

A Blueprint for Change

Ending Cycles of Gender-Based Violence & Homelessness



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Intimate partner homicides increased by 29.2% in the one-year period between 2021 and 2022; the second largest increase in intimate partner fatality rates in New York City in a decade.

Intimate partner homicides increased by 225% in Brooklyn and 57.1% in the Bronx between 2021 and 2022.

Black women accounted for 31.2% of all intimate partner homicides, while accounting for only 13% of the city population.

Hispanic women accounted for 27.3% of intimate partner homicides, while accounting for only 14.6% of the city population.

In New York City between 2010 and 2022, there were 793 intimate partner homicide incidents involving 854 victims; these victims accounted for 16.7% of all homicides (854 of 5,125).

Gender-based violence is not inevitable. With the right resources and solutions in place, we can help survivors and their families find safety and interrupt the cycles that fuel gender-based violence and homelessness.

“Every single life lost, every future derailed as a result of gender-based violence is a policy failure that could have been prevented.”

Nathaniel Fields, Chief Executive Officer at URI

Historically, when difficult budgetary decisions have had to be made, the programs that support survivors, their families and those experiencing homelessness are among the first to be cut.

Last year, providers like URI and its partners in the sector were left reeling after the final New York City Budget including a 2.5% PEG (program to eliminate the gap) that was disguised as an efficiency measure and passed down to providers in the form of significant staff reductions. (This at a time when the sector was universally advocating for a long-overdue cost-of-living increase for its workforce.)

Once again, our sector, along with many others this time, is facing another round of cuts that will be phased in over time. There is no more left to cut. The consequence of another round or two of cuts would be disastrous, threatening service delivery.

One can see clearly the impact of historic disinvestment in victim's services and violence prevention in the increasing domestic violence fatality rates. Instead of measuring the cost of another round of cuts in dollars saved, we should be measuring the number of lives lost or displaced.

It is against this backdrop that we offer the Blueprint for Change, which is designed to provide policymakers with a set of action items that could be implemented today to help end the cycles that drive gender-based violence and homelessness.

Introduction

For more than 40 years, [Urban Resource Institute \(URI\)](#) has worked at the intersection of poverty and racism to end cycles of gender-based violence and homelessness. Today, URI provides temporary housing to more than 2,900 people in one of our purpose-built shelters and transitional housing each night. Our staff strives to provide trauma-informed and client-centered care to more than 40,000 people each year who are experiencing domestic violence and homelessness.

URI believes that a future free from violence and poverty is possible. With the right resources and partners working together to scale solutions along with targeted investments, we can end domestic violence and homelessness. Sadly, our current reality does not reflect possibility.

URI aims to change that with [The Blueprint for Change: Ending Cycles of Gender-Based Violence and Homelessness](#).

Background

Domestic violence continues to be [one of the leading causes of homelessness in New York](#). On any given night, domestic violence accounts for 41 percent of the family population (adults with minor children) entering DHS shelter system.

Domestic violence fatalities have increased by an astonishing 29% in the one-year period between 2021 and 2022, according to the most recent report released by the New York City Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee. This increase is the second largest year over-year increase in domestic violence fatalities in a decade.

[While anyone can experience domestic violence, Black women have the highest rate of domestic violence fatalities followed by Hispanic women.](#)

While domestic violence fatality rates have increased precipitously, New York City has reported a significant decrease in other forms of violent crime. [In 2022, murders decreased by 11.3%](#), to the lowest level since 2019. [As of June 2023, shootings, murders, robberies, burglaries, and hate crimes continue to decline.](#)

Though shootings have decreased overall, **the use of firearms in domestic violence fatality situations increased by 80% between 2017 and 2021.** In 2021, a firearm was used in 37.5% of all domestic violence homicides.

This increase should raise red flags for policy makers and advocates alike and signal a significant need to invest in comprehensive gender-based violence prevention, intervention and trauma-informed supportive services.

Domestic violence accounted for nearly **20% of all homicides** in New York City between 2010 and 2020.

The Blueprint Events

On October 4, 2023, at the very beginning of Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM), URI convened a group of policy makers, experts, advocates and survivors in a solutions-oriented discussion about the individual and systemic obstacles that survivors of domestic violence and their families face as they work to access safety, stability and healing.

The day-long discussion series centered the experiences of survivors and focused on four core areas:

- **Flexible Funding as a Vital Anti-Violence Tool: Coercive Control Embedded in Our Systems**
- **Removing Roadblocks to Safety: Human-Animal Co-living Enhances Shelter Access and Healing**
- **Decriminalizing Domestic Violence: Investing in People Who Cause Harm is Investing in Survivors**
- **Interrupting Intergenerational Violence: Youth-Led Relationship Abuse Prevention Programming**

Each panel discussion concluded with agreement around a shared set of recommendations. By no means an exhaustive list, URI believes that if New York were to finance and implement these solutions today, we could have a measurable impact on the lives of survivors and their families and finally drive down domestic violence and fatality rates.



“ It’s an honor and a pleasure to host some of the best minds who are committed to expanding the framework of safe spaces for survivors. The often overlapping crises of gender-based violence and homelessness are solvable with the right policies and investments in place. ”

Nathaniel Fields, Chief Executive Officer at URI

Key Findings

On the following pages, you will find a summary of the key findings from each panel discussion followed by recommendations for implementation.

Flexible Funding as a Vital Anti-Violence Tool: Coercive Control Embedded in Our Systems

Key Finding

Economic abuse is universal. Nearly all survivors of domestic violence experience economic abuse, which may take many forms, yet few resources exist to support survivors of economic abuse.

Recommendation: Pass Bill A.1309-A/S.2278, which would create a legal mechanism for survivors of economic abuse to discharge a debt that was coerced in the context of abuse.

Key Finding

Survivors report economic abuse as among the primary reasons that they stay in or return to a dangerous/abusive situation.

Recommendation: Expand funding for and access to workforce development and economic empowerment programming designed to support survivors and their families as they work to achieve financial wellness and independence.

Recommendation: Create and finance low-barrier direct cash assistance programs to support survivors and their families access safety and healing. These programs should be available to all families, regardless of immigration status.

Key Finding

Historical attitudes about survivors result in them being denied benefits because they are unable to meet unreasonable and unrealistic eligibility requirements to qualify for assistance from municipal support programs.

Recommendation: Remove unnecessary barriers to access support, such as requirements that survivors file a police report; file for and use support within a specified and unreasonably short period of time; place needless restrictions on what funds may be used to purchase; limit support to survivors without criminal records, to name a few.

Key Finding

Late payment of contracts and reimbursement for services provided to survivors by advocacy and temporary housing organizations delays aid and places these organizations at grave financial risk.

Recommendation: Ensure timely and full payment of contracts to providers within 90 days of execution.

Key Findings

Removing Roadblocks to Safety: Human-Animal Co-living Enhances Shelter Access and Healing

Key Finding

50% of survivors of domestic violence report that they would not leave an abusive situation if they had to leave their pet behind. URI PALS is the first NYC provider and remains one of only few temporary housing providers that allows survivors of domestic violence and their families to co-live in shelter with their pets. More providers would likely follow suit with the right resources in place.

Recommendation: Provide resources, technical assistance and other forms of support to temporary housing providers empowering them to easily create more opportunities for people and pet co-living.

Recommendation: [Implement the policy solutions contained within URI's Pawprint for Action](#), that will help pave the way for additional opportunities for people and pet co-living in transitional housing for survivors of domestic violence and families experiencing homelessness.

Key Finding

Pets are part of the family and have a profound and positive impact on healing from trauma, regardless of the cause. Separating families as a condition of entry into shelter is damaging to both people and pets. Shelters for families experiencing homelessness do not allow people and pet co-living in shelter, unless the pet is a service or emotional support animal.

Recommendation: Expand opportunities for people and pet co-living in temporary housing for survivors of domestic violence and families experiencing homelessness.



Key Findings

Decriminalizing Domestic Violence: Investing in People Who Cause Harm is Investing in Survivors

Key Finding

Many people who have caused harm experienced significant childhood or other forms of trauma. Research shows that some people with unresolved trauma may be more likely to engage in unhealthy or violent behaviors as a result.

Recommendation: Invest resources in accountability programming that provides people who have caused harm with access to trauma-informed care, while requiring them to take responsibility for the harm they have caused.



Key Finding

With the right services and supports in place, all people are capable of change. Conversely, when basic needs – such as access to housing, stable employment, substance use and mental health interventions to name a few – are lacking, individuals will struggle to change their behavior.

Recommendation: Develop and implement a statewide trauma-informed accountability program curriculum for people who cause harm to ensure quality, uniformity and scalability.

Recommendation: Implement a comprehensive needs assessment and referral program ensuring strong linkages to culturally responsive and community-based service providers for wrap around supports for people who have caused harm.

Key Findings

Interrupting Intergenerational Violence: Youth-Led Relationship Abuse Prevention Programming

Key Finding

Young people who are exposed to violence—either as a witness or victim—are at a higher risk of experiencing or perpetrating future violence. Violent behavior begins as early as age 12.

Recommendation: Invest in school- and community-based youth violence prevention and healthy relationship programming to provide youth with tools to build healthy, violence-free relationships.

Recommendation: Make youth violence prevention programming available to youth in family shelter who have likely already been exposed to violence at home or in their communities.



Conclusion & Next Steps

While there is no on single remedy that will alone end domestic violence and homelessness, URI and its partners believe that by implementing the comprehensive series of recommendations outlined above, which center the experience of survivors and their families and make significant investments in violence prevention and intervention, we will have a significant positive impact on the lives of survivors, their families and their communities and we can finally begin turning the tide on domestic violence.

There is no excuse for an increase in domestic violence fatalities when we have at our fingertips the tools necessary to end domestic violence and homelessness. The days of passive fatality tracking and reporting are over.

It is time for action.

URI will work with survivors, its allies and partners in government to implement the policies outlined above and secure the funding necessary to end cycles of domestic violence and homelessness. We hope you will join us.

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