

*Shifting the Focus:
An Interdisciplinary Approach to Advancing
Violence Prevention in California*

**A Local Call to State Action
Findings from Community Hearings in California**

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June 2001

Shifting the Focus: A Local Call to State Action Executive Summary

Shifting the Focus held a series of ten hearings and distributed surveys across the State of California between November 2000 and April 2001. The purpose of these activities was to gather input from local violence prevention practitioners and decision-makers about the successes and challenges they experience working with State government. Specifically, *Shifting the Focus* sought to learn about State practices, policies, and programs that either support or hinder local efforts and about successful models of collaboration that the State could use in forming future partnerships.

Because local efforts are vital to overall violence prevention success, it is important to learn from local practitioners about how State government affects their community efforts and how State service delivery to communities can be improved. While many State officials may have an impression about local needs based on their own experiences, work with other sectors, and inquiries of community practitioners, *Shifting the Focus* members felt that an organized process to clarify, confirm, or deny these impressions was vital. It was with this understanding and goal that *Shifting the Focus* set out to learn from local practitioners.

Methodology

A local hearings subcommittee consisting of *Shifting the Focus* members guided the planning of the hearings. The committee decided to hold ten hearings, each in a different location, and selected locations that reflected the diversity of the state. Three large hearings were held, one in Northern California (Oakland), one in Southern California (Los Angeles), and one in a rural community (Redding); smaller hearings were held in Fort Bragg, Sacramento, Stockton, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Salinas, and San Diego.

Members of the planning committee felt it was important for the hearings themselves to be shaped with attention to local needs and formed State-local partnerships with community organizations to serve as local hosts wherever possible. Members of the planning committee worked closely with local hosts throughout the planning and completion of each hearing. Local hosts include the Violence Prevention Coalition of Greater Los Angeles (Los Angeles), the Youth Violence Prevention Council (Redding), the East Bay Public Safety Corridor Partnership (Oakland), the California Crime Prevention Officers Association (Stockton), and Partners for Peace (Salinas). Local sponsors were responsible for helping to shape the format of the hearings, identifying and conducting outreach to participants, identifying hearing locations, and co-facilitating various parts of the hearings.

Each hearing began with an overview of *Shifting the Focus*, followed by a brief question and answer period. The hearings consisted primarily of prepared testimony from local violence prevention practitioners and local government officials. A panel of State government representatives and Prevention Institute staff was present at each hearing. Each hearing also provided time for participants to engage in a facilitated discussion about issues raised during the hearing. Invitees were also invited to submit written testimony.

Summary of Findings from Community Hearings

Over 200 local practitioners and government officials attended the hearings and 75 surveys were returned to Prevention Institute. Respondents and participants represented health, education, social services, local and county government, the faith community, law enforcement, grassroots organizations, community-based organizations, medical services, and other sectors. A variety of Northern and Southern California counties, both rural and urban, were also represented.

Responses to the survey questions and from hearing participants were compiled and analyzed by Prevention Institute. Responses clustered into ten major categories, and within each category, several themes emerged.

I. Funding

- a. Community practitioners supported funding for violence prevention efforts.
- b. Local practitioners cited competitive funding as a barrier to local violence prevention success.
- c. Participants supported increased local flexibility with State funding and cited categorical funding as a barrier.
- d. Participants cited lack of sustainable funding as an obstacle in their local work.
- e. Practitioners cited complicated RFPs, systems of invoicing and reimbursement, and funding cycles as barriers in their efforts.

II. Access to Information

- a. Local practitioners cited the need for better systems of information sharing regarding available funding, training opportunities, data, and technical assistance.
- b. Participants cited a need for information on best practices for different populations and locales.

III. Technical Assistance

- a. Local practitioners reported that State technical assistance providers are knowledgeable and described State-sponsored technical assistance as high quality.
- b. Local practitioners cited the need for technical assistance related to best practices.
- c. Local practitioners supported expanding the content of State-sponsored technical assistance programs.

IV. Training

- a. Participants cited State-sponsored conferences as excellent training opportunities.
- b. Practitioners expressed the need for State-sponsored training that addresses specific local needs.
- c. Participants cited the lack of funding or restrictions on funding for training as a barrier.

V. Data

- a. Practitioners reported that the Department of Health Services data system is useful and easy to use.
- b. Practitioners cited non-integrated data reporting and operating systems as an obstacle in local work.
- c. Local practitioners cited the difficulty of accessing locally relevant data as a barrier.

VI. Evaluation

- a. Practitioners cited the need for enhanced resources (e.g. funding, staff, and training) to support evaluation.

- b. Local practitioners stated that evaluation requirements are often unrelated to local measures or indicators.
- VII. Local Needs and Community Ownership
 - a. Local violence prevention practitioners appreciated the hearing process; asking local practitioners about their experiences is valuable.
 - b. Participants called for State programs and policies to be increasingly attentive to local needs.
 - c. Local practitioners stressed the value of community ownership in local violence prevention efforts.
- VIII. Primary Prevention
 - a. Local violence prevention practitioners stressed the need for increased leadership to support and advance prevention.
 - b. Participants expressed a desire for increased prioritization of primary prevention.
- IX. Cultural Competence
 - a. Participants expressed the need to enhance cultural competence at the State level to address community differences such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and practitioner training and experience.
 - b. Participants expressed the need for flexibility to adopt multiple approaches to serve local populations.
- X. Collaboration
 - a. Practitioners claimed that State level partnerships support local violence prevention efforts.
 - b. Participants supported models that promote community-based collaborations and cited State-mandated collaborations as a barrier in their local efforts.
 - c. Local practitioners cited a lack of funding to support coalition activities as a barrier in their work.

Conclusion

The several hundred violence prevention practitioners who testified at the *Shifting the Focus* hearings across California exemplify the wisdom, compassion, and skills that can make a difference in the prevention of violence. However, local practitioners cannot sustain their efforts alone. They rely heavily on State support to actively maintain and promote local activities. Local practitioners look to the State not only for concrete avenues of support, but also for the vision and leadership that will allow them to continually improve on their work.

The combined voices of practitioners across California have laid out a mandate that the State must heed. The *Shifting the Focus* hearings have captured valuable information that can be used to transform State policies, programs, and practices to better support local violence prevention efforts. These findings represent a local call to action that the State has an obligation to meet in order to support the critical local work that promotes safe, healthy, and sustainable communities for individuals.