



Community Engagement Initiative Report:

SafeTO Roundtable Discussion

Youth Perspectives on a Public Health Approach to Gun Violence

Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness in partnership with the City of
Toronto, and the Toronto Youth Cabinet

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank all of the youth for openly sharing their insights from their own lived experiences and their hopes for what safety and well-being could look like in their communities.

A special thank you to the City of Toronto's Safety and Wellbeing Unit for their mentorship and guidance in hosting this roundtable discussion. And a huge thank you to the Toronto Youth Cabinet for partnering with me in planning, hosting, and facilitating this roundtable discussion.

Prepared by:

Devika Parsaud
Research Fellow

Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness

Contributor:

Zenah Hussun
Director of Council Relations
Toronto Youth Cabinet

VISION

For my community engagement initiative, I partnered with the Toronto Youth Cabinet to host a roundtable community discussion on gun violence. The Toronto Youth Cabinet is a non-partisan organization that advocates on behalf of Toronto's youth. Working with the City of Toronto and other grassroots organizations, the Cabinet is dedicated to providing young people with a forum in which they are able to build an equitable, accessible, and youth-friendly Toronto.

Together, we invited young people ages 16-29 across different Toronto neighbourhoods to discuss SafeTO - Toronto's Community Safety & Well-being Plan.

The goal of our community engagement initiative was to engage young people and share knowledge amongst each other through interactive sessions and dialogue to gain insight on the youth's perspective to addressing community safety and applying a public health approach to gun violence.

The City of Toronto has recognized community and gun violence as a critical public health issue affecting the city. The municipal government is working towards collecting data and finding solutions alongside community members and agencies to build a public health,

A public health approach to gun violence focuses on a culture of prevention and social development. A public health approach collects, monitors and analyzes data on violence, who is affected, understands its consequences, and identifies risk factors and protective factors to develop coordinated evidence-based policy, practices, and program solutions with various sectors and community members.

OUTCOME

The roundtable gathered 25 young people throughout the city of Toronto ranging from ages 16–29. We chose the format of an online 1-hour Zoom session to account for accessibility and to adhere to COVID-19 safety guidelines that discourage large physical gatherings.

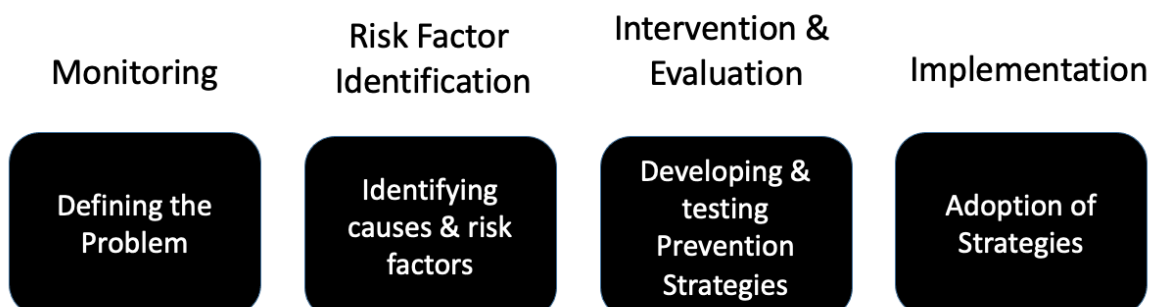
The roundtable discussion involved a presentation that provided context to the issue of gun violence in Toronto, summarized the SafeTO Community Safety and Well-being Plan for the City, and discussed different elements of a public health approach. We then went into smaller breakout rooms in Zoom to cultivate community and to have an open discussion on what a public health approach to gun violence could look like in implementation. For the interactive component, the online tool menti.com was used to anonymously submit responses to various questions and topics we were covering. This method allowed for inclusive participation as participants could feel comfortable submitting their responses and ideas, even if they were hesitant to participate vocally in the room.

The roundtable took place on August 23rd, 2021.

The questions asked focused on the 4 aspects of a public health approach:

- Defining the Problem
- Identifying Risks & Protective Factors
- Developing & Testing Prevention Strategies
- Widespread Adoption of Strategies & Evaluation

Public Health Approach to Gun Violence



KEY FINDINGS

Defining the Problem

How do you think the impact and prevention of gun violence should be defined and measured?

- Collect and analyze data that included socio-demographic information
- Data on the physical and mental health impacts of being exposed to violence
- Race-based data
- Measure the occurrence of gun violence by neighbourhood.
- Data on repeat offenders as opposed to first-time offenders and create resources and supports to help these individuals to exit the violent situations they are in.
- Look at what percentage of gun violence was attributed to gang involvement
- Measure how communities are being impacted by community violence. For example, whether gun violence made it less likely for people to engage in their community because they may not feel safe. Youth also thought it was important to consider how individuals, families, public spaces, and schools were impacted as well.
- To measure impact continue to measure injury and death. Also understand the aftermath and its impact, to measure trauma, physical, mental, and emotional impacts and in what ways the experience of violence affects other areas of one's life.
- Pay attention to inequities that are most prevalent in a community and to monitor how they have changed over time. and may contribute to the rise or fall in gun violence.

Identifying Causes and Risk Factors

What do you think are the causes of gun violence? What do you think contributes to the decision to pull a trigger?

- Gun violence is associated with a confluence of factors – individual, family, school, peers, community, and socioeconomic risk factors that interact over time.
- Social and economic conditions that place individuals in situations that cause them to feel helpless – poverty, lack of opportunities, limited resources, social isolation and loneliness.
- Neighbourhood conflict and getting caught in that cycle – having a hard time removing themselves from it.
- Trauma, stress, mental health, bullying, the feeling of helplessness, social isolation, and anger
- The ease of access to guns is a cause of gun violence, and individuals and their views on conflict management and how to respond to feeling disrespected and threatened.

What do you think are some protective factors against gun violence?

- Investing in communities, supporting programs and services
- Upkeep and programming in park spaces and recreation centers
- Connecting young people to opportunities through career centers and activities will help to build their social skills, network, and build a positive sense of identity
- Mental health education and services
- Hospitals can also play a greater role and intervene when victims are in the hospital to help build strategies and connect them with supports to extract themselves from their environment/violent life.
- Social belonging, fostering a strong sense of community, and celebrating youth
- Restricting the flow of firearms and preventing them from entering our neighbourhoods and communities.

Developing & Testing Prevention Strategies

What are some solutions or effective strategies to tackling gun violence? How can we work together to prevent gun violence?

- Acknowledgement of the structural changes that need to be addressed in order to create a safer environment for communities disproportionately impacted by gun violence – policy changes, funding, programming, and services.
- Trauma-informed process to understand the impact of gun violence on communities
- A collaborative approach where stakeholders and institutions work together to tackle gun violence in their community. Creating better partnerships between the community, schools, and community centres and agencies to work together to address gaps in resources and services needed for a healthy upbringing. Teachers and staff at community organizations and centres should receive training and education on trauma, culturally sensitive programs, and the needs of the community they are serving.
- Community engagement/involvement: Communities should have a greater voice in decisions being made that affect them.
- Gaining the trust of the community. Police need to build strong connections with members of the communities they are serving and protecting, need for more communication, understanding, and trust between each other.

What changes would promote safety and well-being in your community?

- Understanding of the community and their needs
- Safe spaces – recreational, religious services
- Increased services, programming, and education
- More opportunities & supports for young people and families
- Increased mental health services
- Stricter gun laws

Adoption of Strategies

How do you think the community can work together to tackle this issue?

- Have on-going meetings throughout the SafeTO implementation plan
- Involve all stakeholders in the implementation process and define clear goals and roles
- More community based programs, better advertising and campaigning for events, making sure as much of the community gets involved
- Supporting gun violence research, intervention, and prevention initiatives

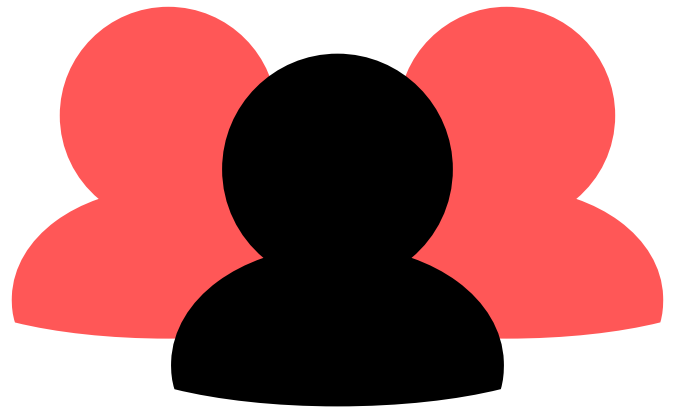
How should we evaluate impact? what should we be looking at and measuring?

- Year over year reduction in gun-related crimes, injuries, deaths
- Reduction of poverty
- Number of youth graduating
- Involvement in activities and programming
- Feedback from local communities
- Student surveys from school asking how they are feeling and whether they feel safe in their communities

How should youth be more engaged in this implementation plan?

- Having honest, safe discussions with government, community agencies, services, and police
- Have input in program planning, messaging, and engagement
- Through education programs, peer mentoring and support

IMPACT



01. Centered Youth Voices

Gun violence often occurs among young people. It was important to involve youth perspectives when discussing the implementation of a community safety and well-being plan that targets gun violence.

02. Knowledge Translation

Share knowledge amongst each other. Allow young people to understand the municipal government's strategy, while also hearing from young people what issues their communities are facing, and how they could envision their communities working together with different stakeholders to address gun violence.

03. Engage Youth

Youth learned of various ways they can get involved with the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan for Toronto, as well as connect to future opportunities for engagement with the Toronto Youth Cabinet