

# Understanding CVI's Impact on Participants

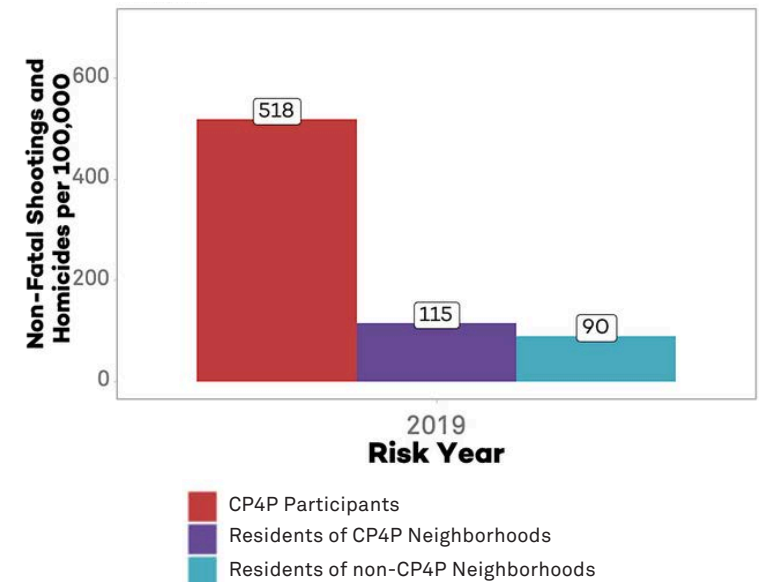
## Emerging Evidence from Violence Intervention Strategies

Community Violence Intervention (CVI) strategies are non-punitive, community-driven, and designed to engage those at highest risk of gun violence through direct outreach and wraparound services. Over the past decade, CVI has increasingly become a component of the civilian public safety infrastructure of cities across the United States. As CVI programs have expanded, so too has the need for rigorous research to understand their impact on participants and the communities they serve. This brief summarizes evidence from key program evaluations to present what is currently known about the impact of CVI programming on individual participants—specifically the impact on official and self-reported outcomes such as arrests, victimizations, gun carrying, and well-being.

### CVI Participants are at the Highest Risk of Gun Violence Involvement

CVI participants have exceptionally high and disproportionate levels of risk for gun violence involvement. Participants of Chicago's Communities Partnering 4 Peace (CP4P)—a consortium of CVI organizations—enrolled in 2020 or later have 4.5 times greater risk of gunshot injury than non-participants within CP4P neighborhoods, and nearly 6 times greater risk than residents of non-CP4P neighborhoods (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> Nearly all participants of READI Chicago (98%) and California's Advance Peace (96%) had been arrested before engaging with CVI services.<sup>2,3</sup> What's more, even after starting programming, participants continue to experience traumatic incidents. A survey of CVI participants in Chicago found that 66% of individuals experienced the loss of a loved one to violence within the first six months of receiving services. Given CVI participants' extraordinarily high levels of risk, even dramatic reductions in their chances of being victimized or arrested leave them at far higher risk than the general public, including others in their own neighborhoods.

Violence Risk by Population Group | Figure 1  
in 2019



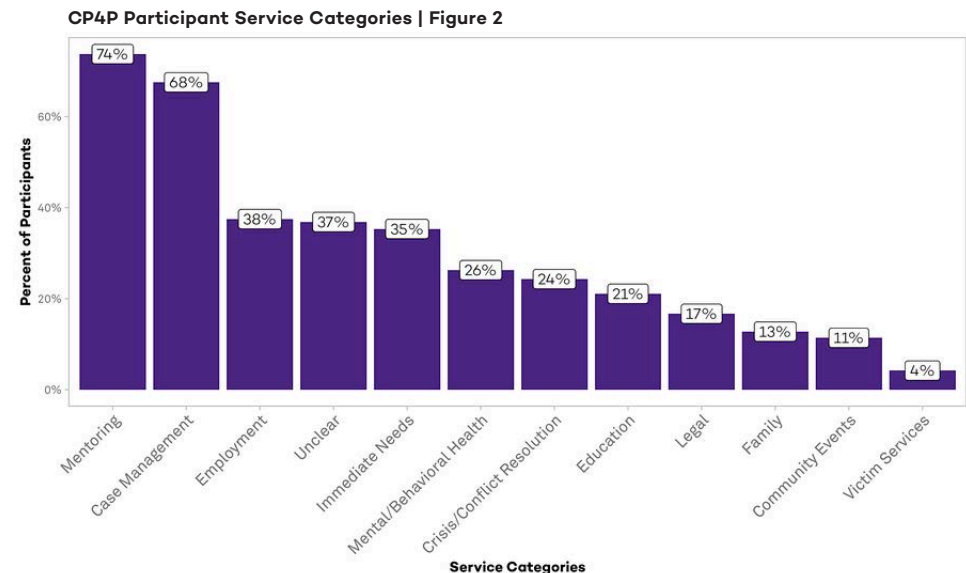
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## CVI Impact Measures are Complex

Current research and much of the field itself are narrowly focused on measuring CVI's impact on violence and arrest outcomes. While, of course, impact on violence and crime are essential indicators of programmatic impact, such a singular focus fails to consider the many outcomes that could follow from the diverse services CVI offers. Indeed, to effectively meet the diverse needs of participants, CVI professionals provide a wide range of services, including crisis response, workforce readiness, housing assistance, counseling, and educational support. A service type shared by CVIs across the country is mentorship—a highly interpersonal yet difficult to measure violence prevention activity that relies on relationship-building as a mechanism for inspiring change. For example, 74% of CP4P participants studied between 2017 and 2025 received mentorship services as part of their engagement with a CVI organization (Figure 2).<sup>4</sup>

Measuring CVI programs' impact on outcomes like violence also presents considerable challenges. Gun violence victimization is statistically rare, even in neighborhoods with high rates of violence, meaning researchers need immense sample sizes to detect meaningful effects. For example, the READI program enrolled over 1,500 participants but still lacked enough statistical power to detect a reduction in shootings from the randomized sample.<sup>3</sup>

Further complicating matters, many programs intentionally work with people who have already been shot, making the relevant outcome repeat victimization (being shot after having been shot once prior to program involvement), which is even rarer. Moreover, gun violence is highly concentrated within small social networks and small geographic areas, meaning that traditional research methods—including randomized control trials—struggle to account for how participants might influence each other.<sup>5,6</sup> These measurement issues require researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to consider novel methods that can address the unique nature of gun violence as well as look beyond police-collected violence statistics to determine CVI efficacy.



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## CVI's Impact on Shootings is Less Clear than on Arrests

Like many public safety, education, and public health interventions, the evidence on CVI programs is mixed. Individual CVI and street outreach programs generally show reductions in arrests but not statistically significant decreases in victimizations. Rigorous evaluations of programs in Chicago, Denver, and California found decreases in arrests for violence-related crimes among program participants.

For example, Chicago CRED alumni who completed the full program were 73% less likely to be arrested for a violent crime over a two-year period compared to similar individuals who did not participate.<sup>5</sup> READI Chicago showed evidence of a 64% reduction in arrests for shootings and homicides.<sup>3</sup> However, this was not statistically significant for all participants. Similarly, Advance Peace Sacramento reported that 90% of their 50 participants had no new gun charges or arrests at follow-up.

These results suggest that CVI programs may effectively support participants in avoiding involvement in the criminal justice system. In contrast, GRID participants in Denver showed no statistically significant differences in arrests over an 18-month period when compared to a control group.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the timing of these effects matters: CP4P participants initially experienced a slight increase in violent crime arrests in the first 12 months after accessing services but saw a 9% decline after 18 months.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the general success in reducing arrests, CVI programs have struggled to demonstrate statistically significant reductions in gunshot victimization among participants. Some programs have reported encouraging survival rates; for example, Advance Peace Sacramento found that 98% of their 50 participants were alive at follow-up. Research on Chicago CRED and READI Chicago found overall reductions in victimization, yet determining statistical significance was more difficult.<sup>3,4</sup>



**73%** Less Likely to be Arrested  
for Violent Crime



**64%** Less Arrests for  
Shootings and Homicides



**90%** of Participants with No  
New Arrests at Follow-Up

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## A Note on Statistical Significance

Here, scientific jargon often clouds the discussion. The lack of statistical significance means that the methods were unable to detect an effect, not necessarily that the programs were ineffective. This is an important caveat given the difficulties of measuring gun violence among a hard-to-reach population.

Even in the best designed programs and research studies, victimization remains challenging to measure with statistical confidence. When individual participants make meaningful progress like completing programming, earning diplomas, or no longer carrying guns, they can still be shot if their broader neighborhood context remains unchanged. This dichotomy highlights a fundamental limitation of CVI strategies: victimization is a particularly intractable outcome without addressing deeply entrenched community and social dynamics that lead to gun violence. As one CRED participant put it, CVI programs have participants “playing defense while the rest of the neighborhood keeps playing offense.”<sup>7</sup>

*Victimization is a particularly intractable outcome without addressing deeply entrenched community and social dynamics that lead to gun violence.*



Photo Credit: Breakthrough Urban Ministries



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## Emerging Evidence Suggests Far-Reaching Impact on Participants' Lives

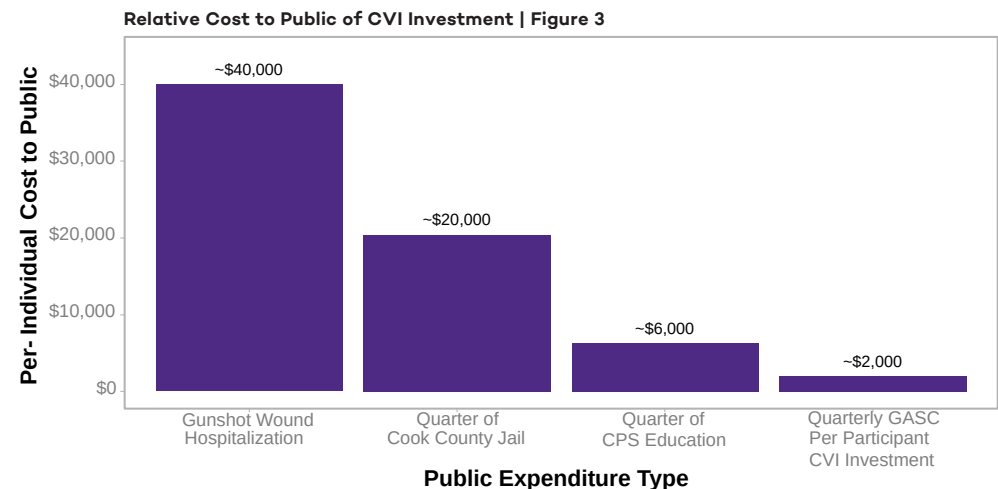
Beyond simply preventing shootings and arrests, emerging research in Chicago, Denver, and California finds that CVI programs are achieving a wide range of positive outcomes in participants' lives. A first-of-its-kind survey of CVI participants in Chicago suggests that such individuals demonstrate positive behavioral and mindset changes within the first six months of receiving services, such as reductions in gun carrying (56%), decreased participation in risky activities (36%), and less willingness to escalate conflicts with violence.

Similarly, self-reported data from Denver's GRID program show participants were 69% less likely to perpetrate violence during the study period.<sup>6</sup> In Advance Peace Sacramento, almost all participants reported an improved outlook on life (84%) by the time they completed the program.<sup>2</sup> These positive outcomes suggest that CVI programs are helping participants make fundamental life changes that are difficult to capture through traditional measures like arrests and shootings.

## CVIs are Cost-Effective Public Safety Strategies

CVI programs yield promising results for individual participants while generating substantial returns on investment. A cost-benefit analysis of READI Chicago indicated that READI programming resulted in projected savings of \$182,000 to \$916,000 per participant—roughly 4 to 18 times the annual cost per participant.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, this study focused on the costs of arrest, incarceration, and victimization, overlooking CVI's other potential public safety and community well-being benefits.

Despite this cost-effectiveness, public investment in CVI strategies is small relative to other safety expenditures. While a single gunshot wound costs the Cook County Hospital system between \$30,000-\$50,000 and a quarter-long incarceration in Cook County Jail costs an estimated \$20,000 per individual, the quarterly per-participant investment by the Government Alliance for Safe Communities (GASC) is only approximately \$2,000 (Figure 3).<sup>8,9</sup> While more research is needed to understand the dosage and conditions that optimize program impact, CVI generates considerable cost savings while contributing to reductions in gun violence and improvements to well-being outcomes.



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