



**National Network  
For Safe Communities  
at JOHN JAY COLLEGE**

# **ALLEGHENY COUNTY IPVI: EVOLUTION AND INNOVATION**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC) at John Jay College is partnering with Allegheny County, Pennsylvania to address Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). NNSC and the County have implemented a unique iteration of NNSC's Intimate Partner Violence Intervention (IPVI) to apply to the County's particular local circumstances. Together, they developed the high-risk review team, an effort that brings together multiple public agencies to collaborate on addressing the highest-risk cases for IPV. This document tells the story of the initiative and how its evolution creates room for further innovations. The information is derived from public and County administrative data, as well as interviews<sup>1</sup> with initiative partners including the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police, Allegheny County Pretrial Services, Allegheny County Adult Probation, Allegheny County District Attorney's Office and the Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Intimate partner violence is one of society's most pernicious problems. Defined as "abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic relationship," IPV includes physical and sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression.<sup>2</sup> It is not exclusive to any particular gender as either the person causing IPV harm or victim survivor. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control

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<sup>1</sup> Interview quotes have been edited for length and clarity

<sup>2</sup> "About Intimate Partner Violence." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed April 11, 2025.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/intimate-partner-violence/about/index.html>.

and Prevention (CDC), over 40% of women have experienced some form of IPV, as well as more than a quarter of men.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, IPV can also be deadly: from 2018-2021, nearly 4,000 women in the United States were killed by an intimate partner.<sup>4</sup>

*Intimate partner violence is a widespread issue – on average, 92 domestic violence-related 9-1-1 calls were made every day in Allegheny County in 2023, totaling 33,728 calls that year. Addressing this crisis is challenging because it involves many different agencies and actors. However, thanks to research and other communities tackling this issue, and support from the National Network for Safe Communities, we know what works to prevent serious violence. The real question is: do we have the commitment and coordination to make it happen?*

*We are showing that we do. With NNSC helping us focus our efforts, we feel hope that the system is in control and we can bend outcomes. From victim advocates to detectives to district attorneys, we are working together to hold perpetrators accountable and keep victims safe.*

- ERIN DALTON  
DIRECTOR, ALLEGHENY COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Allegheny County, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, knows the pain of IPV. It is one of the common forms of violence across the County.<sup>5</sup> One estimate supposes that there are 15,000-20,000 adults experiencing IPV every year.<sup>6</sup> According to data from the County, domestic violence (DV) calls for service, inclusive of IPV, reached a six-year peak last year; calls rose from 31,400 in 2018 to 34,323 in 2024.<sup>7</sup> There were almost 2,500 new criminal filings for IPV in the last year.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the problem of IPV itself, dedicated public servants face challenges in trying to address it. Distinguishing IPV-specific incidents from the broader category of DV can be very nuanced, and IPV cases are often very complicated, in which there are no simple resolutions. Traditional approaches of arrest, prosecution, and incarceration could have adverse effects on the victim survivor. Compounding these challenges is the reality that there are a multitude of system actors involved with the

<sup>3</sup> "About Intimate Partner Violence." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed April 11, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/intimate-partner-violence/about/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> "Notes from the Field: Intimate Partner Homicide among Women - United States, 2018–2021." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, August 29, 2024. [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7334a4.htm#T1\\_down](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7334a4.htm#T1_down).

<sup>5</sup> Sybolt, Colleen. Interview with Colleen Sybolt. February 3, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Advancing a Coordinated Response to Intimate Partner Violence | Urban Institute. Accessed April 11, 2025. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/advancing-coordinated-response-intimate-partner-violence>.

<sup>7</sup> Bialik, Logan. "IPV Trends in Allegheny County." PowerPoint presentation, February 25, 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Alleghenycounty. Accessed May 8, 2025. <https://analytics.alleghenycounty.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/24-ACDHS-14-IPV-Year2.pdf>.

person causing IPV harm and survivors - including police, prosecutors, probation, courts, and victim services. There are over 100 law enforcement agencies throughout the County along with separate jurisdictions between the County and Pittsburgh, which is the second-largest city in the state. All of these various public agencies are not inherently designed to work together as one team. On the contrary, each system actor usually fulfills - and is limited to - a specific role in the process of addressing an IPV incident. However, for the person causing IPV harm and victim survivor, their lives are not compartmentalized - rather they are intertwined with layers of trauma. The result can be a deficient level of accountability for the person causing harm and insufficient support for the victim survivor.

## ALLEGHENY COUNTY TAKES ACTION

Despite these challenges, Allegheny County officials persevered in finding a solution. The County decided to partner with the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, an internationally recognized action research center focused on evidenced-based strategies that reduce violence and build connections between public institutions and the communities they serve.<sup>9</sup> Known primarily for the Group Violence Intervention (GVI), NNSC applies focused deterrence strategies to achieve dual public safety goals of violence reduction and minimized incarceration. The heart of NNSC's work focuses on identifying the smallest number of individuals involved with the greatest amount of harm and delivering specific messaging on potential consequences, while offering unconditional support to potential perpetrators of harm. Under the model, consequences are swift, certain, and fair, while support is swift, certain, and sufficient to meet the needs of those at highest risk of violence involvement. NNSC has applied multiple variations of this strategy to a number of public safety concerns, including gun violence, drug markets, and IPV. First launched in High Point, North Carolina in 2012, NNSC's IPV strategy has since been implemented in cities throughout the United States

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<sup>9</sup> "Mission." National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC), April 11, 2025. <https://nnscommunities.org/who-we-are/mission/>.

and across the globe; as near to NNSC's New York City home as Kingston, NY, and as far away as Malmö, Sweden. Because of very promising results in High Point and Kingston, Allegheny County sought out this strategy to address their IPV problem.

As with all of NNSC's strategies, Allegheny County needed a lead agency to take point and bring together a coalition willing to assume the task at hand. The Allegheny County Department of Human Services had the partnerships and resources to lead this initiative, and in 2022 they formally partnered with NNSC to launch their IPV implementation.

Because of the breadth and unique structure of Allegheny County, NNSC and Allegheny DHS intentionally took time and steps on how to respond to IPV that was both sustainable and impactful. Although the partners desired to implement IPV, it would be a mammoth undertaking for a County with over 100 law enforcement agencies to execute the focused deterrence strategy simultaneously in all areas. As a first step measure, driven by NNSC's action research framework, a retrospective IPV lethality review was conducted.

NNSC analyzed data related to 26 IPV homicides from April 2019 through mid-2022 that occurred throughout Allegheny County. In addition to the quantitative data of homicide reports, risk assessments, and service provision information provided by Allegheny County DHS, qualitative data was collected through interviews with practitioners from victim services and Allegheny County Adult Probation. Key findings from this retrospective IPV lethality review revealed that 86% of the perpetrators of IPV homicides were known to have some contact with an Allegheny County system. When examined further, 85% of the perpetrators of IPV homicides were known to law enforcement for IPV or other activity known to the criminal legal system and more than half of the individuals received supervision from probation. Additionally, 70% of the individuals who perpetrated homicides were known to have engaged with systems outside of law enforcement such as Public Benefits and Children, Youth, and Families (CYF). The findings from this retrospective review also revealed that 43% of the IPV victims were known to the victim services community.

Findings from this retrospective review not only confirmed the intuitions of frontline practitioners, but also laid out how Allegheny County could deter IPV behavior through intervention and messaging. Because the full implementation of the IPVI strategy would require vast resources and capacity, elements of the strategy were deconstructed to create a streamlined approach for the City of Pittsburgh, which has the largest population and calls for service in the County.

With a population of approximately 1.2 million people residing in urban and rural areas, safely implementing a new strategic approach in Allegheny County was crucial. By taking inspiration from IPVI's tiered approach, Allegheny County partners decided to focus on the highest-risk individuals causing harm. This allowed Allegheny partners to target resources and pay attention to those most at risk for committing homicides or causing severe injury. During the summer of 2023, partners established a high-risk criteria based on not only the administrative IPV data available to them, but also the field expertise of key stakeholders.

The multidisciplinary partnership that was convened for the high-risk review team included partners from Department of Human Services, Allegheny County Pretrial Services, the Office of the District Attorney, Allegheny County Adult Probation, Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, and NNSC. This high-risk review team looked at individuals who were coming to the attention of the criminal legal system for an IPV offense in Pittsburgh. To support the work of this high-risk team, the Allegheny County DHS created a unique dashboard that summarized the various system contacts that the individual who committed the IPV offense had in Allegheny County.

Because of the dashboard and the participation of all the multidisciplinary partners, the weekly high-risk team meeting is a space for fluid information sharing and action planning. Allegheny County's high-risk review team operates differently from other traditional IPV community-coordinated responses. Partners not only discuss what they could do to support the victim survivor, but also how to stop the person who is causing the IPV harm—a parallel

approach that is inspired by NNSC's IPVI strategy. Thus, Allegheny County developed their own unique version of the IPVI model that is operated through the high-risk team.

Traditionally, focused deterrence interventions rely on a law enforcement agency to lead the partnership, often resulting in a crime control framework. Allegheny County's high-risk team, however, features the DHS as the primary convener. DHS is able to bring resources to the table - such as the aforementioned dashboard - and coalesce partners within and outside of law enforcement. The result is a holistic approach that is focused on giving attention to those causing IPV harm, while still centering victim survivors.

*Collectively focusing on the people causing harm is new. We haven't done that with IPV in the past. To do this, we established a quantitative and qualitative process to identify and focus our attention and resources, which builds on the frontline knowledge that is essential in this work. I think that if you talk to the folks on the teams, they'll say the success is this kind of shared understanding and focus.*

- KATY COLLINS,  
CHIEF ANALYTICS OFFICER,  
ALLEGHENY COUNTY DEPARTMENT  
OF HUMAN SERVICES

## IMPACT

The high-risk team initiative has changed the way that IPV is addressed in Allegheny County, and the partners are starting to achieve the desired results. National IPV recidivism estimates vary, however, recent research indicates rates of 20%-35%<sup>10</sup>, going as high as 43% within one year when considering non-IPV crimes<sup>11</sup>. In 2024, the total recidivism rate of the 74 individuals reviewed by the Allegheny County high-risk team just touches the bottom of the range at 20%. This means that 80% of individuals had no new criminal filings following their review, a stark contrast from the nationally estimated 57% recidivism of individuals outside of this initiative. While these promising results are not the product of a formal evaluation, they show the work's potential.

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<sup>10</sup> Verdugo-Martínez, Alba, Román Ronzón-Tirado, and Natalia Redondo-Rodríguez. "Personality Traits and Their Role in Intimate Partner Violence Recidivism: A 15-Year Follow-up Study within a Prison Sample." *Personality and Individual Differences* 235 (March 2025): 112969. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2024.112969>.

<sup>11</sup> Klein, Andrew R., and Terri Tobin. "A Longitudinal Study of Arrested Batterers, 1995-2005." *Violence Against Women* 14, no. 2 (February 2008): 136-57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801207312396>.

From a process implementation standpoint, the initiative has been transformative. Partners are working together in ways that they never had previously, collectively sharing data and addressing the behavior of IPV actors and the needs of victim survivors. The weekly meetings provide a forum for each agency to bring information to the table and problem-solve together, making the collective whole stronger than each individual part alone. The information sharing is opening up insights that might not have happened otherwise. In the words of Colleen Sybolt of the Allegheny County Pretrial Services, the high-risk team “has improved the communication. It's gotten people to talk about individuals that might otherwise have been forgotten about.” Katy Collins also spoke to this point:

*Using integrated data in this space, data across the justice and social service systems is new. In Allegheny County, we haven't had access to this kind of information for IPV, and it is changing people's understanding of IPV in our community, informing who are the higher-risk folks and what that looks like. It really is starting to change people's perceptions.*

Just about everyone interviewed spoke about how the initiative has increased cooperation and collaboration. The collaborative working environment has allowed each partner to engage with people causing IPV harm and victim survivors in ways that are more strategic, and more trauma-informed. The dashboard is more than just a set of numbers - it's a catalyst for strategic intervention. Partners can discuss the histories and needs of individuals involved in IPV incidents and their families. This is a huge shift in how IPV is addressed in Allegheny County. Lorraine Bittner of the Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh is a longstanding advocate, with more than 40 years of experience. She spoke to the shift in Allegheny County:

*It's so nice to have a group that we can then get together and identify: What are we doing? What do we need here? And who can do these things for the perpetrator? And who can do these things for the victim? That's communication we've just never seen in my experience here in Allegheny County.*

This shift can make a huge difference in the life of a victim survivor. Aside from any potential legal consequences for the person causing IPV harm, just having the support of the partnership itself can offer a significant benefit. Once they are informed about the initiative, victim survivors know that there is a team of agencies working to support them. This is an important intangible asset. In the words of Maddi Potter of the Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, "victims know that they're not on an island, because so many offenders do try to isolate their victims and make them feel like there's nobody to turn to. So I think that's a big thing that has helped in this system."

In addition, there are ancillary benefits for the partners themselves. "Trust" was one of the most frequently used words throughout the interviews, highlighting a key ingredient to the successful operation of the high-risk team. From Colleen Sypolt's perspective, "the trust came very quickly because it was very apparent from the get-go that all of us really have one common goal and that's to reduce the amount of IPV and DV instances." Bureaucracy is a well-known impediment to stellar government performance, and when it comes to IPV, the stakes for government to perform well are very high. Agency partners are trusting and working with each other to accomplish a singular mission of defeating bureaucratic obstacles. The initiative is a paradigm shift for the partners, changing the way they work beyond just IPV cases. As Alan Pelton of the Allegheny County Adult Probation Office said, "to get information, making those connections through these meetings and having a Rolodex of who to call, is a big benefit."

Furthermore, the initiative provides a platform for sharing the burden of the emotionally intensive world of IPV. Vicarious trauma is real, and each respective partner agency may have its own culture of self-care and mental health, but the initiative allows for peer support. In the words of Nicole Ballard of Allegheny County Adult Probation Office, "...there's nothing like realizing you're not by yourself. When you have a team of people it's uplifting, and you don't get burned out as easily."



## INNOVATING FROM A FOUNDATION

The implementation of the high-risk team is now a foundation that Allegheny partners can continue to build upon. Because Allegheny County partners have made tremendous strides in addressing high-risk IPV through this new approach, there is potential to have a larger impact in deterring IPV by expanding/enhancing the high-risk review team; coordinating messaging and notifications for those identified by the high-risk review team; developing interventions that address the intersection of community violence and IPV; and broadening outreach efforts with judiciaries handling IPV cases.

The collaborative success in intervening on high-risk IPV cases in

*I think the most amazing thing about being a part of this task force is that each case receives the individualized attention that it needs, and it deserves. That's something that we really like to do for the Pittsburgh Police Domestic Violence Unit: every case receives that individualized attention, but now they can receive that individualized attention from all over when it comes to a response from the Women's Center & Shelter, the DA's Office, Probation. Everybody's looking out for this victim, their family, even the actor. It's not necessarily us versus the actor, or us versus the victim. It's 'how can we help them as a group? What do they need?' So I really appreciate the opportunity to support that group and bring more specified knowledge to the group.*

- ERIN FRANK  
PITTSBURGH BUREAU OF POLICE

Pittsburgh is indication that this could greatly benefit the larger County—where IPV has also been a serious violence issue. This expansion effort is already under way and has the potential of achieving unified coordination and intervention for all high-risk IPV cases throughout Allegheny County. The expansion of the high-risk IPV work is also an opportunity to enhance the interventions for people causing IPV harm.

By focusing on those causing IPV harm, the high-risk team has an opportunity to deliver critical messaging that can deter violence. Notification and messaging can have a powerful effect in driving down the violence alongside all the other traditional responses to IPV. Pretrial has already curated messaging that clearly outlines the risks for those causing harm while Allegheny County DHS is currently creating messaging that details the resources available to stop the violence. NNSC recommends that Allegheny County ensure that both sets of messaging are aligned so that people causing IPV harm have the chance to be notified from multiple systems

that this behavior will not be accepted and that there are options to address the violence. And, when needed, more intensive interventions must be considered by Allegheny County partners if the person causing harm reoffends. NNSC recommends that the Allegheny County partnership think strategically and creatively in how they will handle reoffending behavior of high-risk individuals. This combination of consistent messaging and strategic consequences can have a cascading effect in creating new cultural norms and expectations when IPV is committed in Allegheny County.

Addressing high-risk IPV violence also means undertaking efforts to develop interventions and messaging for individuals that fall under the intersection of IPV and Community Violence (CV). Those that fall under this intersection face extreme risk for serious or fatal IPV. Allegheny County DHS is perfectly positioned to help advance this endeavor because they fund work that separately addresses both forms of violence. With NNSC's support in 2024, Allegheny County DHS began efforts to address this intersection. Tied to the high-risk team efforts, Allegheny County can continue to address this intersectional high-risk IPV population by increasing resource sharing and developing messaging to those causing IPV harm. Violence interrupters in Allegheny County have taken initial steps to message those flagged by the high-risk team for possible connections to IPV. This segment of the work can be enhanced by formalizing the referral and messaging process and setting protocols. And most importantly, the messaging given to those causing IPV harm and engaged in CV can be more nuanced while keeping safety of the victim/survivor and violence interrupters at the forefront. There is excitement and hope in this venture as shared by Dr. Monique Williams, Chief Executive Officer of Cure Violence Global,

*Allegheny County's commitment to violence prevention is undeniable. They understand that violence is interconnected—whether in the streets or at home. Cure Violence Global is proud to work at the intersection of community and intimate partner violence, and we're excited to see how Allegheny County bridges this gap within their communities.*

Finally, partners in Allegheny County have shown how much they can unite as different systems to address high-risk IPV, yet there is an opportunity to strengthen this impact by educating magisterial district judges on this issue. With significant experience under their belt, Allegheny County partners must present to judiciaries what they are seeing as high-risk in their community. The high-risk team's quantitative and qualitative insights can illuminate the issue for judiciaries to make more well-informed decisions on high-risk IPV cases that prioritize safety for victims and accountability for those causing harm. By better understanding what high-risk IPV looks like in Allegheny County and what interventions have been utilized to address it, district judges can use this education to consider a wider scope of factors in their decision-making.

Through their deep collaboration and a willingness to be creative, Allegheny County is lessening the burden on victim survivors and taking the responsibility to stop the violence by focusing on those causing the violence. Through each course of action, they are making a significant difference in saving lives. Their motivation, in combination with their high-level of coordination, will continue to inspire new ways to address IPV. As noted by Colleen Sypolt, "the sky's the limit on how we want to move forward with this."