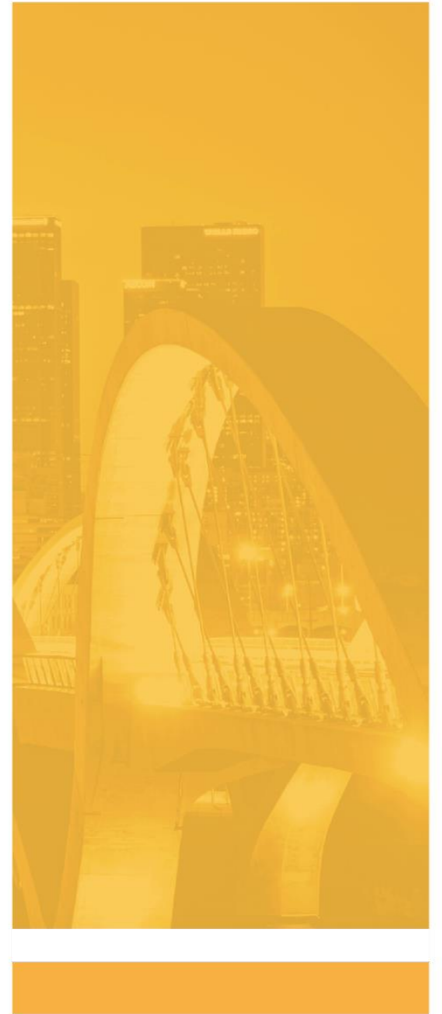
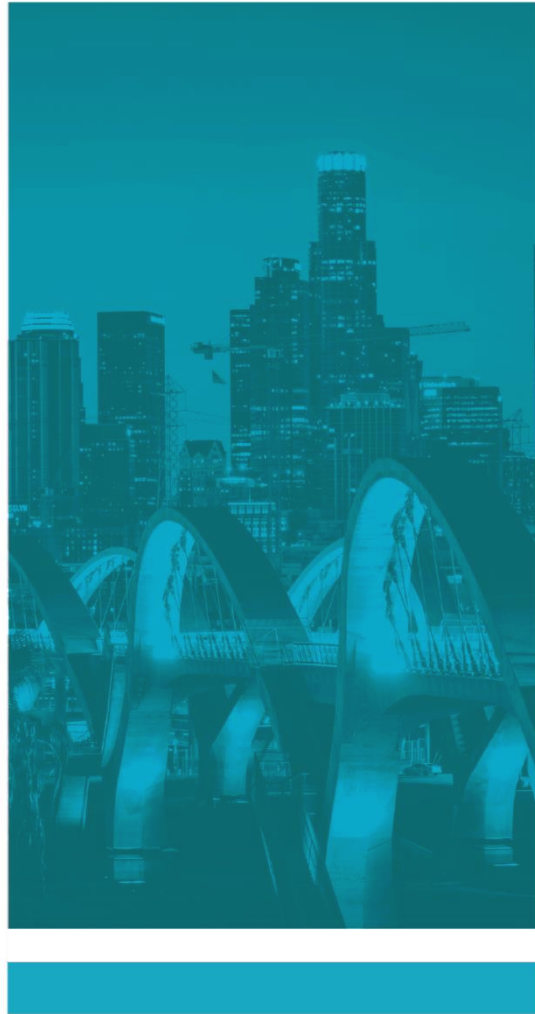
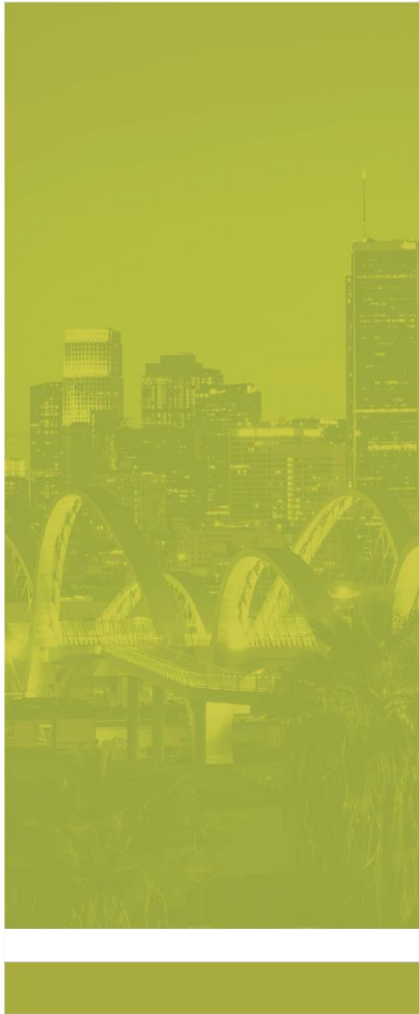


Los Angeles County Office of Violence Prevention

# Public Health Platform to Prevent Gun Violence



March 2023



# OUR CHALLENGE

In May 2022, two mass shootings occurred within 10 days of each other, in Buffalo New York, and Uvalde, Texas. In January 2023, two mass shootings hit closer to home within two days of each other, in the California cities of Monterey Park and Half Moon Bay.

The frequency of mass shootings in the United States – 100 mass shootings in the first eleven weeks of 2023 -- more than one a day -- is staggering.<sup>1</sup> Each of these events causes overwhelming grief among those who are directly affected, while fueling anger, cynicism, and a deep sense of hopelessness nationwide.

And what of those neighborhoods that confront the daily reality of gun violence? According to provisional data, in 2021 there were 625 firearm homicides in Los Angeles County; a 64% increase from the 380 reported in 2019. In 2022, there were 466 firearm homicides; and while this represents a welcome decrease, it is still far too many families and communities impacted by violence that is both predictable and preventable.<sup>2</sup>

# OUR CALL TO ACTION

In the immediate aftermath of Buffalo and Uvalde, and with the rise in the County homicide rate, the Los Angeles County Office of Violence Prevention (OVP), housed in the Department of Public Health (DPH), convened community and faith leaders, health care and mental health experts, public safety agencies, social service providers, public health practitioners, and others as a Gun Violence Prevention Task Force (Task Force) to develop the Gun Violence Prevention Platform (GVPP).

The GVPP used a public health framework to develop a plan to act on gun violence. It focuses on prevention, intervention and healing strategies based on what the data tell us about the nature, extent, and distribution of gun violence across the County and what affected residents tell us about the impact of violence on their communities. It includes a focus on root causes – the upstream conditions that give rise to violence and helps to explain the stark difference between gun violence incidents in this country compared to the rest of the world.

The Gun Violence Prevention Platform is broad - 40 strategies in total, including common sense gun legislation, public awareness campaigns, training programs for relevant service providers, intervention services, healing spaces and services, and primary and preventive interventions for youth.

One of the first tasks of the Task Force was to narrow that very broad platform to urgent priorities to focus on in 2023. Task Force members decided on four key action areas and went on to create implementation plans around each. These priorities, presented in the following sections, will drive the work of the Office of Violence Prevention over the next year.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gun Violence Archive, Mass shooting data for 2023. A mass shooting is defined as an incident where 4 or more people are shot and either injured or killed, not including the shooter. Available here: [Gun Violence Archive](#)

<sup>2</sup> 2019 mortality data file from California Department of Public Health Vital Statistics, provided by Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology; Provisional 2021-2022 California Comprehensive Death Files (CCDF) for LA County, Long Beach, & Pasadena, downloaded 01/17/2023 via Vital Records Business Intelligence System (VRBIS), CA Dept. of Public Health.

## I. Legislation

From its inception, the Task Force recognized the importance of selecting legislative solutions to the gun violence epidemic in Los Angeles County and across the United States. Legislation is a way of defining social norms and shaping the environment that contributes to or averts gun violence and distinguishes the United States from other countries. The Task Force will advance legislative solutions through the following actions.

**Build political will for legislation by creating public awareness that our high rate of gun violence reflects policies that can be changed.**

Engage key messengers including government and political leaders to work and stand alongside community and faith leaders, health providers, educators, business leaders, and entertainment and sports celebrities to disseminate forthright, factual information about the impact of gun violence on our communities; and promote the various ways in which individuals across the County, including youth, can advocate for policies to avert it.

**Advocate for robust gun safety legislation, locally and nationally.** These measures include a reinstatement of the federal ban on assault weapons and large capacity magazines, deterrents to illegal guns, gun trafficking and ghost guns, and improving gun safe storage. Regularly inform our county and community partners of specific legislation at the local, state, and federal level that can help stem the high rate of gun violence across the County.

**Develop a system to track gun safety measures.** Make gun safety legislative tracking results easily accessible to the public. Monitor the impact on rates of gun violence due to policy changes and advocacy efforts.

## II. Social Connections and Healing Services

There is growing evidence, supported by Task Force members, that risk factors such as social isolation, feelings of exclusion, and lack of social support are root causes of violence. Unresolved trauma following exposure to violence is also a risk factor. Although these experiences are compounded by poverty, racism, and other inequities, they are a common denominator across individuals who engage in multiple forms of violence. In communities with high rates of violence, the complexity of trauma can include emotional trauma that is compounded by the impacts of ongoing and institutionalized racism.

Given this, investing in strategies that promote protective factors such as increasing feelings of belonging and social connection, creating opportunities for healing, and advancing trauma-informed systems of care is critical. The Task Force will build community togetherness and increase access to mental health support, healing services and trauma informed systems through the following actions.

**Engage survivors and residents in communities with high rates of violence** to better understand issues of access, gaps in current services, and to serve as leaders in community advocacy for more trauma informed systems, mental health resources, and culturally relevant social connection and healing services and activities.

**Fund and facilitate access to programs, resources and interventions** that promote healing and social connection and that build trust within and between communities. This could mean funding peer support groups; offering healing events and activities in parks and libraries; conducting workshops on trauma, grief, and loss; supporting local healing or drumming circles, music, or art therapy; and providing mini grants for culturally relevant and community-based healing practices and programs.

**Ensure residents have information about relevant resources.** Widely distribute information and resources about mental health and healing services and resources through leafleting, door-to-door outreach, community meetings and activities so people know where to turn to find the resources and support they need. Partner with DMH to conduct outreach during Mental Health Awareness Month (May 2023) and with community and faith-based partners after local crisis incidents.

### III. Gun Violence Restraining Orders

A 2016 California law allows eligible people, including police, family members, intimate partners, housemates, employers, co-workers, and school officials, to petition a court for a Gun Violence Restraining Order (GVRO) if someone they know poses a threat to themselves or others. GVROs prohibit gun purchases or ownership by individuals subject to a court order for up to a 5-year period. While this law has great potential to prevent gun violence and save lives, it is drastically underutilized across the State.

The Task Force recognized that in Los Angeles County we must do better to ensure that members of the public know that GVROs exist, how to petition for one, what the process looks like once they are filed, and where to go for GVRO assistance and resources. The Task Force will work to increase awareness and enforcement of GVROs through the following actions.

**Improve public awareness of GVROs through a culturally and linguistically** relevant public awareness campaign. The campaign, at a minimum, informs and educates the public on California's landmark GVRO law that took effect in 2016 including what GVROs are, how to apply for one, who can apply for one, the application process, and how to access resources that can provide assistance.

**Evaluate the effectiveness of GVRO outreach and education efforts by tracking and publishing the number of GVROs filed annually by law enforcement and the public.** Data collected will include the number of GVROs filed annually, the number of emergency GVROs, the number of petitions that result in an order after a court hearing, the number of firearms removed as a result of the GVRO, the relationship of petitioners to the subjects, and zip code and demographic data for petitioners and subjects.

## IV. School Safety and Services

School communities across the country are rethinking their strategies for providing a safe and supportive learning environment. Safety concerns have been well documented since before the pandemic, with 13% of surveyed Los Angeles Unified School District high school students not going to school because they felt unsafe; 20% of 7th graders in Los Angeles County reporting fear of being beaten up at school; and 16% of 9th graders reporting suicidal ideation. Increased violence in the County, along with the pandemic, has resulted in further loss of social and school connectedness.

Task Force members shared the perspective that an emotionally and physically safe environment is a critical factor in positive youth development, a sense of self-worth, and better learning. The Task Force will focus on increasing access to comprehensive, culturally relevant physical and mental health services for all students, K-12, and enhancing school safety through the following actions.

**Conduct a rapid environment scan, making use of available data to map services and initiatives in K-12 schools** and identify opportunities to expand effective practices, and improve coordination across initiatives, in communities with the highest rates of gun and community violence.

**Obtain input from students, parents, and school personnel** to understand safety concerns, solutions, and best practices for supporting physical and emotional wellbeing and safety, for youth.

**Invest in the expansion of programs and services that support youth** in communities with the highest rates of violence through grants and mini grants. Assure that staff that work with youth have the training and resources they need to address youth trauma.

**Identify resources for a comprehensive school safety initiative** in at least three school districts.

# CONCLUSION

The Public Health Platform to Prevent Gun Violence prioritizes:

- Primary prevention – the focus of Priority #4, designed to raise children with the support, knowledge and skills required to navigate a stressed and stress-inducing environment safely and with compassion;
- Secondary prevention – the focus of Priorities #1 and #2, which focus on changing the social environment in ways that buffer communities against entrenched factors in our history, culture, and policies that place us at risk, and
- Tertiary prevention – the focus of Priority #3, which recognizes that some individuals in our communities are at imminent risk of turning to violence and can be stopped from harming others and destroying their own lives before they act.

As a society, we are at a critical juncture in the history and course of gun violence. The Task Force rejects the notion that we must resign ourselves to this ongoing, all-pervasive threat to daily life and wellbeing. We maintain that violence is predictable and preventable. In the end, we have no choice but to act with a sense of urgency, for ourselves and for generations to come.





## **GET INVOLVED!**

Join with us. The only way we will truly be able to eliminate gun violence in LA County is if we all work together collectively and collaboratively to ensure that violence is no longer the norm, no matter our individual areas of focus, perspectives and/or biases. Working together to prevent violence and promote healing has tremendous value and benefit for all of us. Everyone has a part and role to play. If you would like more information about how you can get involved, or would like to join our mailing list, contact us:

**Our Website:** [www.ph.lacounty.gov/ovp](http://www.ph.lacounty.gov/ovp)

**Our Phone:** 626.293.2610

**Our Email:** [ovp@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:ovp@ph.lacounty.gov)



# APPENDIX A

## 40-point Gun Violence Prevention Platform

### I. Prevention Strategies

Prevention acknowledges the need to understand and address the root causes of gun violence, including the role of structural racism, and provides an opportunity to examine systems, policies, and practices.



#### a. Gun Safety Policies

1. Support enhanced requirements and technology for gun manufacturers to restrict gun use to the owner, prevent accidental discharges, and prevent alterations.
2. Support federal legislation allowing for guns to fall under consumer protections and promote smart gun designs to enhance safety.
3. Support universal background checks with clear definitions of those prohibited from purchasing/owning guns.
4. Create a red flag system with local, state, and national databases.
5. Restrict permits or licenses to carry and/or use a gun to those 21 years of age and older. Require gun owners to register and meet a safe storage requirement and a mandatory training requirement.
6. Support legislation to ban assault weapons, large capacity magazines and ghost guns.
7. Support firearm injury and mortality prevention research.



## **b. Youth Development and Support**

1. Provide resources for every K-12 school to implement bullying prevention, healthy relationships, and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curricula, including programs to promote social connectedness for isolated youth.
2. Increase access to comprehensive culturally relevant physical and mental health services for school-aged children; require annual screening for emotional well-being for all students, K-12.
3. Provide peer leadership training opportunities for youth.
4. Support student led on-campus anti-violence activities and efforts.
5. Invest in culturally competent youth suicide prevention programming and a 24/7 call center.



## **c. Family/Community Support**

1. Provide free, accessible, trauma informed and culturally relevant parenting support for families.
2. Increase access to high quality, culturally competent, comprehensive physical and mental health services for all residents.
3. Address cultural norms and public awareness around violence in all forms. Implement “know the signs” campaigns highlighting risk factors for all forms of violence including risk of self-harm as well as risk of harm to others.
4. Create new norms around the responsibility that comes with gun ownership. Promote awareness of the impact of violence on whole communities and reduce the stigma that now impedes entry into services for those at risk of violence. Assure participation of healthcare settings, schools, gun stores and ranges, and veterans’ services in building awareness.
5. Create a public awareness campaign on Gun Violence Restraining Orders (GVROs) that informs the public how to support the removal of a firearm from a loved one they fear will harm themselves or others.
6. Create and disseminate information that communicates strategies for preventing gun violence and influences cultural norms around the acceptability of violence.



## II. Intervention

Intervention allows for targeted actions that focus on interrupting acts and potential acts of violence.



### a. Gun Safety

1. Implement buy-back programs/opportunities in partnership with law enforcement.
2. Enact gun industry accountability laws that hold gun manufacturers and dealers liable for lapses in compliance with existing mandates and ensure there is adequate oversight over the marketing and sale of guns.
3. Support legislation preventing marketing to children and youth by gun manufacturers and dealers.
4. Target gun dealers responsible for selling guns used in crimes and illegal gun trafficking.
5. Distribute through gun stores, gun ranges, and healthcare providers, gun safe storage and suicide prevention education materials and gun locks.
6. Improve the enforcement of Gun Violence Restraining Orders (GVROs), in partnership with communities, courts, the district attorney, and law enforcement; provide culturally relevant training to individuals and organizations around GVROs.
7. Establish a linked local, state, and national red flag system to prohibit those that pose a danger to themselves and/or others from owning guns.



## b. Youth Safety

1. Expand school-based student assessment and support teams. Every district should have a team able to provide its student population with rapid assessment and immediate mobilization of appropriate resources including: health evaluations, culturally appropriate psychiatric evaluations, counseling, substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, and placements in alternative therapeutic settings/ residential placements.
2. Provide comprehensive crisis intervention/de-escalation and suicide intervention training for school personnel, law enforcement, health care providers, community and faith-based organizations and middle school/high school students.
3. Invest in training youth peer leaders in conflict mediation, mental health first aid, and de-escalation strategies at every high school.
4. Invest in safe passages programs to and from schools, parks, libraries and after school programs with peacemakers/credible messengers.
5. Provide funding for youth jobs, arts and sports programs, and mentoring programs, particularly in underserved communities.
6. Develop clear protocols and provide training for school and park response to active shooter events, escalating conflicts, and other acts of violence.
7. Expand anti-hate and upstander intervention programs such as LA vs Hate, Hate Free Zones, Sandy Hook Promise's Know the Signs; create a coordinated system to identify and refer people showing extremist, violent or hate motivated behavior to community programs.





### c. Community Safety

1. Invest in a community-driven public safety approach that employs violence interrupters/gang interventionists to promote peace, reduce potential for retaliation, and connect impacted community members to services. These evidence-based strategies promote equity and inclusion by engaging those most impacted in the solution to violence.
2. Expand Hospital Violence Intervention Programs (HVIP) for survivors of gun violence. Ensure HVIP includes domestic violence/intimate partner violence as part of patient assessment and referrals. Also ensure that HVIP integrates long-term case management linking clients with community-based organizations and other entities that can provide risk reduction resources such as vocational training and employment.
3. Work with healthcare providers to develop screening tools and counseling interventions that clinicians can use to help prevent firearm injuries and deaths; this includes collecting information from patients on their access to firearms.
4. Provide Anti-Hate, Psychological First Aid and Community Resilience Model training for community leaders and faith organizations.

### III. Healing

1. Develop and implement trauma-informed policies and programs at schools, youth programs and health/social service programs. Provide training for school personnel and agency staff.
2. Build capacity through training and technical assistance and other supports for trauma informed care and healing centered services.
3. Increase the number of prevention and healing programs and events that promote social connectedness and a culture of peace within neighborhoods. Integrate the arts throughout community spaces.
4. Provide quiet restful spaces/zones in communities and schools where individuals can go to relax and access a calming environment.





For more information and resources, please scan here to visit our Gun Violence Prevention Platform.