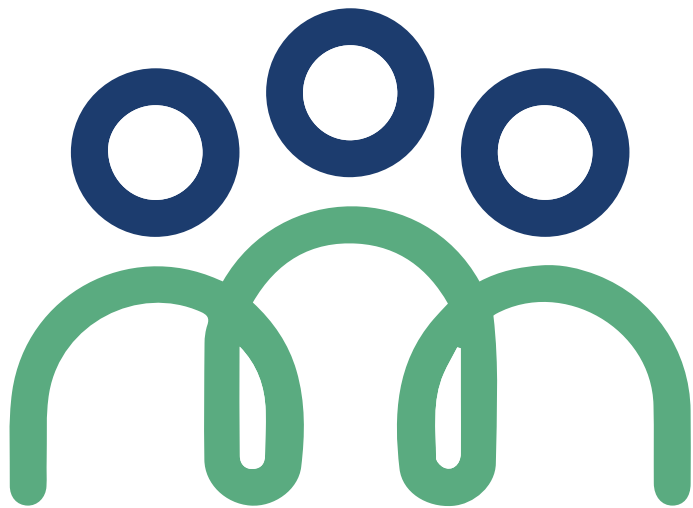


2024-2027

Community Violence Prevention Strategic Plan



Office of Violence Prevention
NC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING DIRECTOR	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
KEY TERMS	5
BACKGROUND	6
OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION	9
ABOUT THE STRATEGIC PLAN	12
GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	13
CONCLUSION	15
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	16

MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING DIRECTOR

Everyone wants to feel safe. We all want to keep our families and communities out of harm's way, and we all want to feel comfortable where we live.

Despite these desires, nearly 60% of U.S. adults and youth worry about themselves or a loved one being the victim of violence (1, 2). Certain groups, such as communities of color, experience disproportionate impacts from different types of violence. These high levels of violence give rise to a cycle of grief, fear, trauma and physical and mental health challenges, and further violence for individuals, families, front-line workers and our communities.

This does not have to be our reality. Violence is preventable, and maintaining healthy and safe communities throughout our entire state is achievable; however, we have work to do, together, to get there.

Using a public health approach centered around prevention offers a clear path forward. By forging critical partnerships, learning from lived experience, implementing layered strategies and bringing together leaders from law enforcement, health care, public health, government and local communities, we can use data to inform actions, address immediate crises and go upstream to address root causes of violence.

Fortunately, through partnership with many communities and agencies across the state, our work toward improving safety in North Carolina [has already begun](#). Since the [Office of Violence Prevention](#) was established in 2023, we have been visiting and learning from communities across the state, hearing about their vision, successes, barriers and needs. A statewide campaign to help firearm owners secure their firearms effectively is underway, communities and health systems are implementing violence intervention and prevention initiatives, local suicide prevention teams are established and growing and efforts to support justice-involved people with their re-entry into society are expanding.

With the support of many partners and the counsel of great community leaders across our state and country, we are growing OVP's capacity to further support our communities and agencies in this important work. While building the infrastructure for this office has not been an easy feat, I have been most encouraged by how our partners and advisory board members, in true North Carolina fashion, have rallied around us to provide support and extend the reach of our efforts.

This strategic plan reflects that spirit of collaboration and is one more step forward in helping to create a safer North Carolina for everyone.

Together, we can build on areas of broad agreement, achieve a deeper understanding of each other's concerns to save lives and keep our families and communities safer. I am honored and excited to be on this journey with you all to reach this shared vision.



Acting Director Sierra Scott, NCDPS Office of Violence Prevention

¹ Schumacher, S., Kirzinger, A., Presiado, M., Valdes, I., & Brodie, M. (2023). Americans' experiences with gun-related violence, injuries, and deaths. KFF. <https://www.kff.org/other/poll-finding/americans-experiences-with-gun-related-violence-injuries-and-deaths/>

² Southern Poverty Law Center, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, & Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab. (2023). U.S. youth attitudes on guns report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violence is a multi-faceted issue that can have lasting impacts on the health and well-being of individuals in communities across our country, including right here in North Carolina. In an effort to increase statewide coordination around this issue, the Office of Violence Prevention was created to reduce violence, harm from violence and firearm misuse in the state utilizing a public health approach. The office began this work with a focus on community violence and its intersections with firearm violence.

To provide direction for these efforts, the OVP team went through a concentrated strategic planning process, which included input from the community violence advisory board, as well as state and federal partners. The plan that was developed provides a road map on how OVP will work, in collaboration with a host of partners, to advance our state's progress towards reducing the immediate and long-term impacts of violence happening within local communities. This work will center around three priority areas:

1. Enhancing collaboration and coordination
2. Strengthening the community violence prevention workforce
3. Preparing and empowering local communities

In order to break down silos, increase collective impact and begin to build a community violence prevention ecosystem across the state, there is a need to focus on enhancing collaboration and coordination of the various existing and emerging prevention activities. To accomplish this, OVP will focus on improving interagency alignment of data and resources, expanding cross-sector partnerships and fostering connections between city, county, state and federal agencies and communities.

There is a need for intentional efforts to strengthen the community violence prevention workforce in our state, to ensure that the professionals dedicating their time and expertise to this work are enabled with the tools, resources and support needed to move forward strategies effectively and efficiently. To this end, OVP will focus on establishing core competencies for professionals leading or implementing community violence prevention efforts in North Carolina, better demonstrating the utility and reach of prevention and intervention strategies and expanding the reach of the community violence prevention workforce.

To ensure that local communities have the infrastructure and information needed to act and move effective strategies forward, OVP will prepare and empower local communities through enhancing understanding and application of the public health approach, providing access to information and training on existing evidence-based models and strategies and enabling efficient and effective implementation.

Building on strong partnerships and existing infrastructure, OVP will work to effectively and transparently implement this plan that will make strides toward the vision of a North Carolina where all communities have the tools, resources and expertise needed to create and maintain safety and well-being.

KEY TERMS

See below for clarity on how the terms listed are utilized in the context of this strategic plan.

Community Violence – Violence that happens between unrelated individuals, who may or may not know each other, generally outside the home (Ex: assaults, fights among groups, shootings in public places).

Community Violence Prevention Workforce – Leaders, practitioners, direct service providers, etc. working toward a shared goal of preventing violence in communities across North Carolina, regardless of the strategies or models utilized.

Community Violence Prevention Ecosystem – A network connecting the organizations and professionals who are working to prevent violence in communities across the state; enables coordination and collaboration to increase collective impact.

Collaboration – Working together with a partner to create a product or meet an objective.

Coordination – Working alongside a partner to achieve a shared goal through supporting or amplifying each other's individual offerings.

Firearm violence leads to cascading harm across society

● Those who **lose their lives to firearms**

In 2022, **48,204** people **died** from firearm injuries, over 8,000 more lives lost than in 2019.¹

Those who are **injured**

From 2019 to 2022, the mean number of weekly ED visits for firearm **injuries** were **consistently highest** among young people (15–24 years).²

Those who are **direct witnesses**

Mothers who **witness** at least one shooting in their community are up to **60%** more likely to meet criteria for depression.³

Those who **lose their loved ones**

Siblings of children and adolescents who **died** from firearm injury exhibited a **2.3-fold** increase in **psychiatric disorders**, mothers exhibited a **3.6-fold** increase, and fathers exhibited a **5.3-fold** increase.⁴

Those who are exposed in **affected communities, including schools**

51% of U.S. teens (ages 14-17) say they **worry** “about a shooting happening at my school or a local school near me.”⁵

Those who experience **collective trauma and fear**

79% of U.S. adults report experiencing **stress** from the possibility of a mass shooting, while **33%** say **fear** prevents them from going to certain places or events.⁶

1. Centers for Disease Control. (2023) *National Center for Health Statistics Mortality Data on CDC WONDER*. WONDER. 2. Zwald, M.L., Van Dyke, M.E., Chen, M.S., et al. (2023) Emergency department visits for firearm injuries before and during the COVID-19 pandemic – United States, January 2019–December 2022. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*, 72, 333–337 3. Leibbrand, C., Rivara, F., & Rowhani-Rahbar, A. (2021). Gun violence exposure and experiences of depression among mothers. *Prevention Science: The Official Journal of the Society for Prevention Research*, 22(4), 523–533. 4. Song, Z., Zubizarreta, J.R., Giuriato, M., Koh, K.A., & Sacks, C.A. (2023). Firearm injuries in children and adolescents: Health and economic consequences among survivors and family members. *Health Affairs*, 42(11). 5. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Everytown Research and Policy, & Polarization and Extremism Research & Innovation Lab (PERIL). (2023). U.S. youth attitudes on guns report. 6. American Psychological Association. (2019). *One-Third of us adults say fear of mass shootings prevents them from going to certain places or events.*



Office of the
U.S. Surgeon General

BACKGROUND

The need for violence prevention is high in North Carolina

Seven North Carolinians die every day from a violent death, with more than 2,500 North Carolinians dying from a violent death in 2021, according to the [North Carolina Violent Death Reporting System](#). The 2024 [Child Fatality Task Force Annual Report](#) states that firearms are the leading cause of violent deaths among all North Carolinians and the leading cause of injury deaths in children in NC. Firearm deaths are just the tip of the violence iceberg. Rates of emergency department visits for violent injuries exceed rates of deaths — for young adults, rates of injuries are as high as five times the rate for deaths, according to [North Carolina Firearm-Related Injury Surveillance Through Emergency Rooms](#).

Further, as described in the 2024 [U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Firearm Violence](#), the impact of violent death and injury can have short- and long-term physical health, behavioral health and economic consequences for the victim, family members, front-line workers and the broader community and can give rise to a cycle of grief, fear, trauma and further violence

Certain groups experience disproportionate impact of violence, injuries and deaths. Homicide rates and violent injuries are higher overall among Black and Native American males than other populations. Women are disproportionately killed by their intimate partners as compared to men. Almost 50% of homicides in women are related to intimate partner violence as compared to 10% in men. Suicide rates are higher among veterans and older white males than other populations. Rural areas have higher rates of firearm injuries than urban areas, according to the [North Carolina Violent Death Reporting System](#) and [North Carolina Firearm-Related Injury Surveillance Through Emergency Rooms](#). Understanding the differences across impacted populations can inform tailored interventions and help to ensure resources are directed strategically and effectively.

Using a public health approach can drive progress

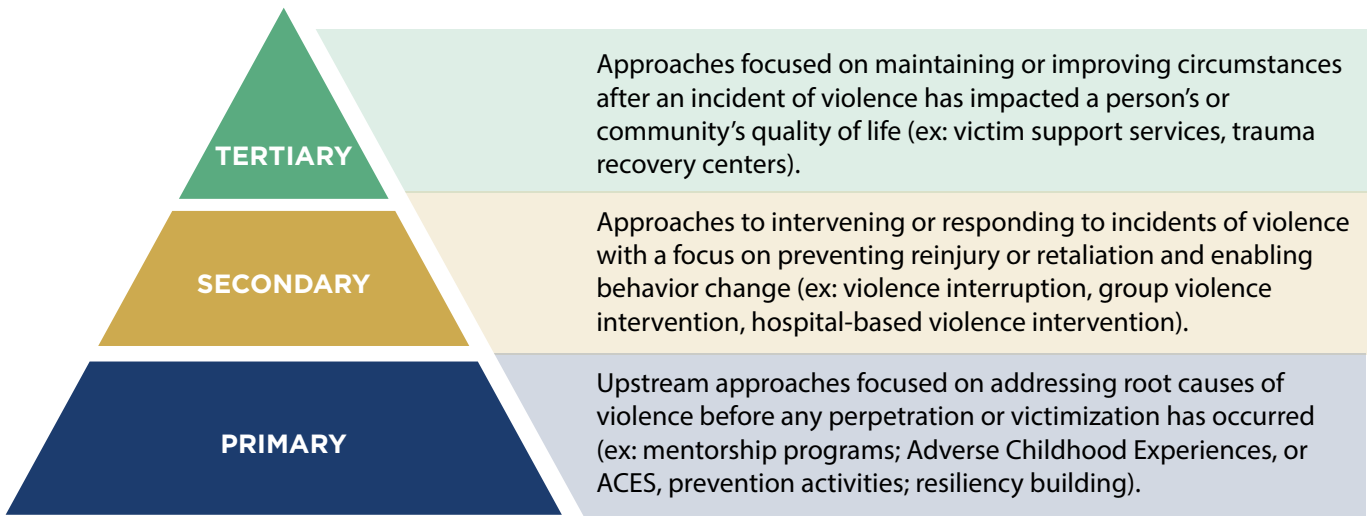
The public health approach can guide our strategy by using four basic steps.

- **STEP 1: Define and Monitor the Problem:** The first step in preventing violence is to understand it. Data from multiple sources can demonstrate how frequently violence occurs, where it occurs and other trends. It also tells us about the people who are victims and who commit violence.

- **STEP 2: Identify Protective and Risk Factors:** Certain factors protect people or put them at risk for experiencing or committing violence. These factors help identify where to focus prevention efforts. Risk factors do not cause violence. They mean that a person has a greater chance of being involved in it.
- **STEP 3: Develop and Test Prevention Strategies:** We can use data and research to show us which actions are likely to work. First, we identify existing strategies or develop new ones. Then we evaluate each strategy to determine if it is effective. We may find a way to improve the action.
- **STEP 4: Assure Widespread Adoption:** This same evidence can guide communities as they select programs and actions to prevent violence. Some techniques will rise to the top. Partners statewide can promote adoption of the most successful techniques. Training, networking and technical assistance can further bolster success.

Using a public health approach can catalyze opportunities for prevention by:

- **Forging Critical Partnerships:** By bringing together leaders across sectors, — e.g., law enforcement, health care, public health, state and local government and community organizations — we can break down siloes across agencies, work more efficiently and better identify and scale the most effective ideas.
- **Implementing Layered Strategies:** Like most complex issues, there is no one solution to prevent violence. By layering different strategies at the different levels of prevention that address the spectrum of violence — from addressing immediate crises to going upstream and addressing root causes of violence — we can continue to make progress.
- **Incorporating Harm Reduction Elements:** Harm reduction is intrinsic to the public health approach. It does not always strive to eliminate a threat to health but identifies practical ways to reduce the negative consequences of an action. For example, the public health approach to injuries and deaths from car crashes didn't ask people to stop driving. Instead, it made cars and drivers safer to reduce crashes and their severity. The same can be done with violence, and we can interrupt cycles of trauma.



North Carolina has been and can continue to work to keep our families and communities safer.

For many years, state and local agencies in North Carolina have been involved in violence prevention work. For example, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' Injury and Violence Prevention Branch has been leading work on injury epidemiology, surveillance and informatic and focusing on areas of violence that include suicide, sexual violence and adverse childhood experiences. The North Carolina Department of Public Safety's Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has been leading work on safe storage of firearms, juvenile crime prevention and education around gun violence. The Governor's Crime Commission has been working to disburse federal funds to local partners to address violence through funding streams, including Victims of Crimes Act and Violence Against Women Act. NCDHHS and the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction are collaborating on re-entry services to reduce the risk of violence among formally incarcerated people.

We have also seen many local communities making necessary changes to improve health and safety by implementing strategies and creating programs that address and prevent violence. Currently, North Carolina has six hospital-based violence intervention programs, dozens of community health workers trained as violence prevention professionals, several community violence intervention programs, many firearm safety teams and multiple city and county offices being created to exclusively focus on moving these efforts forward.

Although the work was underway, much of it was happening in silos. To address this, Gov. Roy Cooper worked with NCDPS to convene multiple round tables to discuss violent crime with police chiefs, sheriffs, and district attorneys. The Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice recommended investing in more violence prevention programs, and the GCC prioritized grant funding for hospital-based violence intervention efforts.

After the 2022 mass shooting by a youth in the Heddingham neighborhood of Raleigh, Gov. Cooper convened a roundtable of medical providers, public health professionals, researchers, community agencies and law enforcement to understand the multiple dimensions of violence and unite people across sectors around the need for action. The result was a white paper called [Keeping Families and Communities Safe: Public Health Approaches to Reduce Violence and Firearm Misuse Leading to Injury and Death](#).



Operating within the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, and in close partnership with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, OVP serves as a centralized resource for organizations working to reduce violence and address its impact on communities in our state. The mission of OVP closely aligns with the missions of both the NCDPS and the NCDHHS to prevent and reduce violence across the state and protect and promote health, safety and well-being of North Carolinians, and their work centers around championing a comprehensive, public health-informed approach to violence prevention.

OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION

In an effort to further progress and collaboration, Gov. Roy Cooper signed [Executive Order 279](#) on March 19, 2023, making North Carolina the first state in the South to establish a statewide Office of Violence Prevention.

Mission: Reduce violence, harm from violence and firearm misuse in North Carolina

Vision: A North Carolina where all communities have the tools, resources and expertise needed to create and maintain safety and well-being

Approach: Foster collaboration across sectors and leverage the public health approach to support local communities in deploying evidence-based programs and strategies

The creation of OVP has played a key role in facilitating collaborative work between NCDHHS and NCDPS and coordinating efforts across state agencies and local leaders to lead the state in implementing a whole of government approach to preventing and reducing violence. OVP works closely with relevant parties, including city and county authorities, law enforcement, medical, public health and educational institutions and community organizations, aiming to develop impactful partnerships at both state and regional levels.

The core functions of OVP are:

1. Connecting: Enable access to resources, information, subject matter experts, etc., to support violence prevention work
2. Convening: Provide opportunities for networking to foster peer-to-peer learning and community collaboration
3. Collaborating: Work together with local, state and national entities to increase collective impact through whole of government coordination
4. Training: Prepare communities to effectively implement evidence-based strategies and measure impact

OVP is currently primarily focused on making progress in addressing community violence and its intersections with firearm violence. This prioritization was based on the prevalence of this form of violence across the state and an identified gap by state leaders in level of attention and coordination for this issue. The office is also actively collaborating with, supporting and amplifying the work of other state agencies who are currently leading efforts to address other forms of violence. See [North Carolina Prevention Activities](#) for a snapshot of activities since the establishment of the OVP.

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE ADVISORY BOARD

In an effort to engage local communities across the state and leverage their perspectives and expertise to inform the work of the office, OVP established a [Community Violence Advisory Board](#). In December 2023, NCDPS Secretary Eddie M. Buffaloe Jr. appointed the first group of advisory board members, a key milestone in furthering these collaborative efforts.



This working advisory board is comprised of 25 members from organizations across every region of our state that are leading and implementing activities to address violence in local communities through a variety of prevention and intervention strategies. These members represent and offer perspective from several sectors, including law enforcement, public health, research centers, community-based organizations, hospitals and city and county agencies. The board meets several times a year to provide input and support related to OVP activities and priorities.

2023 - 2024 OVP Community Violence Advisory Board

Patrice Andrews

Chief
Durham Police Department

Dr. Martin D. Avery

Trauma Surgeon
Wake Forest Baptist Hospital/
Atrium Health

Ronny Bell

Director
Division of Pharmaceutical
Outcomes and Policy
UNC Eshlman School of
Pharmacy

Andrae Banks

Assistant Professor
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North Carolina Central
University

Ingram Bell

Program Director
Gate City Coalition

Clarence Birkhead

Sheriff
Durham County

William Baxter

Coordinator
Community Safety and
Violence Prevention
Buncombe County

Curtis Brame

Sheriff
Vance County

Tracie Campbell

Director
Office of Violence Prevention
Mecklenburg County Health
Department

Becky Ceartas

Executive Director
NC Against Gun Violence

Nicole Elliott

Chair and Founder
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Rashad Gattison

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Chief
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Willa Robinson

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Firearm Injury Prevention
Partners

Liz Star

President and Founder
HopeStar Foundation

Doris Stith

Executive Director
Community Enrichment
Organization

Jim Sumney

Executive Director (Retired)
High Point Community
Against Violence

ABOUT THE STRATEGIC PLAN

This plan is intended to outline how the Office of Violence Prevention will work to advance our state's community violence prevention efforts to reduce the immediate and long-term impacts on local communities. The information in this plan should inform community-based, local, state and federal organizations working to lead, implement or fund community violence prevention work on what they can expect from OVP and how they can be involved in or amplify these efforts.

Development Process

Over the past year, the OVP team — with support from leadership at the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and the Governor's Office — has gone through a comprehensive process to develop this strategic plan as a first step to guide the office's work toward its mission.

The process began with conducting a landscape analysis of community violence prevention efforts in North Carolina and around the country to inform the direction of this strategic plan.

Local: OVP spent several months building relationships with local communities to become better familiar with existing programs and understand their strengths and challenges. Additionally, once the Community Violence Advisory Board was established, members were surveyed to provide insight and perspectives on barriers and gaps hindering the progress of cohesive and effective community violence prevention efforts across the state. Board members were assigned to committees and tasked with collectively developing a list of recommendations in response to the survey results.

State: OVP met with and surveyed strategic partners from several state agencies. Information was gathered about existing resources and relevant initiatives that have the potential to support or elevate efforts to address risk factors or strengthen protective factors of community violence within the state.

National: OVP participated in several visits, convenings, roundtables and virtual meetings with federal agencies, including the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, as well as other national organizations. These events provided opportunities to connect with peers across the country leading violence prevention efforts. During these events, OVP engaged in discussions and learning opportunities that explored challenges, opportunities for impact and sustainability of community violence prevention efforts.

Upon synthesizing this information and identifying themes, the OVP team developed a draft plan including goals, objectives and strategies to move forward the state's community violence prevention efforts. This draft went through a review process with the community violence advisory board, key partners and leadership at NCDPS and NCDHHS.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Enhance Collaboration and Coordination:

There is a need to break down silos and build a community violence prevention ecosystem for our entire state in order to align efforts and maximize resources

Objective 1.1: Improve interagency alignment of data and resources

- Establish a state government workgroup on violence prevention comprised of representatives from key state agencies that will convene and collaborate to ensure awareness and alignment of complimentary violence prevention initiatives
- Coordinate and make more publicly accessible relevant state data and resources to inform or support violence prevention work
- Provide guidance and technical assistance on best practices for data sharing among local entities to inform and support community violence prevention work

Objective 1.2: Expand cross-sector partnerships

- Work with research and academic institutions to enhance the research capacity of local violence prevention programs and ensure data driven best-practices are utilized for program implementation, evaluation and quality improvement

- Provide opportunities to build intentional, productive working relationships between law enforcement/public safety, public health and community-based organizations
- Engage non-traditional sectors that intersect with the risk and protective factors of community violence (business, philanthropy, etc.) to increase their involvement and support of prevention activities across the state

Objective 1.3: Foster intentional connections between city, county, state and federal agencies, and communities.

- Regularly host a statewide convening to provide learning and networking opportunities for people and entities leading, implementing or funding violence prevention efforts across the state and around the country
- Maintain a multidisciplinary community violence advisory board comprised of representatives leading and implementing local community violence prevention work
- Facilitate the establishment of local cross-sector partnerships to strengthen violence prevention ecosystems within communities

Goal 2: Strengthen Community Violence Prevention Workforce:

There is a lack of professional recognition for the work being done to address violence through a holistic, programmatic and healing lens. In some cases, this has prevented the professionals doing this work from accessing tools, resources and support needed to move forward strategies effectively and efficiently

Objective 2.1: Establish core competencies for professionals leading or implementing community violence prevention efforts in North Carolina.

- Provide guidance on recommended foundational and supplemental competencies for people leading and implementing local community violence prevention activities
- Work with partners and organization leaders to encourage and enable access to professional development training for violence prevention staff

Objective 2.2: Better demonstrate the utility and reach of prevention and intervention strategies

- Provide training and technical assistance to ensure local programs are accurately measuring implementation and impact

- Utilize a variety of communication channels to highlight progress of community violence prevention efforts throughout various communities
- Conduct assessments across the state to better understand impact, needs and scalability of existing community violence prevention initiatives

Objective 2.3: Expand the reach of community violence prevention workforce

- Work with partners to integrate roles dedicated to community violence prevention activities into a variety of relevant settings (schools, health departments, faith-based organizations, community centers, youth-serving organizations, police departments, correctional facilities, etc.)
- Support the development and growth of professional networks/associations for the various segments of the state’s community violence prevention workforce

Goal 3: Prepare and Empower Local Communities:

Recognizing that “those closest to the problem also have the solutions,” we need to ensure that communities have the infrastructure and information needed to act on and move forward effective strategies

Objective 3.1: Enhance understanding and application of the public health approach

- Utilize a variety of communication channels to increase awareness of the public health approach and how it can be employed to address and prevent violence in local communities
- Develop guidance to increase awareness and improve use of data resources
- Work with local communities to assess capacity and readiness for community violence prevention efforts, taking into account geographic, cultural and systemic factors

Objective 3.2: Provide access to information and training on existing evidence-based models and strategies

- Disseminate existing and emerging resources from trusted entities
- Provide opportunities for new and existing programs to engage with and learn from subject matter experts (webinars, regional meetings, site visits, etc.)

- Work with partners to develop tailored trainings for a variety of sectors
- Support and amplify NC S.A.F.E. (Secure All Firearms Effectively) campaign messaging and training efforts

Objective 3.3: Enable efficient and effective implementation

- Provide technical assistance for city, county and community leaders to support the development and implementation of multi-faceted strategies to prevent violence in communities
- Disseminate and advocate for funding opportunities to initiate and expand efforts to prevent violence in communities across the state
- Provide guidance and education on how local, state and federal policies and laws can enable or impact violence prevention efforts

CONCLUSION

Violence is impacting quality of life for communities across our state, but we have the ability to change this.

North Carolina has an infrastructure already established to make significant strides in reducing violence and creating safer communities. The Office of Violence Prevention is here to help our state make progress in the areas that need growth, but none of us can do this work effectively alone. We must break down our silos, follow the data, share resources, learn from each other, leverage the expertise of our colleagues within communities across the state and around the country, hold each other accountable and stay grounded in our shared vision.

While the seeds for much of what has been outlined in this strategic plan have already been planted, what comes next from here is the development of an intentional implementation plan, in collaboration with our partners across the state, that will include metrics for measuring progress towards these goals, followed by deliberate action to move this work forward and consistent updates on our progress.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Office of Violence Prevention would like to take a moment to express our gratitude to those who participated in or contributed to this strategic plan development process at any point. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the following:

The 2023 - 2024 OVP Community Violence Advisory Board

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

**North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services'
Division of Public Health, Injury and Violence Prevention Branch**

**North Carolina Department of Public Safety's Division
of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention**

**North Carolina Department of Public Safety's
Governor's Crime Commission**



Office of Violence Prevention
NC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY