

Evidence on Non-Carceral Safety Investments

Research consistently demonstrates that holistic, non-carceral investments can produce dramatic improvements in community safety—while avoiding the devastating consequences of jails, prisons, and police contact. The following memo surveys some of the research that shows the promise of these non-carceral, non-punitive approaches.

Investments in Social Capital & Urban Design

- According to one national study, every additional ten [non-profit community organizations](#) tackling violence and building stronger communities results in a 9 percent drop in the homicide rate.
- In Seattle, a program that provides matching funds to community organizations to work on [neighborhood improvement projects](#) was found to substantially decrease violent crime, especially in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods.
- [The design of urban spaces](#) can have crime-reducing effects. Recent studies in multiple jurisdictions, including [Philadelphia](#), [Baltimore](#), and [Youngstown](#), have found that maintaining green space reduces certain types of crime.
- In New York City, research demonstrates that [streetlights](#) can reduce “index crimes”—including murder, robbery, aggravated assault, and some property crimes—by more than a third.
- A [rigorous study](#) found that restoring vacant land in cities significantly improves both local residents’ perception of their safety, as well as their actual physical safety. Restoration projects produced large reductions in crime, including a 30 percent reduction in gun violence.

Investments in Education & Opportunities for Youth

- Increasing students’ [educational attainment](#)—i.e., ensuring students stay in school longer—decreases the likelihood of future incarceration by 16 percent. Improving [school quality](#) also reduces the probability of serious crimes and incarceration, particularly for at-risk youth.
- Programs to support students’ [social and emotional well-being](#) have been found to reduce total arrests by as much as 35 percent, violent crime arrests by as much as 50 percent, and, for program youth in juvenile detention facilities, recidivism by 21 percent.
- Robust research shows that correctional education programs are [one of our most effective ways](#) to reduce recidivism and increase employment opportunities upon reentry.
- Socioeconomic [segregation of schools](#) has been found to increase violent crime, suggesting that promoting more diverse and integrated schools could reduce violence.

- Youth-focused sports and therapy programming can reduce the [likelihood of future arrests](#) for a violent crime by 50 percent.
- [Safe Passage to School](#) programs—which place civilian guards along specified routes to keep students safe on their way to and from school—have been found to reduce violent crime by 14 percent.
- High-quality afterschool programs have broadly positive impacts for children. By providing a safe space that promotes students’ health and development, these programs [can reduce drug use and decrease arrests](#) and other forms of criminal-legal involvement among children.
- Increasing [youth employment](#), such as through summer jobs programs, has been found to reduce violent crime by 35 percent—with long-lasting, positive effects.
- Robust research has shown that [violence prevention programs in schools](#) significantly reduces violent behavior among students at all grade levels and in all school environments. Many of these programs also have the added benefit of improving academic performance and reducing substance abuse among youth.
- Early childhood intervention programs, as well as nutrition programs for newborns, are [likely to reduce crime](#).
- Programs focused on wraparound education services in high risk areas [have been shown](#) to reduce juvenile arrests as well as child abuse cases.

[Bolstering Economic Security & Tackling Inequality](#)

- [Emergency financial assistance](#) for those experiencing economic insecurity, one study showed, reduced total arrests, including a 51 percent reduction in arrests for violent crimes. Short-term financial assistance, especially when [combined with cognitive behavioral therapy](#), has been shown to decrease violence and crime. Many studies have demonstrated that [cash transfers reduce domestic violence events in particular](#).
- [Decreasing unemployment](#) has been shown to reduce property crime. In fact, much of the reduction in property crime seen during the 1990s can be attributed to the declining unemployment rate.
- Economic inequality predicts homicide rates “[better than any other variable](#).” A simple measure of inequality predicts approximately [half of the variance](#) in homicide rates between American states and between countries. Data from 39 countries shows that even small [decreases in inequality](#) would reduce homicides by 20 percent and cause a 23 percent long-term reduction in robberies.

- Local inequality drives property and violent crime. Looking at neighborhoods within major American cities, property crimes are much more common in areas that have [higher median income gaps](#) between adjacent areas. The researchers suggest that reducing localized inequality would reduce the incentive for property crime. Other researchers [found that](#) “within-tract”—that is, within income tract—inequality was associated with higher Uniform Crime Reports of violent and property crimes. This held when the comparison was not within tracts, but between neighboring tracts.
- [Decreasing the gender wage gap](#) has been found to reduce domestic violence against women. Reductions in the gender wage gap can explain 9 percent of the domestic violence decline between 1990 and 2003, as measured through hospital admissions.

[Investments in Health & Treatment](#)

- One study shows that [Medicaid expansion](#) reduced crime by 3 percent annually, producing crime-related cost savings of \$13 billion each year.
- Further research has shown that Medicaid expansions led to significant reductions in robbery, aggravated assaults, and larceny theft. This was primarily due to increased [uptake of substance use disorder treatment](#) through Medicaid coverage.
- Additional research demonstrates that when the number of substance abuse treatment facilities increases in a particular area, [violent and financially-motivated crimes decrease](#) locally.
- Expanded access to [mental health treatment](#), and to psychiatric treatment in particular, has also been found to reduce violent crime.
- Targeted [interventions for children who have suffered from lead poisoning](#)—including lead abatement, medical care, and public assistance—have long-term positive impacts, including a reduction in future arrests for violent offenses.
- [Decriminalizing marijuana](#), specifically through allowing access to medical marijuana, was found to decrease violent crime, particularly in Southwestern border states.

[Investments in Housing](#)

- At the local level, increasing [access to affordable housing](#) by building more low-income housing units results in significant reductions in violent crime.
- [Reducing socio-economic segregation](#) of neighborhoods—such as through housing vouchers that enable low-income families to move to neighborhoods of opportunity—has been shown to reduce youth arrests for violent crime.