

The Casey Foundation's Approach to Community Safety

To thrive and grow, young people and their families should feel safe in their communities.

Yet, many people — including a disproportionate share of youth of color — grow up in neighborhoods marred by violence. In this environment, educational and economic opportunities are limited, and the trauma inflicted can last a lifetime.

This is why, over the last several years, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has supported community-led efforts to prevent violence and promote healing locally. In addition, Casey has invested in national networks that are treating this issue as an urgent public health matter and working to reduce the role that the justice system plays in preventing violence.

“As the nation grapples with questions about the appropriate approach to policing and addressing community violence, the time has come to explore new visions and strategies to keep communities safe,” says [Amoretta Morris](#), director of National Community Strategies for the Casey Foundation. “Violence is a public health matter, and comprehensive community and environmental interventions are emerging as key measures to address violence at its roots.”

How Casey is investing in community safety

Casey's support so far includes:

- **Advancing programs that rely on “credible messengers” to interrupt violence.** The Foundation has helped community-based organizations [implement a violence prevention model](#) called [Cure Violence](#) in a number of cities — including Baltimore, Milwaukee, and Baton Rouge, La. — as well as six primarily Black neighborhoods in [Atlanta's southside](#). The Cure Violence model treats shootings like an epidemic that must be stopped before spreading and relies on credible messengers — people with strong community ties — who intervene when violence or retaliation is likely to occur.
- **Implementing prevention strategies at hospitals.** [The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention](#), a Casey partner, supports hospital-based violence intervention programs. These programs enlist staff and community organizations in counseling patients with violent injuries and help connect the victims to services and supports — such as financial assistance and mental health care — when reentering the community. Another example: Casey has invested in the long-term evaluation of [Healing Hurt People](#), a

hospital-based intervention program operating in five trauma centers across Philadelphia.

- **Supporting opportunities to heal.** [CHRIS 180](#), a Casey partner based in Atlanta, hosts regular “healing circles” for residents who have been exposed to community violence. During the pandemic, these sessions shifted online.
- **Advocating for greater investment in community violence intervention.** National Casey partners, like the [Community Justice Reform Coalition](#), have led or funded local campaigns to promote violence intervention efforts. These partners have helped ensure that Black and brown people — including young women and also transgender, gender nonconforming and queer youth of color — are included in crafting solutions to violence. Casey also supports the [Fund for a Safer Future](#), a network of funders that invests in community-based efforts to address violence and advance policy reform.
- **Researching community violence.** In 2019, Casey supported a [special edition](#) of Health Affairs, the nation’s leading health-policy journal. The edition, which focused on the intersection of community safety and health, included articles that highlighted the need for community-based strategies to curb violence.

Why invest in community safety?

The toll that violence takes on families and communities is well-documented. Gun violence stifles economic growth and lowers home values. Exposure to violence also increases feelings of loneliness and pokes holes in supportive safety nets, according to research.

Safe communities, on the other hand, enable young people and families to thrive and reach their full potential. Embracing community-led solutions to violence should result in:

- fewer people involved in the justice and juvenile justice systems;
- greater trust among community members and in public institutions;
- more active, vibrant communities where families feel safe and supported; and
- greater use of public spaces and businesses, which bolsters economic activity and job creation.

Addressing community violence to achieve greater equity

People of color — and especially young Black men — are more likely than white people to experience violence, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Latino and Native American men are also more likely than white men to die from violence, according to the CDC.

“Addressing violence means addressing a major racial and ethnic health disparity that holds back communities of color,” Morris says. “We hope that

local leaders — including funders and government officials — recognize the importance of reducing violence to promote healthy communities and then begin to take action with community-based violence interventions.”

ARE YOU A FUNDER? LEARN ABOUT HOW TO JOIN THE FUND
FOR A SAFER FUTURE

READ ABOUT HOW VIOLENCE-INTERVENTION PROGRAMS HAVE
PROVIDED VITAL SERVICES DURING THE PANDEMIC