

\$6M grant to advance youth firearm violence prevention research

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Middle and high school-age children across the United States are more likely to die as the result of a firearm injury than from any other single cause of death.

A \$6 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention awarded this week to the University of Michigan will support researchers so they can partner with communities on innovative projects that ultimately aim to reduce youth firearm violence.

The CDC grant will specifically support the Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center, which is based at U-M and is one of only five National Centers of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention.

The award comes just months after President Mark Schlissel announced a separate \$10 million university commitment over the next five years to launch a new Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention, further solidifying U-M as a national academic leader in addressing this public health crisis.

“The fact that firearms result in more than 3,000 youth fatalities every year is absolutely unacceptable, and as a university research community, we have a responsibility to the public to use our knowledge and experience to address this vital public health problem,” said Marc Zimmerman, MI-YVPC director, co-director of the Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention, and the Marshall H. Becker Collegiate Professor of Public Health.

As part of the five-year CDC grant, U-M researchers from the School of Public Health and Michigan Medicine will launch community-based interventions in and around Muskegon, Michigan, and Washington, D.C. There, researchers will partner with community groups,

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economic development organizations, health departments, hospitals and police departments to develop, implement and evaluate efforts that aim to reduce youth firearm violence.

The two locations were identified because they share a history of severe racial segregation, disinvestment and economic inequality, and both areas also are experiencing escalating crises of youth firearm violence and homicide.

Researchers will work with community partners and youth across Muskegon and Washington to identify core components of community-driven firearm violence prevention programs so they can develop a toolkit for use in other communities.

Patrick Carter, co-director of the Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention, also will lead a team of U-M researchers in Muskegon and Grand Rapids to test the effectiveness of a hospital-based intervention called SafERteens.

As part of the evidence-based intervention, participants will learn about ways to resolve conflict, and after leaving the emergency department, they can receive routine text messages for two months to reinforce effective conflict resolution tactics.

SafERteens is part of the MI-YVPC and was initially designed to address youth violence, but U-M researchers now will test its effects on firearm violence at the community-level.

With support from the CDC, U-M researchers previously worked with community groups in Flint; Youngstown, Ohio; and Camden, New Jersey, where they engaged residents, including youth, in mowing and revitalizing vacant lots to help prevent youth violence and firearm violence.

Those efforts paid off, as findings from their Flint-based study revealed street segments that were subject to community-engaged maintenance had 40 percent fewer violent crimes and assaults than street segments that did not have community-engaged maintenance. Researchers also noted significant net declines in firearm violence surrounding vacant lots that were maintained by community members as compared to areas surrounding vacant lots that did not receive any form of care.

“This is a critical and important pivot for the CDC to provide funding for large centers like this that explicitly focus on youth firearm violence prevention,” said Rebecca Cunningham, vice president for research and the William G. Barsan Collegiate Professor of Emergency Medicine.

“Support like this will help researchers and community groups generate new evidence around firearm injury prevention that can inform policies and ultimately protect children and teens, while also generating increased momentum around the new U-M Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention.”

Tags:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, firearms, Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center

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