

Municipal Crime Prevention Offices: Importance, Role, Function, and Models

Strategic Overview

The collective impact of inter-personal crime per year is estimated to be \$1.5 billion in terms of harm to victims in a municipality with a population of one million.



In 2014, one in seven adults reported being the victim of a property crime and one in fifteen adults reported being a victim of a violent crime (Perreault, 2015).

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has stressed that the unsustainable growth in expenditures in policing and related public safety costs are crowding out financial resources for early intervention and prevention as well as other human services. Policing costs have doubled since 2000, while investments in prevention efforts have lagged. The continued overreliance on enforcement and corrections for the prevention of crime is financially

unsustainable and fails to prevent human suffering in the first place.

Based on 30 years of accumulated evidence, major national and international reports conclude that well-planned approaches to crime prevention can significantly reduce street, intimate partner, and other inter-personal violence.

Many Canadian provinces have come to the same conclusion (Ontario, 2011; Alberta, 2007; Quebec, 1993). Similarly, several municipalities have their own task force reports that echo these understandings (Surrey, 2016; Halifax, 2014, 2009; Thunder Bay, 2013; Edmonton, 2009; Ottawa, 2004; Waterloo Region, 1996, 2005, 2010, 2014).

Feedback from across the country shows that Canadians increasingly demand that ALL orders of government dedicate resources to where we can have the greatest impact for the most number of people in both the short and the long-term.

Actions for Municipal Stakeholders

1. Establish and sustain a crime prevention office in your municipality;
2. Provide core funding for its role in planning, promoting, and facilitating the implementation and evaluation of effective crime prevention programs at a minimum investment of \$1 per citizen;
3. Support the training and development of key staff for the crime prevention office;
4. Advocate for collaborative knowledge generation, the utilization of existing evidence, and funding for effective prevention from all orders of government; and
5. Model resource dedication to crime prevention in budget process.



The Importance of Municipal Crime Prevention Offices

Municipalities are strongly impacted by crime. Despite Canada being one of the safest countries in the world, far too many citizens still suffer loss, injury, and trauma from crime and violence. This is most acutely experienced in municipalities because of their direct investment in policing and close connection between crime, public safety, and fear of victimization.

Municipal crime prevention offices are important because they guide collaborative action and engage communities to maximize limited resources in diagnosing, mobilizing, implementing, and evaluating crime prevention policies and programs.

Municipalities are at the core of crime prevention through social development. In some countries, cities with municipal crime prevention offices have planned and implemented strategies that have achieved 50% reductions in certain crimes, often within just a few years (see AB2016.4). In Canada, municipalities with crime prevention offices have developed local and evidence-based strategic plans, significantly animated the community, supported prevention approaches with many positive impacts, and generated broad scale engagement in primary and secondary prevention measures (see AB2017.1) as well as brought in additional funds.

The Role and Function of Municipal Crime Prevention Offices

A municipal crime prevention office is a community-government partnership that facilitates collaborative and evidence-based prevention. Its role is to mobilize collaboration for prevention through "doing with" not "doing for" communities.

Municipal crime prevention offices are about making the shift to greater planned investment in primary and secondary prevention approaches. Such a crime prevention office provides coordinated efforts that build strong relationships between key sectors (including non-government agencies) in the community that have the capacity to reduce the known

risks for crime and victimization. A permanent crime prevention office is the catalyst for strategic efforts to reduce harm and facilitate government and community engagement and collaboration towards a shared vision of a community where everyone is and feels safe.

The role of the office is to adapt evidence-based crime prevention programming to the local context, support efforts that contribute to the safer city / crime prevention agenda (including helping to secure resources for prevention programs), provide education, training, and a place for knowledge exchange, and advocate for evidence-based approaches to reduce and prevent crime.

In support of these functions, a municipal crime prevention office:

- a) Has strong relationship building capacities to bring key partners to the decision-making table and to keep them there, including leadership from social services, police, school, health, community groups, and many more (UNITY, 2015);
- b) Trains staff in how to mobilize different sectors and the community, while staying grounded in knowledge about successes and evidence (Youth.gov, 2016);
- c) Supports resource development including, but not limited to, the development of funding proposals to other orders of government, foundations, and the private sector; and
- d) Provides diverse public education and community engagement opportunities through public lectures, information sessions, dialogue sessions, and social media campaigns (IPC, 2007) akin to other areas where initially small-scale investments turned into broad-based social momentum (e.g., municipal use of recycling bins).

Design and Governance of Municipal Crime Prevention Offices

The design and governance of municipal crime prevention offices vary, but ideally should include the following:

- A core budget;

- Backing through the political leadership (e.g., Mayor's office) or municipal leadership;
- Staff with technical skills, including the capacity to encourage collaboration, mobilize resources, and foster public understanding;
- A multi-sector partnership that shares in the responsibility for designing and implementing the municipally based crime prevention through social development approach.

Strategic Crime Prevention Plans

In most cases, the main function of a municipal crime prevention office is to develop and sustain strategic crime prevention plans and approaches through:

1. Performing safety and crime prevention diagnoses to determine the risk factors of local crime problems;
2. Facilitating the collective investment in solving the problems;
3. Advancing evidence-based practices and sound crime prevention logic;
4. Coordinating the implementation of multi-sector solutions; and
5. Monitoring and evaluating the outcomes (e.g. EFUS, 2016; Safer Cities, 2016).

Strategic crime prevention plans and approaches led by a municipal crime prevention office commonly have short, medium, and long-term goals, which are informed by an overall vision. Effective crime prevention efforts might be focused on specific social and local risks, environmental design challenges, and are commonly based in sound research. These efforts are supported by a problem solving process that involves multiple agencies that have the capacity to identify local issues, strategically plan for change, develop programs and policies, and recruit key stakeholders for collaboration of integrated and comprehensive solutions (EFUS, 2016; IPC, 2007 ; Linden, 2000).

While municipalities have a significant role in ensuring the coordination of these strategic actions, the sense of ownership over the issues of crime and victimization by non-government

agencies and engaged citizens cannot be under-stated. In that sense, the resources provided by municipalities leverage significant additional in-kind resources that usually match and often surpass the investment from local government within a short period of time.

Models for Municipal Crime Prevention Offices

Several Canadian municipalities have crime prevention offices often directed by a multi-sector board. These are building on the pioneering initiatives by the City of Montreal and Waterloo Region.

City of Montreal

The earliest Canadian model was initiated in the City of Montreal with an external agency called Tandem, which successfully reduced break and enters. Tandem was later adopted by the City of Montreal in 1989. Today it is part of a much larger social development approach that includes investments in youth centres in high crime areas, a gang reduction strategy, and actions to advise citizens about how to protect themselves against victimization. (<http://www.securite-urbaine-montreal.org/>).

Waterloo Region

The Waterloo Region model was initiated in 1994 with a motion to Regional Council to establish a crime prevention task force to address crime prevention challenges, opportunities, and mobilize multiple sectors such as schools, restorative justice agencies, and others. Today, the central office that is funded by the regional government is made up of seven staff, including persons working on community engagement, research, and communications. A multi-sector community board, representing many of the agencies that have the capacity to contribute to a broader crime prevention agenda, also supports the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council (www.preventingcrime.ca). The Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council model has influenced many other Canadian municipal initiatives ranging from Thunder Bay (Ontario) to Surrey (British Columbia).

The Case for Investment in Municipal Crime Prevention Offices

On average, a Canadian municipality of one million will pay between \$250 and \$350 million a year for policing services alone. In addition, municipalities have to pay for paramedics and other emergency responses that are greatly impacted by crime and victimization. In addition to these expenses, victims of crime suffer losses through pain and trauma estimated at \$1.5 billion in a municipality of up to one million in population.

The annual budget for a municipal crime prevention office in most cities ranges between \$1 to \$2 per citizen or \$2 per average household per year (this is the approximate cost in Edmonton, Ottawa, and Waterloo Region). In communities with a population of less than 100,000, it is important that there is at least one staff member able to devote significant time to crime prevention work and efforts in the community. The potential returns on these relatively small investments, is several times that of the initial costs.

For example, it is estimated that a teenage boy starting on a path of crime will cost society and taxpayers at least \$2.4 million over his lifetime. Evidence suggests that smart investments can cut these costs in half within a 3 to 5-year period. Savings in emergency response times alone can partly be reallocated to more proactive measures or can be redirected to other emergencies in the face of unprecedented population growth, which in turn is in part due to an aging population across the country.

The Need for Sustainable Funding from All Orders of Government

Permanent municipal crime prevention offices should encourage community investment and engagement in evidence-based solutions to crime and victimization. When collaborative actions across different sectors are grounded in a shared vision, mission, and mandate as well as an application of resources, they will remain productive and relevant. For municipalities to have a lasting impact on crime rates and the root causes of crime, it is essential they acquire funding from other orders of government. A

funding approach that recognizes the vital role of municipalities in crime prevention is most likely to stimulate significant grassroots action and engagement. A permanent matched funding program negotiated between the federal and provincial/territorial governments to match municipal investments could significantly advance the shared vision for a safer, healthier, and more inclusive Canada.

The funding programs should provide each municipality with the resources to:

- a) Establish a crime prevention office;
- b) Conduct local safety diagnoses;
- c) Collaboratively plan, implement, evaluate, and guide strategic investment in prevention; and
- d) Invest in effective crime prevention programs (for examples see AB 2016.3)

Growing Support for Collaborative and Evidence-Based Crime Prevention

Currently, Public Safety Canada has a national crime prevention strategy, which funds crime prevention projects that are evidence-informed and focused on addressing risk factors for crime and victimization. Since 2007, it has funded numerous applications of evidence-based projects across Canada and has generated process and outcome data. Similarly, the United States has a number of major government resources to provide information on what works in crime prevention and community safety (AB 2016.2).

Worth mentioning is that the UK, in an effort to increase collaborative and evidence-based approaches, has established a Policing College to pursue research on cost-effective policing and crime prevention as well as develop professional standards (Council of Canadian Academies, 2014). Furthermore, the European Forum for Urban Safety has accumulated a large body of practical knowledge on municipal crime prevention and has encouraged the development of university courses focused on these successes. In each of these situations, the evidence is produced through investments in universities that advance partnerships between universities and practitioners (EFUS, 2016).

Canada can build on these initiatives by creating a Centre for Excellence in Crime Prevention that brings together the best Canadian and international evidence, organizes training courses, establishes standards, and supports municipalities in their upstream prevention efforts. In Waterloo Region a local college developed a Community and Criminal Justice degree program that is now seeing a third cohort of students graduate into policing, probation, and other related professions with a sound knowledge of prevention (<https://www.conestogac.on.ca/employers/bachelor-of-community-and-criminal-justice-honours>).

Developments in Canada

In the past ten years, municipalities that have set up a crime prevention office have tended to adopt a hybrid version of those currently in existence to accommodate local characteristics. In some, the municipalities provide core funding with a mandate to engage the inter-agency board in the planning, development, and implementation of prevention efforts. In others, municipal staff members are in charge of providing resources to local grassroots groups that contribute to crime prevention through social development. In some cases, there is a combination of the two.

While municipal crime prevention offices are relatively new in Canada, the notion that complex social problems are best solved through multi-sector partnerships is not. Attention to this has recently been reignited in the literature, often referred to as a Collective

Impact (CI) approach. In the context of CI, municipal crime prevention offices are referred to as “backbone organizations” that utilize a small body of staff to mobilize and engage broad-based sectors across the community. Backbone organizations are important for achieving measurable reductions in crime through such collaborative processes, which comes from planning, funding, and good governance efforts (AB2016.4).

Municipalities are increasingly implementing inter-sectoral processes such as Collective Impact (Kania & Kramer, 2011; Cabaj & Weaver, 2016). Collective Impact has five key elements:

1. A common agenda;
2. Shared measurement;
3. Mutually reinforcing activities;
4. Continuous communication; and
5. Backbone support.

Collective Impact is consistent with good governance for crime prevention and has the capacity to contribute to broad success through core resources that leverage grassroots and multi-agency engagement.

In order for a municipal crime prevention office to become a sustainable backbone organization, it must ultimately be guided by clear professional standards similar to the UN Sustainable Development goals. These goals target the prevention of violence through attention to the risks that are known to increase interpersonal crimes in municipalities, neighbourhoods, and homes.

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The evidence used in this action brief are based on the list of resources available on www.safercities.ca which also provides the full references for abbreviated citations.

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