



# ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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## Community Advisory Board Awards \$310,000 in Funding to Combat Violence

**PITTSBURGH** – The Allegheny County Health Department today announced that its Violence Prevention Community Advisory Board has awarded \$310,000 in funding to FOCUS Pittsburgh and the University of Pittsburgh. The two organizations were selected from five applicants for street outreach and trauma response in regions of the county which have been disproportionately impacted by gun violence.

A two-year grant of \$150,000 was awarded to FOCUS Pittsburgh. Managed by Reverend Paul T. Abernathy, the organization will approach violence through a trauma response team that will be deployed to a community within 24 hours of a violent gun occurrence. The team will be available for the affected persons as well as to the surrounding community members to help build relationships, address acute and immediate needs and to create a plan focused on health and well-being, opportunity making, placemaking and engaging influencers.

“Homicide and gun violence are clear and recognized issues for Allegheny County where we experienced nearly double the national rate for homicides in 2015. This cannot continue,” said Josiah Gilliam, member of the Community Advisory Board. “The public health approach demonstrated by Allegheny County’s Violence Prevention Advisory Group squarely and appropriately frames these issues so that residents, stakeholders, and leadership can draw from evidence-based approaches to take concrete actions. This cross-sector approach represents another unique opportunity for the Pittsburgh region to lead by example and work towards a better future for our communities.”

A two-year grant of \$160,000 was awarded to the University of Pittsburgh to support a Street Outreach Team to prevent gun violence. Under the direction of Dr. Steven Albert in the Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences, two full-time street outreach interventionists will work with key at-risk populations in the communities of Penn Hills, Wilksburg, Duquesne, McKeesport, Braddock and Rankin. The team members will also interface with the City of Pittsburgh’s Group Violence Intervention/Family Life Corporation effort. This approach has staff following hospitalized firearm assault injured patients to determine if they have human services needs and can help make referrals so that individuals receive services once they return to the community. The staff will also work closely with other Violence Prevention Initiative members on social media monitoring, tracking of arrests, defusing imminent violence by mediating disputes, and meeting with local organizations to seek input.

“It’s important that Pittsburgh and surrounding communities in Allegheny County act now by combining our available resources to prevent violence,” said Cecelia Ware, member of the Community Advisory Board. “We need to build and restore relationships among youth, peers and authority figures so that our children can feel safe and thrive in this community.”

The Community Advisory Board has been supporting the work of the Allegheny County Health Department to help address gun violence as a public health issue. The public health approach focuses on populations and communities rather than individuals, and on prevention rather than intervention. It takes a system approach and necessitates engagement across a broad group of stakeholders. In essence, such an approach assumes that street violence is similar to an infectious disease outbreak and that it can be prevented if the contributing risk factors are understood and addressed. This approach then allows for intervention with culturally-appropriate, evidence-based prevention strategies.

“Gun violence and its aftermath is a public health problem disproportionately impacting some of our communities and it requires a community approach to solve,” said Dr. Karen Hacker, Director of the Allegheny County Health Department. “We are excited to make this announcement to provide additional and critical services to our communities in need.”

Under the Health Department’s Office of Violence Prevention, a Community Advisory Board was created to assist the department in choosing public health approaches to violence, data-driven strategies and collaborations which will best serve residents within communities with high rates of violence. The board, made up of 32 stakeholders from government, non-profit, neighborhood and faith-based organizations, has provided guidance, monitored data and collaborated with other stakeholders. One of its first charges was to review applications for funding and make recommendations based on that review. The board, which meets monthly, is currently reviewing applications to support local youth organizations to adopt violence prevention strategies in their current work.

For more information on the Health Department’s Office of Violence Prevention, visit <http://www.achd.net/commhealth/index.html> or call 412-247-7969.

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