



# PREVENTING VIOLENCE: Roles for Local Public Health Agencies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY • OCTOBER 2011

## BACKGROUND

Violence is a leading cause of death and disability in the US<sup>1</sup>. While there has been a growing recognition of the unique skills and solutions the public health community can offer to prevent violence<sup>2</sup>, the role of public health is often overlooked and many times public health practitioners themselves do not know the appropriate roles they should assume to contribute to solutions.

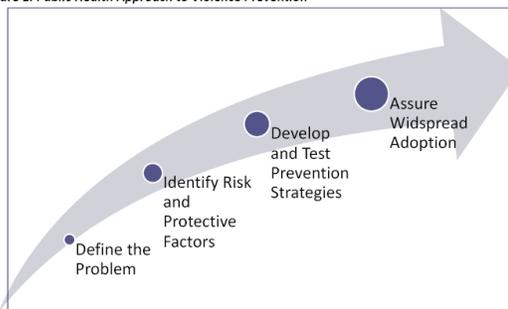
In April 2010, the Safe States Alliance, with funding from the CDC, convened a roundtable of twenty-four violence prevention experts and stakeholders to address this issue. Recommendations resulting from these discussions are offered as a resource for public health departments in identifying specific roles for their organizations in a full report on the Safe States website. This is a summary of recommended roles for local public health agencies.

## THE PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

The Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention is a four-step process designed to guide practitioners through program planning, evaluation, and dissemination (Figure 1)<sup>3</sup>.

The first step in the public health approach is to clearly define the problem by collecting and analyzing epidemiological data. The second step is to identify the factors that protect

Figure 1. Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention



people or put them at a higher risk for experiencing or perpetrating violence. The third step is to select and adapt a preexisting

intervention or develop and test new prevention strategies to appropriately address the issue. The final step is to broadly disseminate the intervention strategies and evaluation results to facilitate adoption in other communities.

## OVERARCHING ROLES

Public health leaders at national, state, and local levels must continuously demonstrate an interest in and commitment to the multi-disciplinary approach needed to prevent violence. Throughout the roundtable meeting four overarching goals

were identified that must be addressed at all levels of public health in order to successfully prevent violence:

1. Institutionalize visible, high-level leadership that prioritizes violence prevention;
2. Prioritize a balanced approach that includes the primary prevention of violence;
3. Focus on disparities and the role of social determinants, including racism and poverty; and
4. Re-frame the issue of violence as a community-level problem that involves all of us, and not simply “them.”

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES

- 1 Build coalitions and partnerships;
- 2 Conduct needs assessments and strategic planning;
- 3 Identify and support effective policy approaches to violence prevention;
- 4 Seek sustainable financial resources;
- 5 Implement evidence-based policies, programs and practices to prevent violence;
- 6 Enhancing public awareness;
- 7 Conduct surveillance;
- 8 Build public health practitioner capacity and skills to prevent violence; and
- 9 Support the medical community to assess and respond to violence

Local health departments (LHDs) are critical access points for the assurance of community health. LHDs protect and improve community well-being by preventing disease, illness, and injury, as well as impacting social, economic, and environmental factors fundamental to excellent health. LHDs have a critical role in facilitating, promoting, and supporting community-level violence prevention efforts.



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## 1. Build coalitions and partnerships

LHDs can provide essential leadership to develop community coalitions that can: convene stakeholders; develop and monitor coordinated local plans; provide mechanisms for the regular dissemination of information; and reduce duplication and gaps among stakeholder efforts.

## 2. Conduct needs assessments and strategic planning

Like SHAs, LHDs must conduct assessments to identify gaps in strategies, services, and initiatives, as well as develop local plans to prevent violence. LHD strategic plans and needs assessments can build from those created by SHAs by being narrower in scope and more specific to individual communities.

## 3. Identify and support effective policy approaches to violence prevention

LHDs can help identify and support organizational and community-wide policies – from school policies to zoning ordinances – to support community violence prevention efforts.

## 4. Seek sustainable financial resources

While state and federal funds are often used to plan and implement violence prevention measures, LHDs can provide leadership in identifying sustainable local sources of funding.

## 5. Implement evidence-based policies, programs and practices to prevent violence

LHDs are well positioned to collaborate with key stakeholders to implement culturally appropriate and evidence-informed violence prevention programs.

## 6. Enhance public awareness

LHDs can raise community awareness about the risk factors that can lead to violence, and perhaps more important, the protective factors necessary for preventing violence. By raising awareness, LHDs can engage community members and build social and political support.

## 7. Conduct surveillance

LHDs should collaborate and coordinate with state and national surveillance efforts to develop an integrated approach to surveillance that addresses both risk and protective factors. Data should also be utilized and disseminated widely between the health department, schools, law enforcement, social services, city officials, and other community stakeholders.

## 8. Build capacity and skills

LHDs can help build the capacity and skills of public health professionals and other partners by providing training, technical assistance, and mentorship to prevent violence.

## 9. Link to and support the medical community's clinical response role

LHDs can provide essential support to the medical community to assess, respond to, and prevent violence.

## USEFUL TOOLS & RESOURCES

- [Healthy People 2020](#)
- [National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention](#)
- [National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Surveillance System \(NISVSS\)](#)
- [The Community Guide](#)
- [The National Prevention Strategy](#)
- [Violent Death Reporting System \(NVDRS\)](#)

## CONCLUSION

This is an important call to action for local public health to provide leadership and support in accelerating the prevention of violence across the United States. The costs to individuals, communities and society at large require that public health, in addition to other key multi-disciplinary stakeholders; contribute its expertise toward the prevention of violence. While, the roles of public health in violence prevention are often overlooked, even among public health practitioners themselves, public health approaches complement criminal justice approaches, saving lives, saving money, and building thriving communities.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011, June 7). Violence Prevention. Retrieved August 2011, from Injury Center: Violence Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/peribus-aut-facillenis-qui-quiatis-acillenis-qui-qui>
- <sup>2</sup> Dahlberg, L., & Krug, E. (2002). Violence-a global public health problem. In E. Krug, L. Dahlberg, J. Mercy, A. Zwi, & E. Lozano, World Report on Violence and Health (pp. 1-56). Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.
- <sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2008, March 5). The Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention. Retrieved August 2011, from Injury Center: Violence Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/overview/publichealthapproach.html>

***The complete report, "Preventing Violence: Roles for Public Health Agencies," can be found at [www.safestates.org](http://www.safestates.org).***