

Violence Prevention Recommendations Report

City of Cambridge

Community Safety Department

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Introduction:

This report begins with an overview, followed by a review of relevant models, local context, and data, program outcomes, and concludes with recommendations. CSD funded four programs (My Brother's Keeper, Inner City Weightlifting, Cambridge HEART, and Transition House) with \$150k each to support their violence prevention efforts in the 2024-2025 fiscal year. Based on community conversations, program evaluation data reported by the organizations that received funding, and best practices from the field of violence prevention, we recommend:

- 1) CSD continues to work with community-based organizations, coordinating efforts, checking for redundancy, and identifying opportunities to improve collaboration. This focus is on reducing violence through case management programming that emphasizes career development, physical and emotional wellness, college success, and wrap-around support for members of the community before and after traumatic events.
- 2) CSD hires an FTE on par with an Assistant Director or Senior Manager who is both administrative/clinical to coordinate the violence prevention ecosystem, implement a new Request For Proposal (RFP) process, and evaluate its effectiveness over the next 18 to 36 months.
- 3) CSD develops, implements, and evaluates the impact of an internal violence prevention program informed by the next 18 to 36 months of case management data, using a harm-reduction framework and drawing on the field's best practices. The new position will be responsible for collaborating with CSD responders, clinicians, and trusted community members. CSD plans to evaluate the correlation between violence prevention programming and the number of gun-related incidents over the next 5 years.

Background:

In 2024, The Economist and other national media outlets recognized the City of Boston as the “Safest big city in America.” According to the Boston Regional Intelligence Center, Boston reported the lowest number of homicides (24) in 2024, down from 37 in 2023, since data collection started in 1957. In exploring how other cities are addressing similar challenges, CSD worked closely with Issac Yablo, Director of the Office of Violence Prevention and Senior Advisor for Community Safety to Mayor Wu, and his team to better understand Boston’s methodology, processes, and successes in this space.

Boston's Community Safety Team focuses its long-term violence prevention efforts in four key areas: Prevention, Intervention, Recovery, and Reinvestment. In Cambridge, the Pathways to Success Report (Belletti, Clark, and Green, 2023) recommended violence-prevention efforts focused on reducing gun violence. They also recommended increasing violence-prevention programming in education, literacy, postsecondary success, and mentoring. Their recommendations went so far as to imagine a "Department of Postsecondary Success" and a "Mentor and Support Division" within the Department of Health and Human Services.

The City of Cambridge's violence prevention efforts prior to FY'25 were robust. In early discussions with key stakeholders, the community's needs were explored and assessed. Representatives from the city, the schools, and the police estimated that there are around a dozen known individuals perpetrating gun violence. City leadership also highlighted three key assumptions about violence prevention, specifically gun-related incidents:

First, there was a fundamental belief at the start of this project that success in reducing violence was possible, due to the manageable number of at-risk individuals in Cambridge. Cambridge Police data between 2020 and 2024 shows an average of 11.2 shootings per year (CPD, 2025).

Second, we must adapt our vision of how the modern violence-prevention ecosystem is evolving. This includes accounting for the impact of social media, regional dynamics, and mental health on violence prevention programming. This will require greater flexibility and vigilance in data collection to ensure participant privacy concerns remain at the forefront. As Yablo explained, when it comes to data collection, "We do not track kids, we prioritize them."

Third, violence prevention programming is not reaching the most at-risk individuals in Cambridge. According to recent Police Executive Research Firm (PERF) findings, "about 5% of the highest risk youth do not appear to be engaged by any program." Past city-led violence prevention efforts have included street teams, but without consistent funding and reliable data collection, it is difficult to prove their effectiveness, and the consensus remains mixed (Pro Publica, 2023).

Findings:

National Violence Prevention Models

The Albuquerque Community Safety (ASC) Department, currently funded at close to 20 million dollars annually and with a staff of close to 150, deploys specialized teams to meet specific needs within its population. There is a close relationship between the Albuquerque Police Department and Community Safety, wherein the former can refer at-risk individuals and schedule focused deterrence with credible messengers. There are Behavioral Health Responders (crisis intervention), Community Responders (lower-level wellness checks), Street Outreach Responders (unhoused encampments), and Mobile Crisis Team (co-response with police). Additionally, ACS leverages a Violence Intervention Program (VIP) Division, five trauma-informed offerings that address violence, addiction, and recovery through peer-led support and education. The Community-Oriented Response & Assistance (CORA) program supports victims of trauma, the Opioid Education & Prevention (OEP) program offers recovery support, and

the Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Program (HVIP) and the School-Based Violence Intervention Program (SBVIP) teams work to meet individuals where they are. Lastly, the Violence Intervention Program (VIP) engages those at the highest risk of gun violence through credible messengers and case management.

In a ride-along with the CORA team and VIP peer support, we traveled to the home of an adolescent boy, who spent 2 weeks in juvenile detention after threatening his family with a knife. Before his arrest, he had already suffered the physical and emotional trauma of losing his leg to a lawnmower accident. Additionally, he lost his 5-year-old sister to a drive-by shooting. The parents left the country, and the individual was left to live with de facto grandparents. The CORA team was able to establish a relationship with the *grandparents*, who only spoke Spanish, providing them with emotional support for the shooting, education around the boy's medication and Multisystemic Therapy (MST), and coaching around “system navigation.”

Meanwhile, the VIP peer drew on his lived experience to build trust with the young boy and his family. In conversation, we learned that the young boy was the leading goalscorer on his competitive soccer team. He showed the team his new chess set and invited us to play a game with him. All indicators show that with the right support in place, the young boy and his family could find success integrating into his community without violence or fear.

In 2024, the Department of Community Safety in Durham, North Carolina, allocated a little over \$200,000 to establish an Office of Survivor Care (OSC) focused specifically on supporting victims of gun violence and their families. Data from the Durham Police Department shows 81 people have been shot so far in Durham this year, a decrease from 112 in 2023 and 119 in 2022. Led by a dedicated program manager and clinician, the pair works alongside the community safety team to provide casework, mental health support, resource connection, and help applicants navigate the Office of Victim Compensation, which can support claims of up to \$45,000. This can support everything from funeral costs to healthcare bills, etc. Similarly, the Victim Compensation Program in the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance (MOVA) supports claims up to \$25,000.

Boston's Community Safety team shifted away from traditional street teams toward a direct support model, which prioritizes the individual—meeting people in hospital rooms and lockup, and working directly with families and survivors to offer harm reduction services and build trust through sustained relationships. The PERF study argues that “Centering police as drivers of the approach may make it harder to build trust with and engage youth and their families.”

Street teams are meant to support neighborhoods by maintaining a visible presence and building relationships where violence occurs. However, in 2025, many affiliations are now spread across the region or exist primarily on social media. For example, there is an individual who grew up in Cambridge but is affiliated online with the New Bedford-based Run Down Gang (RDG) and, after moving to Burlington, has been linked to several shootings there. This example helps explain the regional nature of the issue, illustrating how traditional neighborhood teams could struggle to reach someone like him, whose activities span multiple locations and digital spaces.

Furthermore, traditional street hierarchies have also changed. Previously, street workers relied on elders for influence, but social media has shifted power dynamics. As Paul Callanan, Director of Louisville's Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods, notes, "You may have a 22-year-old with more clout than the 40-year-old who started a gang there." Hiring based on past affiliations may no longer be effective (Pro Publica, 2023).

Violence Prevention Efforts in Cambridge, Massachusetts

In Cambridge, there is a small number of recurring incidents of gun violence in specific neighborhoods, often concentrated among a small number of individuals, during specific times of day and periods of the year. A recent analysis of police data from 2020 to 2024 shows that over the five years, Cambridge experienced 56 confirmed shots fired or shooting incidents, with only two fatal shootings recorded, one each in 2021 and 2023. Not pictured in this data set is the January 14th fatal shooting of Angel Nives, 21, in North Cambridge. Of the 56 incidents, the total number of people non-fatally shot was 21.

The Port neighborhood accounted for over half of all shootings/shots fired recorded between 2020 and 2024; however, the two recorded fatalities were in North Cambridge (1) and Cambridgeport (1). Over the same 5-year period, most shootings occurred overnight, between midnight and 2 AM, and were concentrated in the third quarter of each year: July, August, and September.

According to the data, juveniles (>17) represented 12% and adults (18+) represented 88% of all individuals (25) arrested or charged in shots fired/shooting incidents between 2020 and 2024. While everyone over the age of 18 is legally an adult, developmental experts argue that adolescence can span between an individual's late teens and early 30s. Arnetta (2004) calls this phase of life "emerging adulthood." CSD is uniquely positioned to embrace this demographic simply by adding emerging adults to the CSD caseload using existing protocols and operational procedures.

Cambridge Community Safety Department

Program evaluation data suggest that Cambridge's violence prevention efforts are thoughtful and effective. In FY '25, CSD provided funding for four organizations that are generally focused on violence prevention, but decentralized in scope and implementation. The data also supports allocating funding more strategically, focusing Cambridge's harm reduction efforts on four tracks. Not every community-based organization needs the same level of funding. By utilizing tracks in the RFP process—rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to harm reduction, it outlines a clearly defined scope of work for community-based organizations, making it easier for them to measure their impact and for CSD to track their effectiveness long term.

CSD gave money to My Brother's Keeper Cambridge, Inner City Weightlifting, Cambridge HEART, and Transition House. Each organization provided a mid-year report on its violence prevention efforts.

Cambridge HEART reported that as of March 31st, 2025, they used funding to hire three additional responders. According to their services data, 95% of calls included emotional support,

and 67% were for resource referrals. Overall, they connected with 271 community members through 14 unique community outreach efforts and 75 local businesses, community organizations, nonprofits, housing centers, libraries, and resource centers.

Transition House used CSD funding to provide Children's services and Counseling services. They provide case management services to 108 clients (517 hours across 1456 sessions), counseling services to 47 clients (760 sessions), direct 1-1 counseling to 15 children and 25 adults, and a 90-minute training session for 90 student athletes between July 2024 and December 2024.

InnerCity Weightlifting provided health and wellness apprenticeships and comprehensive care management services. They used CSD funding to serve 200 participants with Individual Advancement Goals, and 154 achieved their goals between July 2024 and January 2025. They served approximately 47 participants a month and supported 41 participants working towards a level 1 certification. ICW reported that their model has drastically reduced recidivism rates as participants advance through the program.

My Brother's Keeper Cambridge provided a six-week summer program to 21 participants who completed five-year plans built around SMART goals in areas of financial literacy, career planning, healthy relationships, life planning, mental health, and entrepreneurship.

The Cambridge Police Department provides a youth-focused, violence-prevention program, "The Safety Net Collaborative," which empowers Youth Resource Officers to serve as "case managers" who reach out to individuals and their families to create diversion plans for juvenile offenders (CPD, 2025). Additionally, CPD works in concert with Roca, an organization that engages in outreach for 16-24-year-olds who have survived traumatic events in the greater Boston area. CPD has also found success hosting community events like cookouts, cultural nights, basketball tournaments, and an inaugural fishing trip in the summer of 2023.

According to data pulled from Roca's FY 2024 Annual Report, the organization served 1,000 of the highest-risk young men across five sites in Massachusetts. Through what Roca describes as "relentless outreach," they partner with local communities to provide case management, restorative justice, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, which focuses on rewiring the brain over 3 years. Roca works to guide individuals through classroom sessions, therapy, workforce readiness, and job placement, with built-in safety nets in the case of physical or emotional relapse. The Massachusetts-based program delivered a 86% retention rate, with 860 participants staying engaged throughout the year. On average, 84% of participants received support each month, reflecting consistent and sustained engagement. Headquartered in Chelsea, MA, this location serves young men and women from Chelsea, Revere, East Boston, Malden, Everett, Somerville, Cambridge, and Charlestown.

Robert Alba serves Roca as a Youth outreach worker for the Cambridge community. The average age of the community members he serves is 22.8 years old, with a range of 16 to 27. He oversees a caseload of 20 young men, most of whom were referrals by the Cambridge Police Department. Almost all 20 young men are homeless or have been displaced to other cities, so they may not be fully represented in our datasets despite their Cambridge origins.

Although Roca does make an effort to work with young women and new mothers, Alba's caseload is entirely male. As far as capacity, Alba and his team are confident there is more work to be done in the Cambridge community. With additional funding, they would celebrate the opportunity to bring on another Youth Outreach Worker for Cambridge, doubling their touchpoints and caseload.

Recommendations:

Based on the data, CSD would like to

1. Work collaboratively with CPD and Cambridge-based organizations, such as Roca, to support their current, developmentally appropriate harm reduction efforts. Over the next 18 to 36 months, Cambridge's CSD can expand its coverage, offer more services, and evaluate its effectiveness under a harm-reduction umbrella, similar to those in Albuquerque, Durham, and Boston.
2. Quarterback a data-driven, evidence-based case management service to those individuals most likely to be involved or enmeshed in gun-related violence. The goal of these interventions is to demonstrate a decrease in gun violence incidents and improved safety for the whole community.
3. Revise the RFP process to focus Cambridge's harm reduction efforts on the programs with the greatest impact on the ecosystem. We plan to focus our harm reduction efforts by funding four specific tracks using a case management lens:
 - a. Career Development: Workforce training, resume building, executive functioning, job placement, professional mentorship, and networking opportunities.
 - b. Physical and Emotional Wellness: Developing healthy habits, emotional regulation, mental health support, physical fitness, and healing.
 - c. Academic Success: Addressing systemic barriers to education, exploring non-traditional pathways to college, academic mentorship, and youth empowerment.
 - d. Wrap Around Services: Support for families and community members before and after traumatic events related to gun violence.
4. Hire an Assistant Director or Senior Manager to oversee the Violence Prevention programming ecosystem. Please see the included job description.

Job Title: Assistant Director or Senior Manager of Prevention Manager

Position Overview: The City of Cambridge seeks a Violence Prevention Manager to lead strategic initiatives that build resilience and empower communities. These initiatives require a holistic, collaborative, and community-driven approach to reducing the harms inflicted by systemic violence, particularly those that impact vulnerable youth and families.

Key Responsibilities:

Community Engagement and Leadership

- Lead a citywide, community-based harm reduction and violence prevention strategy
- Facilitate and formalize partnerships with valued stakeholders (i.e., community-based organizations, credible messengers, youth leaders, and faith groups);
- Coordinate integrated, cross-sector violence prevention efforts between the City Manager's office and other stakeholders.

Program Design and Oversight

- Design, develop, and implement harm reduction programming
- Identify resource availability through asset mapping and inclusive planning
- Oversee the distribution of grant funding to community agencies while collecting data to evaluate the funding's impact.
- Implement community-based participatory research (CBPR) to assess needs and collaboratively identify solutions.
- Prioritize the voices of youth, survivors, and system-impacted individuals.

Data-Informed and Equity-Driven Strategy

- Utilize and apply data to inform prevention and intervention efforts for high-risk members of the community.
- Utilize appropriate qualitative and quantitative data analysis strategies to inform harm reduction efforts.
- Identify desired outcomes, implementation strategies, obstacles, and solutions (e.g., community wellbeing, harm reduction, increased trust, program attendance, participant self-report).

Capacity Building and Technical Assistance

- Oversee training for staff, partners, and community members on trauma-informed care, de-escalation, credible messenger mentoring, and systems navigation;
- Create professional development pipelines for system-impacted residents and youth interested in careers relating to violence prevention and community well-being.

Required Qualifications:

- Master's degree in Social Work, Public Health, Education, or a related field;
- Experience working with vulnerable youth and families
- Experience in navigating systemic barriers

Valued Experiences:

- Exceptional communication abilities, demonstrated experience building sustaining partnerships, and community-facilitation skills;
- Bilingual and/or bicultural

Preferred Qualifications:

- Familiarity with the City of Cambridge service provider landscape and history of public safety reform efforts;
- Experience with program evaluation and participatory research.

Endnotes:

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11. Durham Police Department. *Year-to-Date Shooting Victim Data, 2022–2024*. Durham, NC.
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