

Overview of the # UNITY Policy Platform

What cities need to
prevent violence
before it occurs

URBAN NETWORKS TO
INCREASE THRIVING YOUTH
UNITY
through Violence Prevention



Cities need support to prevent violence. The UNITY Policy Platform describes what needs to be in place on the ground in cities to prevent violence and the supports cities need for their efforts to be successful and sustainable. The UNITY Policy Platform builds on what we know:

■ **We know how to prevent violence.** There is a strong and growing evidence base, grounded in research and community wisdom, that confirms it is possible to prevent violence in the long term. Cities with more coordination and collaboration have lower rates of community violence.

■ **Violence is a terrible burden on young people, families, neighborhoods, cities and taxpayers.** Nearly one in 10 students in urban schools does not feel safe enough to go to school, and more than 650,000 young people ages 10 to 24 are treated annually in emergency departments for injuries sustained from violence. Violence also exacts a considerable emotional and social toll. People living in urban areas are disproportionately affected by community violence.

■ **Investments in preventing violence pay off.** Violence is extremely costly due to emergency medical care costs, criminal justice expenses, school absences, and the economic divestment and loss of employment opportunities when local businesses move elsewhere. Reducing violence is an effective way to stimulate economic development that also saves lives and money.

What Cities Need on the Ground to Prevent Violence

Cities need strategic plans to prevent violence and coordinated efforts across multiple sectors. The following strategies should be part of a balanced approach and include high-level leadership and community engagement in planning and implementation. Efforts should be driven by local data and evaluation.

I. **This strategy can reduce shootings and homicides by up to 70 percent in neighborhoods highly impacted by violence: Street outreach and interruption:** Street outreach workers can detect and interrupt violence, prevent imminent death and injury. They can also begin changing community norms about violence and create favorable conditions for long-term prevention strategies and the return of businesses.

II. These strategies reduce community and school violence by 50 percent in two to five years in neighborhoods highly impacted by violence:

Universal, school-based violence prevention at all schools promotes a safe climate for children to learn and fosters positive social and emotional development. **Treat mental health problems and substance abuse**, and enhance protective factors among youth to prevent mental illness and substance abuse. **Reduce young children's exposure to violence** in homes and communities. Reduce family violence. **Build community capacity** so residents can effectively address current and future problems, and sustain positive outcomes.

III. These strategies reduce risk factors to sustain reductions in violence over the long term in neighborhoods highly impacted by violence:

Social connections characterized by trust and concern for one another. **Economic development**, including youth employment. **Conflict resolution**: Enhance the skills of young people to resolve conflicts without violence. **Youth leadership**: Support and engage young people in decision-making. **Quality after-school and out-of-school programming**. **Mentoring**: Provide positive role models who can form strong and enduring bonds with young people. **Quality early care and education**: Foster social, emotional and cognitive skill development. **Positive social and emotional development**: Support growing self-awareness and self-regulation. **Parenting skills**: Train parents and caregivers on parenting practices and developmental milestones. **Family support services**: Provide integrated family services to promote self-sufficiency.

IV. This strategy reduces recidivism and prevents the re-occurrence of violence:

Successful re-entry: Support a successful transition from incarceration/detention to the community.

What Cities Need on the State and National Levels to Maximize Local Efforts

Investing in cities to prevent violence pays off, saving dollars at the federal, state and local levels in the long term. For local efforts to be successful and sustainable, cities need support in the following ways:

Allocate and align resources: Cities need adequate, flexible financial resources to implement effective strategies on the ground, bring them to scale and coordinate them.

Create a high-level focal point for preventing violence in federal and state governments. This would foster accountability and coordination across multiple agencies.

Establish a mechanism for multi-sector collaboration in federal and state governments: This would provide a vehicle for aligning federal initiatives, establishing joint funding streams, coordinating data systems, and sharing evaluation strategies.

Equip people with the necessary skills to build a common language and foster understanding about one's own role and each sector's contribution.

Establish supportive data, research and evaluation systems: A national research agenda on effective prevention and disseminating multi-sector surveillance data on key risk and protective factors would inform and enhance local efforts. This information could be used to establish national baseline measures and standards.

Develop a communications campaign to lend local efforts heightened visibility and added credibility. Convey positive messages about youth and make the case for prevention.

Enhance public health's capacity and infrastructure at the federal, state and local levels to address violence. Public health has a track record and proven methodology for changing behaviors that contribute to poor health and safety outcomes.

The UNITY Policy Platform, released in December 2010, is a summary of *The UNITY Urban Agenda for Preventing Violence Before it Occurs: Bringing a Multi-sector Prevention Approach to Scale in U.S. Cities*, which was developed in partnership with the UNITY City Network and is endorsed by city representatives. For more information or to sign on, contact the UNITY team at [Prevention Institute](http://PreventionInstitute.org) by calling (510) 444-7738 or e-mailing unity@preventioninstitute.org. Please send requests for references to unity@preventioninstitute.org.

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