

Youth Violence: A Public Health Response

Health Equity Council

Executive statement

Youth Violence is a major public health problem, disproportionately harming young people of color. A public health approach that includes prevention strategies can result in reductions in violence and overall improvement in health, wellbeing, and safety of the youth in Albuquerque.

Background

Youth violence refers to harmful behaviors that are perpetrated by and/or against young people. It includes behaviors such as bullying, assaults, gun violence, etc. It can lead to emotional harm, physical injuries or even death. It disproportionately affects youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth. Exposure to violence is also linked with health outcomes and behaviors, such as increased physical illness, psychological distress, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, asthma, smoking, and suicide.

Public health research and experience show that youth violence is preventable. Youth violence is influenced by multiple individual, interpersonal, and community risk and protective factors. Although these risk factors are complex and interactive, public health approaches can increase protective factors and reduce risk factors. Implementation of broad and overlapping public health strategies can enhance strengths and strengthen protective factors.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Prevention

Make prevention a priority, and engage in multi-sector partnerships to strengthen youth violence prevention efforts.

Recommendation 2: Comprehensive Action Plan

Develop a public health centered comprehensive action plan that addresses root causes of violence and all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) of prevention.

Recommendation 3: Youth Engagement

Convene youth, families, public health specialists, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders in all phases of the development and implementation of the action plan. Implement youth engagement and center youth voices.

Recommendation 4: Policy and Program Development

Conduct trainings for policy makers, elected officials, and city departments about the role of public health in preventing violence and promoting adolescent health.

Recommendation 5: Public health Infrastructure

Build infrastructure, systems, and capacity of public health community to develop adequate data and evaluation systems, implement culturally-centered and evidence-based prevention efforts, and promote health.

Recommendation 6: Public Awareness Campaign

Create a public campaign to increase public awareness that youth violence is a preventable public health issue and to increase awareness of prevention efforts and healing-centered intervention programs.