

READI Chicago Evaluation Finds Reductions in Shootings and Homicides



READI Chicago reduces the overall cost to society of violence by at least \$184,000 per participant, implying a 3:1 benefit cost ratio from violence reduction, according to the analysis of program outcomes at 20 months. Although the study found that READI does not decrease all forms of serious violence, READI participants are less likely to be involved in the most severe and costly types of violence: shootings and homicides. For the full study sample (2,500 men at the highest risk of gun violence), the analysis found that READI participants had 63% fewer arrests and 19% fewer victimizations—findings that we have 85% confidence that can be attributed to READI. For the subset of READI participants who are referred through community partner organizations, the study found that those participants are 79% less likely to be arrested for a shooting or homicide and 47% fewer victimizations—findings that we have 95% confidence can be attributed to READI. Overall, these results promising enough to warrant more investment in, and study of, similar approaches to community violence intervention.

“Before READI, I was confused about what I was going to do after all that time incarcerated. READI helped me be able to communicate my thoughts, and not think I have to go into a situation with violence.” –Sylvester, READI Chicago Englewood participant

ABOUT READI CHICAGO

READI Chicago works to help men at the highest risk of being involved with gun violence stay safe, free from incarceration, and able to sustainably support themselves and their families. Through cognitive behavioral interventions (CBI), employment in paid transitional jobs, and support services, the initiative works to decrease violence involvement, arrests, and recidivism among adult men facing high rates of arrests and victimizations.

This innovative program leverages a strong evidence base and a new application of predictive analytics to test whether a highly targeted, intensive program can produce a measurable decline in violence and criminal justice involvement. The program is being implemented in Austin, West Garfield Park, Englewood, West Englewood and North Lawndale in collaboration with six local partner organizations. READI identifies eligible participants through three referral sources: community partners, reentry from the criminal justice system, and a data-based risk assessment. The University of Chicago’s Crime Lab and Inclusive Economy Lab are conducting a randomized control trial evaluation, which is yielding powerful data and insights about the men who are most at risk of gun violence involvement and the effectiveness of the READI Chicago model.

“You can feel the tide changing around here. People have seen that other places offer support, but we offer a future.” –Michael, READI Chicago INVC Outreach Worker

KEY LEARNINGS:

READI Chicago is finding the right participants. Referrals to READI Chicago are at extremely high risk of involvement in gun violence. We know that men referred to READI Chicago previously experienced high rates of gun violence and justice system contact. For example, of the approximately 2,500 men in the total READI study sample, 35% had been shot at least once; on average they had been arrested at least 17 times. READI Chicago distinguishes these men from others living in the same community areas who are already disproportionately at high risk for gun violence involvement. READI Chicago serves men who are 54 times more likely to be shot and killed than the average Chicagoan, and 2.8 times more often than even other young men in the neighborhoods where READI operates, even when eligible for all existing and/or new services available to them except READI.

READI Chicago participants are staying engaged in programming¹ over time. Fifty-five percent of all individuals eligible to start work do so within 20 months. Prior to COVID, over 50% of those who start the initiative were still engaged after a year and continued to work during at least 79% of weeks available to them. These rates of engagement are comparable to those of in-school programming for young people who are much more attached to services. Interviews with participants indicate that they are initially attracted to the paycheck, but stay engaged because of the strong “family-like” relationships in READI Chicago and access to CBI. Both participants and staff confirm participants are learning new skills and concepts in CBI that they are using in their everyday lives to change their thinking or navigate stressful situations. Staff report seeing evidence of behavior change in participants as a result through extensive qualitative data collection including observations, interviews, surveys, and focus groups.

We are more than 85% confident that READI Chicago is helping keep participants² safer. Although the analysis of READI outcomes does not find that the program helps reduce all forms of serious violence³, participants who are enrolled in READI had 63% fewer arrests for shootings and homicides and 19% victimizations. The program appears to be most effective for participants referred through community partners. These participants had large reductions in arrests (79%) and victimizations (47%) for shootings and homicides; and we are 95% confident that these results are attributed to READI.

When weighing acts of violence by the costs they impose on society, READI reduces social harms from violence. The study estimates that each READI participant reduces harm to society by \$185,000, implying a 3:1 benefit-cost ratio, using the most conservative estimates of violence costs⁴.

Heartland Alliance partners with five community-based organizations to implement READI Chicago:

- Centers for New Horizons
- Heartland Human Care Services
- Institute for Nonviolence Chicago
- North Lawndale Employment Network
- UCAN

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¹ The READI program model has evolved over time. While virtually all men in the study sample were offered the 18-month version of READI described above, on July 1, 2020, Heartland Alliance implemented changes to the program model, most notably shortening the program length to 12 months and frontloading the cognitive behavioral programming prior to job placements.

² For the study, program participation is defined as attending at least one day of programming, including orientation.

³ Researchers are conducting a randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluation to determine READI's impact on participant involvement in serious violence relative to the status quo. Researchers published a [pre-specified research plan](#) prior to the launch of the study. The primary outcome, for which the study does not find a statistically significant result, sought to detect whether READI would have an impact on a combined measure of all forms of serious violence, including shootings, homicides, armed robbery, non-shooting aggravated battery. The study design accounted for plans to evaluate impact on the subset of serious violence (shootings, homicides and other forms of serious violence) and by referral pathway (referrals by community partners, individuals returning to the community from jail or prison, and a predictive algorithm based on administrative data on individuals most likely to be impacted by gun violence).

⁴ The total most conservative estimates of violence estimates a total of approximately \$122 million in costs of serious violence avoided due to READI during a 20 month period.