

# ON THE FRONT LINES: Elevating the Voices of Violence Intervention Workers

Community violence intervention work—which involves individuals with lived experiences intervening with the small subset of people at the highest risk of violence—is critically important but also dangerous, underpaid, and undersupported. Homicides are surging in cities across the country, but we have a tremendous opportunity at our fingertips to invest in programs and individuals who have the ability to reverse this deadly and tragic trend and bring much-needed peace to our streets.

## Survey Results

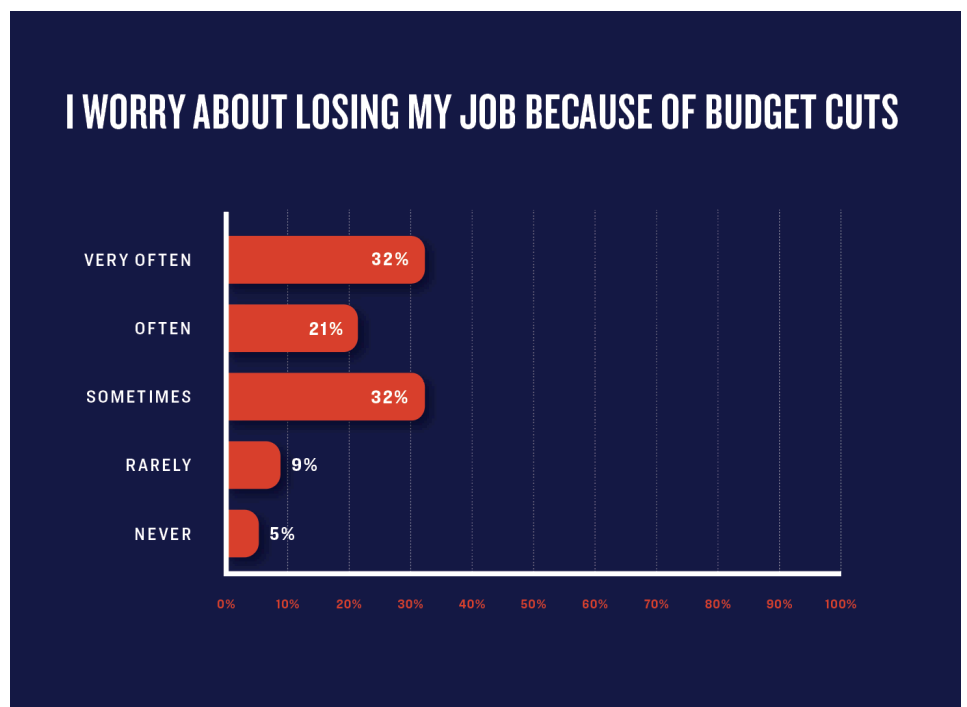
In June and July 2021, we surveyed more than 200 community violence intervention (CVI) workers in four cities, with the help of four partner organizations: the Urban Peace Institute in Los Angeles, the Oakland Department of Violence Prevention, Chicago CRED, and the Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement in Baltimore. The results below reflect the experiences of 180 full-time CVI workers in these cities.

## Demographic Characteristics

- The majority of CVI workers in our sample—78%—were male. The average worker was 44 years old, with workers ranging in age from 22 to 72.
- Workers overwhelmingly identified as people of color: 72% of workers identified as Black and 26% of workers identified as Latino.
- 73% of workers had been working for their current employer for at least one year, while 18% had been working for their current employer for at least five years.

## Worker Compensation, Benefits, and Tangible Supports

- 75% of full-time CVI workers reported making between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per year.
- 86% of workers have occasional or frequent worries about losing their jobs due to a lack of funding.
- 87% of full-time workers reported that they work additional hours beyond their regular work schedule at least once a month.



## Support for CVI Work

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- 52% of CVI workers said they neither agree nor disagree that law enforcement support their work. Only 26% of workers fully agreed that they felt supported by law enforcement.
- 43% of respondents indicated that they did not feel they were respected by other professionals they worked with in their role, such as hospital workers and emergency services workers.
- 56% of respondents disagreed with the statement that their local government adequately supports and funds their work, while 61% of workers indicated that they disagreed that their state and federal governments adequately support or fund their work.

## Access to Resources

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- 68% of workers reported receiving adequate training for their role.
- 93% of respondents indicated that there were not enough CVI workers doing violence intervention work.
- 43% of respondents reported they had seen many coworkers leave the field, while just 26% of respondents fully disagreed that many coworkers had left the field.

**93%**

**OF RESPONDENTS INDICATED THAT THERE WERE NOT ENOUGH CVI WORKERS DOING VIOLENCE INTERVENTION WORK**

## CVI Worker Trauma

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- 53% of respondents agreed that the trauma of people they helped at work had some effect on them, with 56% of respondents reporting that within the last 30 days, they had been less productive at work due to sleep loss.
- 93% of workers indicated that they had directly witnessed gun violence and 56% reported that they had been a victim of gun violence themselves before working as a paid CVI worker.
- 94% of workers reported experiencing at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), while 69% reported experiencing four or more ACEs.

**93%**

**OF WORKERS INDICATED THAT THEY HAD DIRECTLY WITNESSED GUN VIOLENCE BEFORE BECOMING A PAID CVI WORKER**

Our survey results indicate just how far we have to go in ensuring that violence intervention workers and organizations receive the resources and support they need to do their critical work safely and effectively.

In addition to surveying 200 workers, we also conducted a focus group with executives from the surveyed organizations. The following recommendations reflect their input in addition to the survey results and research conducted by Giffords.

# Recommendations

- 1 Identified Issue:** CVI workers struggle with unequal pay and inadequate fringe benefits.  
**Recommendation:** Baseline pay for CVI workers should start at \$45,000 annually (with adjustments based on cost of living and overtime compensation), in addition to medical, dental, life insurance, and retirement benefits.
- 2 Identified Issue:** Many violence intervention workers are dealing with their own untreated trauma while being regularly exposed to vicarious trauma at work.  
**Recommendation:** Organizations employing CVI workers must institutionalize trauma-informed systems of self-care and ongoing support for their employees.
- 3 Identified Issue:** A lack of uniform training and professional standards hamper the field of violence intervention.  
**Recommendation:** A national certifying entity should implement minimum standards of training and experience for CVI workers.
- 4 Identified Issue:** Smaller violence intervention organizations often lack the capacity to leverage public grants.  
**Recommendation:** The government should pass federal funding to smaller community organizations through intermediaries set up specifically for this purpose.
- 5 Identified Issue:** Violence intervention work suffers from a lack of awareness and financial support from local, state, and federal governments.  
**Recommendation:** The CVI field needs to make a concerted effort to raise awareness of the importance of this work.
- 6 Identified Issue:** There is little-to-no local infrastructure to support and develop violence intervention organizations.  
**Recommendation:** Establish Offices of Violence Prevention to provide funding, support, and training for the violence intervention field at the local and state levels.

We are at a critical juncture in our battle against gun violence. We must invest—in a long-term and sustainable manner—in our nation’s most impacted communities and the people doing the hard work of saving lives, using the results of this report as a roadmap for how to allocate these funds. Too many lives have been lost, and too many more are at stake. **There’s no time to waste.**

