Policies and Initiatives to Prevent the Recurrence of Intimate Partner Violence

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Executive Summary

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has devastating cumulative impacts on individuals and communities in California. In a recently published policy report entitled “State Innovation to Prevent the Recurrence of Intimate Partner Violence,” Cal-IHEA examined how other states implement IPV prevention and intervention strategies through public health-oriented approaches to batterer interventions programs, the current primary intervention for those who cause harm. In this evidence briefing, academic, policy, and advocacy stakeholders discussed the report’s six policy recommendations and California’s path towards re-imagining the role of batterer interventions programs and promoting restorative justice as part of IPV prevention efforts. The recommendations include:

1. Invest in mitigating structural risk factors for partner violence.
2. Increase pathways for early intervention.
3. Establish an agency within the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) that is responsible for collaborating with stakeholders and overseeing IPV prevention and intervention efforts.
4. Initiate dedicated state funding for community-based organizations (CBOs) to implement intervention programs and provide wraparound support.
5. Reimagine intervention programs to be restorative and culturally-specific.
6. Collect and evaluate program outcome measures.

Speakers included Marc Philpart, Principal Coordinator for the Alliance for Boys and Men of Color and Managing Director at PolicyLink; Alicia Virani, JD, Director of the Criminal Justice Program at UCLA School of Law; Skipp Townsend, founder and Executive Director of 2nd Call; and Krista Colon, Public Policy Director at the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence. Special remarks were provided by California State Senator Sydney Kamlager (District 30) and California State Assemblymember Ash Kalra (District 17). This event was co-sponsored by the Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, with support from the Blue Shield of California Foundation.
California State Senator Sydney Kamlager  
Senate District 30

Senator Kamlager opened the evidence briefing with a powerful call to action, emphasizing the opportunity California has to promote restorative justice, uplift survivors, and break generational cycles of violence by engaging both those who cause and experience harm in healing. The Senator discussed how AB 118 (the CRISIS act) will establish an evidence-based pilot program that allows cities or counties to shift emergency response calls from law enforcement to community-based organizations, which shows that the state is interested in investing in solutions outside of law enforcement. She also discussed the importance of culturally-specific programming, acknowledging that there may be cultural and community-based differences in how programs address healthy masculinity and relationships.

“We know that in the majority of instances, with intimate partner violence, [calling the police] causes additional fracturing and stress on relationships, on families, and on folks who are parenting or who are guardians. We know that we have a judicial and legal system that doesn’t create sustained safety for survivors... We know that we have institutionalized a system that exacerbates racial inequities and perpetuates violence. We also know that we have community-based organizations, foundations, think tanks, and advocacy organizations across this state that are actually dedicated to working through these issues and bringing fairness and restorative justice to these issues. So why not involve them more deeply into the solutions?"

California State Assemblymember Ash Kalra  
Assembly District 17

Assembly member Kalra explained how California’s current method of addressing IPV through the criminal legal system does not provide safety or healing for victims, nor does it address the multigenerational trauma underlying the violence, in effect allowing the cycle of violence to continue. As a former public defender, he had many clients who had experienced violence as children, resulting in suppressed trauma and contributing to the violence they inflicted on others. The response (incarceration) led to more trauma, for both the client and future generations. Instead of a punitive approach, he said, a public health approach rooted in healing can help to reduce and ultimately end violence. Assembly member Kalra noted that this is still a relatively novel idea for policymakers, who have long relied on systems of incarceration and punishment. The Assembly member advocated for policy recommendations that align with our recommendations as the path forward, specifically reimagining intervention programs to be restorative and culturally-specific and collecting and evaluating program outcome measures.
“Our current system needs bold and systemic intervention to make a meaningful difference. Although these issues may be preventable, and reports such as [the Cal-IHEA report] provide the roadmap, the problem is the politics. These aren’t easy issues because they have such a stigma attached to them... There is a rightful anger associated with domestic violence, but the problem is that anger doesn’t lead to solutions that end the violence, nor does it lead to ending the trauma.”

Marc Philpart
Managing Director, Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, PolicyLink

Mr. Philpart began with an overview of ABMoC, explaining how the Network shifted to focus on IPV after understanding that violence seen on the streets was an “outgrowth of their experiences at home.” He framed the conversation with background information on California’s batterer intervention programs and provided an overview of the methodology and key recommendations from our recently published report.

“A key thread within conversations [with gender justice advocates, survivors, and those who have caused harm] was that the current approach of relying on the punishment system as the singular response to partner violence wasn’t creating safety. It was reinforcing and normalizing patriarchal violence.”

Skipp Townsend
Founder and Executive Director, 2nd Call

Mr. Townsend explained how currently siloed systems result in a “triangle pull” from agencies that send conflicting messages to survivors and families, causing chaos and confusion for the survivor, perpetrator, and children or other family members. He encouraged intervention programs to provide wraparound services that support the family as a whole, enable participants to address childhood traumas, and treat people who cause harm as humans before ‘case numbers’; based on his experience working closely with those who have caused harm, these are the key facilitators to healing-centered intervention programs and family reunification.

“I want to see what they're running from. What are some of the issues that went on in childhood? Because the same thing that makes you laugh eventually makes you cry. I want them to go back and understand some of the things that they suffered through in childhood, some of the things that they call the childhood norms, which were actually dysfunctional. If they continuously go through dysfunction, it becomes normal to them, and they don't realize [their childhood experiences] are unhealthy.... We have to do
everything possible to get these families to be healthy, or else we have another generation that's coming right behind them that will continue that same cycle.”

Alicia Virani, JD  
Director, Criminal Justice Program, UCLA School of Law

Dr. Virani discussed her research on the financial implications of Los Angeles County’s batterer intervention programs. She found that many programs either did not accept fee waivers, did not offer sliding payment scales, or required a registration fee, all of which posed significant challenges to participants in fulfilling court-mandated programs. As a former public defender, she witnessed firsthand how many clients returned to court due to a financial barrier that prevented them from attending batterer interventions programs, leading to a cycle of reincarceration.

“It is illegal to incarcerate somebody because they cannot afford something that the court has ordered them to do that they have no choice but to do. But nonetheless, it happens every single day.”

Krista Colon  
Public Policy Director, California Partnership to End Domestic Violence

Ms. Colon closed the briefing by emphasizing the value of state investments in primary prevention strategies, such as engaging youth in establishing healthy relationship behaviors, helping young people understand how to navigate conflict in their relationships, promoting healthy communication, and shifting traditional gender norms. In tandem with primary prevention, she highlighted the importance of focusing on components along the spectrum of prevention, including mitigating societal risk factors, increasing protective factors, and strengthening batterer intervention programs.

“I want to reinforce how important and essential batterer intervention programs are within the spectrum of prevention. There is incredible power in helping and working with someone who has committed harm to be able to change their behaviors, and to change how they approach relationships, so that they no longer commit future harm, both in terms of their ongoing connection and relationship to that initial survivor, but also in future intimate partner relationships.”