

# BREAK THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE ACT

## THE PROBLEM

Each year, there are more than 13,000 gun homicides in the United States and between 2010 to 2019, over 175,000 people were murdered across the country. Hundreds of thousands more were hospitalized or treated in emergency departments after surviving life-changing gunshot injuries and other violent assaults—and these numbers are rising. In 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States suffered the largest single-year spike in homicides on record, driven largely by record spikes in fatal shootings.

This violence is a cycle: in studies of some urban hospitals, researchers have found that up to **45 percent of patients** treated for injuries like gunshots were violently reinjured within five years. People who have been violently victimized are also at **increased risk of retaliating and becoming perpetrators of violence**: being shot, being shot at, or witnessing a shooting doubles the probability that a young person will commit violence in the next two years. This violence disproportionately impacts young people of color. From 2015 to 2019, Black children and teens were 14 times as likely to be shot to death as their White peers. Hispanic children and teens and Native American children and teens were both about 3 times as likely to be shot to death as their White peers. Over this period, 72 percent of children murdered before their 18th birthday were people of color, and 50 percent were Black. Guns now kill more young people than car accidents: researchers have determined gun violence as the second leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 15 and 29, just following drug overdoses.

This violence imposes enormous fiscal costs on all communities and taxpayers. On average, a single gun homicide generates approximately \$448,000 in medical care and criminal justice expenses—and most of those costs are paid by taxpayers. In total, **gun violence costs the United States \$280 billion every year**—with each American shouldering over \$700 of this cost annually.

## THE SOLUTION: VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Evidence-based community violence intervention and prevention programs designed to interrupt cycles of violence and retaliation have proven to be highly effective at reducing rates of community violence, saving both lives and taxpayer dollars. From 2012 to 2013, a \$2 million violence reduction program in two Massachusetts cities generated nearly \$15 million in savings from decreases in crime. However, these programs require consistent and reliable federal funding to be successful. Currently, these effective programs have been implemented in only a handful of cities and lack a reliable or adequate stream of resources.

- **Community outreach programs** hire violence intervention and prevention specialists who have established relationships, relatable lived experiences, and credibility with individuals in their communities at high risk of violence and connect them with intensive counseling, mediation, peer support, and social services in order to reduce their risk. Evaluations have found that these programs, particularly when integrated into wider networks of supportive services, are frequently associated with significant reductions in gun violence.

- **Group violence intervention strategies** provide tailored social services and support to group-involved individuals at highest risk for involvement in community violence. This intervention, which must be trauma informed, culturally responsive, and community driven to be most successful, includes a process for community members to voice a clear demand for the violence to stop and narrowly focused enforcement actions against those who continue to engage in acts of serious violence. The approach coordinates law enforcement, service providers, and community engagement efforts to reduce violence in ways that do not contribute to mass incarceration.
- **Violence interruption and crisis management** respond to potentially violent incidents to mediate conflicts or to scenes where violence has occurred to offer trauma-informed services and community supports to survivors and others exposed to violence. These strategies help to prevent retaliatory violence and promote healing and well-being. Programs that include these components have reported deescalating dozens of disputes that were highly likely to end in lethal violence.
- **Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs (HVIPs)** seek to break the cycle of violence by leveraging credible violence intervention and prevention specialists to provide intensive counseling, peer support, case management, mediation, and social services to patients recovering from gunshot wounds and other violent injuries. Research has shown that violently injured patients are at high risk of retaliating with violence themselves or being revictimized by violence in the near future. Evaluations of HVIPs have found that patients who received HVIP services were often less likely to be convicted of a violent crime and less likely to be subsequently reinjured by violence than patients who did not receive HVIP services.

## RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The Break the Cycle of Violence Act authorizes \$6.5 billion over 8 years to invest in effective community-based violence intervention programs and provide jobs to opportunity youth between the ages of 16-24: \$5 billion over 8 years for a competitive grant program to community-based organizations and local units of government that develop effective, prevention-oriented violence reduction initiatives focused on young people at highest risk for violence, and \$1.5 billion over 8 years for the Improving Approaches for Communities to Thrive (IMPACT) grant for eligible organizations and units of local government to provide job training, education, apprenticeship, skilled trades training, or other paid and unpaid work experiences for opportunity youth in communities disproportionately affected by gun violence.

The bill will also create a new Office of Community Violence Intervention and National Community Violence Response Center housed in the Department of Health and Human Services. The National Community Violence Response Center will provide technical assistance to grantees in the implementation of coordinated community violence intervention programs; collect data that measure safety, community health, opportunity youth engagement, economic development, and recidivism; and establish a research advisory council in consultation with non-profit, nongovernmental organizations and researchers whose primary expertise is in community violence.