A NEW VISION FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY:

A Federal Blueprint to Advance Community Safety through Evidence-based Policies
In a new research collaboration, Authors from the Brookings Valuing Black Assets Initiative, the Brookings Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking, Civil Rights Corps, Color Of Change, and the Vera Institute for Justice recently released a policy blueprint, “A new community safety blueprint: How the federal government can address violence and harm through a public health approach,” that presents evidence-based approaches to keep individuals, families, and communities safe and offers broad policy recommendations based on this evidence. The research brief, originally published on brookings.edu, can be found [here](https://brookings.edu). The following document is a summary of this brief.

**SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE BLUEPRINT**

All people deserve safety in their homes, workplaces, parks, and other community spaces—safety not only from violence, but from the economic, social, and environmental conditions that fuel violence in the first place. Within the United States, however, access to physical safety—just like access to clean air, economic mobility, and high-quality schools—is shaped by where someone lives, with our most unsafe places reflecting decades of systemic disinvestment.

To keep individuals, families, and communities truly safe from violence and harm, policymakers must tackle the “social determinants of safety” that contribute to neighborhood violence. Just as in public health, where prevention is the most effective way to keep people healthy, preventative safety is the most effective way to keep individuals, families, and communities safe. The recent brief, “A new community safety blueprint: How the federal government can address violence and harm through a public health approach,” is designed to help federal lawmakers harness this crucial insight, specifically by outlining a multi-disciplinary, evidence-based policy agenda that prioritizes upstream interventions to advance community safety. This document summarizes its core findings.
SAFETY THAT WORKS: THE EVIDENCE ON WHAT KEEPS COMMUNITIES SAFE
PUBLIC HEALTH & PREVENTION PROGRAMS

A public health approach to preventing violence addresses the structural factors that increase susceptibility to violence, while advancing protective environments that nurture safety, health, and well-being.

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE & TREATMENT:
Increasing access to healthcare, substance use treatment, and mental health treatment is significantly associated with crime and recidivism reductions. States that expanded Medicaid coverage after the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was passed, for instance, achieved significant decreases in annual crime rates and an annual cost savings of $13 billion two years following the expansion.

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION:
Community violence intervention (CVI) employs trained professionals to intervene and de-escalate violent conflicts, while providing wraparound services to those who have a high-risk of committing violence. Both “hospital-based community violence intervention” and “neighborhood- or street-level violence intervention” have been associated with reduced re-hospitalization for violent injury and reduced youth involvement in future crime—while also being cost-effective.

CIVILIAN CRISIS RESPONSE:
Given that police are often ill-suited to safely and effectively address behavioral health crises, a growing body of evidence indicates that civilian crisis response models can be both treatment- and cost-effective. A recent study of the oldest civilian crisis response model, the Crisis Assistance Helping Out On the Streets (CAHOOTS) program in Eugene, Oregon, found that in 2019, CAHOOTS effectively responded to 17% of city 911 calls while requiring police back-up in less than 1% of cases.
Create sustainable funding streams for community violence intervention (CVI) programs. The federal government could more effectively prevent violence by creating long-term funding streams that support evidence-based community violence intervention (CVI) programs—both hospital-based and community-centered models.

Scale civilian crisis response models. The federal government should consider providing competitive grants to help scale these models nationwide—while embedding an evaluation component to further measure the associated success and cost savings.

Increase funding for community health clinics, trauma recovery centers, and community health workers. The federal government should consider increasing long-term funding for clinics, community health workers, and training and workforce development for healthcare professionals, such as through: dedicated support for Trauma Recovery Centers; expanding the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program to cover public health workers; creating a new AmeriCorps program that funds health workers in target jurisdictions; increasing the Health Resources and Services budget for healthcare workforce development training; and/or creating new grant programs that fund community health workers specifically.
INVESTING IN EMPLOYMENT:
Youth workforce development and employment programs have been found to reduce youth violent crime arrests by as much as 45%, making summer jobs one of our most effective safety programs. Evidence indicates that this efficacy applies to adults, too. One study of a New Orleans-based job training program found that program participants were two-fifths as likely to be arrested as non-participants.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE:
Providing direct financial assistance has likewise been associated with crime reductions. One study in Chicago, for example, found that emergency financial assistance for those experiencing economic insecurity in Chicago reduced arrests for violent crimes by 51%.

INCREASING HOUSING & REDUCING RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION:
Substantial evidence shows that investing in housing and reducing socioeconomic segregation within neighborhoods can reduce violence. For instance, permanent housing subsidies have also been associated with reduced rates of intimate partner violence while efforts to reduce neighborhood foreclosures and vacancies have been found to significantly reduce crime.
EVIDENCE TO ACTION

Expand access to workforce development & employment programs. Congress could advance community safety by prioritizing investments that would improve employment outcomes, such as: piloting a “jobs guarantee” program that could fund different models in different jurisdictions while embedding an evaluation component; funding programs like a Civilian Jobs Corps; and increasing targeted funding for workforce development programs specifically geared at those who have previously been incarcerated or are at high risk of incarceration.

Fund summer jobs for youth. The federal government could create dedicated funding streams that help cities and states launch summer youth jobs programs like those in Boston, DC, and Chicago.

Fund targeted cash assistance programs for harm survivors. Congress should consider expanding programs that provide financial assistance to harm survivors.

Expand economic opportunity for formerly incarcerated individuals. Congress could create and expand grant programs that specifically work to employ formerly incarcerated people, including by: providing education, job training, entrepreneurship support programs like Aspire in Washington, DC; providing direct financial assistance to help these individuals as they search for employment following incarceration; and removing existing barriers that prevent this community from accessing Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, and other life-saving programs.

Expand access to housing through eviction defense, vouchers, and alternative real estate models. Congress could enhance funding for programs that provide eviction defense, housing vouchers, emergency housing, programs of “permanent supportive housing,” and alternative real estate models—such as “community land trusts”—that can increase the availability of affordable housing while letting community members share and retain ownership.
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION

Investing in youth—whether through school programs, early childhood, mentorship, or other interventions—is one of the most impactful ways that policymakers can support community safety long-term.

**Youth Employment & Skills Training:**
Providing summer jobs for youth may lower violence not only during the period of employment, but also in the months and years afterward.

**Youth Programming:**
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 youth recidivism by 21 percent. Youth-focused sports and therapy programming can halve future arrests for a violent crime.

**High Quality Education & School-Based Violence Prevention:**
Increased educational attainment may reduce the rate of future incarceration by 16%. Meanwhile, one recent study conducted in Michigan showed that increased spending on low-income schools decreased adult crime rates so substantially that the law saved the state money overall.
Create a grant program to fund local “Youth Violence Prevention Plans.” Congress could create a grant program that funds jurisdictions to create and implement plans like the *Blueprint for Action to Prevent Youth Violence*, which was associated with a 43 percent reduction in violent crime.

Increase resources for low-income schools. One way to follow the evidence surrounding youth programs, high-quality education, and mentorship involves increasing resources for school-based counselors, social-emotional learning programs, wraparound supports, and school funding generally, such as through: expanding and making mandatory Title I funding, prioritizing school quality and holistic services within the lowest-income census tracts (such by enhancing *Promise Neighborhoods* funding, *21st Century Schools* funding, and funding for *Full-Service Community Schools*), and enacting new grants that facilitate “community schools” programming like counselors, psychiatrists, mentorship, and peer supports.

Fund youth centers, sports, enrichment activities, and neighborhood-based wraparound support programs. Congress could create a new grant program that funds out-of-school programming and community infrastructure for youth, such as youth and community centers, sports programs, art, music, drama, and related activities—including provisions that make these programs free or free to students who could not otherwise participate.
GREEN SPACES & TRANSFORMING VACANT SPACES:
Numerous studies have found that renovating vacant buildings, land, and lots in disinvested communities reduces violent crime rates. In one Philadelphia neighborhood, for example, a population-based, case-controlled study conducted between 2008 and 2014 found that the presence of street lighting, painted sidewalks, public transportation, and parks was associated with at least 76% decreased odds of a homicide.

INVESTING IN NEIGHBORHOOD-LED PROJECTS & “THIRD SPACES”:
Centering community leadership in neighborhood improvement projects offers additional safety dividends. In Seattle, a program that provides matching funds to community organizations to work on neighborhood improvement projects substantially decreased violent crime, especially in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods.
**EVIDENCE TO ACTION**

- **Increase grant funding for place-based neighborhood improvement projects.** Congress should create a new program at the Department of Housing and Urban Development that supports directly impacted and/or other community members in developing and implementing place-project plans that will transform community spaces to maximize community safety.

- **Provide grant funding for “participatory budgeting for community safety” programs.** The federal government should incentivize community-driven and participatory budgeting processes by establishing a grant fund that provides sustainable funding to qualified community-rooted organizations doing “participatory budgeting for safety” projects in high violence communities.
Pillar #5

INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

Community safety is a multidisciplinary endeavor rooted in public health, but our institutions are only now beginning to reflect this preventative and community-based orientation.

ENHANCING THE CAPACITY OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS:
Research shows that investments in place-based nonprofit organizations can significantly affect how safe a community is. In fact, sociologist Patrick Sharkey found that, in any given city possessing 100,000 people, every community organization dedicated to building stronger neighborhoods and confronting violence led to approximately a 1% drop in violent crime and murder.

CIVILIAN AGENCIES DEDICATED TO COMMUNITY SAFETY:
Recognizing the multidisciplinary nature of community safety, some cities have created civilian “community safety agencies” or “neighborhood safety offices” whose purpose is to fund, research, and coordinate interdepartmental work on non-carceral safety. Data on these institutions’ effectiveness is still emerging, but outcomes from Richmond are promising: research associates the Richmond ONS with a 55 percent reduction in gun homicides and a 43 percent reduction in firearm-related crimes.
Provide sustainable & accessible funding for grassroots organizations working on community safety. As Congress expands funding for community safety programs, it should prioritize reaching and funding organizations that have already been doing this work—many of which are lower-capacity, more grassroots-level organizations.

Create a Community Safety Division at the Department of Health and Human Services. As Congress expands investments in community safety, these new programs should be administered by a non-carceral agency that is dedicated to prevention-oriented public health and safety.

Fund additional research on the “social determinants of safety.” Although this brief presents evidence on the power of preventative safety, additional research is necessary to help communities understand what works best to keep their residents safe.
LOOKING AHEAD: SHIFTING OUR PARADIGM ONE POLICY AT A TIME

This policy blueprint offers a concrete path to how federal lawmakers can help to keep individuals, families, and communities genuinely safe, namely by addressing the underlying factors that drive violence and harm. This “public health approach to safety” will not only reduce the harms of punitive approaches, but also will create structures that address all of our multifaceted safety needs.