

Safe Streets Strong Neighborhoods

New Haven's Strategy to Combat Gun Violence

Gun Violence is on the rise:

Gun violence is on the rise in America – 2020 was one of the deadliest years in recent memory with more than 19,000-gun related deaths (excluding suicides). That's more than 50 per day. And 2021 is shaping up to be another record setting year, with more than 14,000 gun deaths by the beginning of September.

Earlier this year, President Joe Biden identified gun violence as a major threat to public safety. [The President outlined his national strategy](#) to combat the trend of increasing gun violence.

COVID-19 made evidence-based interventions tougher to execute:

Beginning in March of 2021 the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way Americans lived their lives – importantly it greatly reduced in-person social interaction. This fact had a devastating impact on key violence intervention strategies – such as Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs, Street Outreach Programs, and Group violence Intervention Programs. The interruption of these services, at a time of sustained financial insecurity created an immensely difficult environment to prevent violent crime.

New Haven has a strategy to combat gun violence:

Since taking office, Mayor Justin Elicker has identified combating gun violence as a top priority of his administration. During the height of the pandemic, many crime intervention tools were unavailable, but since the beginning of 2021 they've been reactivated with increased investment.

Combating gun violence takes a multi-pronged approach – one that draws from both law enforcement and social services to improve outcomes for communities experiencing violence. [Earlier this year, Mayor Elicker, Chief Dominguez, and Dr. Mehul Dalal outlined New Haven's plan to fight gun violence](#), which includes:

Re-entry Welcome Center: [In February of this year New Haven, through a partnership with project M.O.R.E. opened a re-entry welcome center.](#) This one stop shop offers wrap around services, such as job training, counseling, housing, and substance abuse services for individuals re-entering the community. These services aim to reduce recidivism and keep individuals from re-entering a cycle of violence. [Re-entry was a key component of President Joe Biden's anti-gun violence proposal.](#)

Shooting Task Force: In June of this year the city of New Haven announced that [the New Haven Police Department has reformed the shooting task force.](#) By partnering with West Haven, East Haven, Hamden, Meriden, and Yale Police Departments as well as federal and state law enforcement partners the New Haven Police Department is able to more quickly

identify linkages between shootings. This increased collaboration is already paying dividends and has led to arrests of shooters.

Engaging Individuals at High Risk: The New Haven Police Department in collaboration with the Department of Justice has [re-started Project Longevity and Project Safe Neighborhood call-ins](#). And the city's Youth and Recreation Department expanded its' Youth Connect Program. These programs are designed to bring in individuals known to be associated with violence. These evidence-based interventions were severely impacted by the pandemic but since early 2021 the city has significantly increased the frequency of these call ins when compared to normal times.

Increased Youth Programing: As part of our "summer rest" the city of New Haven's [Youth and Recreation Department invested more than \\$1.5 million into summer youth programing](#). That programing included extended summer camps, more youth employment opportunities, a summer concert, and neighborhood pop-up events. President Joe Biden named youth engagement as a key area of focus in his plan to address violent crime.

Increased Police Walking and Bicycle Beats: Through additional overtime, the New Haven Police Department increased the presence of officers in communities. There are more [bicycle](#) and [walking](#) beats in city neighborhoods than there were in 2020.

More Street Outreach Workers: The city of New Haven has increased its' investment into the [Connecticut Violence Intervention Program](#). This program is led by a former Chief Probation Officer and employs returning citizens to engage directly with individuals at risk of violence. This year the city doubled the number of street outreach workers.

Expansion of Cameras and Shot Spotter: The New Haven Police Department is actively pursuing expansion of the shot spotter system as well as expanding the number of cameras in the city. These will assist in faster response times and increased solve-rates.

Rebuilding the Police Department: For several years the New Haven Police Department lost officers to surrounding communities faster than we could replace them. The city is working to rebuild the depart and fill the 70+ vacant positions. The city announced a new recruitment period beginning September 13th – which will allow for a new academy class. But, new police classes take a long time – so the city is also hiring trained officers already serving in other communities.

Taking Guns Off the Street: The New Haven Police Department has [increased its efforts to take guns off the street](#). Since January 1, 2021 the NHPD has made 135-gun arrests and confiscated 141 guns. A significant increase from years' past. In addition to increasing gun arrests and seizures, the [New Haven Police Department hosted a gun buy-back](#) earlier this year and plans to host more in the future.

Building a resilient community:

In August, [the city unveiled plans to create a Department of Community Resilience](#). This office would house five key functions: (1) Homelessness Services (2) Community Crisis Response (3) Community Mental Health (4) Re-entry, and (5) Violence Prevention.

Adding a coordinator for violence prevention and housing these interrelated services under one department will help the city better serve the needs of residents. In addition to a first ever full-time coordinator for violence prevention, the department will have a full-time data analyst to help the department test, analyze, and inform how it invests its' resources.

Speaking out for reform:

In addition to local interventions, Mayor Elicker has been a vocal proponent for gun safety interventions at the federal level. Gun dealers do not recognize state borders – and without strong federal action guns will continue to flow from states with weak gun safety laws to those, like Connecticut, with stronger ones.

Ghost Guns: In August, [Mayor Elicker spoke out for federal action on ghost guns](#). The Department of Justice is weighing a rule that would place additional regulation on these untraceable guns, and Mayor Elicker submitted public comment in favor of the proposed rule. New Haven Police have already confiscated four such ghost guns this year.

Federal Gun Safety Reform: Recently, [Mayor Elicker called on Congress to take action](#). He said: “implement common-sense gun safety laws...Until Congress acts to reform our gun laws, the flow of guns isn’t going to stop.”

Standing Up to The Gun Lobby: Recently, the Connecticut Citizens Defense League, a pro-gun advocacy group, sued police chiefs in four Connecticut city’s – including New Haven. [Mayor Elicker spoke out](#). Mayor Justin Elicker said, “This group has, in the past, opposed common sense gun safety legislation which enjoyed bipartisan support, such as Ethan’s Law, restricting untraceable ghost guns, and expanded background checks. My priorities are keeping our residents safe – not profiteering for gun retailers and manufacturers. Last week a fourteen-year-old boy was gunned down in our city, this is unconscionable.”

Closing:

In the long run, we cannot solve violence through policing and violence interruption initiatives alone. We are working to invest in communities that have historically been impacted by violence through job training, entrepreneurship programs, homeownership support and other wealth-building initiatives. It is by investing in people’s future that we will truly be able to overcome the challenges of gun violence. [Getting computers into the hands of every New Haven student](#), the [construction jobs pipeline](#), and [cultural equity plan](#) are all examples of those investments.