

Public Health is a Strategy for Abolition

Fighting for Healthy and Safe Communities

Policing Harms Public Health: the APHA Statement

While public safety is essential for public health, as a society we have delegated this important function almost exclusively to law enforcement. Evidence of continued law enforcement violence shows that U.S. policing has failed to equitably deliver safety, placing an inequitable burden of mental and physical harm on socially and economically marginalized populations [134].

from "Addressing Law Enforcement Violence as a Public Health Issue," 2018 American Public Health Association policy statement

Policing is a public health issue. After three years of organizing, a national public health coalition led the 25,000-member strong American Public Health Association (APHA) in November to pass a policy statement stating that the violence of policing is a public health issue. The policy advocates for decriminalization measures, investment in public health resources to address public health and social concerns, and alternatives to policing. The implications of the statement's passing are wide-reaching; not only are APHA policy statements a mandate to the association's lobbying bodies to align their work with the statement's recommendations, the passage by this large, diverse body of public health workers reflects a clear commitment to a fundamental shift in the practice of public health work away from reformist measures and towards structural, root-level changes to the harms policing (and, by extension, prisons) cause to the health of our communities.

This national collective included health workers, educators, and anti-policing organizers from Critical Resistance (CR) and the Public Health Justice Collective (PHJC). We are bringing this statement back into movements fighting to eliminate the violence of policing and build up community health. The policy outlines concrete Action Steps to reduce the violence of policing. In your work, you can put these to use in your planning or in setting your strategic demands of institutions and officials by framing ideas through them: "The APHA recommends [action step] to reduce the negative public health impacts of policing, therefore we must..." This pamphlet shares ideas about the action steps, organizing talking points, and a worksheet for implementing the APHA statement where you are. Check out and share media coverage on the Ending Police Violence website (see sidebar)! Bring this worksheet to your community groups and organizations to learn about this win and to put it to use in your campaigns!

Toward liberation!

**Critical Resistance Oakland
and the Public Health Justice Collective**



Articles and other resources

- * Read the statement in full and access media from *Filter Mag*, *Rewire*, *The Guardian*, and others: endingpoliceviolence.com
- * See Critical Resistance's summary of the statement and policy victory, on Black Agenda Report: blackagendareport.com/national-abolitionist-victory-public-health
- * Check out Oakland Power Projects, an alternatives to policing project of CR Oakland, including a Know Your Options health initiative: OaklandPowerProjects.org

Contact us!

Critical Resistance

criticalresistance.org * 510-444-0484
croakland@criticalresistance.org

Public Health Justice Collective

[facebook.com/groups/
publichealthjusticecollective/](https://facebook.com/groups/publichealthjusticecollective/)

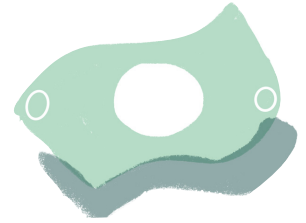
APHA Policy Statement team

endingpoliceviolence.com/contact-us/

Recommended Action Steps

Divest

- * Redistribute law enforcement funding to social services and structures to address social inequity ("meet human need" through, for example, jobs, housing, transportation, education, healthcare, youth programs).
- * Reverse militarization of local, tribal, regional and federal law enforcement; disuse military equipment, discontinue military equipment acquisitions and SWAT teams and deployments.



Decriminalize

- * Decriminalize activities "designed to control marginalized people, including, but not limited to substance use and possession, sex work, loitering, sleeping in public, minor traffic violations (e.g. expired registrations, jaywalking, not signaling a lane change, broken taillights), and targeting undocumented immigrants; and to also ensure that decriminalized offenses are removed from the purview of law enforcement."
- * Review and eliminate policies that lead to disproportionate violence against specific communities (e.g. stop and frisk).



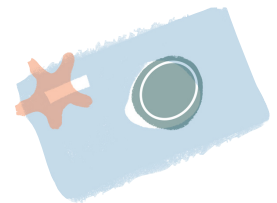
Invest

- * Prioritize programs that do not criminalize people, such as transformative justice, restorative justice, violence and mental health intervention, prevention and support programming and policies.



End law enforcement impunity, demand transparency

- * Prioritize documentation, data reporting and collecting information by public health bodies and institutions about the violence of law enforcement.
- * End laws shielding law enforcement from investigation and public information disclosure or access. Demand full public disclosure of police violence investigations through a public database, for example.



Organize! Strategies and Tactics Starter List

What follows is a starter list of strategies and tactics to bring the power of this policy statement to bear in your campaigns. Put this statement to use! You can...

- * Advocate at decision-maker meetings. "The American Public Health Association has identified law enforcement as a public health issue... It recommends that instead of policing approaches which exacerbate systemic harms, we/you must..."
- * Use it to get a special health hearing on your community concern or campaign topic. Ask /recommend/ demand that a statement author be invited to provide expert testimony. (Go to www.endingpoliceviolence.com/contact-us to contact)
- * Refer to the policy statement in media work on your campaign or issue. Quote the text, supporting research, and recommendations, and name it as a source of national expertise in public health to be followed.
- * Use it to outreach to health workers, public health workers or figures, social service folks, groups and institutions to show that this is our shared issue. Share recent victories that demonstrate these overlaps, and invite them to join the local, regional, national movement work.



Organizer Talking Points

Law enforcement has a negative public health impact, therefore we must...

Decriminalize, divest, and dismantle.

Organizer talking point:

The best way to reduce the violence of policing is to limit and eliminate people's contact with law enforcement. This can look like: reducing funding to law enforcement and creating and investing in community-led programs and practices that address both harm and other concerns – like disaster response, for example; ending programs and policies that target and criminalize people, including stop and frisk, and creating buffers that limit people's contact with policing, such as direct phone numbers to ambulance services, removing cops from schools and service agencies, and local disaster response teams and trainings. These steps aim to divest from law enforcement, shifting the reliance on police to address social, economic, and interpersonal issues and focusing on dismantling that system and building other options.

Create grassroots knowledge – gather information.

Organizer talking point:

While there is a growing body of data documenting the harms of police violence and we know what we need to demand and vision for abolition, it is powerful for us to be experts on our own conditions. Participatory community research can create capacity for us to name the problems, and frame the questions, while organizing together for improved health and self-determination over resources and state power.

Shift resources away from policing and toward supporting public health.

Organizer talking point:

Government bodies cannot prioritize both policing and health at the same time. Not only are they in direct conflict with each other, as this statement demonstrates, history and current conditions also prove that states do not fund health and life-affirming programming at the same scale as policing and militarization. Governments and institutions often argue that they can't address public health issues or try non-police approaches until law enforcement is "securely" funded and established. Fight back, draw on the APHA statement to argue for the benefits of working with public health organizations to achieve real public safety. We can: 1) work with local public health departments instead of law enforcement; 2) reduce funding for policing and redirect it to public health and non-police social services; and 3) invest in health programs and root-level shifts in social conditions that shape health.

Organize with health practitioners, teachers, students, and families to publicize effects of police in schools on students.

Organizer talking point:

Organizing itself increases health and wellbeing by connecting people to each other, building collective community power to make self-determined and necessary changes in social conditions. Young people and their loved ones are harmed by the presence of policing in schools and the often-simultaneous defunding of social workers, counselors, art programs, health resources, and additional teachers and youth leadership roles. Police contact is traumatizing for all involved. To stop it we can: 1) stand up with youth and their families' fight against youth criminalization in schools; 2) fight back against school push-out and school-to-prison youth criminalization; 3) fight for robust funding of public education without ties to law enforcement.

Analyze, Strategize, Organize!

1. In my everyday life, community or organizing campaigns (refer to a campaign or project, or a need your community faces), police have a presence in these ways...

2. In these places, the harms or violence law enforcement causes are...

draw or write your response

draw or write your response

3. We can strategize and organize with the APHA Action Steps to end this harm with these solutions...

APHA interventions or Action Step (list specifically)

Our community action solution would then be...

For example, if you've identified as SWAT raids and "anti-gang" policing a problem, the APHA statement argues that policies that lead to disproportionate violence against specific communities cause harm. In your area, gang injunctions and gang databases represent these policies.

End gang injunctions and gang affiliation profiling, policing, surveilling and data collecting by police.

4. We can put the statement to use to strengthen our project, campaign, or to meet our community needs and fight for our issues' solutions by...

(Refer to the **Organize! Strategies and Tactics Starter list** and apply / integrate them into your context or campaign.)

draw or write your response

