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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

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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.
● System of policing is not “broken” or an attempt at prevention. It does was 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 houselessness
- people with disabilities
- the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer [LGBTQ] community
- individuals with mental illness
- people who use drugs
- sex workers
• 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.

**Policy Action Steps**

- Decriminalize
- Divest/Invest
- Demilitarize
- New Systems of Community Safety
- Oversight + Accountability
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

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.
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)
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

tinyurl.com/publichealthpledge
COVID-19 and Policing

End Police Violence Collective

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

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View at: endingpoliceviolence.com/covid19

www.endingpoliceviolence.com