



# PREVENTING VIOLENCE: Roles for National 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.

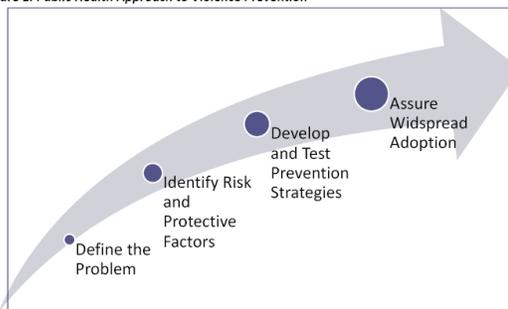
In April 2010, the Safe States Alliance, with funding from the CDC, convened a roundtable of twenty-four violence prevention experts and stakeholders to address this issue. Recommendations resulting from these discussions are offered as a resource for public health departments in identifying specific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

- 1 Strengthen public health systems;
- 2 Convene stakeholders;
- 3 Improve surveillance;
- 4 Provide funding and other resources;
- 5 Educate and advocate for violence prevention policies;
- 6 Develop and disseminate effective policies, programs and tools;
- 7 Identify connections between different types of violence and other key areas of public health concern; and
- 8 Conduct needs assessments and strategic planning.

By effectively collaborating with one another, federal agencies and national public health organizations can work together to identify prevention priorities to form a national agenda, effectively utilize limited prevention dollars, and create a lens through which the broader causes of violence can be better understood. Ideally, these national agencies and organizations can serve as a model for states and communities by showing how multi-sectoral partnerships can work effectively and successfully to plan, implement, and evaluate violence prevention efforts.



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### 1. Strengthen public health systems

Efforts to strengthen public health systems should focus on capacity building, expanding data systems, evaluating and disseminating evidence based policies and programs, and systematizing communication.

### 2. Convene stakeholders

It is vital that national organizations and agencies provide the leadership necessary to provide focus and direction, effectively coordinate activities, identify common ground among partners, and maximize available resources at the national level.

### 3. Improve surveillance

Surveillance of violent deaths and injuries can be improved at a national level through: the development of uniform definitions; improvements in the timeliness of data; assessment of the contexts in which violence occurs; creation of appropriate models for data linkage; and translation of data into actions for national, state, and local level agencies.

### 4. Provide funding and other resources

Limited resources can be maximized at the national level by: coordinating federal investments; providing incentives for the alignment of resources at the state and local levels; demonstrating where public health violence prevention efforts align with existing federal investments; and funding strategies rather than discrete projects.

### 5. Educate and advocate for violence prevention policies

National agencies and organizations are well positioned to identify and utilize policy change as a means of preventing violence. National agencies can utilize national authorizations and appropriations as well as identify and disseminate effective policy guides.

### 6. Develop and disseminate effective policies, programs, and tools

A key role of federal agencies and national organizations is to develop and support the implementation and dissemination of evidence-informed and culturally appropriate strategies, interventions, model programs, standards, messages, tools, and other resources.

### 7. Identify connections between different types of violence and other areas of public health concern

WHO recommends utilizing violence risk reduction strategies

to address the shared underlying risk factors. Additionally there is growing recognition that exposure to violence can substantially impact long-term health.

### 8. Conduct needs assessments and strategic planning

In order to identify strategies rooted in evidence and the public health approach to violence prevention, national efforts are needed to support state and local needs assessments and strategic planning efforts.

## 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 national 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-qu>
- <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).***