

Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved.

Gun violence prevention



GERALDINE MASSEY MS PRC, Family Counselor/Outreach Specialist, Center of Life

"I commit to having a mental health evaluation completed as an action in the prevention of gun violence."

GERALDINE MASSEY, MS PRC

BETTY CRUZ, Founder, Change Agency, project director, All for All

"I commit to taking action for gun safety, including a ban on assault weapons in Pennsylvania, advocating for a federal licensing system that limits loopholes in purchasing guns by people who must never be armed and urging divestment from corporations who support the National Rifle Association, including institutions located right here in Pittsburgh. There are currently more guns in circulation in the United States than there are people. We need to build a future with fewer guns."



BETTY CRUZ



FELICIA SAVAGE FRIEDMAN, BS, MED, registered yoga teacher-trainer, Yoga Alliance, yoga teacher, Urban Zen Integrative owner, YogaRoots on Location LLC, continuing education provider, YACEP-Yoga Alliance

"I commit to continue to publicly acknowledge that this country was colonized and is still ruled with the gun, which is the

antithesis of love and acceptance. I choose love moment to moment."

RICHARD GARLAND, MSW, assistant professor of behavioral and community health sciences, University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health

"I commit to the work of ending gun violence, especially in the urban communities. For years, I have stated one agency cannot be responsible for stopping the spread of this disease; it is all of us working to-



RICHARD GARLAND, MSW

gether to treat this disease."

THE NEW PITTSBURGH COURIER PUBLISHING COMPANY

Publication No.: USPS 381940
315 East Carson Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
Phone: 412-481-8302
Fax: 412-481-1360

The New Pittsburgh Courier is published weekly

periodicals paid at Pittsburgh, Pa.
PRICE \$1.00
(Payable in advance)

6 Months.....\$25
1 Year....\$45
2 Years...\$85
9 Month School Rate \$35

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
New Pittsburgh Courier
315 East Carson Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219



WILLIAM PEDUTO

WILLIAM PEDUTO, Mayor of Pittsburgh
"I commit to fighting gun violence by providing opportunities to all Pittsburgh neighborhoods—to take a gun out of someone's hand and put a paycheck in it instead."

This month, the "Take Charge of Your Health Today" page focuses on gun violence prevention. Erricka Hager, Health Advocate at the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh; Esther L. Bush, President and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh; and Bee Schindler, Community Engagement Coordinator with CTSI, spoke on this topic.

EB: I'm so pleased that we're finally addressing the issue of gun violence prevention, Erricka and Bee. I hear about a new tragedy almost every day. The Joyce Foundation reports that more than 110,000 Americans are injured or killed by guns every year, in community violence, domestic violence, mass shootings, suicide and accidents. It is imperative that we interrupt this cycle of violence that's negatively impacting the Black community.

EH: It's a tragic time, Ms. Bush. In urban areas like Pittsburgh, young people of color, their families and communities experience the impact of gun violence most acutely. Tim Stevens, CEO of the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP), is correct in saying that we cannot become numb and accept the constant tragedies as our new reality. Lack of trust between police and community members further weaken communities and compromise public safety.

EB: Absolutely! The negative impact of gun violence has caused us, as community leaders and city officials, to demand an end to gun violence. Black communities fear for their safety. For Black communities to feel safe and just, we must renew our efforts to prevent gun violence before it occurs. It's important that we talk about how the Black community can build greater police-community trust.

BS: Yes, Ms. Bush. To make change, we need to all show up—not only people in Black communities. It's important, for both the health and progress of the Black community,



ESTHER BUSH

to put an end to gun violence by addressing the systematic racism and policies that have kept this violence in place. Gun violence and the community trauma aftermath is a public health crisis. At the legislative level, just this month, PA Bill 2060 started the process by passing a monumental law that takes important steps to disarm domestic abusers and make Pennsylvania families safer. With this week being voting week, it's a hopeful and actionable step.

EH: Voting is such an important, actionable step in which Courier readers can engage.

Readers can also join the local

Black Women for Positive Change (BW4PC) chapter. BW4PC is a national, policy-focused network of predominantly Black women who are working to change the culture of violence in the United States. BW4PC recently hosted their sixth annual "Week of Non-Violence." During the week of October 14-20, BW4PC held workshops and discussion panels aimed at reducing violence in the Black community.

BS: Small, local and immediate change, like neighborhood revitalization, has proven to help bring communities together by highlighting outside collective spaces, as indicated in Dr. Alison Culyba's research about gun violence prevention. In her research, green space, proper working infrastructure, like porch and street lights, and easy access to public transportation were linked with a lower risk of youth homicide. This could be something in which we all could take part.

EB: Thanks for sharing those actionable steps with our readers, Erricka and Bee. I'd encourage everyone to come together in this time. I hope our readers will join us at our Dinner & Dialogue series to have the hard discussions and commit to working together to put an end to gun violence. I look forward to talking about another important health issue next month—infant mortality.

Gun Violence and Community Trauma

As a country and a community, we have lived through the effects of gun violence. Whether it is through the heartbreaking loss of loved ones or witnessing its effects in our neighborhoods, gun violence affects everyone. It leaves us struggling to understand why it happens. It is an emotional, politically charged crisis. But sometimes the information circulating about gun violence is based on myths. Regardless of how people feel about gun ownership, the community trauma from gun violence is deep and long-lasting.

Any discussion of gun violence in the United States begins with an awareness of just how many people own guns. According to the latest Small Arms Survey (smallarms-survey.org), there are 393 million civilian-owned guns in the United States—which means there are more guns than people. A 2017 Gallup report stated that 42 percent of households in the United States contained a gun—which means that the average gun-owning household contains several guns. However, the United States is one of three countries, including Guatemala and Mexico, that has a Constitutional right to arms. The United States is the only one of those countries that has no restriction on who can own guns (nytimes.com/2013/04/05/opinion/rewrite-the-second-amendment.html). In the United States, the high rate of gun ownership is coupled with a high homicide-by-firearm rate—which is 25.2 times higher than that of other high-income countries (Grinshteyn E, Hemenway D. 2016. Violent death rates: the US compared with other high-income OECD countries, 2010. Am. J. Med. 129[3]:266–73).

Even though the incidence of gun violence in the United States is high, research shows that incidences are still not as high as they are portrayed to be in national media outlets.

"If we look at trends over the past 30-40 years, gun homicides are down significantly," says John "Jack" S. Rozel, MD, MSL, associate professor of psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, and medical director at resolve Crisis Services (sponsored by Allegheny County and UPMC Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic).

Another common myth about gun violence is that it is mostly done by people with mental illness. Not true, says Dr. Rozel.

"Research has found that the overwhelming majority of people who are violent do not have an identifiable mental illness," he says. "Some of the violence relates more to substance-use and intoxication. In fact, people with mental illness are three times more likely to be targets rather than perpetrators of violence. This myth does little more than promote the stigma of mental illness and distract people from dealing appropriately with the often separate issues of violence, mental illness and gun violence."

Despite the loaded myths surrounding gun violence, its devastating effects on people are unquestionable. The grief of losing a loved one is immeasurable. Research has shown that people who live in high-stress situations or neighborhoods experience persistent activation of the body's stress response systems (increases in heart rate, blood pressure and stress hormones). This response can have a negative effect on people's health—especially to the developing brains of children. Even losing sleep because of stress can have serious health effects.

"If you live in an environment where people are getting shot, it's a lot harder to feel comfortable enough to fall asleep," says Dr. Rozel. "Sleep deficits take a huge toll on



People start a protest march against the shooting death of Antwon Rose Jr. on Tuesday, June 26, 2018, in Pittsburgh. Rose was fatally shot by a police officer seconds after he fled a traffic stop June 19, in the suburb of East Pittsburgh. (AP Photo/Keith Srakocic)

health. It's not uncommon to see people who have been exposed to gun violence showing symptoms of post-traumatic symptomatic stress disorder, which include an exaggerated startle reflex, getting angry really quickly, etc. Something as simple as the sound of a door slamming can trigger people. What we can say, quite clearly, is that any



"Research has found that the overwhelming majority of people who are violent do not have an identifiable mental illness. In fact, people with mental illness are three times more likely to be targets rather than perpetrators of violence. This myth does little more than promote the stigma of mental illness and distract people from dealing appropriately with the often separate issues of violence, mental illness and gun violence."

JOHN "JACK" S. ROZEL, MD, MSL

exposure to firearm violence—from being a target, victim or witness—takes a tremendous toll. Wherever you stand in the gun debate, no one should have to deal with that level of stress."

So, what can people do to minimize the effect of gun violence in their lives? People need to take care of themselves and seek help from health care providers whenever possible because living in high-stress situations can negatively affect health. Dr. Rozel reminds people that violence between strangers is uncommon. Violence between people who know each other, to some degree, is far more common. And there's usually a signal well in advance that someone is under a threat of violence. People may have concerns about sharing information they know; people do not want to become targets, themselves.

"One of the most important things to help decrease firearm injury is trusting and loving relationships within families and communities," says Dr. Rozel. "Children need adults they trust to tell if they saw or are worried about something. Adults need the same. Trust takes time and effort to build and create, but it can make a really big difference. Find the people in the community you feel you can trust. Develop those relationships."

"Remember that being exposed to gun violence doesn't mean you can't grow from those emotional and physical scars. It takes time. It takes work to find the right relationships, therapist and, sometimes, physical health interventions, but there's a way to live a life after gun violence. Start with a health care provider you trust and say you need help."

Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved.



DIALLO MITCHELL JR., 23, urges youth to “become the change that we want to see,” at an Aug. 14 news conference denouncing the recent violence in Pittsburgh’s Black communities. Mitchell is paralyzed from the waist down after being shot in Greenfield five years ago. (Photo by Rob Taylor Jr.)

Can investing in neighborhoods help to reduce gun violence?

In 2016, 5,175 youths between the ages of 15 and 25 were killed by firearm homicide in the United States. More than 43,000 youths were treated for firearm-related assault injuries, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey of high school students, 5 percent of teens reported carrying a gun in the past year.

As a doctor and violence prevention researcher, I study how neighborhood factors affect youth violence. Research shows that investing in neighborhoods can affect gun violence, crime and mental health. These simple, low-cost investments include improving vacant and run-down spaces. In a study done in Philadelphia, my colleagues and I found that green space, street lights, walking and having easy access to public transportation were linked with a lower risk of youth homicide. Colleagues and I are now studying how neighborhood



ALISON CULYBA, MD, PHD, MPH

factors relate to fighting and weapon violence in Pittsburgh. So far, our results suggest that walkable neighborhoods in mid-sized cities like Pittsburgh may also protect youths from violence. We are still examining how these neighborhood improvements help to reduce gun violence. It may be, for example, that building playgrounds and sidewalks in a community bring more people outdoors to interact with each other, creating a stronger sense of community, connection and safety.

In partnership with community members, we hope to use our research to guide future interventions. By rethinking and redesigning neighborhood space, we hope to reduce youth violence.

Alison Culyba, MD, PhD, MPH, is assistant professor of pediatrics, School of Medicine, and of behavioral and community health sciences, Graduate School of Public Health, University of Pittsburgh

Community Resources

Resolve Crisis Services: resolve is a 24-hour, 365-day crisis service. It’s free to all residents of Allegheny County, regardless of your ability to pay.

- 24-hour hotline to speak to a trained clinician at **1-888-7-YOU-CAN (796-8226)**.

- mobile crisis team can travel anywhere within Allegheny County to respond to a crisis. They provide face-to-face support and will work to arrange further care and stabilization if needed.

Center for Victims is a community-based, nonprofit organization. It is the largest, most comprehensive and inclusive provider of services, advocacy and education for victims of all crime in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Center for Victims provides critical programs and services to the Allegheny County as a:

- Domestic Violence Emergency Shelter, Housing and Counseling Center
- Rape Crisis/Sexual Assault Center
- Comprehensive Crime Victim and Witness Assistance Center
- Community Crisis Response Team
- Professional Development, Training, Education, Media-

tion and Advocacy Center

Greater Pittsburgh Coalition Against Violence: 2201 Wylie Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15219, **412-758-7898** or **412-212-8775**

Black Women for Positive Change is a national, policy-focused network of predominately African American women. The network has two primary goals—to positively contribute to ideas and methods that can strengthen and expand middle and working classes in the United States, with an emphasis on the African-American community, and to change the culture of violence in the United States. E-mail Diane Powell at pittbw4pc@gmail.com for more information.

CeaseFire Pa is a statewide organization working with mayors, police chiefs, faith leaders, community organizations and individual Pennsylvanians to take a stand against gun violence. Through outreach, education, coalition building and advocacy, we work to reduce gun violence and gun tragedies in our communities, stop the flow of illegal guns onto our streets and keep guns out of the hands of people who should not have them.

RICH FITZGERALD, Allegheny County Executive

“I commit to having county departments—including Health, Human Services, Police and others—work collaboratively with the community for a comprehensive approach to combating this public health issue.”



RICH FITZGERALD



PASTOR NATHANIEL M. BROWN

PASTOR NATHANIEL M. BROWN, president and CEO, 5A Elite Youth Empowerment

“I am committed to partnering with students to reverse the impacts of historical and generational trauma, while training them to activate holistic wellness in urban youth environments.”

AJAYLA JOHNSON, youth activist

“I am committed to being the loud voice in the crowd of quiet faces. We should all have the chance to reach our full potential. We were born into this generation and should have the opportunity to shape it for the next. Our plea will be heard.”



AJAYLA JOHNSON



ROBERT MARIN, MD

ROBERT MARIN, MD, Board of Directors, Community Empowerment Association, Homewood, PA, associate director, Center for Public Service Psychiatry, UPMC Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic

“I commit to working with others as an advocate and partner, an independent voice, an activist, good listener and not just someone who says, ‘Isn’t this terrible...someone should do something about this.’”

TIM STEVENS, Chairman and CEO, Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP), Co-convenor, Greater Pittsburgh Coalition Against Violence (CAV)

“I am committed to expand our work to bring anti-violence youth summits to as many schools as possible in order to share our CAV strategies on gun violence and to share the personal pain and destruction gun deaths cause to family members, friends and the community at large. We will continue to partner with CeaseFirePA in advocating for rational and reasonable statewide gun legislation and background checks.”



TIM STEVENS



DIANE POWELL

DIANE POWELL, Black Women for Positive Change

“I commit to work toward changing a culture that leads to violence, one person, one family and one community at a time.”



REVEREND PAUL ABERNATHY

REVEREND PAUL ABERNATHY, Director, FOCUS Pittsburgh

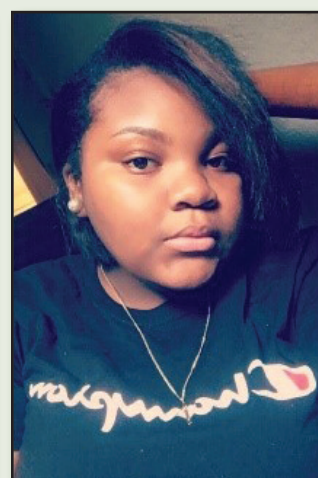
“I commit to continuing to support the Trauma Response Team as a healing response to gun violence in our community.”



KAREN HACKER

KAREN HACKER, director, Allegheny County Health Department

“I commit to educating the public on gun violence as a public health issue and continuing Allegheny County Health Department’s efforts to reduce it.”



PARISHA “SHAE” TAYLOR

PARISHA “SHAE” TAYLOR, youth activist

“I am committed to bringing the peace of God that surpasses all understanding by loving my generation so hard that they have no choice but to love for themselves.”

Take Charge of Your Health Leadership

“The tragic loss of life from gun violence at the Tree of Life in Squirrel Hill recommit the Take Charge of Your Health page in its goal to support and disseminate necessary and innovative approaches to research that directly affects public health practice and policy, such as gun violence and the associated trauma that affects communities across the spectrum.”