

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Violence Prevention addresses the complex factors that drive violence in our city. Rooted in a public health approach to violence prevention, our efforts are shaped by elevating the voices of those who are most impacted. This includes but is not limited to youth, community residents, and key stakeholders. Our systematic approach calls for strategic, aligned efforts with sustained investments and actions that are all designed to prevent violence, build resilience, and create a safer Portland.

Countless individuals have worked tirelessly to promote safety and prevent violence in Portland through numerous programs, policies, and initiatives. However, we have lacked a unifying vision and overarching plan for working in a more coordinated manner to advance the disproportionate impact of gun violence in the African American community in Portland.¹ The gravity of this work demands that all of our efforts be steered by clearly identifiable and shared goals, activities informed by best practices that help us reach those goals in the near term, and a coordinated multi-sector service approach with strong and active community participation.

Recognizing this gap and the urgent need for a city-wide approach, Mayor Ted Wheeler and other City leaders have called for the reshaping of the approach to reduce gun violence. This strategy that would be directed at reducing gun violence in Portland in every neighborhood and in every community. The agreed-upon strategy would need to encompass and address the following components:

1. Reducing gun violence in the near term
2. Utilizing evidence-based and promising practices to reduce gun violence
3. Intervening with those **currently** at the highest risk to offend or become victims to reduce their risk of future victimization, and involvement in the criminal justice system based on the gun violence problem analysis conducted for the City
4. Building on the existing community assets, culture, and expertise
5. Developing a partnership-based and data-informed strategy to reduce gun violence
6. Developing success measures that are not based on the number of arrests, but on reductions in gun violence

It is also imperative that the strategy be inclusive of the community that it will impact. “I will not support any strategy that does not include the impacted community,” Mayor Wheeler said.

BACKGROUND

Gun violence and homicide is a high-visibility and a high-priority concern for the City of Portland and involves a number of government entities within the Portland metro area, including but not limited to the fire department, the police bureau, public health agencies, and the District Attorney’s office. Unlike other forms of violence, gun violence in particular can impact entire communities and families for generations. When gun violence leads to death, the impact on the victim, their family, and their community is permanent, and no community, whether affluent or poor, urban, suburban, or rural, is immune from its devastating effects. According to a recent study conducted by the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR), Portland residents are currently paying an average of \$1.4 million per homicide and \$670,000 per injury shooting.²

¹ Portland Problem Analysis, slide 18, 30, 31,41, 57, 58.

² Portland Cost of Violence Study

Despite having a lower-than-average homicide rate compared to cities of similar size nationally, Portland has the highest homicide rate in the state of Oregon. Portland’s gun violence also has an extremely disproportionate impact on the City’s Black community. Given the emotional and financial toll of this type of violence, in 2018, the Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) and Multnomah County civic leaders felt that more could be done to reduce gun violence and started looking at national models and strategies that could unify existing work and focus on reducing gun violence in the near-term. OVP reviewed several gun violence reduction initiatives across the country and found a strategy called focused deterrence to be most effective. A large body of research supports this approach. In 2016, Harvard Professor Thomas Abt and sociologist Christopher Winship reviewed the evidence for strategies to combat community violence, including more than 1,400 individual studies in all. **Of the 30 strategies they studied, “focused deterrence had the strongest and most consistent anti-violence effects,” Abt writes.**

Another **review of the research**, from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, supported this approach, finding it reduced “gang violence, street crime driven by drug markets, and repeat individual offending” in both the short and long term.” Ceasefire³ has the highest possible rating from the U.S. Department of Justice in terms of evidence-based practice.⁴

As a result of this research, a team of Portland delegates traveled to Oakland, California, in June of 2018 to learn about the focused deterrence work done there. Between 2012 and 2017, Oakland’s partnership-based approach, known as “Oakland Ceasefire,” led to an over 40% reduction in gun violence that could specifically be attributed to this strategy. The strategy has been independently evaluated by Northeastern University and was responsible for the vast majority of gun violence reduction during those years.⁵ The “Oakland Ceasefire” strategy borrows heavily from the elements of focused deterrence but added a much more robust community and service component. Because of this more balanced and comprehensive approach, the work in Oakland is recognized as a national model.⁶ A few months later, in December 2018, a team of representatives from Portland attended a conference to learn more about the Oakland strategy. Through these activities and several workgroup sessions, the OVP and the Mayor’s office decided that before moving forward with any recommendations, an objective assessment of Portland’s specific needs would need to be completed. OVP contracted with the California Partnership for Safe Communities (CPSC) and the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) to analyze Portland’s gun violence problem, assess Portland’s current gun violence reduction efforts, and provide recommendations for next steps specific to Portland.

Though Portland and Oakland didn’t exactly mirror each other, important lessons were learned about what was necessary to reduce gun violence in the near term in Portland. These lessons included;

- Using data to understand the gravity and nature of gun violence specific to the community
- Actively including and informing the strategy by data and the lived experiences of people most impacted by gun violence

³ Ceasefire is often used interchangeably with focused deterrence

⁴ Thomas Abt, Bleeding Out, see also Anthony A. Braga and David L. Weisburd, The Effects of “Pulling Levers” Focused Deterrence Strategies on Crime

⁵ Oakland evaluation

⁶ A Case Study in Hope

- Defining clear goals agreed upon by all partners that prioritize near-term reductions in gun violence
- Ensuring that activities engaged in were based on national best practices and helped to reach articulated goals
- Creating accountability metrics for all partners to measure success specific to the goals of the partnership

In recognition of all these key lessons, the OVP decided to take steps to understand Portland's gun violence problem and dynamic. Although the other elements are equally important, they all stand on the foundation of the understanding the problem (gun violence) that we actively seek to reduce in the near term. Without understanding this, we are not in a position to follow through and begin implementing these other key elements. As such, this Problem Analysis and the Cost of Violence Study were conducted by the CPSC and NICJR as a ***first*** step in developing Portland's unified gun violence reduction strategy.

Using Data to Understand Portland's Gun Violence Problem: Portland's Problem Analysis

A "problem analysis" is a set of data collection and analysis exercises designed to support the implementation of violence reduction strategies, including Ceasefire. This methodology has been developed and refined over the last 20 years, and used in dozens of cities nationally. This analysis establishes a common understanding of the local violence problem that guides and informs the work of civic, community, and criminal justice leaders to reduce violence. The problem analysis identifies the groups and individuals within a community who are at greatest risk of violence and helps tailor an intervention to reduce that risk. Though the methodology is informed by research, the problem analysis is primarily a practice document with implications for local policy.

Due to the lengthiness of the Problem Analysis, it is included as an attachment. However, we have included a summary of the findings below:

2 HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Scope: This analysis examined all homicides in the City of Portland from January 2015 to May 2019 (number = 101), and all injury shootings between January 2018 to December 2018 (number = 78). The 101 homicides involved 188 unique victims or identified suspects, and the 78 shootings involved 130 unique identified victims or suspects.

I. *Shootings Generally*

- African Americans are 50.8% are victims/suspects 38.5% are Caucasian, African American adult males are disproportionately impacted by shootings. They are only 5.7% of the population but 50.8% of victim/suspects. **No other racial group in the city is more disproportionately impacted**
- Avg. age of a victim/suspect is 31.2
- **Less than 8% of victims and suspects are under the age of 18. There are more people age 45 and older involved in shootings than those age 17 and under.**
- 25- to 34-year-olds are the largest percentage of shooting victims and suspects, followed by 18- to 24-year-olds. ***Effective intervention in the near term will require Life Coaches to work with these adults.***
- Over 90% of shooting suspects and nearly 78% of shooting victims have prior criminal justice system involvement.

- Over 63% of shooting victims and suspects had **prior** probation and post-prison supervision.
- Over 14% of shooting victims and 28% of shooting suspects were on active probation or post-prison supervision. Current/prior probation parole is a risk factor.
- Suspects had been arrested an average of more than 10 times by the time of the incident. Shooting victims had been arrested an average of more than 13 times.
- Most (approximately 50%) had prior felony convictions.
- Most prior arrests were for unarmed violent, property, disorder, and drug offenses.
- **Victims and suspects represent very similar demographics.**

II. **Group Member Involved (GMI) Shootings**

- 55% to 64% of shootings are possibly GMI, 36% are not.
- Male (**100% of GMI suspects are male**), 70.8% of victims/suspects are African American, over 67% of victims are African American.
- **No other group is more victimized by this type of crime than African American adult males**
- 32.6% of GMI shootings are due to an ongoing group conflict, unknown is the second-largest category, followed by instant disputes.
- 25- to 34-year-olds make up the largest age group of victim/suspects followed by 18- to 24-year-olds. **The least impacted age group is made up of those 17 and under.** There are more individuals 45 years old and older that are impacted by GMI shootings than people under the age of 17. **Effective intervention in the near term will require Life Coaches to work with these adults.**
- GMI shootings do not involve all of the groups in Portland. Some are much more impacted than others.

PORTLAND'S HOMICIDES INVOLVE TWO SUB-DYNAMICS:

1. GMI involved gun homicides and shootings driven by high-risk social networks, and
2. Non-GMI involved homicides.

III. **Homicides Generally**

- Two Important subcategories emerge regarding homicides in Portland:
 - i. GMI homicides are mainly impacting African American males
 - ii. Non-GMI homicides are mainly impacting white males, with African American adult males still being the most disproportionately impacted.
- Victims/suspects are primarily Caucasian (47.9%) and African American men (38.3%).
- Average age of victims/suspects is 35.1, and 74% of victims are between the ages of 18 to 44, **fewer than 4% are juveniles.**
- Criminal Justice Involvement: 66% of homicide victims have prior criminal justice system involvement.
- Over 44% of homicide suspects had prior probation or post-prison supervision.
- Homicide suspects had been arrested over 10 times by the time of the incident. Homicide victims had been arrested over 6 times.
- More than 65% of homicide suspects had a prior felony conviction. Most arrests were for unarmed violent, property, and drug offenses (cafeteria-style offending).

IV. **Group Member Involved (GMI) Homicides**

- More than two-thirds of the 61 gun homicides in Portland from January 2015 to May 2019 were GMI as either victims or suspects or both (66-74%).

- Sex: 86.5% are male, 52.8% are African American, followed by Caucasians at 34.8%
- Age: 31.5% are 25-34, followed by 35-44, and 18-24.
- Circumstances: ongoing group conflict, ongoing personal dispute.
 - i. Of the 27 groups identified, only 7 were associated with the greatest amount of homicide cases.
 - ii. These are many of the same top groups identified in the shootings.

V. Other Homicides

- This is the other 45% of homicides
 - i. 80% of the victims are over the age of 25.
 - ii. 18% of victims/suspects experiencing homelessness.
 - iii. Most victims and suspects are adult Caucasian males.
 - iv. African Americans are also disproportionately impacted (26.7%) but not at the same rate as GMI homicides.
 - v. The majority of these homicides are stabbings, followed by gun homicides.

Portland's gun homicides and non-fatal shootings were both largely driven by group-involved individuals. Approximately 400-500 people a year were involved in Portland's very highest-risk groups. Approximately 100 were directly involved in a shooting or homicide. This is less than 1% of Portland's entire population.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Solutions need to include evidence-based practices that have been proven to reduce shootings and homicides in the near term, focused narrowly on individuals at the very highest risk, which contain:

- Clear goals and accountability metrics
- Appropriate social services for this population (e.g. Life Coaches)
- Ongoing data collection
- Systematic coordination between law enforcement and intervention service organizations.

3 COST OF VIOLENCE STUDY

According to the recent study commissioned by OVP and conducted by NICJR, Portland residents are currently paying on average \$1.4 million per homicide, and \$670,000 per injury shooting. The full Cost of Violence study is in the appendix of this report.

4 NEXT STEPS

- **Sharing this information with the community and obtaining the input of individuals most impacted by violence (formerly incarcerated individuals, former group member involved individuals, mothers of shooting and homicide victims, etc.).**

The individuals closest to the problem are also closest to the solution. In an attempt to heed the lessons of Oakland, the MOVVP will facilitate this working process with all partners.

- **Developing Goals & Management Structure**

Once there is a shared understanding of the nature of gun violence in Portland, OVP will meet with community partners most impacted by gun violence to decide on the goals of our work together. This will inform the strategy used to reduce gun violence, identifying and incorporating other key partners, defining what success looks like for this community, and developing the appropriate management infrastructure to support this work.

In addition to the Problem Analysis, the OVP currently has a Trauma and Violence Impacted Family Program meeting with partners where information is shared with OVP and service partners from the recent shooting incidents to ensure services and supports are provided to individuals currently at the very highest risk of violence (VHR). The purpose of this meeting is to provide services and supports to individuals currently⁷ at the VHR to reduce their risk of victimization and future involvement in the criminal justice system.

- **Developing Performance Metrics for the Stated Goals**

Once the goals and “successes” have been identified and defined by key partners, the CPSC and NICJR will begin to work with OVP and their partners to identify performance metrics that will help the partnership achieve their goals. This not only includes metrics and deliverables, but an actual management *process* that helps each component of the partnership meet the stated goals of the strategy.

- **Ensuring that there are Services & Supports for VHR Individuals: Life Coaches**

The Problem Analysis identified that in Portland, African American adult males aged 18-44 who are well-known to the criminal justice system (average 10-12 prior arrests), have a prior or current probation/post-prison supervision, are involved in an active high-risk group/network, have been previously shot or socially connected to a recent shooting or homicide victim, and have a previous felony conviction are at the very highest risk of engaging in gun violence in the city of Portland. Based upon this data, the OVP did an inventory of its existing services to identify which aspects of its current public health approach reached this demographic in a way that would help reduce victimization and future involvement in the criminal justice system. After a thorough analysis, the OVP realized that this demographic was not receiving services consistently and for the purpose of gun violence reduction. As a result of this gap, the OVP with the help of the CPSC & NICJR began developing the “Intensive Life Coach” position to solely focus on and support this population. The responsibility of the new Intensive Life Coaches will be to work directly and intensively with individuals at the VHR of violence. The goal of Intensive Life Coaches are to reduce the risk of harm/victimization of the people they serve and the risk of engaging in gun violence.

5 CONCLUSION

The ultimate future we seek through the application of the stated directives within the executive summary is to spare our community the personal trauma associated with gun-related violence. Many

⁷ The Problem Analysis is a foundational document that provides *historic* information on the violence dynamic in a specific city. This document is necessary to help develop a gun violence reduction strategy. Unlike a Problem Analysis, regular Shooting Review meetings help partners understand the *current* violence dynamics and individuals currently at the VHR that need services and supports.

members of our community have witnessed the horrors of gun violence firsthand. That includes in May 2017, when a 9-year-old child and his mother were victimized in their home in the Portland metro area. The child was shot nine times, and the mother three times. This was stimulated by the motive of retaliation. The child suffered major injuries to his head and torso and spent six months in the hospital. The child lost an eye, is partially paralyzed on the left side of his body, and is deaf in one ear. Two adult males, involved in the shooting have been sentenced, and now are serving prison terms.

The Office of Violence Prevention provided resource assistance and support to both victims through their medical recovery, through criminal trial proceedings, and through the child's return to school. However, the ultimate goal of the program strategy recommendations contained in this document is to spare all persons involved in incidents like this one from the life-long trauma associated with gun-related violence, impacting both victims and offenders. No one should have to go through the trauma and violence witnessed by many members of our community. Preventing situations like this is why this work is crucial.

This work is especially imperative for the lives of our African American community members. While African Americans make up only 5.7% of Portland's population, 50.8% of the victims and suspects of shootings are African American. The work of gun violence prevention can mean the difference between life and death, especially for Black Portlanders. Beyond the impact on victims and suspects, gun violence has a permanent and devastating impact on everyone in the community for generations to come. For this reason, it is imperative that all areas of this overarching strategy be mindful and inclusive of the communities that it will impact most, particularly the African American Portlanders disproportionately impacted by gun violence.

Beyond the priceless benefit of saving human lives, violence prevention also has economic benefits. Portland residents are currently paying on average \$1.4 million per homicide and \$670,000 per injury shooting, according to a study commissioned by OVP and conducted by NICJR.

In order to reduce the impact of gun violence, our efforts must be steered by clearly identifiable and shared directives, goals, and activities informed by best practices. We must coordinate and work toward a unified vision. Reducing gun violence in the near-term is our overarching goal. As outlined in this executive summary, the following practices will guide us toward that goal:

1. Utilizing evidenced-based and promising practices to reduce gun violence.
2. Intervening with those currently at the highest risk to offend or become victims to reduce their risk of future victimization, and involvement in the criminal justice system.
3. Building on the existing community assets, culture, and expertise.
4. Developing a partnership-based and data-informed strategy to reduce gun violence.
5. Developing success measures that are not based upon the number of arrests, but on reductions in gun violence.

This analysis is a first step in developing Portland's unified gun violence reduction strategy, and it has given us the practical knowledge necessary to put these directives into practice. With the knowledge provided in this information gathering, we will be able to make major steps toward reducing gun violence in Portland. This means we reduce the chances of Portlanders and their family members from bearing the trauma of gun violence and reducing the costs of gun violence in our community.