Public health responses to crime lead to safer communities

We all want safe communities, which is why we need to take a commonsense and practical approach to addressing crime. While the U.S. saw a slight increase in the number of reported motor vehicle thefts from 2015-2016, it was down 30.4 percent when compared with 2007 rates.\(^1\) Overall, crime has decreased and public safety continues to improve.\(^2\) The increase in car thefts, while serious, does not constitute a public safety crisis. To prevent future car thefts, we should incorporate common-sense approaches to prevention and proven interventions that help youth take responsibility for their actions and redirect them to law-abiding behavior.

Prevention is always the first step to healthy and safe communities. Cities have seen measurable results by investing in signage, better lighting in parking lots, and other environmental designs.\(^3\) At the same time, public health approaches that address root causes of crime are extremely effective in preventing crime and improving public safety. For instance, investments in education and community supports have been proven to help young people create pro-social ties and put youth on the path to success. Such programmatic investments have also shown to help youth complete high school, reducing crime and leading to healthier communities.\(^4\)

In instances when car thefts are not prevented, there is mounting evidence that the least amount of intervention by the juvenile justice system, the lower the recidivism.\(^5\) Proven, community-based, public health-oriented approaches such as restorative justice are the most effective way to ensure accountability and personal responsibility. These interventions might not only require young people to take ownership over their actions, but also to repair the harm to the victim and the community, and to learn skills to make better decisions in the future. These kinds of approaches cost less and accomplish more than typical justice responses.\(^6\)
Public health interventions that work

Restorative Justice
Restorative justice programming requires young people to take personal responsibility for their actions and to repair the harm to victims.

- In Alameda County, CA, restorative justice programming was used for youth where there was an identifiable victim, including car theft. Participants in the program were 44% less likely to receive new charges than those who were processed through the traditional juvenile justice system.\(^7\)
- Restorative justice approaches focus on repairing harm to individuals and thus yield better results for survivors of crime. In a study of the Alameda County program, 97% of survivors of harm who engaged in restorative justice programming felt that the conference process seemed fair.\(^8\)

Cure Violence Models\(^9\)
The Cure Violence Health Model uses epidemic control method to reduce violence. Cure Violence trains carefully selected members of the community -- trusted insiders -- to anticipate where violence may occur and intervene before it erupts.

- Neighborhoods with Cure Violence types of interventions show between a 41% to 73% reduction in shootings and killings.\(^10\)
- The presence of Cure Violence is associated with reductions in social norms that support violence when compared to similar neighborhoods without the program.
- Cure Violence only costs $500,000 per neighborhood.

Credible Messengers Mentoring\(^11\)
Credible messenger mentoring is a transformative mentoring intervention for young adults in the justice system. Men and women who were themselves justice-involved, “credible messengers,” are hired to engage young people on their own terms in structured and intentional relationships.

- ARCHES is a group mentoring program with curriculum delivered by culturally appropriate trained mentors for justice-involved young adults. Relative to their peers, ARCHES participants had 69 percent lower felony reconviction rates 12 months after beginning probation and 57 percent lower rates 24 months after beginning probation.\(^12\)

Conclusion
If we want to create safe communities, we must embrace a common-sense approach to youth crime by prioritizing the use of proven prevention and intervention programs. Responses to youth crime that are based in public health approaches provide cost effective methods to give young people structured opportunities for personal responsibility and accountability and to address the root causes of their behavior.
4 For example, positive behavior management techniques have been effective in reducing self-reported offenses and arrests and positive youth development programs, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, have shown reductions in youth crime. U.S. Office of the Surgeon General, Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General, Chapter 5 – Prevention and Intervention (Rockville, MD, 2001), https://bit.ly/2ILiQWk.
8 Baliga, et. al., 9.
9 For more information visit: http://cureviolence.org/.
11 For more information visit: https://cmjcenter.org/archesimpact/.