

The Way Forward

**Mecklenburg County
Community Violence
Strategic Plan
FY2023 – FY2028**



MECKLENBURG COUNTY
North Carolina



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Overview

Like other communities across the U.S., multiple forms of violence have caused significant injury and trauma for individuals, families, and neighborhoods within Mecklenburg County. The experiences of victims and survivors impacted by violence weigh heavily on the community and provide a rallying cry for immediate and sustained leadership and action.

Community violence happens between unrelated individuals who may or may not know each other—generally outside the home. It includes assaults or fights among groups and shootings in public places, affecting the entire community.

A recent uptick in local gun related assaults (Figure 1) and homicides (Figure 2) have led to a call for solutions to prevent and reduce community violence from wide-ranging stakeholders.

The Mecklenburg County Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) was launched in response. OVP coordinates countywide violence prevention efforts to ensure all residents live, learn, work, and play in safe, healthy, thriving communities. The OVP operates under five Guiding Principles (see Figure 3).

The Way Forward describes the current state of community violence and a localized five-year plan to reduce its impact. The plan broadly aims to reduce homicides and gun related assaults. This lofty goal is achievable through community support. The plan outlines engagement opportunities for everyone committed to creating and sustaining safe communities for all Mecklenburg County residents to contribute to solution-making.

Figure 1: **Gun-related Assaults in Charlotte, 2015-2020**

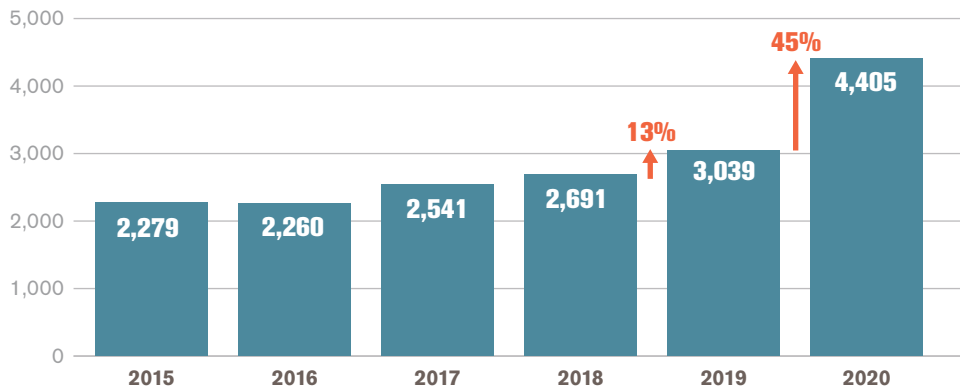
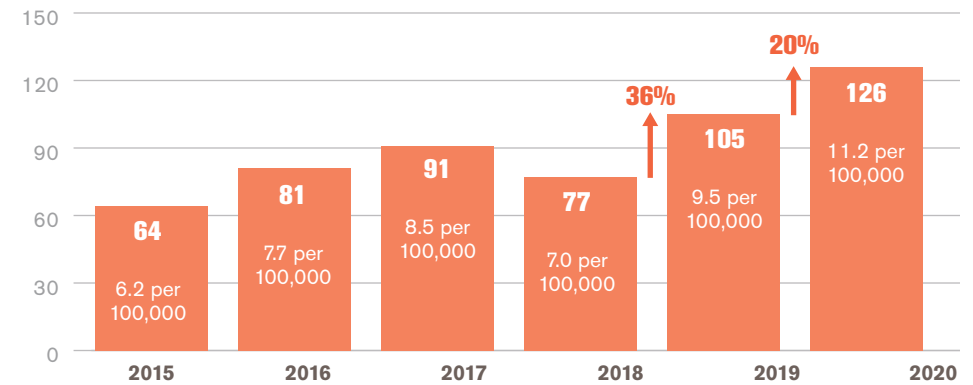


Figure 2: **Homicide Counts and Rate per 100,000, 2015-2020**



Source: CMPD

Figure 3: **Guiding Principles of the Office of Violence Prevention**



Community Violence in Mecklenburg County

Where:

Community violence occurs everywhere, however, homicides in Mecklenburg County are disproportionately concentrated in Charlotte across five zip codes.

More than half (50.9%) of homicides from 2015-2020 took place in only five ZIP codes.

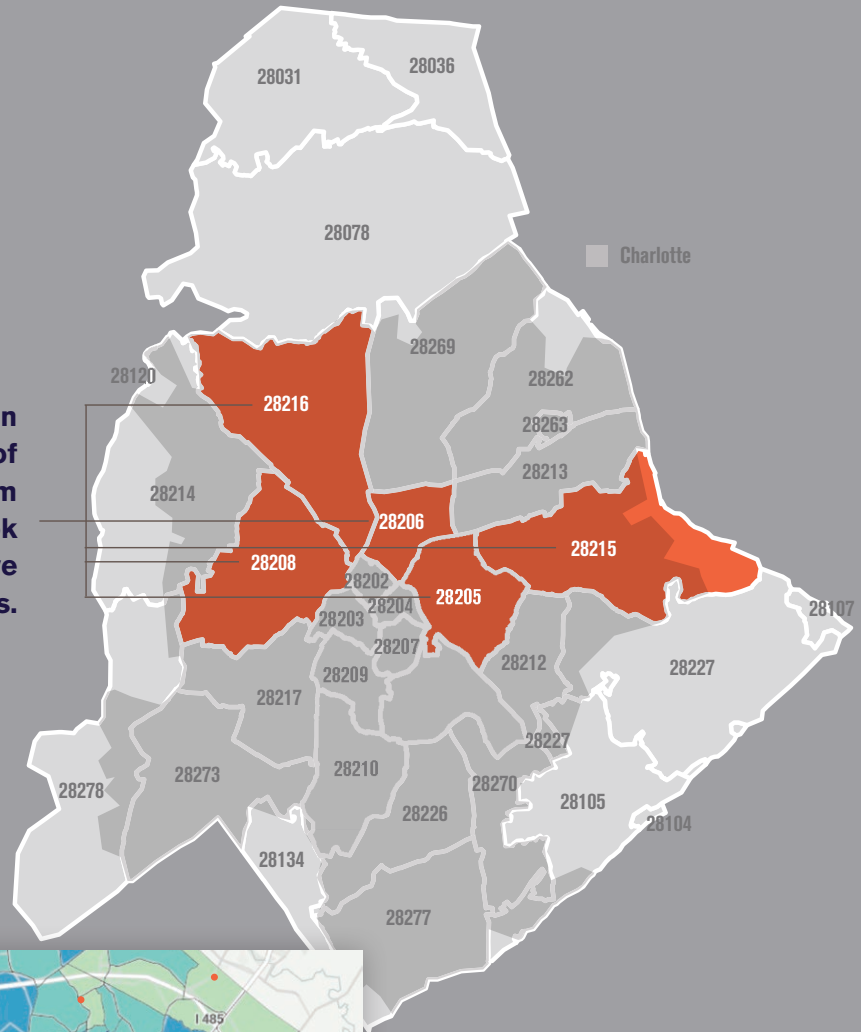
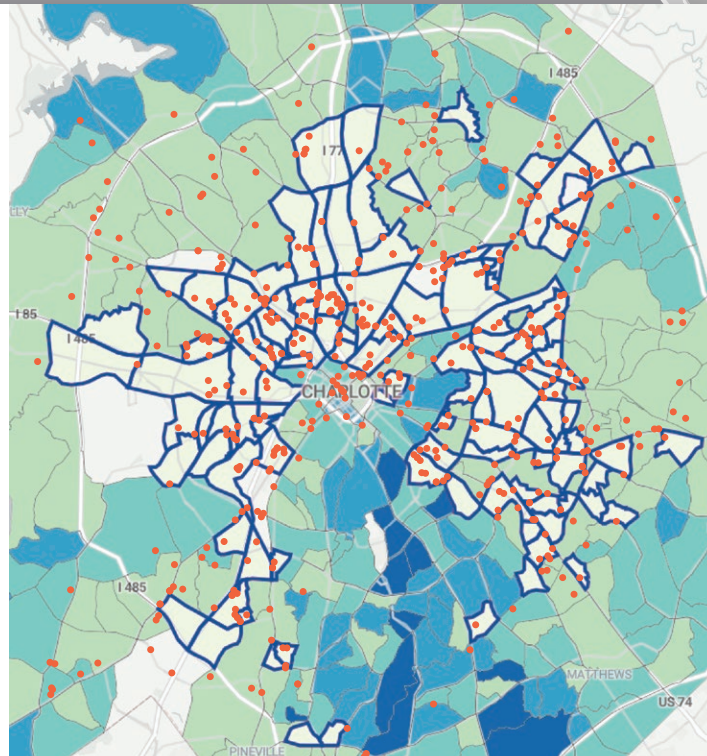


Figure 9: **Neighborhood Planning Areas (NPAs) with Lowest Income Compared to Map of Homicides (2015-2020)**

- lowest income areas
- homicide location, 2015-2020

Source: The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Quality of Life Explorer, The Mecklenburg County Community Violence Data Dashboard



The map to the left shows how communities with lower median incomes experience higher rates of homicides than those with higher median incomes. These communities also tend to have lower rates of educational attainment.

Neighborhoods or groups of people experiencing higher rates of violence are not violent by nature.

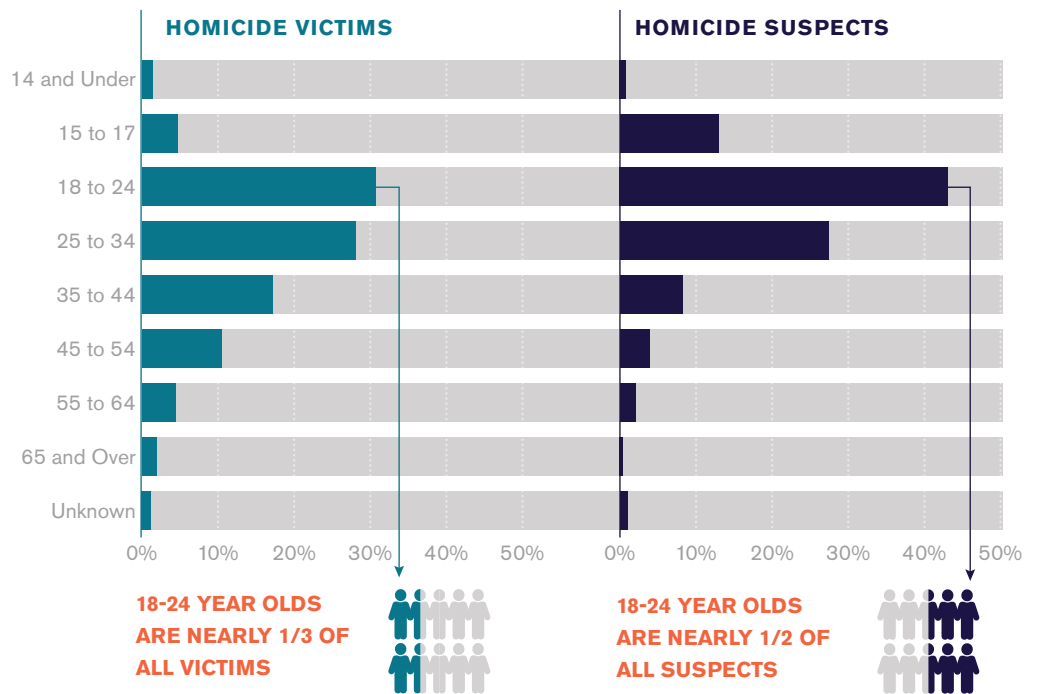
Who:

The leading age groups of individuals involved in homicides—for both victims and suspects—were between the ages of 18-34.

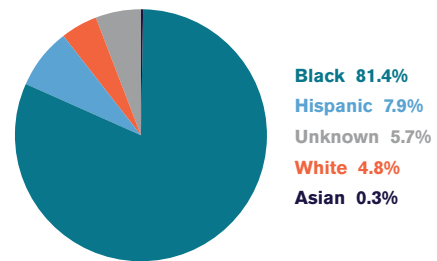
Combined, these groups made up over 50% of homicide victims and over 70% of known suspects in 2015-2020.

Although individuals ages 18-24 were 8.7% of the population between 2015-2020, they represented nearly a third of all homicide victims and nearly half of all homicide suspects.

Finally, Black and African American residents of Mecklenburg County are disproportionately impacted by community violence, particularly homicides.

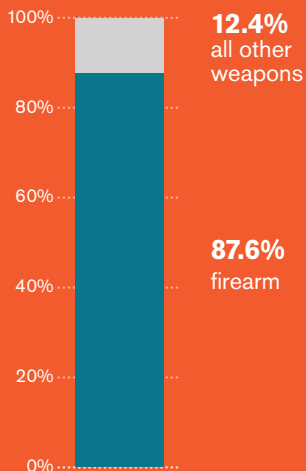


Homicide Victims and Suspects by Race, Mecklenburg County, 2015-2020



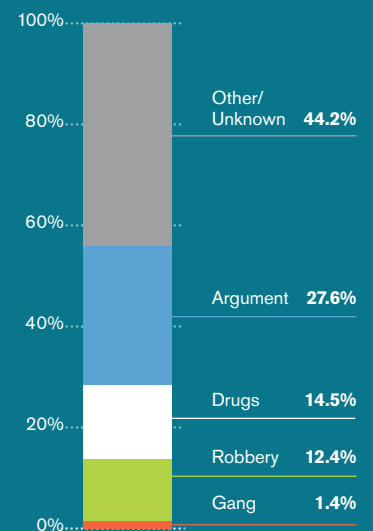
How:

The majority of homicides in Mecklenburg County involved a gun.



Why:

In Mecklenburg County, arguments are the most common circumstance leading to homicide. The term argument includes fights immediately resulting in homicide, as well as ongoing disputes between two or more parties leading to loss of life.⁴ However, the causes of many local homicide cases are unknown by law enforcement.



Our Approach

The Way Forward outlines a five year county-wide plan to address, reduce, and prevent community violence using a public health approach to violence prevention.

The public health approach brings together community members, organizations, government entities and other stakeholders to (1) define and monitor the problem, (2) identify risk and protective factors, (3) develop and test prevention strategies, and (4) ensure widespread adoption of effective strategies (Figure 6).

Over 400 Mecklenburg County community members and stakeholders contributed to the development of *The Way Forward* through a variety of engagement activities such as surveys, focus groups, listening sessions, and interviews. This information was organized to inform the plan’s strategy.

The Way Forward outlines data-driven approaches and best practices to tackle the root causes of local community violence through primary, secondary, and tertiary strategies (Figure 7).

Figure 6: **The Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention**



Figure 7: **Violence Prevention Strategy Levels**

Violence prevention strategies are categorized into three levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary. The figure describes approaches used at each level and examples of solutions at each level.

Primary prevention:

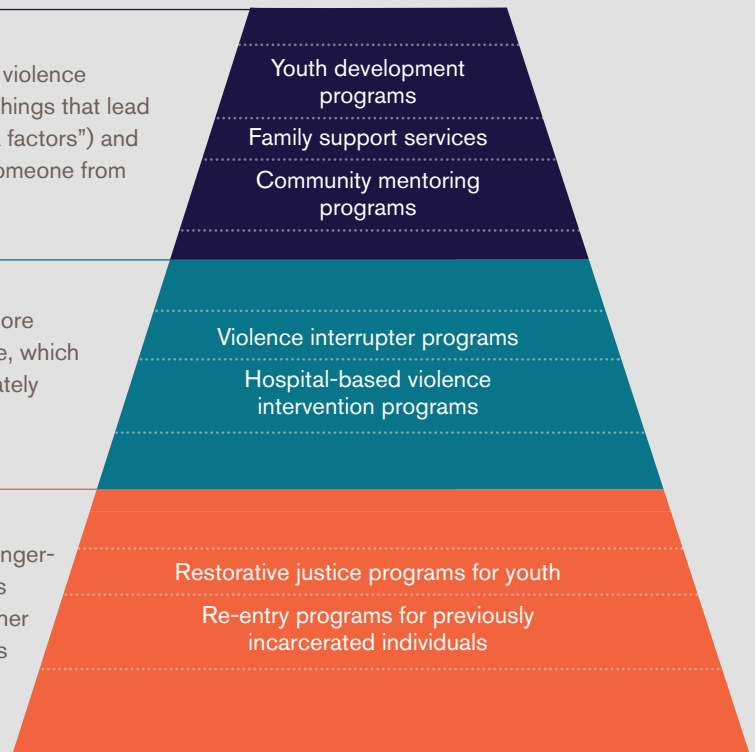
Approaches that aim to prevent violence before it occurs by decreasing things that lead to a higher risk of violence (“risk factors”) and increasing things that protect someone from violence (“protective factors”).⁵

Secondary prevention:

Approaches that focus on the more immediate responses to violence, which happen either during or immediately after it occurs.⁵

Tertiary prevention:

Approaches that focus on the longer-term impacts and consequences of violence to either prevent further harm or to prevent repeated acts of violence.⁵



Long-Term Goals

The plan aims to reduce overall community violence in Mecklenburg County through two long-term goals. We hope to see a reduction in the rates (per 100,000 residents) of both homicides and gun-related assaults at the end of the implementation period of this plan (2028) compared to the baseline year (2022). Focusing on the rate instead of the count is important, as it accounts for population growth in our county. By 2028, the plan aims to reduce the rates of homicides and gun-related assaults by 10%.

HOMICIDES

10%

decrease from baseline (2022)

GUN-RELATED ASSAULT RATES

10%

decrease from baseline (2022)

Areas of Focus and Goals

Violence is a complex problem that requires comprehensive solutions. No single program or organization will resolve the issue immediately. Community violence is preventable, but its prevention requires an investment of resources, people, time, and most importantly commitment.

The Way Forward includes two overarching long-term goals and 21 strategies grouped into five areas of focus.

Community Engagement and Partnerships



Public and private stakeholders will work as equal partners with community members and organizations in planning, measuring, and carrying out policies, programs, and practices to address violence in their community.

Support for Youth & Families



Youth and families impacted by violence and those at higher risk of violence involvement will have easy access to services that address physical and mental health needs to enhance their ability to foster healthy relationships and ensure the healthy development of both child and caregiver.

Economic Opportunity



Mecklenburg County residents impacted by violence and those at a higher risk of violence involvement will have access to resources needed to secure and keep a job with opportunities for upward economic mobility.

Intergovernmental Collaboration



Community organizations and local government will work together to reduce violence through sharing data, resources, and staff to create policies, practices, and programs.

Safer & Healthier Neighborhoods



Individuals, families, and neighbors within all communities in Mecklenburg County will have enough access to the resources needed to lead lives free from violence despite location or zip code.



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Community Engagement and Partnerships

Goal: Public and private partners will work as equal partners with community members and organizations in planning, measuring, and carrying out policies, programs and practices to address violence in their community.

Strategies

Strategies	Key Performance Indicator(s)	How will we measure that?	5-year Target
1.1 Establish shared decision-making framework with community leaders.	Program and policy recommendations identified through community engagement activities	Number of program and policy recommendations compiled, vetted and presented	10 program and policy recommendations identified
		Number of program and policy recommendations adopted	5 programs and policies adopted
	Community perceptions of shared decision-making authority related to community violence prevention initiatives	Median scores of survey items measuring perceptions of shared decision-making authority, taken from community leaders	A baseline/target for this measure will be established in FY2023.
1.2 Create opportunities for on-going community feedback and engagement with Mecklenburg County residents.	Community engagement activities (community meetings, focus groups, etc.)	Number of OVP-hosted community engagement activities with residents of Mecklenburg County	5 community meetings each year (25 by FY2028), 10 focus groups each year (50 by FY2028)
	Reports and presentations based on community engagement activities	Number of reports and presentations summarizing findings [perceptions, ideas, recommendations for solutions, and other feedback] from community engagement activities	This measure does not have a target, as it is used for tracking and process improvement

Community Engagement and Partnerships

Strategies	Key Performance Indicator(s)	How will we measure that?	5-year Target
1.3 Implement multi-media violence prevention (VP) campaigns with community partners.	Social Media Impressions	Number of Violence Prevention campaign posts generated by County and Community partners were displayed in users' feeds on social media websites	500,000 Social media impressions from all platforms combined by FY2028
	Awareness of initiatives, resources, and support services related to Violence Prevention (VP)	Measurement of input from Annual Mecklenburg County Community Survey to assess knowledge of initiatives, resources, and support services related to Violence Prevention	A baseline/target for this measure will be established in FY2023
1.4 Provide performance-based funding for community partners to implement evidence-based strategies that reduce violence.	Awardees funded to implement evidence-based strategies	Number of community partners awarded funding	15 community partners awarded by FY2028
	Number of residents engaged in strategies implemented by funded community partners	Number of residents who participated in evidence-based strategies	A baseline/target for this measure will be established in FY2023
1.5 Provide technical assistance and training to community-based organizations implementing violence prevention initiatives through the Peacekeepers Academy.	Community-based organizations (CBOs) successfully completing Peacekeepers Academy (PA)	Number of CBO graduates from program	15 Community-based organizations graduated by FY2028
	Awareness of implementing violence prevention initiatives learned through PA	Measurement of input from pre and post surveys asking about knowledge, skills, and ability gained from participating in PA	This measure does not have a target, as it is used for tracking and process improvement
1.6 Subsidize infrastructure support of safe communal spaces for community partners within priority areas through shared administrative services and physical space.	Safe communal spaces for community partners within priority neighborhoods	Number of subsidized infrastructure components (shared administrative services and physical space, etc.) used for the establishment of safe communal spaces	All priority areas identified in FY 2023 have at least one safe communal space by FY 2028
	Utilization rate of subsidized safe communal spaces by community partners	Number of activities hosted by community partners in subsidized safe spaces, out of all recorded events/activities hosted in safe communal spaces	25% increase in utilization rate of safe communal spaces in FY2028 compared to FY2023

“there’s no one fix, It’s a customized approach.”

–Community engagement activity participant



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Support for Youth & Families

Goal: Youth and families impacted by violence and those at higher risk of violence involvement will have easy access to services that address physical and mental health needs to enhance their ability to foster healthy relationships and ensure the healthy development of both child and caregiver.

Strategies

2.1 Adopt universal screening and referral process for trauma related to violence in youth and family service initiatives.

	Key Performance Indicator(s)	How will we measure that?	5-year Target
	Referrals made to individuals by youth and family service agencies using universal screening process	Number of referrals made using universal screening process	Baseline data will be collected in FY2023 to establish a target for FY2028
	Utilization rate of mental health services among youth/family members receiving screening and referral	Number of youth/families that reported successful follow-up within 90 days of receiving screening and referral, out of all referrals given to youth/families	25% increase in utilization rate of mental health services in FY2028 compared to FY2023

Support for Youth & Families

Strategies	Key Performance Indicator(s)	How will we measure that?	5-year Target
2.2 Expand access to behavioral and mental health services for individuals exposed to violence.	Community partners qualified to make referrals for individuals exposed to violence to behavioral and mental health (BMH) services	Number of community partners that are enrolled in referral systems used for BMH services	20% increase in community partners enrolled in referral systems in FY2028 compared to FY2023
	Utilization rate of BMH services by individuals exposed to violence living in priority areas	Number of residents living in priority areas reporting utilization of BMH services following exposure to violence, out of all individuals residing in priority areas	10% increase in utilization rates for BMH services in FY2028 compared to FY2023
2.3 Expand community-based youth mentorship and parenting education initiatives.	Mentees and mentors involved in community-based youth mentorship programs	Number of youth and adult participants involved in community-based youth mentorship programs	20% increase in number of both youth and adult program participants in FY2028 compared to FY2023
	Individuals enrolled in parenting education initiatives	Number of program participants	35% increase in enrollment in FY2028 compared to FY2023

“We don’t talk about the fact that there’s been disinvestment in those communities. We don’t talk about the fact that there’s not good public transportation, there’s food deserts, there’s they’re not good educational opportunities, not good job opportunities, there’s environmental inequity in those environments.”

—Community engagement activity participant

“The violence that we have in our community is a result of so many factors: guns, mental health, drugs, poverty, hopelessness, racism, lack of discipline, lack of coping skills and education, teenagers don’t have enough positive activities to participate in outside of school, especially on the weekends or in the evenings.”

—Community engagement activity participant



“Jobs are coming but the infrastructure is not coming around the job. The job doesn’t come with right assistance for the impoverished area that we know exist in these cities in the United States of America”

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Economic Opportunity

3

Goal: Mecklenburg County residents impacted by violence and those at a higher risk of violence involvement will have access to resources needed to secure and keep a job with opportunities for upward economic mobility.

Strategies

	Key Performance Indicator(s)	How will we measure that?	5-year Target
3.1 Enhance job training and placement strategies to improve employee hiring and retention rates for individuals with prior criminal justice involvement working with Second Chance Employers (SCEs).	Hiring rates among SCEs	Number of justice-involved individuals hired by SCEs, out of number of justice-involved individuals seeking employment.	Baseline data will be collected in FY2023 to establish a target for FY2028
	Employment retention rates among SCEs	Number of individuals with prior criminal justice involvement hired after participation in training programs, out of total program enrollees	40% hiring rates among program participants
3.2 Expand access to financial literacy education among residents impacted by violence.	County and community partners offering place-based financial literacy (FL) programs in community violence priority areas	Number of FL programs within community violence priority areas	25% increase in number of FL programs in priority areas
	Completion rates of FL programs by residents residing in priority areas	Number of priority area residents that successfully complete FL programs, out of total number of program enrollees residing in priority areas	50% increase in completion rates among priority residents
3.3 Implement comprehensive workforce development and training strategies, with focus on disconnected youth and other higher-risk individuals.	Workforce development and training (WDT) program participants	Number of enrolled participants in WDT programs offered by county and affiliated partners	50% increase in annual program enrollment numbers in FY2028 compared to FY2023
	Hiring rates among higher-risk individuals that have successfully completed WDT programs	Number of higher-risk individuals that were hired following completion of WDT programs, out of number of all WDT program graduates	50% hiring rates among individuals successfully completing program



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Intergovernmental Collaboration

4

Goal: Community organizations and local government will work together to reduce violence through sharing data, resources, and staff in creating policies, practices, and programs.

Strategies

4.1 Maintain infrastructure for on-going intergovernmental collaboration, including among elected bodies.

Key Performance Indicator(s)	How will we measure that?	5-year Target
Agencies represented in collaborative workgroups related to violence	Number and type of agencies from diverse sectors represented in collaborative workgroups	This measure does not have a target as used for process improvement
Program/policy recommendations produced by intergovernmental workgroups	Number of program/policy recommendations compiled and presented	5 recommendations documented and presented by FY2028

“Until we change policies, procedures and how systems integrate and interact with one another, we’re not going to have the true change that’s going to be something that’s dynamic, transformative for our community.”

–Community engagement activity participant

Intergovernmental Collaboration

Strategies	Key Performance Indicator(s)	How will we measure that?	5-year Target
4.2 Foster partnerships with private businesses and philanthropic organizations to co-invest in violence prevention initiatives.	Dollars or other resources co-invested by private and philanthropic partners for VP initiatives in priority areas	Estimated monetary value of dollars and other resources invested by private and philanthropic partners	\$3,000,000 worth of funds (or other resources) by FY2028
4.3 Establish and implement a coordinated interagency response plan to support communities following violent incidents.	Partnership agreements from community organizations involved in response activities following violent incidents	Number of partnership agreements entered and type of organizations involved in response activities	This measure does not have a target as used for process improvement
	Residents in priority areas provided services through interagency response activities following violent incidents	Number of priority area residents served and type of service provided following a violence incident	50% of residents in priority areas are provided some type of service or resource following a violent incident between implementation and FY2028
4.4 Integrate and analyze law enforcement, health and human service and other relevant data to monitor progress and inform strategies.	Data sharing agreements executed among relevant agencies	Number of data sharing agreements and type of agency	50% increase in number of fully executed data sharing agreements in FY2028 compared to FY2023
	Program/policy recommendations produced using data from integrated sources	Number of program/policy recommendations compiled and presented	5 recommendations documented and presented by FY2028
4.5 Collaborate with local schools to reduce youth violence by implementing the 100 Youth Advisory Council.	Local schools involved in recruitment and promotion of 100 Youth Advisory Council (100YAC)	Number of middle and high schools assisting with the recruitment and promotion	70% of area schools assist with recruitment and promotion by FY2028
	Peer-led discussions related to violence facilitated by council	Number of peer-led discussions by 100 YAC	25 peer-led discussions documented by FY2028



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Safer & Healthier Neighborhoods

Goal: Individuals, families, and neighbors of all communities within Mecklenburg County will have enough access to the resources needed to lead lives free of violence despite location or zip code.

Strategies	Key Performance Indicator(s)	How will we measure that?	5-year Target
5.1 Implement and expand community violence interruption and hospital-based violence intervention initiatives.	New and expanded community violence intervention initiatives within priority areas	Number of initiatives based in priority communities	50% of community violence priority areas will have a community-based intervention initiative by FY2028
	Participants in Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs (HVIPs)	Number of patients served by HVIP initiatives	Baseline data will be collected in FY2023 to create target for FY2028
5.2 Implement public safety initiatives focused on identified Corridors of Opportunity outlined in the SAFE Charlotte Grant.	Priority neighborhoods with initiative(s) enacted	Number of priority neighborhoods and type of initiative(s) enacted	All priority neighborhoods identified in FY2023 have at least one public safety initiative enacted by FY2028
5.3 Prioritize strategies to protect and maintain safe physical conditions in neighborhoods most impacted by violence, including trash pickup, code enforcement for vacant/abandoned properties, and community lighting.	Priority neighborhoods with strategies enacted	Number of priority neighborhoods with strategies enacted to maintain safe physical conditions	This measure does not have a target, as it is used for tracking and process improvement
	Perceptions of safety and quality related to physical conditions from community members in priority neighborhoods	Median scores of survey items measuring perceptions of safety and quality related to physical conditions, taken from participants living within priority neighborhoods	50% improvement of resident perceptions in FY2028 compared to FY2023

Get Involved

The root causes of community violence are multifaceted and so are the solutions. Together, we can reduce and prevent community violence in Mecklenburg County. Below are ways stakeholders can support the implementation of *The Way Forward*.

“We all preach collaboration and we gotta be pulling in the same direction.”

—Community engagement activity participant

Key components of the Implementation Strategy:

Community Partners

can help by:

- Committing staff members or other resources to implement strategies outlined in the Plan (if possible)
- Ensuring that committed staff have the capacity to properly implement assigned strategies
- Participating in periodic check-in meetings with the OVP to discuss progress, issues, and questions related to implementation or process measurement
- Identifying measurements to track the progress of strategy implementation
- Sharing relevant data with the OVP to ensure successful implementation

Mecklenburg County Residents

can help by:

- Learning about violence, prevention efforts, and supportive services in Mecklenburg County
- Participating in community engagement activities related to violence prevention efforts
- Advocating for policies, practices and programs related to violence prevention in Mecklenburg County

The OVP

will be responsible for:

- Identifying community partners to work on each strategy based on relevance and the best fit
- Securing support and participation from community partners and residents
- Asking community partners to establish internal action teams related to strategies
- Collecting and analyzing data to inform process improvement and interagency collaboration
- Assisting partners in data collection to measure the progress of strategy implementation
- Developing and sharing periodic progress reports to elected bodies, community partners, and Mecklenburg County residents

The Way Forward is together

Moving forward, this plan will be carried out in collaboration with many community partners. While the OVP will take the lead, there are some strategies that cannot be implemented or measured without the support of community partners.

Therefore, the implementation and measurement process will be shared between the OVP, community partners, and residents.

Throughout the course of this 5-year strategic plan, the OVP will maintain feedback loops with Mecklenburg County residents to ensure the community's voice is heard in the planning, implementation, measurement and evaluation process.



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NOTE: The homicide data included in this report was prepared by the MCPH Epidemiology Program. It excludes homicides resulting from Domestic Violence and comes from the following sources:

- CMPD
- Cornelius Police Department
- Davidson Police Department
- Huntersville Police Department
- Matthews Police Department
- Mint Hill Police Department
- Pineville Police Department

Acknowledgments

The Way Forward, Mecklenburg County's Community Violence Strategic Plan is the result of many dedicated community partners and members across Mecklenburg County. Thank you to the following agencies and organizations for their commitment to creating a safe and healthy community:

“The way forward is together.”

–African proverb

MECKLENBURG COUNTY

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For questions or to find out more about the Mecklenburg County Office of Violence Prevention, visit on the web at <https://www.mecknc.gov/HealthDepartment/Pages/ViolencePrevention.aspx>

Or email us at OVP@MeckNC.gov