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## How Philadelphia reduced gun violence in 2023

New efforts contributed to the reduction in shootings and homicides.



Detectives on the scene at 29th and Clearfield Streets where a man was fatally shot Dec. 7.

Steven M. Falk / Staff Photographer

by David Muhammad, For The Inquirer  
Published Jan. 18, 2024, 5:00 a.m. ET

Despite the constant media coverage of violent crime, Philadelphia has actually achieved a significant reduction in gun violence this year. As of Dec. 30, [homicides are down more than 20%](#), and [nonfatal shootings are down 28% compared with the same period in 2022](#). And while gun violence is slightly down throughout the country, few cities have experienced Philadelphia's level of reduction. Some cities even saw large increases in murders in 2023, like [Washington, D.C.](#), and [Memphis](#).

For the past year, the organization where I work as executive director — the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform — has assessed the violence reduction efforts of the [Philadelphia Police Department](#) and the city's community violence intervention programs, in partnership with the [Civic Coalition to Save Lives](#).

While we have been critical of certain shortcomings, such as a lack of coordination, collaboration, and communication, it is also clear that recent improvements have [led to the decrease in shootings](#). These include increasing the number of case managers, making referrals to community violence intervention programs, and replicating a successful employment and cognitive behavioral therapy program in Chicago.

In mid-2022, the Philadelphia Police Department redesigned Operation Pinpoint — a program started [in 2019](#) to identify, collect, analyze, and disseminate information that officers and commanders need to target the most violent offenders and the most impacted areas. Operation Pinpoint also improved its use of intelligence-driven policing and focused more effectively on the small number of people in the city who drive most of the violence.

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A recent [external academic evaluation](#) found that the city's group violence intervention program has been successful at engaging very high-risk

neighborhood “crew” members and supporting them in not participating in gun violence. The latest evaluation of group violence intervention in Philadelphia (along with an evaluation of the city’s last attempt at group violence intervention) provides a clear “proof of concept” that such interventions can work in Philadelphia.

New investments in community-based organizations working to reduce gun violence have also paid off. [Launched in 2021](#), the city’s Community Expansion Grant program awarded 31 community groups between \$100,000 and \$1 million each in support of this work. An [external evaluation](#) found that these investments helped the community organizations build capacity and improve services. The evaluation concluded that as of December, programs funded by the Community Expansion Grant program [served nearly 5,000 people](#), saying the city “successfully implemented an innovative approach to funding a constellation of programs proximate to the communities and individuals most likely to be impacted by violence.”

The Philadelphia Police Department also increased resources to solving shootings, expanding its shootings investigations group, which contributed to a higher clearance rate for shootings and homicides this year. Police also more routinely collect and quickly analyze DNA on bullet shell casings from crime guns.

Not only are shootings down, but carjackings also decreased in 2023. The Philadelphia Police Department said that this decrease is due, at least in part, to a newly formed task force between the police department, the FBI, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and other local and state agencies. And despite tensions with the district attorney’s office, an agreement between the police department and the DA’s office resulted in higher bail for the small number of defendants involved in gun violence.

Last year, 30 police commanders were reassigned. This new leadership in critical divisions has also helped to improve outcomes.

After more than a year of planning and some delays, Philadelphia launched P3, a replication of the renowned [READI program in Chicago](#) that provides cognitive behavioral therapy and employment opportunities to people at high risk of being involved in gun violence. And [hospital violence intervention programs](#) throughout the city — which help victims and survivors heal — have been meeting regularly to improve collaboration.

All of these new efforts have contributed to the reduction in shootings and homicides.

There are still too many shootings in Philadelphia. Increased focus, greater use of intelligence, and continued and increased coordination among various programs are needed. But we must also acknowledge and celebrate the tremendous progress that has been made in the past year.

*David Muhammad is the executive director of the [National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform](#). NICJR has worked with the [Civic Coalition to Save Lives](#) and the Philadelphia mayor's office to conduct a detailed assessment of gun violence in the city.*