

Overview of The Community Violence Reduction Initiative (CVRI) of Allegheny County, PA



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Acronyms

- **ACDHS:** Allegheny County Department of Human Services
- **ACTES:** Achieving Change Through Transitional Employment Services
- **BAM:** Becoming A Man
- **QB:** Community Quarterback
- **CSR:** Countywide Shooting Review
- **CVIP:** Community Violence Intervention and Prevention
- **CVI:** Community Violence Intervention
- **CVP:** Community Violence Prevention
- **CVRI:** Community Violence Reduction Initiative of Allegheny County, PA
- **CVIP:** Community Violence Intervention and Prevention
- **OBH:** Office of Behavioral Health at ACDHS
- **OCJS:** Office of Community Justice and Safety at ACDHS
- **OCS:** Office of Community Services at ACDHS
- **WOW:** Working on Womanhood

Context

[Gun violence in Allegheny County is concentrated geographically, demographically, socially, and situationally due to a series of complex, intersecting risk factors.](#) Said another way, just a small number of communities experience most gun violence and these same communities tend to be higher need, with those risk factors that tend to lead to violence stemming from root causes like structural racism, structural classism and deindustrialization.

Violence tends to concentrate further still to just a few blocks or hot spots in highly impacted communities, though violence tends to cross highly impacted communities and municipal borders. Within communities most impacted by violence, just a small number of young men at highest risk of gun violence involvement drive most of the gun violence, with those most likely to be involved or impacted being low-to-moderate income young Black men and transition aged youth.

Most gun violence stems from reactive altercations between high-risk young men when someone is carrying a firearm and credible “eyes on the street” aren’t present to interrupt the conflict or high-risk young men are unable to “slow down their thinking” to prevent violence. Beyond those directly impacted, violence impacts the entire community and leads to further violence, disinvestment and population loss, when left un-interrupted.

CVRI Overview

Building off of decades of community violence reduction work done by community members, practitioners, community-based organizations, universities, and government institutions in Allegheny County, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (ACDHS) launched the Community Violence Reduction Initiative (CVRI) of Allegheny County (Pittsburgh Region) in 2023, alongside the aforementioned partners. CVRI supports evidence-based, coordinated and comprehensive public health approaches to community violence reduction both **within** and **across** highly impacted communities.

CVRI encompasses violence reduction strategies funded and supported by ACDHS’ Office of Community Justice and Safety (OCJS), the City of Pittsburgh’s Office of Public Safety, the University of Pittsburgh, and the Allegheny County Health Department, as well as other key institutions and community-based partners working to reduce community violence within Allegheny County.

View a [interactive map](#) showing where the primary CVRI programs are operating in Allegheny County.

Public Health Approach

Given the concentration of community violence, the most costly of which is community gun violence, effective solutions tend to focus on the small number of people, groups, and places at highest risk of gun violence involvement, while others work more upstream with families and youth at-risk of experiencing or being involved in gun violence.

CVRI defines its focal points using a Public Health approach:

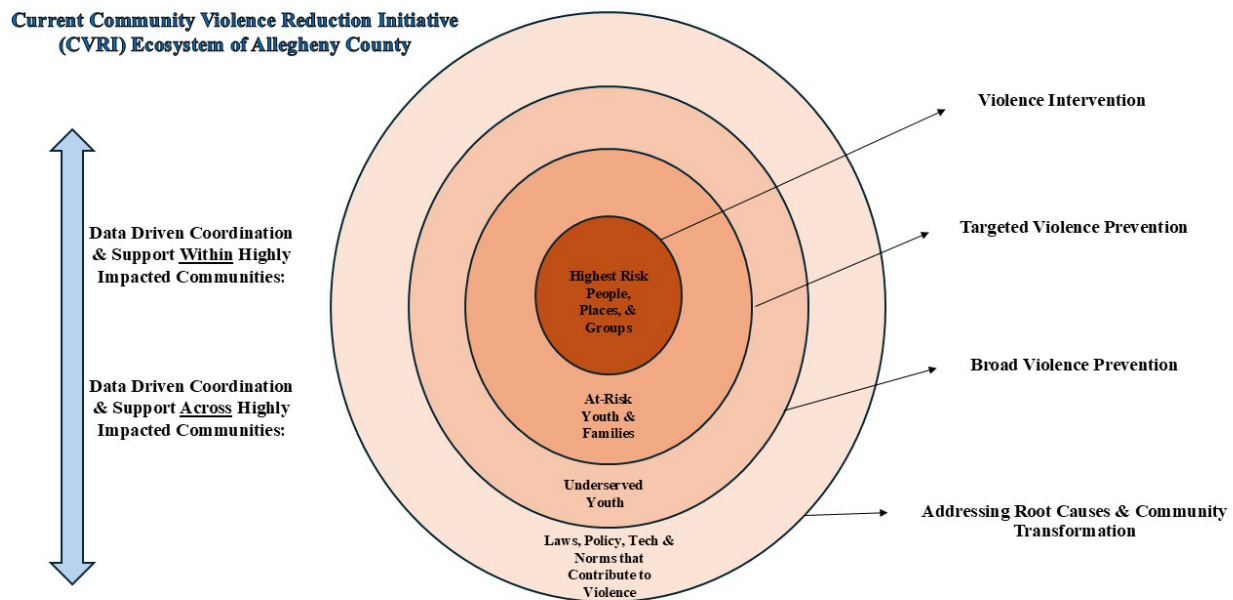
- Using quantitative and qualitative data to define the nature and scope of gun violence in Allegheny County.
- Researching risk factors that increase gun violence risk and protective factors that decrease it.
- Designing, adopting, implementing and evaluating reduction strategies.
- Sustaining effective and promising reduction strategies for the highest risk people and places.
- Moving us away from a moralizing interpretation of human behavior and towards a scientific one.

Under a Public Health model, strategies to reduce gun violence tend to fall under three categories, many of which are informed by a disease control model (also see **Figure 1**):

- Intervention (tertiary prevention): where risk factors have already led to harm, reducing that harm as much as possible
 - For example, violence interruption teams mediating conflict among the small number of people at highest risk of experiencing or being involved in gun violence and using cognitive behavioral theory to help participants “slow down their thinking” in high-stress situations that may otherwise lead to violence.
- Prevention (secondary prevention): where risk factors already exist, preventing harm from occurring
 - For example, school-based programming providing social-emotional learning, peer support and future orientation to youth at-risk of experiencing or being involved in gun violence. Targeted prevention strategies focus on preventing violence as their primary goal, while broad prevention strategies may see violence declines as a secondary effect.
- Addressing Root Causes & Community Transformation (primary prevention): preventing risk factors from appearing.

- For example, large scale investments in blight remediation in highly impacted communities or penalizing businesses who sell firearms to straw purchasers.

Figure 1: CVRI Risk & Reduction Framework + Ecosystem Overview



CVRI Within Highly Impacted Communities

Within highly impacted communities, ACDHS’ OCJS supports Community Quarterback (QB) agencies in coordinating local community violence reduction plans within five highly impacted areas of Allegheny County. Community Quarterbacks bring together local stakeholders to reduce violence via their local violence reduction ecosystem, which includes multiple evidence-based Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Programs (CVIP). The City of Pittsburgh’s Violence Prevention Specialists play a similar role across Pittsburgh’s six police zones.

Community Violence Intervention (CVI) strategies use credible messengers to focus on and relentlessly engage the small number of people, groups and places already at highest risk of experiencing or being connected to gun violence. CVI works to disrupt the transmission of violence, connect those at highest risk to needed services, change

behavior among those at highest risk of gun violence involvement, and change the normalization of violence in communities highly impacted by community violence.

ACDHS' OCJS supports the CVI strategies [Cure Violence](#) and Achieving Change Through Transitional Employment Services (ACTES), with ACTES being adapted from the [Rapid Employment & Development Initiative \(READI\)](#) model. The City of Pittsburgh supports the [Group Violence Intervention strategy \(GVI\)](#), wherein [REACH](#) operates as the street outreach team under GVI. ACDHS' OCJS also supports and trains CVI programs in Allegheny County on [Rewire CBT by Roca](#), which prepares practitioners who work with the highest-risk individuals to implement cognitive behavioral theory (CBT) as a core behavior change intervention, helping both participants and the practitioners themselves learn to think, feel and do differently.

More upstream than CVI, [Community Violence Prevention \(CVP\)](#) strategies focus on serving youth and families at-risk of experiencing or being involved in community violence. CVP strategies tend to center on social and emotional learning, peer support, and future orientation (with a focus on positive identity transformation and purpose) with the goal of reducing risk factors, including addressing trauma, that may otherwise lead to community violence involvement. ACDHS' OCJS supports the targeted CVP strategies [Becoming a Man \(BAM\)](#) and [Working on Womanhood \(WOW\)](#) (launching in the 2026-27 school year), which operate in high-need middle- and high-schools throughout highly impacted communities in Allegheny County.

ACDHS' OCJS also partners with [Safe Passage](#), through Operation Better Block, which combines the core foundations of both prevention and intervention work and operates in higher need schools throughout the City of Pittsburgh. Along with REACH, Safe Passage workers utilize an innovative application called [NewEra412](#) which was designed for frontline worker accountability, threat assessments and resource connections for participants. [The Achieve, Inspire and Motivate \(A.I.M\) Initiative](#) deploys a model similar to Safe Passage in places where youth at-risk of violence involvement tend to congregate.

[The Allegheny County Health Department \(ACHD\)](#) supports the Youth Advisory Board, which allows youth and young adults to identify their needs. In turn, the Youth Advisory Board informs ACHD's Youth Program Coordinator, which implements school-based programming geared towards addressing identified needs, including violence prevention.

Beyond the aforementioned targeted Prevention programs, ACDHS' OCJS partners with ACDHS [Office of Community Services'](#) (OCS) supported programming, [City of Pittsburgh STOP the Violence Grantees](#), [University of Pittsburgh](#) supported Prevention programming, [MAD DADs](#) and more, all of which play a broad role in the continuum of care for families

and youth at-risk of experiencing or being involved with community violence in Allegheny County.

Highly Impacted Areas:

Based on both historic and emerging shooting trends, as well as current capacity, CVRI is geographically focused on the following highly impacted areas in Allegheny County in

Table 1, which can also be seen via a map in **Figure 2**.¹

Table 1: Highly Impacted Areas with CVRI Coverage, by Allegheny County Municipality and Pittsburgh Neighborhood²

Highly Impacted Areas	QB Area or PGH Police Zone	Communities	QB (ACDHS) or Violence Prevention Specialist (City)	Cure Violence (ACDHS)	REACH (City)	ACTES (ACDHS)	BAM (ACDHS)	WOW (ACDHS)	Safe Passage
Central Corridor	Zone 2	Central Business District, Central Lawrenceville, Strip District	Zone 2 Violence Prevention Specialist (City)		X				
Eastside & Eastern Suburbs	QB East & Zone 5	East Hills, Homewood, Lincoln-Lemington-Belmar, Penn Hills Municipality, Wilkinsburg Borough	Community Forge (ACDHS) & Zone 5 Violence Prevention Specialist (City)	X	X		X	X	X
Hill District	Zone 2	Bedford Dwellings, Crawford-Roberts, Middle Hill, Terrace Village	Zone 2 Violence Prevention Specialist (City)		X		X		X

¹ Highly impacted areas are clusters of communities with historic or recent homicide or shooting rates above the county rate that also have a CVI team covering the area. The following communities also meet the criteria for a highly impacted area but currently do not currently have a CVI team such as ACTES, Cure or REACH covering the area: Churchill, East McKeesport, North Versailles, Pitcairn, Tarentum, West Mifflin, and Wilmerding.

Inner Eastside	Zone 5	East Liberty, Garfield, Hazelwood, Larimer, Stanton Heights	Zones 4 & 5 Violence Prevention Specialists (City)		X				X
Lower Mon Valley	QB Mon Valley	Clairton, Duquesne, Homestead Borough, & McKeesport	Steels Rivers Council of Governments (ACDHS)	X			X	X	
Northside	Zone 1	Allegheny Center, Brighton Heights, East Allegheny, Fineview, Manchester, Marshall-Shadeland, Northview Heights, Perry South, Spring Hill-City View, Troy Hill	Zone 1 Violence Prevention Specialist (City)		X				X
Southside & South Pittsburgh	QB South Hilltop & Zone 3	Allentown, Arlington, Arlington Heights, Beltzhoover, Brookline, Carrick, Knoxville, Mount Oliver Borough, Saint Clair, South Side Flats, South Side Slopes	South Pittsburgh Coalition for Peace (ACDHS) & Zones 3 & Zone 6 Violence Prevention Specialists (City)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sto-Rox and Westend	QB Sto-Rox & Zone 6	Crafton Heights, Elliott, McKees Rocks Borough, Sheraden, Stowe Township	Focus on Renewal (ACDHS) & Zone 6 Violence Prevention Specialist (City)	X	X	X	X		X

Lower Mon Valley	QB Woodland Hills	Braddock Borough, East Pittsburgh Borough, North Braddock Borough, Rankin Borough, Swissvale Borough, & Turtle Creek Borough	Greater Valley Community Services (ACDHS)	X		X	X		
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Figure 2: Highly Impacted Areas with CVRI Coverage, by Allegheny County Municipality and Pittsburgh Neighborhood



Highly Impacted Areas

- Eastside & Eastern Suburbs
- Hill District
- Inner Eastside
- Lower Mon Valley
- Central Corridor
- Northside
- Southside & South Pittsburgh
- Sto-Rox & Westend
- Upper Mon Valley
- Pittsburgh City Boundary

In addition to supporting ongoing CVRI strategies, from 2021-2026, ACDHS, through its [Office of Behavioral Health \(OBH\)](#), supported the [Resiliency in Communities After Stress and Trauma \(ReCast\) study](#), which implemented and studied the effects of Collective Efficacy, Forging Hopeful Futures, and Creating Peace programming in highly impacted communities throughout Allegheny County.³ ReCAST is a large-scale longitudinal study with partners and funding at the local and federal levels, including ACDHS, the Pittsburgh Study, the Department of Medicine at Pitt, the School of Social Work at Pitt, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

CVRI Across Highly Impacted Communities

Across highly impacted communities, ACDHS and partners coordinate and carry out the following strategies:

Proactive response:

- Across municipal lines, ACDHS' OCJS- and City-supported CVIP teams utilize their relationships to coordinate in real time and via various structured coordination spaces to identify threats or brewing beefs, allowing teams to intervene before violence occurs.
- [In partnership with the National Network of Safe Communities, victims support agencies, law enforcement, and community-based partners, ACDHS is working to better understand the intersection between community violence and intimate partner violence \(IPV\) in Allegheny County](#) and implement referral pathways and intervention points for those at high-risk of involvement in either type of violence.
- ACDHS leverages internal data analysts, data scientists and application developers to support teams in understanding and keeping record of violence reduction trends and risk factors via data summary, data visualization, case management, and provider facing data tools, in addition to supporting data modeling work and program evaluation. ACDHS' internationally recognized [Data Warehouse](#) acts as

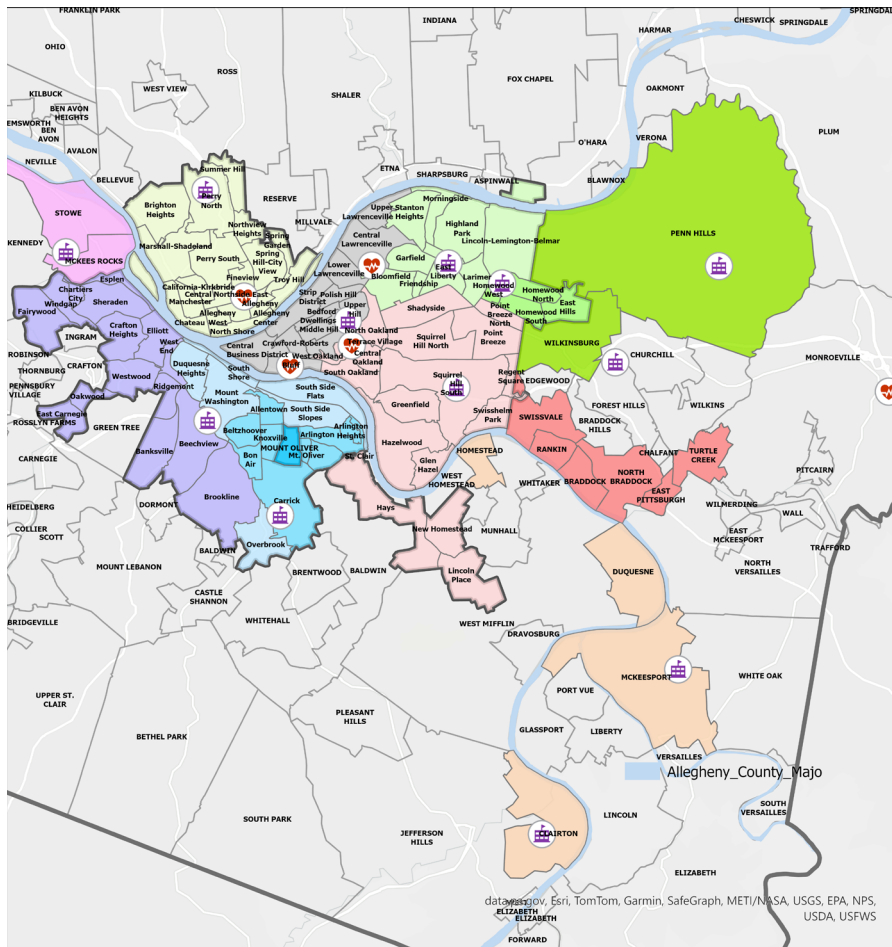
³ Collective Efficacy work was implemented in Arlington, Braddock, East Pittsburgh, Glen Hazel, Hazelwood, Homewood, McKees Rocks, Mt. Oliver, Penn Hills, St. Clair, Stowe Township, Pittsburgh's West End, & Wilksburg; Forging Hopeful Futures in Garfield, Pittsburgh's Hill District, Homestead, McKeesport, North Versailles, & Swissvale; and Creating Peace in Baldwin, Clairton, East Hills, Garfield, Pittsburgh's Hill District, Homestead, McKeesport, North Versailles, Pittsburgh's Northside, Penn Hills, Rankin, Wilmerding and Wilksburg.

the key foundation for data tools that support the CVRI workforce and collective impact work.

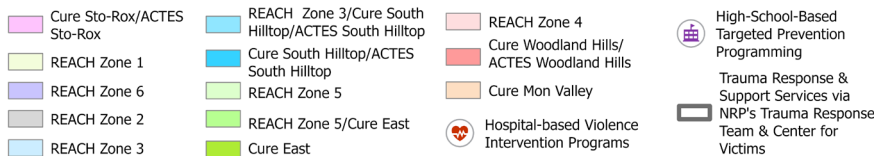
Shooting response & weekly countywide shooting reviews:

- CVIP teams working throughout the County’s highly impacted areas respond to shootings according to a cross-municipal shooting response protocol to coordinate care, connect those impacted by violence to needed services, and prevent retaliation and future violence. The protocol was co-designed between ACDHS’ OCJS and frontline staff supported by both ACDHS, the City of Pittsburgh’s Office of Public Safety and other partnered organizations.
- In collaboration with shooting response teams, Law Enforcement, and the City of Pittsburgh, [ACDHS designed and launched a countywide web-based shooting alert and coordination system, which allows shooting response teams to learn about, respond to and coordinate around shootings in real time.](#) The Allegheny County Police Department, Penn Hills Police Department and liaison for the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police input incident level shooting details into the app as they verify them, as do shooting response teams.
- ACDHS’ OCJS facilitates a weekly Countywide Shooting Review meeting whereby shooting response teams come together to review recent shooting incidents, hold the shooting response protocol accountable, coordinate care and better understand and respond to emerging trends.
 - Shooting response teams include Cure Violence teams, REACH, Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs, [Neighborhood Resilience Project’s](#) Trauma Response Team, victim support agencies, and targeted prevention programming. See **Figure 3** for map of coverage areas.

Figure 3: Map of Primary Intervention, Prevention and Trauma Support Teams



Primary Intervention, Prevention and Trauma Support Teams



Supported by ACDHS, [Center for Victims and Community Empowerment Association](#) provide trauma support services to victims of gun violence and their families:

- Culturally sensitive and community-based survivor support groups:
 - Connect those impacted by gun violence to therapeutic and clinical care, in addition to informal mental health supports.
 - Provide additional support for gun violence victims and their loved ones.
 - Empower and train gun violence victims and their loved ones to become leaders of support groups for their community and people with similar lived experience

- o Center for Victims also directly engages and supports violence Intervention and Prevention teams and their participants
 - o Connect impacted gun violence victims and their families to PA Victim's Compensation
- Supported by ACDHS, [Steel Smiling](#), an organization in residence of Neighborhood Allies, provides the CVRI workforce with:
 - o Group-based therapeutic peer-support sessions guided by people with similar lived experience supporting the workforce to explore their own trauma and develop coping mechanisms for working in a high-stress field
 - o Psychoeducational sessions, led by licensed practitioners, for the workforce to learn more about the symptoms of mental health conditions and the impacts of trauma/stress on the body and mind
 - o Casual kickbacks to build community and fellowship within the workforce and honor the dedication of the workforce.
- Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs like [CommUnity Peace](#) (supported by ACDHS) and [Empowering Teens to Thrive](#) (supported by University of Pittsburgh and housed in UPMC's Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh) connect non-fatal gunshot wound victims by:
 - o Rapidly responding to Level One Trauma Centers in Allegheny County and deliver safety planning, psychological support, system navigation and linkage to needed mental health and social services for consenting patients and their families
 - o For people and families impacted by gun violence who need to relocate for safety reasons, CommUnity Peace work with ACDHS staff via the Allegheny Link to provide emergency relocations services, including temporary and long-term relocation.

Allegheny County Peace Collective:

- o Facilitated by ACDHS' OCJS, violence reduction stakeholders from and/or serving highly impacted communities across Allegheny County come together across municipal lines to:
 - o Review and discuss aggregate level homicide and shooting trends
 - o Elevate challenges or gaps they may be facing in addressing violence, including those identified via Allegheny County's Comprehensive Community Violence Reduction Plan (still in development).
 - o Collectively prioritize and respond to trends, challenges and gaps via evidence-based strategies and promising practices

- Address communication and capacity challenges in ways that will enable violence reduction
- Foster connection with one another and spotlight violence reduction work
- Collectively advocate for and address root causes of community violence, including but not limited to gun control laws and gun trafficking, environmental design and zoning policies, and poverty reduction.
- Alongside CVIP teams and other community-based partners, ACPC includes key government institutions in Allegheny County, community and economic development partners like [Allegheny County Economic Development](#), [Grounded Strategies](#), [Tri-COG Land Bank](#), and [the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh](#), and advocacy groups like [Brady](#), [CeaseFirePA](#), [Cities United](#), and [MOMS DEMAND ACTION](#). These partnerships are leveraged to both improve CVIP work and address the root causes of gun violence and transform communities highly impacted by disinvestment and gun violence.

Technical and Technical Assistance (TTA) Partners:

Technical assistance providers support government and community-based organizations in standing up new programs and initiatives, all with a focus on adhering to model fidelity.

- Cure Violence TTA via [Cure Violence Global](#)
- Intimate Partner Violence and Community Violence Reduction TTA via [National Network for Safe Communities](#)
- ACTES TTA via [Our Power Collective](#)
- Rewire CBT TTA via [Roca, Inc.](#)
- CVRI TTA via [Social Contract](#)

Conclusion

Taken all together, Allegheny County is [leading the way](#) in data driven coordination both **within** and **across** highly impacted communities in Allegheny County, using focused evidence-based programming, practitioner expertise, predictive analytics, and technology to innovate in the field of Community Violence Intervention and Prevention. Community violence does not respect municipal borders, and so municipal focused responses are insufficient alone to address transient violence. While there is much room to build off our foundation and improve, Allegheny County is setting a national example for regional CVIP

coordination. See **Figure 4** for a detailed overview of Allegheny County’s community violence ecosystem via the Community Violence Reduction Initiative.

Figure 4: CVRI Risk & Reduction Framework + Detailed Ecosystem Overview

Current Community Violence Reduction Initiative (CVRI) Ecosystem of Allegheny County

