

# National *Academic Centers of Excellence* on Youth Violence Prevention

## *Philadelphia Collaborative Violence Prevention Center*

### **History**

The Academic Centers of Excellence (ACEs) were established soon after the tragedy at Columbine High School. Each ACE works with the communities it serves to encourage participation and partnership, mobilizing residents and researchers to craft effective solutions for violence prevention tailored to its specific community. The ACEs research youth violence prevention program approaches, collect and analyze surveillance data, and foster relationships with local community partners to help develop, implement, and evaluate promising prevention efforts. In 2006, funding was provided to establish two additional Centers in urban locations at high risk for youth homicide. These sites would be known as the Urban Partnership Academic Centers of Excellence (U-PACEs).

One of these sites, the Philadelphia Collaborative Violence Prevention Center (PCVPC), is a U-PACE working to design, implement, and evaluate programs that reduce youth violence and strengthen the responses of communities to violence. Center collaborators include faculty from the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, and Drexel University. In addition, PCVPC has partnered with the Philadelphia Area Research Community Coalition, a consortium of 21 community organizations committed to changing and improving the health of residents in West and Southwest Philadelphia. Collaborations with local violence prevention groups, police and law enforcement, state and municipal governments, medical institutions, and other public

health-related organizations assist in the development of a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to preventing youth violence.

### **Research**

The primary research project of PCVPC is the Participatory Action Research to Negotiate Every Response (PARTNER) project, a study designed to test the effectiveness of a violence prevention program for youths aged 10–14 and their parents/guardians residing in high-risk neighborhoods of Philadelphia. The intervention, which is conducted at neighborhood venues such as recreation centers and afterschool programs, includes such strategies as problem-solving, anger management, and leadership enhancement to counteract social-cognitive risk factors of youth violence. A second component of the intervention involves parents in a series of supportive educational groups to address their needs and encourage parent-youth communication. PCVPC researchers are measuring changes in youth aggressive behavior and cognitive risk factors for violence as a result of these interventions, as well as youth protective factors and indicators of parental stress and connectedness with their children and community. Several community outcomes will also be assessed to evaluate the community-wide impact of the project; these community outcomes will be identified in collaboration with community partners. In addition to the parent and youth interventions,



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PCVPC staff and partners facilitate community workshops at each of the intervention sites throughout the year to remain responsive to community needs while the project is ongoing.

PCVPC is also involved in other research projects, including

- *Living Healthy in Philadelphia*, a project that involves conducting interviews and surveys with youth to examine their perceptions of risk and resiliency factors for violence and to assess stressors they face in their communities; and
- *Safety Nets*, a project that involves a formative evaluation of a violence prevention education intervention that combines an anger management and coping curriculum with a non-traditional sports program, with the goal of increasing self-esteem, reducing aggression and violence, and improving youths' abilities to cope in high-risk, violent environments.

## Surveillance

The surveillance team at PCVPC is committed to providing the statistical and data management support needed to carry out surveillance tasks for PCVPC and community partners. The analysis of secondary datasets garnered from law enforcement, medical, and existing public health databases assists community partnership activities and research endeavors by PCVPC. Among the surveillance data collected by PCVPC are those representing 27 community indicators that represent the common interests of academic and community partners in monitoring risk and protective factors for violence in their communities. For example, in addition

to monitoring violent crime, the PCVPC Surveillance Core assesses indicators of poverty, green space, trust of one's neighbors, mental and physical health, and volunteerism. In partnership with the University of Pennsylvania Cartographic Modeling Laboratory, these indicators are being mapped geographically by use of state-of-the-art spatial analytic tools to provide direction and feedback to community members and policymakers. Community partners are encouraged to learn the most current surveillance techniques alongside Center staff. PCVPC also conducts ongoing needs assessments of local communities to ensure that projects are meeting the expectations of residents.

## Community Engagement

PCVPC is organized to serve its communities; it relies on continuous input and feedback from community organizations and individual residents. The Center has convened a community advisory board to provide critical insight on dissemination and communication strategies, community engagement, and youth involvement. Community-based participatory research drives community involvement in all aspects of the Center's research. Community residents and partners are invited to regularly scheduled workshops and community meetings; they receive print and mass media updates and access PCVPC news and activities through the Center's Website. The Center believes that sharing research data with community partners, other ACE sites, and the prevention research community will strengthen these important relationships, inform the Center's future research, and ultimately further PCVPC's goal of creating a national model for community-based youth violence prevention.

For more information, please contact:

Philadelphia Collaborative Violence Prevention Center  
215-590-3118 • [www.chop.edu/pcvpc](http://www.chop.edu/pcvpc) • [pcvpc@email.chop.edu](mailto:pcvpc@email.chop.edu)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1-800-CDC-INFO • [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention) • [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)