

Kreena Patel
Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine



Though this year's Chicago Gun Violence Research Collaborative looked a bit different than what I expected because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I still learned an incredible amount about the various ways that community organizations are working to address gun violence in Chicago.

Neighborhood-based practices are invested in their local population, and uniquely primed to address violence because they have an intimate knowledge of the driving forces behind that violence.

One of the major areas of promise we discovered is investment in youth. I was inspired by reading about the organization Good Kids Mad City, an group made exclusively of people in their 20s and younger. These people have seen and felt the ramifications of gun violence in their neighborhoods, and came together to find ways to address it, from hosting events for other youths keep them off the streets, to meeting with legislators. Other organizations focused on working with formerly-incarcerated youth to reduce rates of recidivism, with tools such as job training and art therapy.

Another common theme among the various organizations was the importance of street outreach. These organizations recognize that violence already exists, and their street outreach workers try to stop further violence via de-escalation of conflicts. Additionally, street outreach has been utilized to find people who are at high risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of violence, and connecting them with resources to reduce that risk, from employment to family support.

My biggest takeaway from this project is the vast number of existing organizations working to address violence in their own communities, and the overlapping approaches used by each one. The interventions are always focused specifically on the neighborhood at risk, as each one often has nuances in their needs, but the common themes among them highlight how the root causes of violence are similar across various parts of Chicago. Future research about community-based interventions could focus on the most-used strategies across these neighborhoods and further our understanding of how each approach reduces violence.