



The Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center (HYVPC)

The Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center (HYVPC) is an innovative, multi-disciplinary Center dedicated to “working collaboratively to build community capacity for youth violence prevention in Boston.” Located at the Harvard School of Public Health, Center activities are based on the premise that effective prevention evolves from synergy between researchers, community members, and policy makers. Its active collaborations with multiple community agencies and organizations provide ample opportunities to bridge research and practice. HYVPC has an outstanding multi-disciplinary staff with expertise in survey research, surveillance, program evaluation, and youth violence prevention. Violence prevention is only one of the many important, cross-cutting issues addressed by Center, which include injury prevention, community capacity building, and youth development.

HYVPC collaborates with 11 Grassroots Community Partners, as well as with the Boston Mayor’s Office, Boston Public Health Commission, Boston Centers for Youth and Families, Boston Public Schools, and the Boston Police Department. HYVPC’s primary goals are to work across multiple levels of the Boston community to: (1) Define the problem of youth exposure to, victimization by, and perpetration of violence, (2) identify risk and protective factors for youth experiences with violence, (3) develop and test youth violence prevention strategies, and (4) assure widespread adoption of strategies shown to be effective. Central to this effort, HYVPC has created a multi-layered surveillance system for youth violence in Boston that includes: (a) a comprehensive representative biennial survey of public high school students (Boston Youth Survey); (b) a concurrent biennial community-based telephone survey of adults in Boston households (Boston Neighborhood Survey), conducted in parallel with the youth survey, and (c) GIS integration and mapping of city, state, and federal data on neighborhood characteristics, city trends, and initiatives that affect youth and communities. Data from this surveillance system will be used to determine individual and community risk and resiliency factors, track the changing needs of Boston’s youth and communities, develop evidence-based prevention programs and track their effectiveness, and evaluate the impact of city and community policies on youth violence and well-being.

Appreciating the importance of supporting both research and programmatic efforts, the Center also works with BPHC on the annual Community Meeting series, conducts an annual Boston Peace Party to honor community members who have made significant contributions in violence reduction, and hosts a conference for families of homicide victims. The Center provides community members with training in an asset-based approach to community development and works with Center partners to create neighborhood and city-wide community action plans to reduce violence. A Mentorship Program matches experienced researchers with students, provides post-doctoral fellowships, and promotes research opportunities with community organizations. The Center also provides formal training to graduate students, residents and other physicians, community leaders, and injury control personnel in state health departments. Through its emphasis on research, practice, and collaboration, the Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center is continuing the Boston tradition of developing, implementing, and evaluating cutting-edge violence prevention strategies.