



# **Colorado Teen Dating Violence Prevention Final Report Executive Summary**

**Primary Prevention of Teen Dating Violence in  
the Denver-Aurora Community: Best Practices  
and Strategy Recommendations**

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and Capacity360, LLC, with input from members of the Denver-Aurora Teen Dating Violence Prevention Taskforce and the Colorado Teen Dating Violence State Team.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2009, the Injury, Suicide and Violence Prevention (ISVP) Unit at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) created the Colorado Teen Dating Violence Prevention Initiative (TDVPI) to: 1) raise teen dating violence (TDV) as a public health priority, 2) expand partnerships with key violence prevention and TDV stakeholders; and 3) generate recommendations for the Denver-Aurora community for strengthening community capacity to implement, support and evaluate comprehensive and sustainable TDV prevention programs.

In order to conduct the various planning activities associated with the TDVPI, the ISVP Unit created a Teen Dating Violence Prevention Team (TDVPT) comprising four interconnected sub-teams: the Executive Team, the State Teen Dating Violence Prevention Team (State Team), the Denver-Aurora Teen Dating Violence Prevention Taskforce (Denver-Aurora Taskforce) and the Denver-Aurora Youth Advisory Committee. Together these teams developed and implemented a Community Needs Assessment that included the following components: 1) an agency survey (environmental scan) that was completed by 153 community based organizations that are implementing violence prevention programming or positive youth development activities in the Denver-Aurora area; 2) a prevention strategies critique; 3) 55 key informant interviews; 4) 15 focus groups (two with parents, two with school personnel, two with prevention experts, and nine with teens); 5) a policy scan; 6) a surveillance system scan; and 7) an organizational capacity assessment. Additionally, the TDVPI provided 22 capacity building sessions for members of the TDVPT and other community partners through a variety of venues including, state conferences, local workshops and meetings.

Based on both adult and youth focus groups and key informant responses, teens in the Denver–Aurora community are involved in many different types of relationships. Though most of the Community Needs Assessment respondents acknowledged that teen relationships are casual and between non-committed partners, many of the youth verbalized that they wanted monogamous, committed relationships with their partners. The majority of teens commented that they would like relationships that are respectful, honest, caring, supportive, accepting and trusting.

According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, between 2005 and 2009, the number of Colorado youth self-identify as being a victim of teen dating violence increased by 3.1 percent. Youth and adults that participated in the Community Needs Assessment described the characteristics of teen dating violence in the Denver-Aurora community, including: types of abusive behaviors, intent and severity of the abuse, causes, gender parity, and bi-directionality. The TDVPT explored the CDC-identified risk and protective factors for teen dating violence perpetration, as well as those identified by Community Needs Assessment participants. Additionally, respondents described a number of community factors that may impact teen dating violence, such as: having an absentee father; criminalization of youth; culture, race and ethnicity; homophobia; immigration status; community acceptance of violence; school climate, and socio-economic status.

The TDVPT envisions a Denver-Aurora community where it is the norm for teens to have healthy, non-violent relationships. Recognizing that many of the risk and protective factors for teen dating violence are shared with other youth issues, such as child abuse, youth suicide, and bullying, the TDVPT believes it is critical to combine resources to implement strategies that address multiple issues. Additionally, in order to eliminate TDV in the Denver-Aurora

community, prevention strategies must be implemented at the individual, relationship, community, and society levels of influence. Therefore, the TDVPT adopted a socio-ecological framework for the development of prevention strategies to address the primary prevention of teen dating violence. The TDVPT's recommendations include best practices for strategy development, as well as program and policy recommendations organized by socio-ecological level, teen dating violence intervention recommendations, and capacity recommendations.

### **BEST PRACTICES FOR STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT**

- ❖ **Community TDV primary prevention plans should include strategies that meet these criteria.**
  - ✓ Address all socio-ecological levels
  - ✓ Can be implemented community-wide
  - ✓ Have varied teaching methods
  - ✓ Have dosage based on effectiveness
  - ✓ Are evidenced/research or theory based if possible
  - ✓ Are inclusive of all communities
  - ✓ Are tailored to the level of community readiness
  
- ❖ **When developing and implementing TDV primary prevention strategies communities should follow these best practices.**
  - ✓ Ensure that the targeted community is intrinsically involved at all stages.
  - ✓ Ensure that strategies are piloted with target audience at each phase of strategy development.
  - ✓ Ensure that strategies are strength-based and based on positive youth development principles.
  - ✓ Ensure that strategies are focused on outcomes and address the risk and protective factors for teen dating violence.
  - ✓ Develop strategies that promote the development of positive relationships.
  - ✓ Ensure that strategies are developed and implemented so that prevention and intervention are integrated and not separate silos.
  - ✓ Ensure that strategies are implemented by trained personnel that have expertise in teen dating violence prevention with on-going training and supervision.
  - ✓ Ensure that strategies are evaluated.

## **PROGRAMMATIC AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRIMARY PREVENTION OF TDV**

### **Individual and Relationship**

- ❖ Implement evidenced-based home visitation programs.
- ❖ Ensure that early childhood education is accessible for all children.
- ❖ Implement healthy relationship education and skill building being implemented in schools and youth serving organizations.
- ❖ Implement bystander intervention programs.
- ❖ Implement mentoring programs.
- ❖ Provide education on healthy and unhealthy teen relationships and how to effectively communicate with youth for parents, school personnel and other youth serving providers.
- ❖ Cultivate positive parent/guardian-child relationships.
- ❖ Ensure comprehensive services for youth and their family.

### **Community and Society**

- ❖ Adopt school policies that address implementation of healthy relationship education and skill building.
- ❖ Implement programming that promotes youth activism and leadership in addressing teen dating violence.
- ❖ Implement social norms marketing campaign.

## **PROGRAMMATIC AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESPONDING TO TDV**

- ❖ Increase accessibility to and availability of community-based services for youth victims and perpetrators.
- ❖ Develop a coordinated community response to teen dating violence.

## **NATIONAL, STATE AND LOCAL CAPACITY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ❖ Develop sustainable funding on national, state, and local level for primary prevention strategies.
- ❖ Provide state and local level leadership that reflects the diversity of the state and is inclusive of government and community based stakeholders

- ❖ Develop and/or enhance collaborations that focus on primary prevention of youth violence and address the shared risk and protective factors across issues.
- ❖ Encourage that state and community level planning be inclusive of all youth violence prevention issues including teen dating violence.
- ❖ Provide training and technical assistance on teen dating violence primary prevention at the state and community level.
- ❖ Enhance federal, state and local surveillance systems tools that capture more detailed and contextual information on teen dating violence.
- ❖ Identify and utilize evaluation tools and processes for measuring the impact of teen dating violence primary prevention strategies.

Advocate for ongoing research on teen dating violence.