

# YOUTH VIOLENCE RESEARCH PRIORITIES

## Problem Description

Youth violence is defined as the intentional use of physical force or power to threaten or harm others by young people ages 10–24 years. Youth violence can take different forms, such as fighting, bullying, threats with weapons, and gang-related violence. Homicide is a leading cause of death of young people. Victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of youth violence often experience a range of consequences, including physical injuries, depression, academic difficulties, and increased risk for other forms of violence. Youth violence also has substantial economic impacts on communities' healthcare costs, property values, and social services systems.

Preventing youth violence can reduce the risk for other forms of violence that young people experience, such as teen dating violence. Research on youth violence and delinquency has yielded many effective individual-, family-, and school-based approaches. CDC's research will address the gap in the availability of complementary strategies that address community risks. Research also is needed about strategies that reduce lethal violence by minors. To increase communities' ability to develop prevention plans that address their unique needs and efficiently address multiple forms of youth violence, CDC will examine approaches that support continued declines in some forms of youth violence (e.g., homicide, fighting) and jumpstart declines in other forms (e.g., gang-related violence, bullying). A solid research foundation provides communities with the potential to prevent youth violence. With a focus on key research gaps, communities will be able to use evidence-based approaches and achieve population-level and sustained reductions in youth violence.

## Research Gaps and Priorities



Evaluate physical environment change strategies for their effectiveness in reducing youth violence behaviors, injuries, and fatalities and their economic efficiencies.

The physical characteristics of the environments in which individuals interact influence safety, crime, and violence. Strategies that modify the physical characteristics of housing, schools, and community areas (e.g., recreation areas, business areas, public transportation hubs) are beginning to emerge and suggest potential benefits of increasing the development and examination of these prevention strategies, but important questions remain.

### Examples of research questions include:

- Is youth violence reduced with environment change strategies that improve visibility (e.g., “eyes on the streets”), manage accessibility (e.g., appropriate barriers such as landscaping), and provide for the repair and upkeep of neighborhoods and schools?
- How can these physical environment strategies modify social conditions in communities (e.g., perceived and actual safety, residential and business instability, social connectedness among residents, norms about the acceptability of violence) and reduce youth violence?
- What are the short- and long-term economic efficiencies experienced by the health, education, social, and justice systems from the implementation of these strategies?

Rigorous evaluation of these strategies, particularly in high-risk communities, is necessary for broad reductions in youth violence.



Identify and evaluate **strategies to decrease** inappropriate access to and use of weapons by minors and to prevent lethal violence.

Firearms are used in the majority of homicides of minors ages 10–17 years. Although the prevalence and correlates of inappropriate gun carrying among minors and the consequences of firearm use are well known, less is known regarding the factors associated with minors’ access to, possession of, and use of firearms and other weapons to threaten or injure others and how to prevent lethal violence among young people.

### Examples of research questions include:

- What are the sources, motivations, and deterrents of weapon-carrying behavior among minors at high risk for violence-related injuries?

- Do existing strategies that prevent violent behaviors such as physical fighting and bullying also effectively prevent weapon-related violence and lethal violence among minors?
- What innovative prevention strategies can reduce weapon carrying by minors and risk for serious injury or death?

This research will enhance the safety and health of all community residents.



Evaluate the **effectiveness and economic efficiency of prevention strategies** that reduce the likelihood of different forms of youth violence.

Youth violence can take many different forms, including physical fighting, threats with weapons, bullying, and gang-related violence. Communities often seek prevention strategies that will efficiently and simultaneously prevent different forms of youth violence, but few programs have been evaluated for their effectiveness in reducing multiple forms. Expanding the evaluation of prevention approaches would increase the availability of evidence-based programs that efficiently address multiple forms of youth violence, enabling different communities to better design approaches that address their unique needs.

**Examples of research questions include:**

- What is the impact of existing evidence-based family- and community-level prevention strategies on gang joining and gang-related violence?
- What impact do existing or adapted youth violence prevention programs have on multiple types of bullying, including traditional in-person bullying and cyber-bullying?
- How can new media and communication technology be used to reduce different forms of youth violence?
- What are the short- and long-term economic efficiencies of using evidence-based approaches that simultaneously reduce the risk for multiple forms of youth violence?

This research will enhance communities’ ability to address their unique needs with evidence-based approaches.

CDC’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (the Injury Center) advances research to prevent injuries and violence and reduce their consequences. Research includes identification of factors that increase or decrease risk and rigorous evaluation of innovative prevention strategies. The Injury Center translates science into effective policies and programs and guides how to adapt evidence-based strategies to community needs to increase widespread use. The research priorities strategically focus on research gaps that the Injury Center can address to strengthen public health action and impact. The Injury Center research priorities are updated as research and public health needs evolve.

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