



Overview The Prison Violence Intervention (PVI) aims to enhance safety and security in prisons for both staff and inmates, and create the conditions necessary for treatment, rehabilitation, and effective reentry. PVI relies on direct communication with inmates through call-ins, as well as briefings during intake and documents distributed to cells, to deliver an antiviolence message from community members, information about consequences for further violence, and an offer of help for those who want it.

Adapting to the prison context

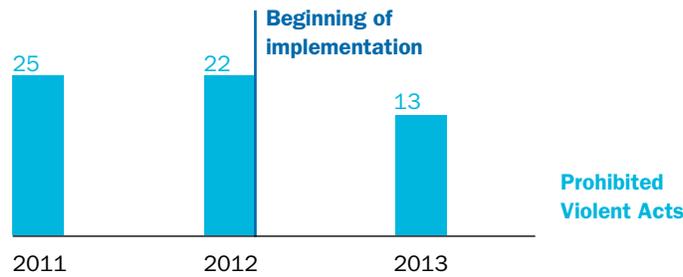
Prison violence is a serious problem that threatens the physical and emotional well-being of prisoners and corrections officers, threatens the rehabilitative mission of correctional facilities, and adds significant antagonism to a dynamic already characterized by fear and distrust.¹ Reducing violence in prisons is essential to improving quality of life, mental and physical safety, and post-incarceration prospects.^{2,3}

The PVI strategy maps the National Network’s basic approach of direct communication of community standards, support and outreach, and prior notification of consequences onto the prison setting. Working in partnership with the Washington State Department of Corrections (Washington DOC), the National Network designed the intervention to identify the institution’s key players, identify group “cliques” that drive violence, and target serious offenses the prison staff identified as most harmful. In call-in meetings, prison staff informs inmates that further violence by any member of a group will result in swift, certain consequences for its members—things meaningful to inmates, like limits on telephone privileges, personal radio use, television access, or time in the yard. The prison also invites family, influential community members, and ex-offenders to speak to inmates, sharing their experiences with the damage caused by prison conditions in which men become gang involved, commit new offenses while inside, fail to take advantage of programs, and become locked in a cycle of incarceration. Finally, prison staff explains the help they can offer—opportunities like substance abuse counseling and GED and vocational classes aimed at making good use of their time and helping them come out prepared.



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Prohibited Violent Acts at the Washington State Penitentiary, 2011–2013



Data courtesy of the Washington State Department of Corrections.

Impact The National Network worked with Washington DOC to pilot the implementation of PVI in the Washington State Penitentiary’s West Complex in 2012.

Washington DOC identified three offenses that would trigger a group enforcement action:

- ▶ **1)** staff assault by an inmate
- ▶ **2)** assault with a weapon
- ▶ **3)** assaults involving three or more inmates

The Washington DOC chose these offenses because they constitute the most powerful threats to the safety of inmates and corrections staff. Two call-in sessions were held with about 40 inmates attending each. Staff and community partners explained the enhanced response and interacted with inmates after a formal presentation to answer questions. Staff also distributed notification documents throughout the facility to ensure that inmates would know what to expect should they be housed at the West Complex.

Initial reports suggest that PVI has resulted in significant decreases in violence against staff and other inmates. While overall violence has remained consistent, prohibited violent acts—aggravated staff assaults, fights and assaults with weapons, and multi-offender fights—dropped by nearly 50 percent.⁴

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The National Network for Safe Communities supports cities advancing proven strategies to reduce violence, minimize arrest and incarceration, and strengthen relationships between law enforcement and distressed communities.

¹ Ginder, S., & Noonan, M. (2014, October). Mortality in Local Jails and State Prisons, 2000-2012 – Statistical Tables. *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, NCJ 247448.
² Carson, E., & Sabol, W. (2012, December). Prisoners in 2011. *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, NCJ 239808.
³ Anderson, C., et al. (2010). The Cycle of Violence Behind Bars: Traumatization and Institutional Misconduct Among Juvenile Delinquents in Confinement. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 8(2), 107-121.
⁴ Warner, B., Pacholke, D., & Kujath, C. (2014). Operation Place Safety: First Year in Review. Washington Department of Corrections, Unpublished Report.