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We Will Never Police Our Way to Public Health

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Addressing Law Enforcement Violence as a Public Health Issue

[< Policy Statements and Advocacy](#)

Date: Nov 13 2018 | Policy Number: 201811

Key Words: Violence, Racism, Prevention, Social Determinants of Health



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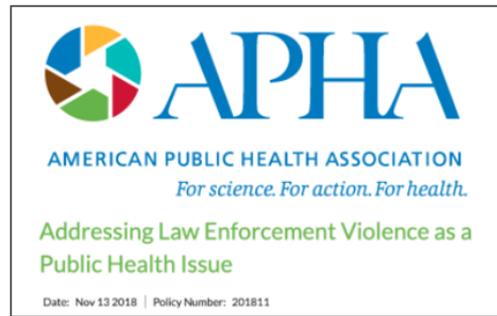
Authors of the [@PublicHealth](#) statement on police violence. Police violence is a public health issue & solutions must be upstream & led by those most impacted.

 United States  endingpoliceviolence.com  Joined October 2017



2018 APHA Annual Conference, San Diego

Overview of the Statement



- System of policing is not “broken” or an attempt at prevention. It does what it is designed to do: reinforce and create racial and class hierarchies, maintain social control.
- Given this understanding, reforming law enforcement is not a logical response to the issues of policing. Instead, we need upstream, structural approaches to prioritize health above all else, build new systems of community safety, and eliminate state-sanctioned violence.

Overview of the Statement

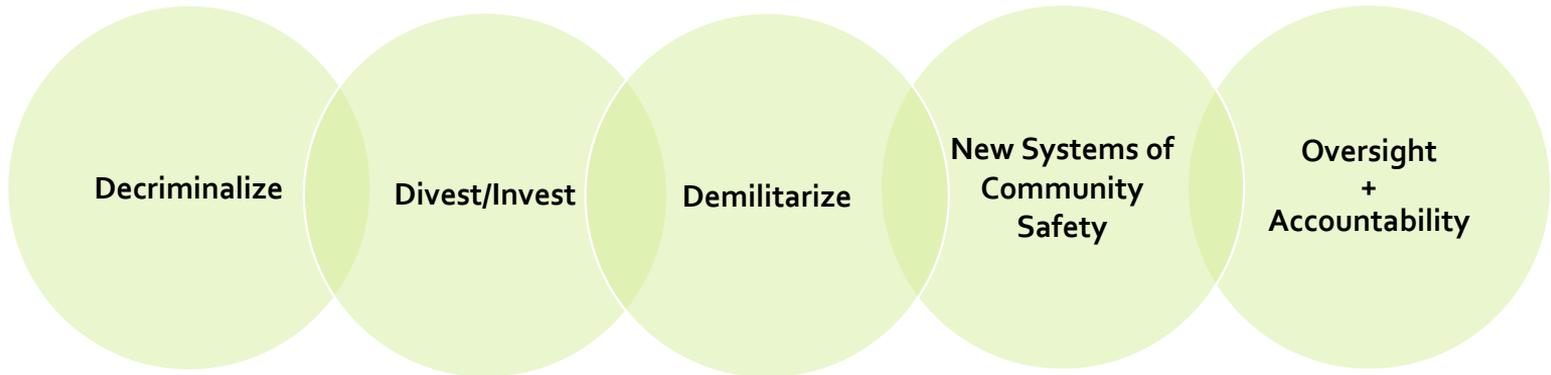
Policing disproportionately harms Black, Indigenous, communities of color, and other marginalized communities such as:

- Immigrants
- individuals experiencing homelessness
- people with disabilities
- the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer [LGBTQ] community
- individuals with mental illness
- people who use drugs
- sex workers



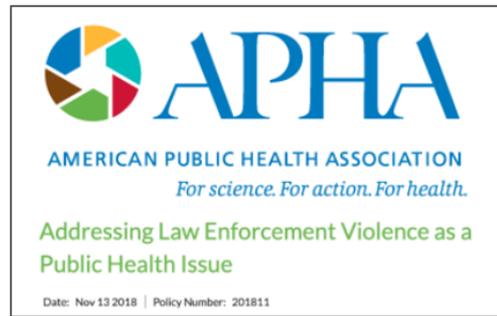
Policy Action Steps

- Law enforcement officers should **not** be seen as a primary way to keep communities safe, to which dominant white & capitalistic culture widely ascribes.
- Safety is better promoted when resources are **shifted from** policing **to** **1)** providing basic needs (i.e. investing in public health) such as housing, economic opportunity, education, **and 2)** funding community-led initiatives to promote public safety and violence prevention.



Oversight + Accountability

Goal: Remove police protections, Collect data, Create opportunity
for public health intervention



Action Steps from the Statement:

APHA urges data collection and research on law enforcement violence and research on law enforcement violence by the Center for Disease Control, National Institutes of Health, and National Center for Health Statistics, *and* full public disclosure of all recordings & investigations of law enforcement officer excessive use of force

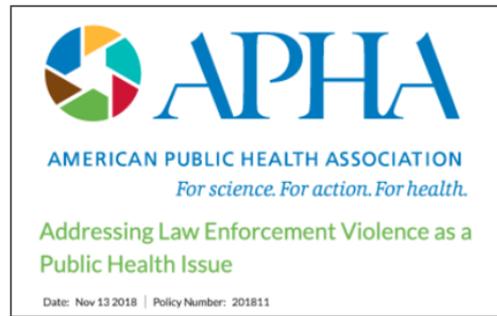
APHA urges state government to eliminate legislative provisions that protect law enforcement from investigation & accountability, *and* APHA urges municipal governments to negotiate police union contracts that eliminate protections that prevent investigation & accountability

Takeaway:

The public health system has the existing infrastructure to generate and maintain data that can be used to inform and support public health intervention related to harms of policing.

Decriminalization

Goal: Remove the pretext for contact with police and end the dehumanization of specific populations with associations to inherent criminality



Action Steps from the Statement:

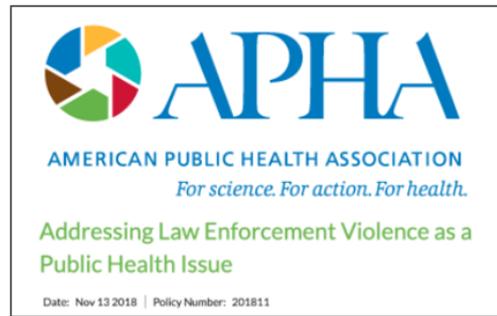
APHA urges governments to decriminalize activities shaped by the experience of marginalization, including: substance use and possession, sex work, loitering, sleeping in public, minor traffic violations, and targeting undocumented people

Takeaway:

Decriminalization reduces police contacts and associated adverse health outcomes

Divest-Invest

Goal: defunding policing by allocating funding from law enforcement budgets to public health (e.g. the social determinants of health)



Action Steps from the Statement:

APHA urges governments to reverse the militarization of law enforcement, including by: not acquiring or using military equipment & reducing the number and use of SWAT teams

APHA urges governments to shift funding from law enforcement agencies to community-based program including: employment initiatives, affordable housing, education, transformative justice programs, and non-police efforts such as civilianized mental health response.

Takeaway:

Reallocating funds from policing to the social determinants of health – to what we already creates healthy and just communities - will improve physical and mental health.

Community Safety

[Tinyurl.com/reformsdontwork](https://tinyurl.com/reformsdontwork)

Reforms Do Not Work

- Community-oriented policing (tinyurl.com/healthnotCOPS)
- Use of tasers and other conducted electrical weapons
- Body and dashboard-mounted cameras
- Training in implicit bias

Do strategies to ensure community safety without reliance on law enforcement work?

- Findings: programming that employs unarmed community outreach workers to identify and defuse potentially violent conflicts have been linked to reductions in homicide and non-fatal shootings.

Takeaway:

Implementing community-led health and safety strategies, shaped by those most harmed by policing, can support building new systems of community safety.



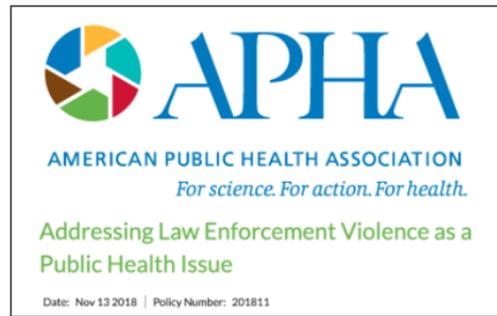
AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

For science. For action. For health.

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Summary



- Decriminalization reduce police contacts and associated adverse health outcomes
- Reallocating funds from policing to the social determinants of health and meeting human need, or what we know already creates healthy and just communities, improve physical and mental health
- The public health system has the existing infrastructure to generate and maintain data that can be used to inform and support public health intervention related to harms of policing.
- Implementing community-led health and safety strategies, shaped by those most harmed by policing, can support building new systems of community safety.

As a structural issue with health consequences, addressing law enforcement violence requires scaling up structurally-targeted public health interventions *while* scaling down the presence, size, and power of policing systems.

What Does Work: Statement in Action

[Policy](#) (e.g. city council meetings, removing police from schools, defunding police)

[Education](#) (e.g. being taught in colleges and universities, shifting narratives to health impact of policing across communities and generations)

[Research](#) (e.g. advancing research on policing as an oppressive system harming public health, cited and used in peer-reviewed publications)

[Practice](#) (e.g. centering community voices most affected by policing; taking the lead from grassroots movements; anti-racism praxis within public health and reckoning with public health's complicity)

Public Health is a Strategy for Abolition
Fighting for Healthy and Safe Communities

Policing Harms Public Health: the APHA Statement

While public safety is essential for public health, as a society we have delegated this important function almost exclusively to law enforcement. Evidence of continued law enforcement violence shows that U.S. policing has failed to equitably deliver safety, placing an inequitable burden of mental and physical harm on socially and economically marginalized populations [24].

from "Assessing Law Enforcement Violence as a Public Health Issue," 2018 American Public Health Association policy statement

Policing is a public health issue. After three years of organizing, a national public health coalition led the 25,000-member strong American Public Health Association (APHA) in November to pass a policy statement stating that the violence of policing is a public health issue. The policy advocates for decriminalization measures, investment in public health resources to address public health and social concerns, and alternatives to policing. The implications of the statement's passing are wide-reaching; not only are APHA policy statements a mandate to the association's lobbying bodies to align their work with the statement's recommendations, the passage by this large, diverse body of public health workers reflects a clear commitment to a fundamental shift in the practice of public health work away from reformist measures and towards structural, root-level changes to the harms policing (and, by extension, prisons) cause to the health of our communities.

This national collective included health workers, educators, and anti-policing organizers from Critical Resistance (CR) and the Public Health Justice Collective (PHJC). We are bringing this statement back into movements fighting to eliminate the violence of policing and build up community health: The policy outlines concrete Action Steps to reduce the violence of policing. In your work, you can put these to use in your planning or in setting your strategic demands of institutions and officials by framing ideas through them. *The APHA recommends [action step] to reduce the negative public health impacts of policing. Therefore we must. * This pamphlet shares ideas about the action steps, organizing talking points, and a worksheet for implementing the APHA statement where you are. Check out and share media coverage on the Ending Police Violence website (see below)! Bring a worksheet to your community groups and organizations to learn about this win and to put it to use in your campaign!

Toward liberation!
Critical Resistance Oakland
and the Public Health Justice Collective



Articles and other resources

- * Read the statement in full and access media from *Inter Mag*, *Resist*, *The Guardian*, and others: endpoliceviolence.com
- * See Critical Resistance's summary of the statement and policy victory, on Black Agenda Report: blackagendareport.com/national-abolitionist-victory-public-health
- * Check out Oakland Power Projects, an alternative to policing project of CR Oakland, including a Know Your Options health initiative: OaklandPowerProjects.org

Contact us!
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Public Health Justice Collective
facebook.com/groups/publichealthjusticecollective/
APHA Policy Statement team
endpoliceviolence.com/contact-us/

tinyurl.com/APHApolicing

Public Health on the Right Side of History

- Abolition is Public Health - "Abolition is about presence, not absence. It's about building life-affirming institutions." - Ruth Wilson Gilmore
- Public health has been complicit:
let us make a pledge to co-create
a world that does not rely on police



**PLEDGE OF
NON COLLABORATION**

we will never police our way to public health

tinyurl.com/publichealthpledge

COVID-19 and Policing

A resource by Human Impact Partners and the End Police Violence Collective

Policing During COVID-19:

**A Public Health Messaging
Toolkit to Invest in Health,
Not Punishment**



May 7, 2020
HumanImpact.org



View at: endingpoliceviolence.com/covid19

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www.endingpoliceviolence.com