leave an abusive partner. Policy makers can invest in violence interruption programs, housing programs, and in domestic and sexual violence programs that have always been underfunded and underresourced in order to address increased demand from survivors.

Costs of Gun Violence

Our playbook will require policymakers to invest money in a time where many budgets are already strained. Data driven organizations like [National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform](#) have continuously shown the evidence to why funding intervention early on can help save lives. At the community level, [studies](#) have shown that gun violence has a substantial long-term effect on local economies by reducing job growth and business investment in the neighborhoods where violence is most prevalent.



PolicyMakers Must Take a Public Health Approach

Through a community-led public health lens, cities, counties, states, and the Federal government can approach gun violence like any other disease by getting to the root of the issues. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color violence prevention leaders across the country like Erica Ford and Alex Sanchez in Los Angeles have studied and researched the healing aspects of treating gun violence like a disease as the key to creating safe and just communities.

[According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\), the public health perspective asks the foundational questions:](#) Where does the problem begin? How could we prevent it from occurring in the first place?

Instead of waiting until gun violence happens and deploying the police, we can send in teams of culturally-competent community workers to intervene and prevent the violence from occurring. Successful gun violence prevention requires strengthening the systems that protect and support children, young adults, families, and communities, as well as reducing the risk factors and environmental root causes that increase the risk for violence. [Left unaddressed at the individual level, trauma from violence makes it hard to succeed in school, interferes with work productivity, damages relationships, increases the risk of suicide and other forms of violence, and is associated with shorter lifespans.](#) Being a witness to a shooting, whether at school, in the community, or at home, has a [major influence on children, including increased risk of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, difficulty in school, engagement in criminal activity, and abuse of drugs and alcohol.](#)

The public health perspective can allow policy makers to see the intersections where risk factors and environmental root causes overlap and where communities can intervene to prevent multiple forms of violence at once. Viewed through a health equity lens, early investments highlights the importance of joining with community leaders like Reggie Moore in like Milwaukee and his [calls for first addressing violence in neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by persistent and concentrated levels of structural, community, and police violence.](#) These communities are the critical starting point for investing in healing justice and equitable safety.

Complex problems require comprehensive and integrated solutions. A community-led planning process must be the foundation of a playbook for gun violence prevention. The process should operate on the principles of justice, equity, inclusivity, transparency, self-determination and participatory decision-making. During this process, it is imperative to integrate these spaces with opportunities for healing from collective trauma.

Cities have shown that working with effective investments in technical assistance (TA) providers to conduct a thorough problem assessment can mean the difference between success and failure in the implementation of a city or state-wide gun violence reduction strategy. Such efforts like in the city of Philadelphia [ensure that critical resources are directed toward the individuals, groups and neighborhoods at the highest risk of being involved in gun violence.](#)

The Essential Power of The Frontline Organizers

Investing in, and supporting trained, culturally-appropriate outreach workers with relevant life experience - to directly engage with people most likely to commit acts of serious violence must be the North Star of any solution to end gun violence. Too many violence intervention workers are fighting many epidemics with little to no funding or support. Frontline organizers develop a caseload of clients whom they work with intensively – seeing clients several times a week and assisting with their needs such as drug treatment, employment, housing, etc. Utilizing proven methods like the Cure Violence model, [workers identify ongoing conflicts by talking to key people in the community about ongoing disputes, recent arrests, recent prison releases, and other situations and use mediation techniques to resolve them peacefully.](#) When a shooting happens, trained workers immediately work in the community and at the hospital to cool down emotions and prevent retaliations – working with the victims, friends and family of the victim, and anyone else who is connected with the event. Staff on the front lines of fighting the gun violence epidemic not only need supplies like PPE, they need to be given respect, autonomy, and essential funding to do their life saving work every day.



Connecting the Connectors

Every moment without funding to support violence intervention is a possible life lost. In order to support the life-saving efforts of gun violence prevention, the connection and power of policy making must be centered on investing in healing. In order to do this, policy makers should invest in funding the essential work of gun violence prevention efforts rooted in a public health approach.

CJAF recently launched the “Invest in Us” Campaign to support the on the ground demands for policy makers to invest in proven solutions to end gun violence. To get connected to groups working on the ground, technical assistance experts, or to learn more about ongoing campaigns to support local organizing visit www.cjactionfund.org or email amber@cjactionfund.org.



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