

AN ASSESSMENT OF GUN VIOLENCE

PORTLAND, OREGON

INTRODUCTION

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Contrary to popular assumption, in both homicides and non-fatal, injury shootings, the average age of victims and suspects was 33 years old. Juveniles make up less than 6% of victims and suspects in shootings and homicides. The age range of most people involved in shootings and homicides in Portland is 18-34.

The vast majority of both victims and suspects in shootings and homicides in Portland have previous involvement in the criminal justice system – at least 70% (there was some inconsistency in available data for homicide victims). For those with prior criminal justice system involvement, they had on average eight arrests before the shooting incident, half of those arrests being for felonies. Most had been incarcerated before and most had previously been under supervision (probation or parole).

A large polarity of shootings and homicides in Portland involve members of street/neighborhood groups/cliques/gangs. Some of the groups are recently created and not organized. And while some of the gun violence is related to group on group conflict, much of it is personal conflicts that involve group members. According to the Portland Problem Analysis, just under half of all homicides in Portland from January 2019 through June 2021 involved group or gang members as either victims, suspects, or both.

Over the study period, there were approximately 227 group-involved individuals directly involved in a homicide or a shooting, indicating that a **very small and very high risk population is driving a significant portion of the gun violence in Portland.**

INTRODUCTION

The City of Portland experienced an extraordinary rise in gun violence beginning in 2019 and exploding after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the three years between the end of 2018 and 2021, Portland saw more than a 238% increase in homicides, from 26 to 88. The number of non-fatal, injury shootings also skyrocketed, more than tripling from 98 in 2019 to 334 in 2021.

The California Partnership for Safe Communities (CPSC) recently completed a comprehensive assessment of shootings and homicides in Portland. This Portland Problem Analysis examined all homicides in the City of Portland from January 2019 to June 2021 (n = 117), and all non-fatal injury shootings between January 2019 and December 2021 (n = 314). The 117 homicides involved 214 unique victims or identified suspects, and the 314 shootings involved 462 unique identified victims or suspects. This analysis examines the characteristics of these incidents and the involved individuals, including demographics and criminal justice system involvement.

Over the two-and-a-half-year study period, 91% of Portland's homicide suspects were male. An extremely disparate number of victims and suspects were Black. Although Black residents make up just 6% of Portland's population, they account for 40% of victims and suspects in homicides. While White homicide victims and suspects account for a larger share, 46%, they also make up 75% of the city's population.

For the much higher volume of non-fatal, injury shootings, over three years, 89% of victims and suspects were male. Blacks accounted for 53% of victims and suspects and Whites were 31%.

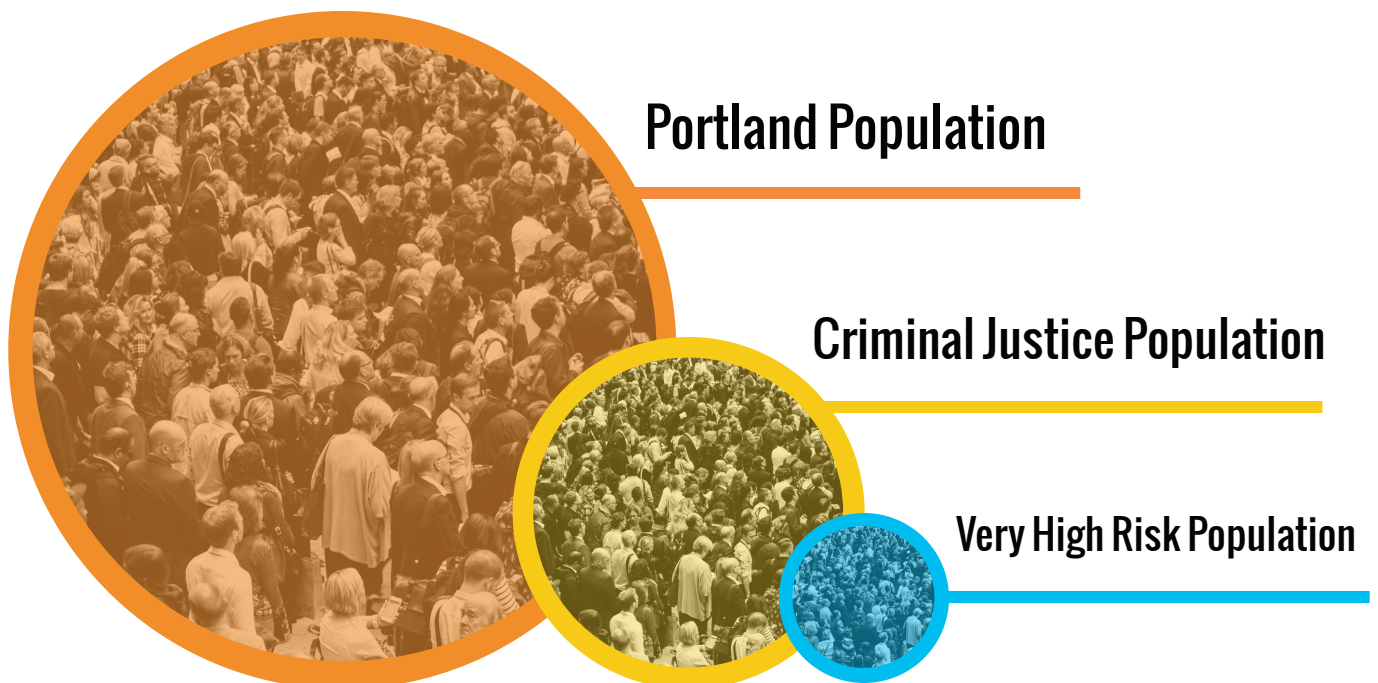
RISK FACTORS

Risk Factors

The leading risk factors of those at the very highest risk of being involved in gun violence in Portland are:

- 18-34 year old Black or White male
- Significant criminal justice involvement, including current or previous supervision
- Member of or connected to an active, high-risk group/gang
- Has been a previous victim of gun violence (based on national data)
- Is connected to a recent shooting (in past six months a family member or fellow group/gang member has been shot or a suspect in a shooting)

Someone with at least four of the above five risk factors should be considered at very high risk of being involved in gun violence within the next six months. From NICJR and CPSC's work in Portland in the past few years, it is also known that social media taunts and conflicts drive a large amount of community violence. Someone with the above risk factors who is also making threats on social media would be at even heightened risk.



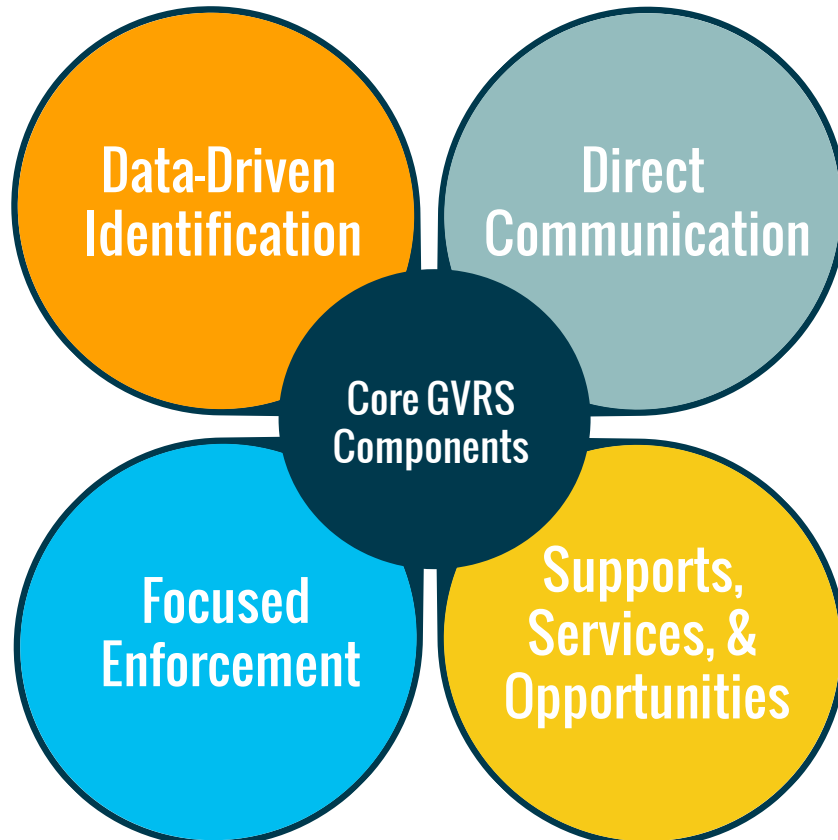
RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

Gun Violence Reduction Strategy

The primary recommendation is for Portland to implement a comprehensive, data-driven Gun Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS). GVRS is a comprehensive strategy that utilizes a data-driven process to identify the individuals and groups at the highest risk of committing or being involved in gun violence, and to deploy effective interventions with these individuals.

GVRS has four core components: Data-driven identification of those individuals and groups at highest risk of gun violence; direct and respectful communication to those at high risk; intensive services, supports, and opportunities; and as a last resort, focused enforcement.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Identification of Program Participants

GVRS employs a data-driven process to identify the individuals and groups who are at the very highest risk of being involved in a shooting. This involves an initial Problem Analysis, which Portland has completed. Due to the ever-evolving dynamics of gun violence, in addition to the detailed review of gun violence over time, regular Shooting Reviews are also necessary. At weekly Shooting Reviews, law enforcement and community violence intervention specialists—often in two separate meetings—review every shooting that has occurred in the past seven days and identify the incidents that have a likelihood of imminent retaliation. Portland has started these Shooting Reviews but they need to be significantly improved and maybe redesigned.

Engagement: Direct and Respectful Communications

Once high-risk individuals and groups are identified, the GVRS requires immediate engagement. This engagement involves direct and respectful communication to inform identified individuals of their risk and offer them services. There are two primary formats for these discussions: Group meetings referred to as “Call-Ins” and individual meetings sometimes referred to as “Customized Notifications”. For Call-Ins, the identified very high risk individuals are invited to attend a meeting with community leaders, law enforcement officials, formerly incarcerated individuals, survivors of violence, and service providers. All of these different stakeholders deliver the same message in their own way: based on your risk factors, you are at very high risk of being shot or being arrested for a shooting; the violence needs to end and we will do all we can to achieve that; we care about you; we want to provide you with real and intensive services. Treating the participants with dignity at a safe, neutral location is essential to a successful Call-In. Custom Notifications convey similar messages about the risk of violence and the availability of services. However, Custom Notifications are individual meetings where a high-ranking police officer and a community leader directly make contact with an individual at their home or community. Custom Notifications are frequently employed when the risk of violence is imminent or when individuals are unable to attend group meetings.

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Provision of Services

Following a Call-In or a Custom Notification, individuals identified as being at very high risk of gun violence are directly connected to available services, supports, and opportunities. First and foremost, each individual is connected with a Life Coach (or Violence Intervention Worker). Often referred to as Credible Messengers, these staff members share lived experiences with the clients that they serve. Each Life Coach must develop a personal relationship with their client that fosters trust and communication; this positive relationship is crucial to the success of the GVRS model. Unlike service brokering-based case management, contact between the Life Coach and the client must be frequent, flexible, consistent, and on-going for a long period of time. Life Coaches should have daily communication with every client on their caseload; see each client in person three to four times per week; and work with clients for at least six months (preferably 18 months). Once an initial rapport is established, Life Coaches then work with each client to develop a Life Plan. Life Plans include short and long-term target goals, desired outcomes, and specific referrals to services/supports for the client.

Through the Office of Violence Prevention, Portland has a team of Life Coaches. Most of these staff have received Life Coaching training from NICJR. These Life Coaches must now be connected to the people at very highest risk of gun violence in Portland in systemic and consistent manner.

With the current volume of shootings in Portland, we estimate that there are approximately **220 people that are identifiable as at Very High Risk (VHR)** of being involved in gun violence each year. With 220 VHR people, the suggested staffing to effectively implement a citywide GVRS includes:

- 28 Intensive Life Coaches/Case Managers/Credible Messengers (220/8)
- 9 Outreach Workers (1 for every 3 Life Coaches)
- 8 Violence Interrupters

RECOMMENDATIONS

Primary Roles and Responsibilities of GVRS Staff ¹

Outreach Worker (OW):

- Locate, engage, and hand-off Very High Risk individuals to Life Coaches
- Attend and host key community events for the purpose of developing relationships in neighborhoods with high rates of violence

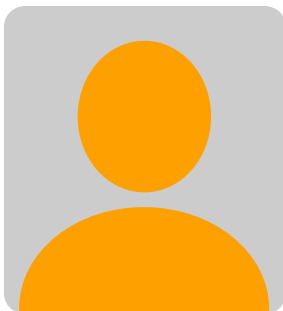
Life Coach (LC):

- Develop positive and trusting relationships with Very High Risk individuals
- Develop and implement Life Plans with each person on the caseload

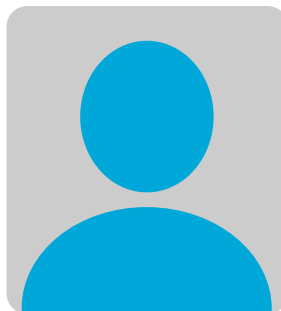
Violence Interrupter (VI):

- Respond to shooting scenes
- Develop relationships with key people and groups engaged in conflicts
- Mediate conflicts
- Gather and share with the team critical information on most active/violent conflicts

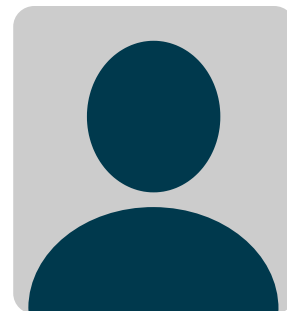
Portland will have to increase its current number of Life Coaches and hire new Violence Interrupters in order to achieve the proposed staffing numbers. The City is in the process of bringing on Cure Violence to conduct Street Outreach, but that program must be incorporated into GVRS for it to be most effective.



Outreach Worker



Life Coach



Violence Interrupter

¹ Full Position Descriptions can be provided upon request

RECOMMENDATIONS

Focused, Proactive Gun Violence Reduction Policing

GVRs includes focused enforcement. Portland should re-constitute a unit of officers focused solely on gun violence reduction. A good team should be built with a case agent, a cold case agent, and other officers for support. Identify the most active (violent) groups/street crews and have on-going investigations. Collect intelligence, follow up on leads, develop intel packages, identify associates, conduct investigative stops in furtherance of active cases (not randomly), including linking ballistics via the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN). These teams should have little to no discretionary time; all team members should have assignments.

Unit Activities include:

- Social media monitoring of VHR groups and individuals
- Greater attention and deeper investigations into older or active cases of VHR individuals (giving those cases more priority and attention than others)
- Developing intelligence into VHR groups and individuals (Confidential Informants, etc.)
- Prioritizing ballistics testing/matching on gang guns
- Surveillance of VHR individuals

These teams should lead with **ethical policing and use procedural justice**. These teams should receive additional training in Constitutional Policing, Procedural Justice, and Community Engagement.

The Portland Police Bureau (PPB) would have to re-assign at least 20 officers to such a proactive, focused enforcement unit. But with the number of shootings and homicides and the size of the Police Bureau, the unit should have 50 officers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

GVRS Management Cycle

To effectively implement and sustain a successful Gun Violence Reduction Strategy, Portland will need to create or improve the following meetings into a regular GVRS Management Cycle:

- **Weekly Leadership Meeting:** Key leaders of the strategy meet to review progress, address any challenges, and confirm priorities and deliverables for the week (small meeting of no more than three to four people). This should include the OVP Director, PPB Deputy Chief, and the assigned Director of the Strategy.
- **Weekly Shooting Review:** Portland has begun to implement these meetings, but they need significant improvements to ensure the efficacy of the GVRS.
- **Weekly Coordination Meeting:** Information from the Shooting Review is provided to intervention organizations and assignments made for outreach and/or direct communication. This meeting should preferably be held immediately following the Shooting Review. Portland started these meetings and for a time they were going well, but the meetings now need to be redesigned and ensure information from the Shooting Review is being shared in them and assignments to Outreach Workers are being made.
- **Weekly or Bi-weekly Case Conference with Life Coaches:** Briefly review every case assigned to each Life Coach and review one challenging case per Life Coach to foster group problem solving.

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- **Weekly Team Meetings:** Each team meets with their supervisor to check in, highlight successes, discuss challenges, and discuss areas for improvement (if this is happening regularly then the Case Conference can be bi-weekly).
- **Bi-Weekly Technical Assistance (TA) Meetings:** Leadership Team meets with the TA providers who will share best practices and help navigate any challenges that may occur.
- **Monthly or Bi-Monthly Mayor’s Performance Management Meeting:** With the Mayor, GVRS Director, OVP Director, Police Chief, other police leadership, primary service provider Directors, and possibly Supervision agency leadership. Review GVRS goals and metrics, agree to any needed improvements and deliverables, and receive brief updates from each agency.
- **Bi-Monthly or Quarterly Partnership or Advisory Committee:** Key community stakeholders and government agency partners meet to receive updates on GVRS and provide input and ask questions.