

Violence as a Public Health Challenge – Position Statement

Introduction and Background

Caring for Colorado Foundation has not had explicit funding strategies on violence prevention and intervention but recognizes the significant impact of violence on the health of children, youth and families. As we advance our vision and purpose and deepen our focus on health equity, we seek to broaden our understanding of how violence is connected to the health and well-being of children and families and how our investments can align with and amplify efforts to address this issue.

Violence is caused by complex and interrelated individual, community and societal factors. Violence can be self-inflicted or committed against individuals and communities, and it can be physical, emotional, sexual and/or psychological. There are multiple forms of violence, including suicide, intimate partner violence, bullying and harassment, child abuse, sexual abuse and assault, trafficking and more. The ripple effects of violence are significant – violence harms those directly killed or injured, as well as their family members, friends, neighbors and community members. Many perpetrators of violence have been victims of violence themselves.

Alignment with Caring for Colorado Foundation’s Purpose, Values and/or Focus Areas

Caring for Colorado’s vision is that Colorado’s children and families are happy, healthy and thriving. Our purpose is to create equity in health, well-being and opportunity for Colorado’s children and families.

Violence impacts all individuals in society, and we are especially concerned about how it affects children and families and creates barriers to health and well-being. Violence can interrupt the healthy development of children and adolescents, impair parents’ and caregivers’ ability to care safely and adequately for their children, and erodes community cohesion and stability. It is important to acknowledge the historical and social context of violence for specific populations. Structural racism, discrimination and bias and underinvestment in critical community supports have created conditions where certain groups and communities disproportionately experience violence, including but not limited to people of color, LGBTQ individuals, women and children. An understanding of how violence impacts children, youth and families is important for ensuring that policies and programs can successfully address barriers to health and create opportunities for well-being for children and families.

Caring for Colorado Foundation’s Position

- We recognize violence as a public health issue and understand violent behavior as arising from contextual, biological, environmental, systemic and social stressors.
- We believe that children, youth, families, and communities deserve to live free of violence and we support policies and practices that promote health and safety.
- We believe violence is preventable and requires comprehensive population- and community-level interventions. We support a range of approaches to violence prevention and intervention, including improving economic opportunity in communities, supporting positive community connection and relationships, reducing access to and unsafe use of firearms and other weapons,

and improving access to mental health and substance use treatment resources. All efforts must include the voices and perspectives of individuals and communities disproportionately impacted by violence.

- Mental illness is often invoked as a cause of violence, a frame that we believe increases stigma and discrimination against people with mental health conditions. We do not adhere to the narrative that mental illness causes violence; people with and without mental illness alike engage in violent behaviors for complex reasons. Individuals with mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators of violence.

Potential Use of this Statement

Caring for Colorado supports policies and programs to prevent and address violence in communities across Colorado. The foundation will recognize this position on violence as a public health issue in public comments and factor this position into decisions to join partnerships and/or collective actions, when weighing in on public policy, when making investment decisions and when developing strategies.

References

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