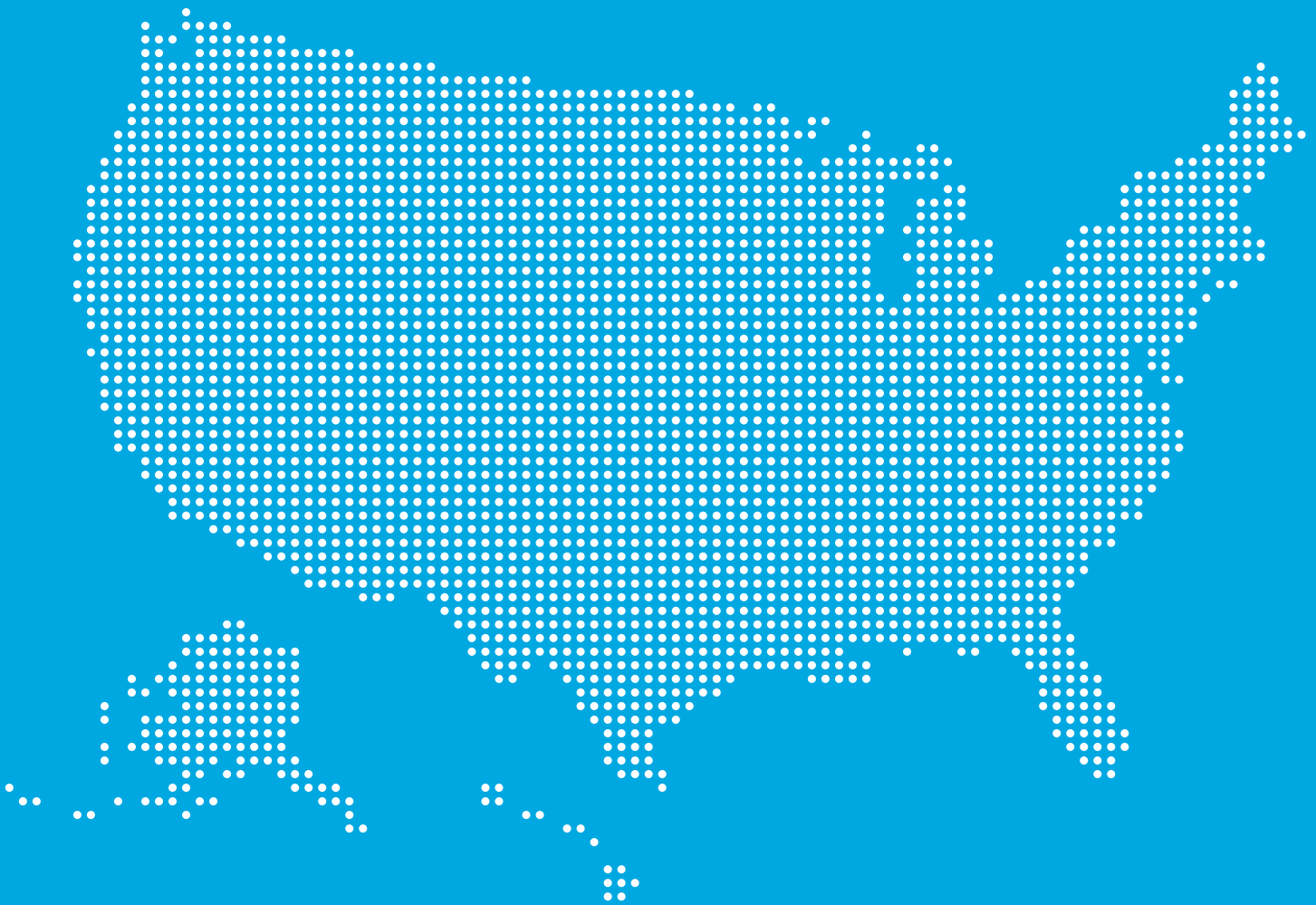




# National Crime Victims Agenda:

Stopping Cycles of Community and Gun Violence

2023



Seven policy recommendations to better support victims in the aftermath of violence.

# National Crime Victims Agenda:

As community and gun violence continues to impact families, becoming the leading cause of death of our children,<sup>1</sup> crime survivors are calling for an end to the cycle of violence and for more help in the aftermath of trauma. Crime victims – including victims of gun violence and other types of community violence – urgently need both immediate and long-term resources to heal from the trauma they have experienced.

Most crime victims suffer long-term physical, emotional, and financial harm from their victimization and the ensuing instability and untreated trauma. However, a national survey of crime victims by the Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) shows most crime victims never received the help they need. Nearly 90 percent of victims did not receive economic assistance and three-quarters did not receive mental health support, according to the survey. The lack of investment in support for crime victims' trauma-related needs leaves communities trapped in cycles of crime and violence.

All victims deserve equitable and immediate access to victim services that allow them to heal and recover. The following seven policy recommendations present priority policy solutions needed to advance healing, prevention, safety, and trauma recovery for communities most harmed by gun violence. This agenda has been informed by crime survivors who are members of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice, a national network of 180,000 crime victims who join together to share stories, heal, and advocate for a justice system that prioritizes healing, prevention, and recovery.

## The seven policy recommendations include:

1. Establish and Grow Trauma Recovery Centers
2. Increase Access to Public Safety Funding for Community Organizations on the Front Lines of Responding to Gun Violence
3. Fund Community-Based Organizations Providing Peer-to-Peer Support to Victims
4. Expand Access to Victim Compensation and End Discriminatory Exclusions
5. Develop Flexible Victim Assistance Funds
6. Increase Legal Protections to Ensure Job and Housing Stability in the Aftermath of Violence
7. Document and Understand the Harm Caused by Gun Violence

## 1

## Establish and Grow Trauma Recovery Centers

The evidence-based Trauma Recovery Center (TRC) model is designed to reach survivors who face barriers to accessing other types of victim services and help them to heal from trauma. TRCs help to remove barriers to care for underserved victims of crime by meeting survivors where they are through a one-stop center that provides mental health services, case management, support with navigating the justice system, assistance in applying for victim compensation, and a wide range of other services.

TRCs cost one-third less than traditional fee-for-service mental health treatment alone.<sup>2</sup> Outcome data demonstrates TRCs achieve: high rates of engagement in services, significant improvements in mental health and wellness, and effective linkage to other community services and systems.

Investing in more TRCs and growing the capacity of existing TRCs – especially in communities most harmed by gun violence – will help more survivors access the support and services they need to recover, and help communities build a stronger infrastructure of mental health services and wraparound support for victims.

## 2

## Increase Access to Public Safety Funding for Community Organizations on the Front Lines of Responding to Gun Violence

Community-based gun violence intervention and prevention organizations have proven incredibly effective at de-escalating and preventing gun violence by engaging trusted community members to intervene using public health-based responses.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, many of these organizations are under-resourced and unable to grow their capacity to better meet the needs of their communities.

While more government funding has started to become available for these lifesaving approaches, many crime survivors and community-based organizations providing these critical services do not have the capacity to go through lengthy application processes, and therefore they do not have the resources to bring their work to scale. For too long, investments in our boldest and most effective safety strategies have covered a fraction of the need, and community-based interventions have continued to operate on shoestring budgets.

It is critical to ensure public grants are more accessible and available to organizations doing frontline, neighborhood-based intervention work. Federal, state, and local governments can take measures such as: simplifying application processes, providing resources to help organizations apply and offering flexible funding or grants of varying sizes to specifically meet the needs of small, grassroots organizations that are deeply connected to their communities.

## 3

## Fund Community-Based Organizations Providing Peer-to-Peer Support to Victims

Groups closest to and most reflective of the communities they serve are uniquely equipped to deliver critical anti-violence and trauma recovery services.<sup>4</sup> Such groups and organizations are the trusted first responders in their communities when violence happens. Peer support models can be especially helpful for survivors of violence on their healing journeys and may provide a range of services, including trauma recovery, housing and shelter, mental health support, healing circles, wraparound services that support entire families, and faith and non-traditional or culturally-specific healing modalities.

Creating dedicated, flexible, and stable resource streams to fund local crime survivors and community and grassroots victim services organizations will help survivors access the service providers they trust the most to get the support they need.<sup>56</sup>

## 4

## Expand Access to Victim Compensation and End Discriminatory Exclusions

Without financial help, gun violence can wreak havoc on survivors' financial stability, making it that much harder to recover. Fortunately, every state has a victim compensation program, which covers costs like counseling, medical bills, funerals, and lost wages. It promises to serve as a lifeline to crime survivors facing life-altering physical, financial, and emotional consequences. But too often, compensation laws and processes are not designed to meet the needs of gun violence victims.

Victims of color are often denied victim compensation based on racialized exclusions that effectively blame victims for their own victimization. Victims with conviction records may also face informal or formal barriers to help. The nearly six in ten victims of violent crime who do not immediately report to law enforcement are ineligible for compensation in many states. In addition, victims shot by law enforcement and family members of those killed by law enforcement are virtually ineligible<sup>7</sup> for compensation.

Importantly, many survivors describe the process of applying for victim compensation itself as traumatic. Daunting application processes make it impossible for many recovering victims to get urgent help. It takes months, or even years in some cases for an application to be approved. Caps on compensation coverage amounts, and time limits for survivors to apply ignore the immediate and lifelong recovery needs of gun violence victims.

Victims across the country are successfully advocating for long overdue changes to make victim compensation programs more accessible, fair, and useful.<sup>8</sup> But more is needed to transform these programs so that they work for all survivors.

## 5

## Develop Flexible Victim Assistance Funds

Gun violence victims are less likely to be insured, and often face immediate and long-term medical costs on top of job loss, housing instability, and mental health needs due to trauma. Family members of those killed are suddenly faced with overwhelming funeral and other costs while traumatized and grieving. During this critical time, people often turn to family, friends, trusted local leaders, and community-based local support services.

Flexible financial victim assistance funds can supplement victim compensation programs and state-funded victim service programs.<sup>9</sup> Victims and families affected by gun violence have urgent costs, including funeral and burial expenses, housing relocation, emergency shelters, meals, transportation, and other basic needs.

These types of services are needed in the immediate aftermath of gun violence, and families can't wait for a victim compensation application to be approved. The community-based organizations closest to survivors should have the financial resources they need to provide flexible, fast, and immediate financial victim assistance.

## 6

## Increase Legal Protections to Ensure Job and Housing Stability in the Aftermath of Violence

Victims of gun violence and their loved ones should not have to choose between tending to their physical or emotional safety in the wake of a crime, and avoiding the deeply destabilizing consequences of losing a job or housing in the wake of trauma.

In a nationwide survey, more than half of violent crime victims reported that they wanted to relocate following a violent crime, yet nearly half (44%) of those were unable to. More than one in four violent crime survivors feared being forced out of their housing or were evicted as a result of their victimization.<sup>10</sup> One in six victims of violent crime reported losing their jobs or being demoted because they needed to take time off following the victimization.<sup>11</sup> Financial insecurity and other life stressors are among the factors that can increase a victim's risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder,<sup>12</sup> and can have lasting impacts on both victims and their employers.

Gun violence affects fundamental aspects of safety and stability for survivors and their loved ones. Without legal protections, it can cause lasting consequences on job and housing stability. A number of states and localities nationwide have passed trailblazing protections that ensure survivors of gender-based violence can end a lease early to relocate, have their locks changed, and be safe from eviction based on their victimization; and can take time off work to meet safety and recovery needs. Increasingly, legislators are considering policies that include survivors of gun violence and other violent victimization in addition to gender-based violence in these protections. States and localities should adopt comprehensive policies that strengthen job and housing stability for all victims. Access to comprehensive civil legal services for Survivors makes these protections real and possible. Also, government awareness campaigns provide victims information and knowledge of their rights which must include information about housing, employment, immigration, and family law protections that Survivors may have under the law.

## 7

## Document and Understand the Harm Caused by Gun Violence

Victims and families from communities most harmed by gun violence are most knowledgeable about their experiences and what supports they and their communities need. People impacted by gun violence should not only have a seat at the table, but be represented at every level in decision-making processes and strategic planning around public safety policy and resource distribution.

To develop a better understanding of violence and victimization, states and localities should also administer their own victimization surveys. Annual state- and local-level victimization studies can capture the experiences of victims in much greater depth and with more accuracy than other data sources on violence and can build on the existing National Crime Victimization Survey to help states assess victimization prevalence, victim needs, and service gaps.

## How You Can Promote the National Crime Victims Agenda

There has never been a more important time to listen to the perspectives of those most victimized by crime, including community and gun violence. Survivors and organizations nationwide are calling for safety solutions that will end cycles of crime – and they remain in urgent need of trauma recovery and support that our current systems do not serve.

### Here are three ways you can help make their agenda a reality:

- » **CHECK OUT** the Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice Advocacy Toolkit on Gun Violence and Trauma Recovery, or contact us to learn about how to bring these solutions to your community at [SURVIVORSSPEAK@SAFEANDJUST.ORG](mailto:SURVIVORSSPEAK@SAFEANDJUST.ORG).
- » **READ CRIME SURVIVORS SPEAK:** A National Survey of Victims' Views on Safety and Justice to understand the experiences of survivors and the policy solutions they call for.
- » **BECOME A MEMBER** of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice to stay up-to-date on our events, policy advocacy and more at [CSSJ.ORG](http://CSSJ.ORG).

# ALLIANCE FOR SAFETY AND JUSTICE



The Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) is a multi-state public safety organization that aims to replace over-incarceration with more effective public safety solutions rooted in crime prevention, community health, rehabilitation, and support for crime victims. ASJ partners with state leaders and advocates to achieve safety and justice reforms through advocacy, organizing, coalition building, research, and communications.



## CRIME SURVIVORS FOR SAFETY AND JUSTICE

Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice (CSSJ) is a national network of 180,000 crime victims that are joining together to share stories, heal together, and advocate for a justice system that prioritizes healing, prevention, and recovery. CSSJ is a flagship project of the Alliance for Safety and Justice.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 New England Journal of Medicine (2022). <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/nejmc2201761>
- 2 Boccellari, A., and Okin, R.L. (2005). Trauma Recovery Center: Transforming Trauma Services in the Public Sector. Status Report to the State of California Victim Compensation Program.
- 3 <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/departments/health-policy-and-management/research-and-practice/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/solutions/strategies-to-reduce-community-gun-violence>
- 4 See, e.g. Martinez, R, McGilton, M., et. al. (2022). New York City's Wounded Healers: A Cross-Program, Participatory Action Research Study of Credible Messengers. Urban Institute; Shibru D, Zahnd E, Becker M, Bekaert N, Calhoun D, Victorino GP. Benefits of a hospital-based peer intervention program for violently injured youth. J Am Coll Surg. 2007 Nov;205(5):684-9. doi: 10.1016/j.jamcollsurg.2007.05.029. Epub 2007 Sep 10. PMID: 17964444.
- 5 Miami Dade County launched the Supporting Safer Communities Grant Program to address the root causes of violence in the County and ensure that residents impacted by violence have access to the services they need. The funds are specifically designed to be flexible and reach small grassroots organizations that are deeply connected to their communities. Also, the grant application process included support for applicants with limited development and fundraising infrastructure.
- 6 The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) has shown in its recent approach to Community Violence Intervention (CVI) funding that it is possible to make grant funding more accessible and available to smaller frontline providers that have not previously received funding. To respond to the increase in CVI funding available in 2022, PCCD developed a tiered model for distributing funds, to ensure 'micro organizations' doing frontline neighborhood-based intervention work would be eligible and have access. The agency also created a more accessible application process, and shared helpful resources on its website to help organizations apply.
- 7 <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-09-08/compensation-police-violence>
- 8 Healing from Harm: Expanding Access to Victims Compensation (2023)
- 9 California recently established and designated \$50 million toward a state-administered pilot flexible assistance grant program designed to reach survivors left out of the state victim compensation program (see Cal Gov Code §§ 8699 - 8699.03), which is set to be implemented in 2023-2024, and will provide grants to frontline organizations in communities hardest hit by violence, who will then distribute funding in direct financial assistance to survivors to meet urgent needs. Local governments can also establish these funds - the City of Chicago's Emergency Supplemental Victims' Fund offers flexible financial support to survivors of gun violence in five neighborhoods heavily impacted by violence. These models can also build on work initiated in the domestic violence space – the Domestic Violence Housing First model prioritizes getting dollars into the hands of victims [See Lopez-Zeron, G. et. al. (2019). DV Housing First: A Statewide Evaluation in California. Michigan State University Research Consortium on Gender-based Violence; Chen, J. and Sullivan, C.M. (2022). Domestic Violence Housing First Demonstration Evaluation Project: Final Report of Findings through 24 Months.]. Gun violence victims need this approach
- 10 Alliance for Safety and Justice (2022). Crime Survivors Speak: National Survey of Victims' Views on Safety and Justice. <https://allianceforsafetyandjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Alliance-for-Safety-and-Justice-Crime-Survivors-Speak-September-2022.pdf>
- 11 Alliance for Safety and Justice (2022). Crime Survivors Speak: National Survey of Victims' Views on Safety and Justice. <https://allianceforsafetyandjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Alliance-for-Safety-and-Justice-Crime-Survivors-Speak-September-2022.pdf>
- 12 Kelly, VG. et. al.. (2010). Outreach, Engagement, and Practical Assistance: Essential Aspects of PTSD Care for Urban Victims of Violent Crime. Trauma, Violence and Abuse, 11(3): 144-156.