In Detail: Violence Disrupter Programs

An extended look for public safety professionals

COLORADO
Division of Criminal Justice
Department of Public Safety

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Background

Colorado is dedicated to reducing and preventing criminal activity through a variety of violence disruptor programs, crime prevention initiatives, and community partnerships. Data show an increase in violent crimes between 2019 to 2022 (Table 1), but the total number of violent crimes decreased by 8.5% from 2022 (*N* = 32,425) to 2023 (*N* = 29,654), the first time there has been a decrease in the past five years (CBI, 2024). Violent crimes include murder/nonnegligent manslaughter, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault.

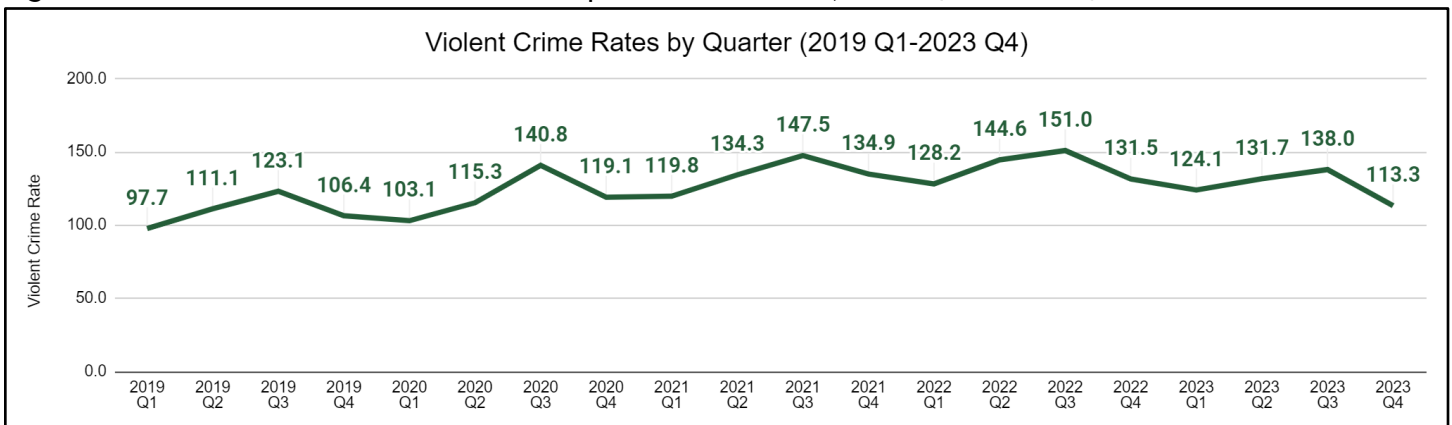Table 1. Total number (*N*) of violent crimes per year, 2019-2023.

Year	Violent Crimes Total	Annual Change %*
2019	25,249	-
2020	27,776	**+10%**
2021	31,185	**+12%**
2022	32,424	**+4%**
2023	29,654	**-9%**

Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigations (CBI), 2024.
* Annual Change percent was calculated relative to the previous year.

The rate of violent crimes has not been below 100.0 since 2019 Q1, with a high of 151.0 in 2022 Q3. There was an 18% decrease in the violent crime rate from 2023 Q3 to 2023 Q4, which marks the lowest violent crime rate in the last three years (Figure 1). For more information about the latest Colorado violent and property crime trends, please review the ORS Quarterly Crime Trends Report. For information on how Colorado compares to the United States annually, please review the ORS Annual Crime Trends Report.

Figure 1. Rates of violent crime in Colorado per 100K residents, 2019 Q1 to 2023 Q4.

Source: Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Crime Statistics, retrieved February 2024.
* **NOTE**: CBI data is dynamic and subject to change as more information becomes available.

Violence Intervention Strategies

Violent crime intervention strategies are targeted approaches designed to address and reduce instances of violent crime within communities. These strategies typically involve a combination of law enforcement tactics, community engagement, and preventative measures aimed at curbing criminal activities such as assault, robbery, and homicide (Kovalenko et al., 2020; Seacrest, 2024). Effective intervention requires a multifaceted approach that includes implementing crime prevention programs, fostering collaboration between community organizations and law enforcement, and addressing underlying social issues such as poverty and substance abuse (Kovalenko et al., 2020; Seacrest, 2024). By focusing on both immediate and systemic factors contributing to violence, these strategies seek to create safer environments and promote long-term crime reduction (Kovalenko et al., 2020; Seacrest, 2024).

Non-law enforcement approaches often focus on addressing the root causes of violence through community-based and preventative measures (Seacrest, 2024). These approaches often emphasize conflict resolution, mediation, and support systems to address underlying issues such as socioeconomic disparities, mental health challenges, and family dynamics (Seacrest, 2024). Programs may include community dialogue initiatives, violence prevention education, and mentorship programs aimed at empowering individuals and fostering social cohesion (Seacrest, 2024). By leveraging local resources and engaging with affected communities directly, these approaches aim to build resilience, reduce the likelihood of violent incidents, and promote constructive solutions to conflicts without relying on traditional law enforcement mechanisms.

Grant Programs in Colorado

In 2023, 56 entities received $14.4M through the SB22-145 Multidisciplinary Crime Prevention and Crisis Intervention Grant Program, which is handled by the Division of Criminal Justice's Office of Adult and Juvenile Justice Assistance (OAJJA). OAJJA collects self-reported data from the grant participants to track progress and performance through quarterly reporting. Of the 56 entities, 22 (39%) self-identified as violence intervention programs, 29 (52%) as early intervention teams, and 30 (54%) as primary and secondary violence prevention programs. In 2023, 2,289 new interventions and strategies were implemented by the violence intervention programs, 827 individuals were trained by the early intervention teams, and 104,826 service hours were provided by the primary and secondary violence prevention programs. For more information about this grant program and other Colorado-based crime prevention programs, visit the [Crime Prevention Grant Programs website](#).

In addition to crime prevention programs, Colorado also has community violence intervention (CVI) programs that "focus on those who are at the highest risk of becoming victims of or engaging in violence" intending to reduce "firearm injuries and deaths by addressing the root causes of violence and engaging with affected individuals and communities" (CDPHE, n.d.). Violence disruption is a long-term collaborative effort between law enforcement and the community built upon mutual trust and understanding, open communication, and open-mindedness. Unfortunately, this has been a significant challenge due to the pandemic and "the deterioration of police-community relations after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, which led to less proactive policing and less cooperation from residents" (MacGillis, 2023). These programs can take a long time to fully develop and hire trained staff, delaying their ability to justify the funding granted in the short run (Ali, 2022). Colorado continues to invest in these evidence-based approaches to address the criminal activities happening throughout the state in collaboration with community programs.

Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP)

The Colorado Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP) was established in 2021 as part of the state's broader efforts to address and reduce gun violence. This office operates under the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and serves as a central resource for data collection, research, and education on gun violence. Its primary goals include promoting safe firearm practices, providing resources for gun violence prevention programs, and supporting communities affected by gun violence. Most notably, the OGVP manages the Colorado Firearm Data Dashboard and plays a vital role in coordinating statewide efforts to prevent gun violence through public awareness campaigns, grant funding, and partnerships with local organizations and law enforcement agencies.

Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO)

A bill to implement Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO) or a "Red Flag" law, was passed in 2019 (Colorado House Bill (HB) 19-1177) to provide a legal mechanism for temporarily removing firearms from individuals deemed to be a significant risk to themselves or others. Under the ERPO, law enforcement officers, district attorneys, family members (defined by birth, marriage, or legal adoption), household members who have resided in the same residence for the past six months, licensed educators, or licensed medical or mental health professionals can petition a court to issue an order requiring the individual to surrender their firearms (CDPHE, n.d.). The intent of the law is to prevent gun violence, including suicides, domestic violence, and mass shootings, by intervening before a potential tragedy occurs. Since its enactment, the ERPO law has seen varied use across Colorado, with some counties utilizing it more actively than others, sometimes due to political considerations (Barnard, 2021). While the law has been credited with preventing potential harm in certain cases, it has also sparked debate regarding its impact on individual rights and due process (Barnard, 2021). The law's implementation has highlighted both the potential for early intervention in crises and the ongoing challenges of ensuring consistent application across the state.

For comparison to other state's ERPO implementations, please review The Effects of Extreme-Risk Protection Orders by RAND Research.

Violent Reduction Initiatives

The most effective violence reduction approaches often involve multi-component interventions that address risk factors at various levels, including individual, relationship, community, and societal levels (Noorman et al., 2023). Strategies such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, social-emotional learning programs, and community-based initiatives that promote social cohesion and address systemic issues like poverty and inequality have been found to be particularly effective (Noorman et al., 2023). These approaches not only reduce immediate instances of violence but also contribute to long-term behavioral change and the creation of safer environments.

In 2020, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice's Research and Evaluation Center released a report titled *Reducing Violence Without Police: A Review of Research Evidence* that found the following initiatives most effective in reducing violent crimes:

- Improve the Physical Environment
- Strengthen Anti-Violence Social Norms and Peer Relationships
- Engage and Support Youth

- Reduce Substance Abuse
- Mitigate Financial Stress
- Reduce the Harmful Effects of the Justice Process
- Confront the Gun Problem

In 2021, the US Department of Justice, Office of the Deputy Attorney General released a [memorandum](#) regarding strategies to reduce violent crimes based on the following core principles:

1. **Foster trust and have legitimacy in the community**

The first core principle emphasizes the need for meaningful law enforcement engagement with the community as well as accountability to increase public trust in the establishment. The following principles and their strategies cannot work effectively if there is a lack of trust between law enforcement and the community they serve.

2. **Invest in community-based prevention and intervention programs**

The second core principle is to invest in community-based prevention and intervention programs to help reduce the number of people who are involved in the criminal justice system, whether as an offender or a victim. These programs help provide preventative measures and alternative resources for those at high risk of offending or being victimized.

3. **Set strategic enforcement priorities**

The third core principle explains the importance of maximizing the limited law enforcement resources and personnel by concentrating efforts on areas or "drivers" of violent crimes that would make the biggest impact on the community. For example, gun violence, domestic violence, criminal organizations, drug trafficking, or any other forces may be considered drivers of violent crimes. While the raw number of overall arrests, prosecuted cases, or convictions may not necessarily increase, focusing efforts on the major contributors of violent crimes will improve public safety overall and consistent efforts will reduce crimes.

- In 2022, President Biden signed the [Executive Order on Advancing Effective, Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice Practices to Enhance Public Trust and Public Safety](#) as a strategy to help law enforcement improve their investigative processes, recruitment and retention, and new databases to track progress.

4. **Measure the results of the efforts**

The fourth core principle is deciding what metrics to use to measure impacts and adjust methods accordingly to adhere to the established goals (e.g., reduce violent crime rates). Many factors may be out of law enforcement's control, such as some of the originating drivers of violent crimes, court proceedings, or community corrections board decisions. However, factors such as crime rate and overall perception of criminality in the community can be used as metrics to gauge proactive or preventative efforts.

The following table provides examples of violent reduction approaches for different circumstances that have been adapted from multiple evidence-based research studies conducted in the past few decades. The table is divided into four sections: population, timing (stage of criminality process), environment, and activity/goal. The types listed within each section describe a violence reduction approach and an example of that approach.

Table 2. Examples of violence reduction approaches within different populations, timing/stage of criminality process, environment, and activities.

Population	Description	Example
Universal	Target everyone in the community or society	Public education campaign
Selective	Target those at highest risk	Dating education or healthy relationships campaign for teens; direct intervention with gang members
Indicated	Target those who are known to be involved/exposed	Emergency shelter for victims of domestic abuse

Timing	Description	Example
Primary/Prevention	Seek the reduction of violence by acting before conditions for it occur (i.e., address root causes)	Healthy teen dating education campaign
Secondary/Intervention	Seek to intervene immediately after violence occurs or in contexts where it is likely	Street outreach to young people on streets with active conflicts
Tertiary	Address longer-term consequences of violence	Reentry services for high utilizers of prison
Suppression	Traditionally addresses violence after it occurs through specific deterrence and incapacitation	Criminal sanctions (arrest, supervision, jail, and/or prison)

Environment	Description	Example
Individual	Address biological or psychological factors, behavior, or personal experience	In-home visits to teach parenting skills; cognitive behavioral therapy
Relationship (peer, family)	Target interactions between two or more closely associated people	Peer program promoting positive dating norms among friends
Community	Address issues with the health, safety, and stability of whole communities	Physical improvements to neighborhoods; business improvement districts
Societal	Examine broad patterns in thinking and acting that produce a specific social dynamic	Awareness campaigns around intimate partner violence, bystander intervention education, legislation/public policies supporting family leave

Activity/goal	Description	Example
Change individual knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviors	Develop prosocial attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, social skills, marketable skills, and deter criminal actions.	Conflict resolution education; social skills training; job skills training; public info and education campaigns; parenting education
Change social environment	Alter the way people interact by modifying social circumstances	Adult mentoring of youth; job creation programs; battered women's shelters; economic incentives for family stability; lower-income housing
Change physical environment	Modify the design, use, or availability of contributing commodities, structures or spaces	Restrictive handgun licensing; control of alcohol sales at events; increased visibility of high-risk areas; disruption of illegal gun markets

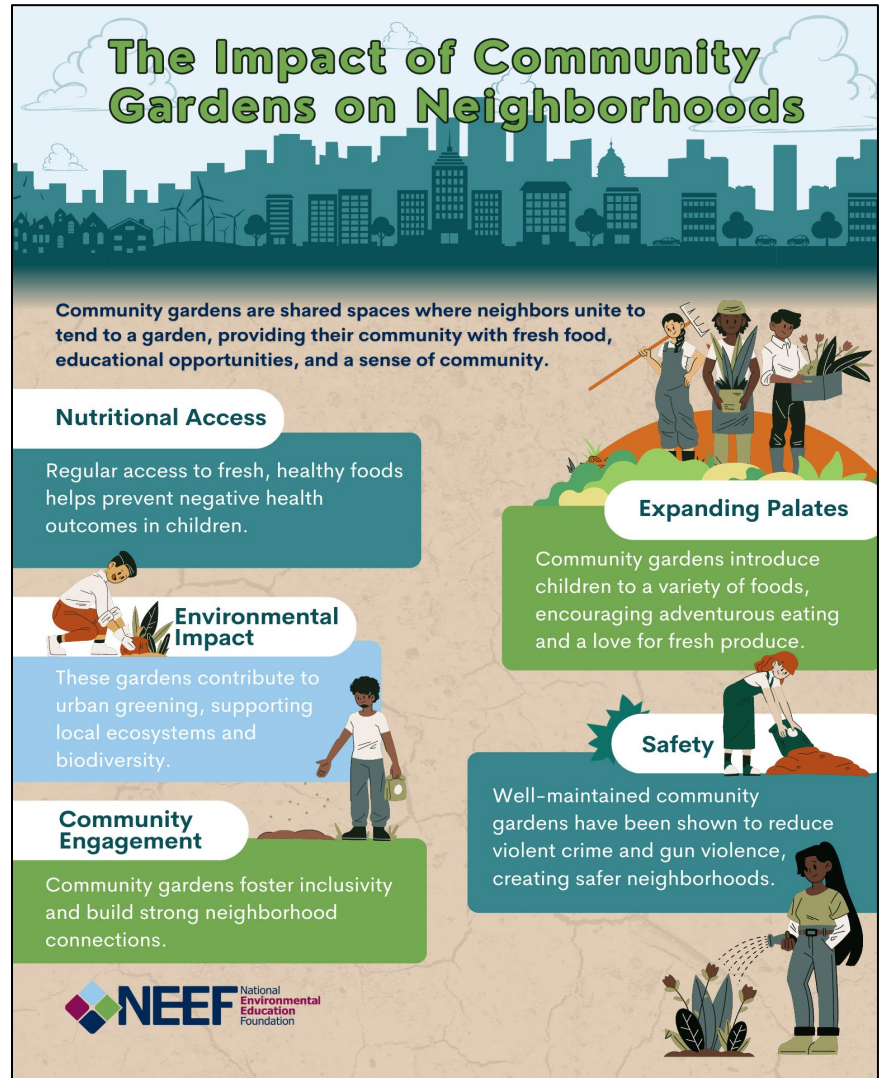Source: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 2020.

Community-Based Violence Intervention (CVI) Programs

Community-based violence intervention (CVI) programs are effective strategies for reducing gun violence and violent crime by focusing on those most at risk (American Progress, 2022; Noorman et al., 2023). These programs engage community members with shared experiences to build trust, offer support, and provide alternatives to violence (American Progress, 2022). Despite their success in lowering violence in several cities, CVI programs often lack sufficient resources, hindering broader implementation. In fiscal year 2023, "the Biden administration has allocated $150 million to the U.S. Department of Justice for development, implementation, and evaluation of CVI programs" (American Progress, 2022). With increased funding and support, especially from federal and local governments, CVIs can address the root causes of violence, particularly in communities disproportionately affected by gun violence.

A meta-analysis study found that sport-based initiatives, particularly martial arts training, and other community-level interventions have the strongest impacts on reducing violence while "general population programs aimed at early childhood, youth development, and reducing sexual assault perpetration by men" had the weakest impacts (Fazel et al., 2024). The same study found that policies and legal initiatives related to gun control had positive effects, though gun buy-back programs and additional CCTV surveillance had little to no effects (Fazel et al., 2024). In addition, anti-bullying campaigns and psychosocial programs targeting sexual and general violence also had positive effects, though with wider confidence levels compared to sports-based initiatives (Fazel et al., 2024).

Urban Green Spaces

Greening communities by creating urban green spaces such as parks, trails, and community gardens can significantly reduce violence and promote community health (Hubbart & Bridger, 2024). Studies show that increasing access to nature or urban green spaces decreases violent crime and promotes physical and mental well-being (Hubbart & Bridger, 2024; Williams, 2021; Shepley et al., 2019). A study conducted in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania found that greening initiatives have reduced violent crime while also encouraging outdoor activities and improving community health outcomes (Branas et al., 2018). A similar study conducted in Flint, Michigan found nearly a 40% reduction in assaults and total violent crime when vacant lots were transformed into urban green spaces (Heinze et al., 2018). These green spaces improve neighborhood safety by transforming neglected areas, reducing criminality, and fostering social connectivity (Hubbart & Bridger, 2024; Shepley et al., 2019).

Source: National Environmental Education Foundation (see Appendix)

Sources on Greening Communities:
- Green America's Communities
- Start a Community Garden
- Youth Violence Prevention Resources for Action

Creating and improving green spaces also aligns with Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies for reducing crime. For more information, see the ORS report, In Detail: CPTED.

A study found that densely populated or overcrowded neighborhoods, poorly maintained roads and buildings, low visibility (such as insufficient lighting), ineffective land use (such as vacant buildings and parking lots), and a lack of public social gatherings due to insufficient urban green spaces and general fear of violence contribute to increased rates of violent crime, substance abuse, mental illness, and overall social unrest (Kondo et al., 2018). The study concludes that "neighborhood violence is a place-based problem that requires place-based solutions" (Kondo et al., 2018). In addition, improving access to affordable housing, stable employment, and reasonable costs of living contribute to a reduction in crimes in neighborhoods (Kondo et al., 2018).

Regional Anti-Violence Enforcement Network (RAVEN)

The Colorado Regional Anti-Violence Enforcement Network (RAVEN), implemented in 2018, has made notable progress in targeting violent crime through collaborative efforts between local, state, and federal agencies (Uchida, 2021). The task force utilizes forensic technologies like the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) to connect evidence across multiple jurisdictions, which has led to significant arrests and prosecutions of violent offenders (ATF, 2023). RAVEN has been recognized for its impact, including receiving a national achievement award for its contributions to the Project Safe Neighborhoods program (ICE, 2021). In 2019 and 2020, the task force successfully prosecuted over 250 violent offenders, demonstrating its effectiveness in addressing violent crime in the Denver metropolitan area (ICE, 2021).

RAVEN and the Crime Gun Information Center (CGIC) are related but distinct programs that often work in conjunction rather than one being a direct successor of the other (Uchida, 2021). CGIC initially focused on collecting and analyzing ballistic evidence to combat gun violence in specific regions like Denver (Uchida, 2021). In 2019, the CGIC expanded into the RAVEN, which broadened the scope by incorporating additional regional partnerships and extending efforts beyond firearm-related crimes to target broader violent criminal activities, including gang violence and drug trafficking (Uchida, 2021). RAVEN utilizes the same ballistic analysis technologies such as NIBIN, but adds a multi-jurisdictional, collaborative approach to target violent crime more comprehensively (Uchida, 2021). The two programs function together, with CGIC contributing its forensic expertise while RAVEN expands the focus and reach of the investigations (Uchida, 2021).

Violence Intervention & Prevention Resources

- American Progress: [Community-Based Violence Interruption Programs Can Reduce Gun Violence](#)
- Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA): [Community-Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative](#)
- Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA): [Violent Crime Reduction Roadmap](#)
- CDPHE, Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP): [Colorado Firearm Data Dashboard](#)
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC): [Violence Prevention](#)
- Center for Justice Innovation: [A Guide to Safe and Equitable Communities](#)
- City and County of Denver: [Youth Violence Prevention Action Table EOY Strategic Planning Session](#)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI): [Violence Prevention in Schools](#)
- Great Lake Equity Center: [Building Equitable, Safe, and Supportive Schools](#)
- John Jay College: [Reducing Violence Without Police: A Review of Research Evidence](#)
- Local Government Association: [Public Health Approaches to Reducing Violence](#)
- National Institute of Justice (NIJ): [Crime Solutions](#)
- US DOJ, Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS): [Community Violence Intervention](#)
- US DOJ, National Institute of Justice, [Crime & Crime Prevention](#)
- US DOJ, Office of the Deputy Attorney General: [Comprehensive Strategy for Reducing Violent Crime](#)
- World Health Organization (WHO): [Youth Violence](#)

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Appendix

Infographic: The Impact of Community Gardens on Neighborhoods

(Infographic available at the National Environmental Education Foundation at neefusa.org: neefusa.org/story/health-and-environment/how-greening-communities-can-reduce-violence-and-promote-health)

Community gardens are shared spaces where neighbors unite to tend a garden, providing their community with fresh food, educational opportunities and a sense of community.

- Nutritional Access - Regular access to fresh, healthy foods helps prevent negative health outcomes in children
- Expanding Palates - Community gardens introduce children to a variety of foods, encouraging adventurous eating and a love for fresh produce.
- Environmental Impact - These gardens contribute to urban greening, supporting local ecosystems and biodiversity.
- Safety - Well-maintained community gardens have been shown to reduce violent crime and gun violence, creating safer neighborhoods.
- Community Engagement - Community gardens foster inclusivity and build strong neighborhood connections.