



## INCREASING CANADIAN INVESTMENT IN CRIME PREVENTION IN MUNICIPALITIES

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to highlight the need for Canada to increase permanent investment in crime prevention in municipalities.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

Canada's national crime prevention strategy needs to recognize and permanently invest in the vital role that municipalities play in crime prevention.

### CURRENT SITUATION

Despite an overall decrease in crime, the total harm to Canadians from crime is an estimated \$55 billion per year. Research suggests that investing the equivalent of 10% of the \$22 billion currently spent on policing, courts and corrections in effective crime prevention can reduce crime by a further 50%.

Municipalities tend to be most impacted by crime. Pressing issues affecting municipalities include:

- Street crime and gang related shootings;
- Intimate partner and sexual violence, particularly affecting women;
- Disproportionately high number of Indigenous persons who are victimized;
- Drug abuse, overdoses, and trafficking; and
- Extremist violence and radicalization.

Rising expenditures on policing and overuse of incarceration does not reduce common crime or these pressing issues (e.g., Council of Canadian Academies, 2014). Municipalities pay 60% of policing costs, which have been rising at more than 40% over inflation. According to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2016) "unsustainable growth in policing and public safety costs for municipalities, [are] often crowding out other essential services such as early intervention and crime prevention programs."

### BACKGROUND

Today we have compelling evidence that, by investing more in the services that address the causes, crime can be prevented. More and more national and international organizations (e.g., US Department of Justice, World Health Organization) are providing this evidence. Therefore, the conclusion that tackling the risk factors that cause crime is the most effective and cost-effective way to reduce crime is well substantiated. Less crime means less harm to citizens and less need for expensive reactive services.

Intergovernmental agencies (e.g., UNODC, WHO, UN Habitat) and Canadian organizations (e.g., Ontario, Saskatchewan, Council of Canadian Academies) are calling for multi-sectoral crime prevention strategies where police are just one sector and the focus is on tackling risk factors at multiple levels (e.g., youth exclusion, parenting, income disparities) to prevent crime. An accumulation of parliamentary, provincial, and municipal taskforces suggest that municipalities are well positioned to direct services to where they are most needed. However, in order to successfully implement evidence-based programs, Canada's municipalities require financial and other support from other orders of government.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

There are a number of important developments to be taken into consideration:

1. The Safer Cities Programme of UN Habitat has identified the following:
  - Violence in cities continuously causes significant harm to people.
  - Effective implementation of violence prevention will achieve several targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's 11, 3, 5 and 16).
  - Municipalities are well positioned to focus on crime prevention through social development but other orders of government do not yet recognize this potential with funding and support.
2. The Mandate Letter to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General includes:
  - Informed by performance measurement, evidence, and feedback from Canadians ... direct our resources to ... (have) the greatest, positive impact on the lives of Canadians.
  - Conduct a review of the changes in our criminal justice system ... to ensure that we are increasing the safety of our communities, getting value for money ...
  - Increase use of restorative justice processes and other initiatives to reduce the rate of incarceration amongst Indigenous Canadians ....
3. Significant evidence has been accumulated that:
  - Crime prevention upstream is the most effective and cost-effective way to reduce crime.
  - Municipalities have significantly reduced violence using well planned multi-sectoral strategies.
  - Contrary to most political opinions, polls consistently show that the Canadian public prefers investments in education and prevention rather than police, the justice system and prisons.

## CANADIAN MUNICIPAL NETWORK ON CRIME PREVENTION (CMNCP)

CMNCP is a community of practice to build capacity and mobilize Canadian municipalities to prevent and reduce crime and foster community safety. It currently involves 17 municipalities. From 2015 to 2018 CMNCP benefits from financial support and collaboration from Public Safety Canada's National Crime Prevention Strategy to *Build Municipal Capacity to Harness Evidence to Prevent Crime*. The project facilitates exchanges and national and regional meetings between cities, crime prevention, and training. CMNCP's strategies and trainings are informed and enhanced by the crime prevention expertise of its partners from the University of Ottawa led by Irvin Waller.

## RECOMMENDATION

Canada's federal, provincial, and territorial governments should recognize the vital role of Canadian municipalities within a national crime strategy and offer a permanent, sustained, and flexible matched funding program (similar to the Homelessness Partnering Strategy) for municipalities to resource a) the collaborative community safety planning and implementation processes that guide strategic investment in prevention as well as b) significant investment in effective crime prevention programs such as those enhancing positive futures for young vulnerable Canadians inspired by the accumulated evidence.

For more information, please contact:

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Together for Safer Canadian Cities

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