



## ILLINOIS CRIMINAL JUSTICE INFORMATION AUTHORITY

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300 W. Adams Street • Suite 200 • Chicago, Illinois 60606 • (312) 793-8550

### **TARGETED VIOLENCE PREVENTION: A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH**

**By Junaid Afeef, Director, Illinois Targeted Violence Prevention Program**

The Illinois Targeted Violence Prevention Program offers a public health approach to engaging communities in the prevention of violence motivated or inspired by political, social, religious, or personal ideologies.

A conviction that violence is necessary to achieve a goal or as redress for grievances is a common thread running through these ideologies. Recent examples of such violence include the mass murder at Orlando's Pulse Nightclub in 2016 and the killing of Timothy Caughman, a homeless black man targeted and murdered by a self-proclaimed white supremacist in New York City.

These cases are rare. While Americans are at a greater risk of being hit by a car than killed in an act of targeted violence, the latter creates a tremendous amount of fear. And that is by design. Acts of targeted violence are meant to terrorize communities. The fear reverberates throughout society, often helping to foment more hate. It can become a cycle that perpetuates violence.

Targeted violence is predatory and individual timeline toward radicalization may vary. These factors lend themselves to prevention and intervention (primary and secondary prevention), but there is an urgency to this work.

Online extremist groups have become increasingly influential in fueling radicalization to violence. This is a challenge to law enforcement interdiction of would-be attackers. In an era of super-encrypted social media applications where individuals can be lured, indoctrinated, and recruited to commit low-tech violence that can harm many, law enforcement has recognized a paradigm shift is needed in the way communities engage their members in public safety.

The Targeted Violence Prevention Program was established to help people build and sustain community-led prevention and intervention programs that can (1) inoculate communities from violent ideologies by making them more resilient, and (2) empower individuals to intervene when someone close to them appears to be in crisis and at risk for committing a violent act. With early intervention, the focus can be on diversion with services rather than a punitive approach with law enforcement involvement. Early intervention can save lives, all lives, including those of the men, women, and, increasingly, teenagers who are at risk for harming others.

This criminal justice challenge has created the need for new violence prevention strategies. The Targeted Violence Prevention Program is leveraging the knowledge and expertise of violence prevention experts with a commitment to evidence-based practices to prevent hate crimes, domestic terrorism, and homegrown violent extremism. The program will partner with communities to measure and evaluate innovative, community-led initiatives designed to improve outcomes.

By building resilient communities and inoculating them from violent ideologies and empowering individuals to intervene, Illinois can prevent ideologically inspired violence.