

Kaiser Permanente Policy Story, v1, No. 3

Preventing Violence and Promoting Healthy Eating and Active Living

- Many new federal initiatives seek to foster healthier communities through community-based prevention and health promotion strategies.
- Violence and fear in communities can undermine attempts to promote healthy eating and physical activity, thereby exacerbating existing illnesses and increasing the risk of chronic disease.
- Kaiser Permanente has sponsored innovative research and pilot programs to determine which approaches most effectively limit the impact of violence on efforts to promote healthy eating and active living.
- The lessons learned from the community-based pilot projects will inform policymakers and community health practitioners about emerging strategies for making the connection between preventing violence and promoting healthy eating and active living.

Policy Context

Community-based prevention and health promotion strategies are central to many new federal initiatives to foster healthier communities across America. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 appropriates \$15 billion over the next 10 years for chronic disease prevention and wellness initiatives—including upstream approaches to address the underlying determinants of health within communities. However, such chronic disease prevention strategies—encouraging walking and bicycling, accessing healthy food outlets, or promoting recreation in parks—are less effective when fear and violence pervade the environment.¹ In light of the federal government’s unprecedented commitment to community-based prevention and health promotion, policymakers need to understand which strategies most effectively limit the impact of violence on community efforts to promote healthy eating and active living.

The Challenge

Each year, Kaiser Permanente commits millions to Community Benefit grants and related programs that aim to increase opportunities for physical activity and improve access to healthy food. Our efforts take us beyond the doctor’s office to make a direct impact in schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces. However, as we engaged in community-based chronic disease prevention strategies, we became increasingly aware of

the need to address community violence as a critical part of our efforts. For example, the children of parents who perceived their neighborhood as unsafe were four times more likely to be overweight than those of parents who perceived their neighborhood as safe.² Furthermore, individuals who described their neighborhood as unsafe were nearly three times more likely to be inactive compared to those who describe their neighborhood as extremely safe.³

Kaiser Permanente Solution — Addressing the Intersection

Kaiser Permanente has worked to address community violence through a variety of initiatives, including hospital-based peer violence intervention programs, school-based health education programs, and community violence prevention grants. To address the knowledge gap relating to the impact of community violence on healthy eating and active living, Kaiser Permanente commissioned the Prevention Institute to research and write an in-depth study. The result, “Addressing the Intersection: Violence Prevention and Promoting Healthy Eating and Active Living,” offers findings and recommendations that have already served to support practitioners and advocates working to prevent chronic disease in communities heavily impacted by violence. The report calls for a violence-prevention framework based on:

1. Inclusion of all community sectors—nonprofits, municipal departments, and agencies—in

development of a comprehensive and sustainable strategy that integrates violence prevention into all activities and mandates;

2. Integration of a violence prevention perspective into all healthy eating and active living strategies, which include creating safe spaces, promoting community development and employment, and fostering social cohesion;
3. Taking greater advantage of the skills and knowledge of existing healthy eating and active living advocates to enhance support for violence prevention.⁴

Outcomes

In 2010 and 2011, strategies for improving food and physical activity while addressing community violence were tested in six communities across the nation. The communities were chosen as pilot sites by Kaiser Permanente and the other members of the Convergence Partnership,⁵ a national collaboration of funders that supports multisector policy change to improve food and physical environments. The pilot project cities include: Chula Vista, CA, Denver, CO, Detroit, MI, Louisville, KY, Oakland, CA, and Philadelphia, PA.

The pilot project teams brought together neighbourhood associations, youth, public health professionals, violence prevention advocates, and other community stakeholders to work in partnership to reduce violence and increase opportunities for

physical activity and healthy food access. Each team has taken a different route to the goal. For example, to positively influence perceptions of safety and to encourage more residents to be active in the neighbourhood, several teams have spurred action among local stakeholders and decision makers to increase street lighting, improve landscaping and concrete infrastructure, and decrease graffiti and blight. One team is working to limit alcohol promotion to decrease alcohol consumption and violence. Another team has engaged youth in comprehensive stewardship of a community park, including developing a community garden and farmers' market in the park.

Practical Implications and Transferability

Kaiser Permanente's sponsorship of innovative research and community-based pilot projects serves as the beginning of a movement to improve food and activity environments while addressing community violence. The findings and recommendations offered in *Addressing the Intersection*, as well as the lessons learned from the community-based pilot projects, will continue to inform policymakers and community health practitioners about the connection between preventing violence and promoting healthy eating and active living.

For more information, please contact:
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¹ Addressing The Intersection: Preventing Violence and Promoting Healthy Eating and Active Living, Prevention Institute, 2010.

² Burdette HL, Wadden TA, Whitaker RC. Neighborhood safety, collective efficacy, and obesity in Women with young children. *Obesity* (2006); 14;518-25.

³ Johnson SL, et. al. Neighborhood violence and its association with mothers' health: assessing the relative importance of perceived safety and exposure to violence. *J Urban Health*. 2009, 86;4;538-50.

⁴ Prevention Institute, 2010.

⁵ The Convergence Partnership members include: the California Endowment, Kaiser Permanente, the Kresge Foundation, Nemours, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.