

Executive Summary

Violence stalks California’s young people like the plague.

Despite our technical and economic progress, almost as many teenagers are killed in homicides as in motor vehicle accidents. Every 10 hours, on average, a young person dies at the hands of another – usually someone they know.¹

More young people die in California from suicide – self-inflicted violence – than from cancer, heart disease and congenital defects combined. Almost every day a teenager in the Golden State dies at their own hands.²

And those are just the cases where the violence is lethal. In horrible, costly and insidious ways, anger and despair is stealing from our children their arms and legs, hopes and dreams.

“The gang members in this neighborhood share one thing in common,” says East L.A.’s Father Greg Boyle, “the pilot light of hope has gone out or nearly gone out. You have to give them something so they will plan for their futures and not their funerals.”

In this project, the Commission explored the ability of publicly sponsored programs to prevent crime and violence, particularly among our young people.

Can we help these endangered children?

The answer is an absolute yes. And as a result, the only conscionable public response is to improve and fortify community-based and state-supported efforts to prevent the violence. The Commission bases this conclusion on two important developments:

Never Too Late

The evidence is mounting that violence prevention efforts cannot begin too early.

Home visits by nurses, for instance, targeted at infants and parents in high-risk households, cost-effectively reduce malevolent outcomes and encourage a more nurturing childhood.

But millions of California children already are past the critical years of early development. Too many of them are already academically behind their peers. They already have witnessed or experienced violence. They do not have the positive influences in their lives that have helped the rest of us to overcome adversity and keep our dreams alive.

These children are seven, eight and nine years old now. And over the next few cycles of the state budget they will either make it or break it.

Just as the evidence shows it is never too early to intervene, the evidence also shows it is never too late.

These children can be brought back into the classroom, healed from early traumas, and inspired to believe in themselves and their futures. These children are the concern of this report, and should be the concern of all Californians.

A growing body of evidence reveals that most violence is learned behavior. Before they were perpetrators, many offenders were victims. The abusers were abused. The heartless were not loved.

The evidence also is increasing that many strategies can cost-effectively intervene in young and troubled lives to prevent harmful and costly behaviors. Emotional wounds can be healed. Stress can be managed. Respect can be learned and earned. Tutoring, mentoring and counseling can restore trust and hope. They can make up for broken homes and lost homework.

Between 1984 and 1991, murder by children between the ages of 12 and 17 increased by 127 percent in California.³ Importantly, crime by children and adults has declined significantly in recent years. But violence is still endemic in many communities, threatening children like a deadly disease. Teenagers are nearly five times more likely to be victims of crime than adults over age 35.⁴

Over the next few years, the number of adolescents in California will increase by 28 percent. Today there are 3.9 million children between the ages of 11 and 18. By 2008, there will be nearly 5 million adolescents.

Twenty-nine other states don't even have 5 million residents. But there will be 5 million young Californians – challenged by the pressure of peers and the influences of pop media, but not always prepared or assisted to make healthy choices.

“Here is the truth...”

Father Boyle tells the story of a 12-year-old named Beto, a frequent visitor of the mission, who was gunned down one night – along with a 19-year-old gang-member who was the intended target:

“All kids know in this neighborhood that when you hear gunfire you run, you hide, you hide behind a dumpster. But Beto froze and took one in the side. An extremely large bullet entered one side and exited out the other. The sheer size of the bullet rendered him paralyzed.

“He went through seven hours of surgery and survived. Then in the last hour of his life I remember looking through this window and watching seven or so nurses and doctors pounding on his heart, massaging his heart, begging and pleading with his heart to cooperate. But it just couldn't do it.

“Here is the truth: He was 12-years-old and he was exactly what God had in mind when God made him.

“This is equally true, and this is the hard one: The kids in that van, kids I know, also were exactly what God had in mind when God created them, but they didn't know it. They had not been surrounded by that truth. They didn't have enough people in their lives to hold the mirror to say, ‘Here is who you are and it is all good,’ so those kids could inhabit that truth.

“Any community that wants to deal with this issue effectively has to do prevention, intervention and enforcement and has to do them all at the same time, with equal allocation of resources.”

Source: Gregory Boyle, S.J., Los Angeles Community Forum on Youth Violence Prevention, October 11, 2000.

Academics are debating how to allocate credit for declining crime. Some credit tougher prison terms or the booming economy. Others note the maturing of yesterday's young adults – which would suggest that crime will increase with the numbers of young people.

Among the many stories the Commission heard – from Vallejo on the edge of San Francisco Bay to Boyle Heights in the shadow of the L.A. skyline – is that communities are coming together to proactively shepherd their children through the unfortunate dangers of contemporary childhood.

The word that some use to describe the goal for children is “resiliency” – the ability to adapt and change. The world is tough and getting tougher. Many of California's children are not getting the start they need. Their homes are not nurturing, or even safe. So what can be done at every opportunity to develop in children the resiliency to overcome the threats and disadvantages?

In many communities, the efforts are dwarfed by the challenge. In some communities, the human capacity is not there to muster the resources or forge the commitment of local leaders.

Importantly, the State has made significant strides to help communities help their young people and their families. Proposition 10, which created the California Children and Families First Program, is targeting funding and attention to children from birth to age 5. Healthy Start is responding to problems through family-focused and comprehensive services to ensure that children thrive. The enormous push to improve education is fortifying what community leaders told the Commission was the first defense against delinquency – vibrant schools that connect with all children. And the State is dedicating substantial resources to “prevention” programs, from truancy reduction to after-school tutoring.

The State, however, has not pulled these programs into a coherent state-wide strategy supporting youth development. It has not defined its goals or created the management infrastructure necessary to ensure that resources are being spent in the best way possible and that no child and no community are left behind.

The Commission has identified six practical ways the State can help local communities seize the opportunity to rescue troubled children:

- 1. *Take action now.*** The State should quickly provide California families, educators and community leaders with the tools to foster the emotional health of youth, and to effectively identify and intervene with troubled youth.

2. ***Make prevention a priority.*** California needs to make prevention the premise – rather than an afterthought – for every program for children and families. The Governor, Attorney General and Superintendent of Public Instruction must get directly involved, along with community leaders, and a new Secretary for Youth Development and Violence Prevention who can bring day-to-day leadership to this effort.
3. ***Reorganize funding.*** The State should streamline and integrate funding for prevention programs. All communities should receive some prevention resources, while some funds should be targeted at neighborhoods with the greatest violence, and incentives given to get communities to adopt proven programs.
4. ***Develop leaders.*** The State should help communities build their capacity for change by developing emerging youth and adult leaders. While statewide in scope, this function might most effectively be performed by a partnership of organizations and individuals with expertise and a role in preventing youth violence.
5. ***Impart new knowledge.*** Violence prevention policy and programs need to be based on the best information about what works. A resource center could gather, assess and disseminate the latest research and best practices to policy-makers and practitioners.
6. ***Evaluate effectively.*** Prevention programs are burdened far more than other public safety policies with proving their effectiveness, and funds are spent unsuccessfully trying to statistically discern the effect of single programs in complicated societies. The State should advance evaluation techniques that are useful to policy-makers, program managers and the public.

Until now, the State's policies have reflected a skepticism about prevention programs. The State funds them as experiments or purchases them as luxuries. The evidence now compels a contrary conclusion. Prevention can consistently and reliably save lives at far lower costs than what crime and violence inflict on public budgets and private lives. Like all public programs, prevention efforts must be well-managed and constantly improved. The Commission's recommendations would move prevention from experimental pilots to fundamental policy.

After careful analysis, and after consulting extensively with many caring and knowledgeable Californians, the Commission submits the following recommendations for public consideration:

A Youth Violence Crisis

Finding 1: Despite declines in some juvenile crime, California faces an immediate crisis of youth violence. Alienated and disaffected young people are escaping the attention of families, friends and teachers until they explode into violence.

An increasing number of young people are emotionally distraught, disconnected from their families and peers, schools and communities, without hope for their own future. The consequences can be deadly, as youth react with unimaginable violence.

On a sun-kissed March morning in San Diego, a 15-year-old student fired on classmates and teachers at Santana High School near San Diego, killing two and wounding 13. Seventeen days later and five miles away another young gunman strode into Granite Hills High School armed with a 12-gauge shotgun and a .22-caliber handgun, wounding five classmates and two staff. The shooter, upset that he might not graduate, set out to kill the vice principal, who was among the wounded.

Those horrors grab headlines. They are high profile examples of persistent and chronic struggles of the heart that are endured by many young people, and warrant an immediate and courageous response by California's leaders. Among the indicators of this crisis:

- The state Department of Education reported a 17 percent increase in violent crime on school campuses between the 1998-99 school year and the 1999-2000 school year.⁵
- The U.S. Surgeon General reported that despite a decline in gun use and lethal violence, the proportion of young people who say they are involved in nonfatal violence has not dropped nor has the proportion of students injured with a weapon at school.
- The Surgeon General found that the number of youth involved with gangs has not declined.⁶
- Gang-related homicides in Los Angeles increased 116 percent from 1999 to 2000.⁷

Scientists have identified dozens of “risk factors” for violence, as well as conditions that protect children from violence. Many of the root causes of violence – abuse and neglect, poor parenting, economic and other stresses – are well documented. Prevention and intervention strategies have been developed and tested. Many have been shown to be effective.

However, while we have pledged to prevent future Columbines, future Santanas, future Granite Hills, the best prevention tools have not yet made it into our families, classrooms and communities.

We also must be vigilant for unintended consequences. Policies intended to deter violence – like zero tolerance for drug and weapon possession at school – may aggravate the underlying causes of violence. The Surgeon General has concluded: “Some popular measures...may further harden troubled children and increase their involvement in crime and violence.”⁸

The young men responsible for recent school shootings share some common and disturbing characteristics. Most were estranged from their parents or not engaged by them in a significant way. Most had perceived grievances against peers or school authorities. And two-thirds said they had been bullied by peers. Evidence suggests that youth who bully and are bullied may be at particularly high risk for violence.⁹ There are no easy solutions to deadly actions like school shootings, primarily because they are still relatively rare. These acts occur when a combination of predisposing factors come together and so they are difficult to predict.

School-Based Services

Schools have unparalleled opportunities to identify and respond to children and adolescents who are experiencing problems that lead to violence. Among their attributes and assets:

Comprehensive services. Educators have long supported efforts to meet the physical and emotional needs of children as a way of improving academic learning. The Healthy Start program provides comprehensive screening and services to children in low-income families. Evaluations of the program show improved student behavior, academic performance and school climate.

Family-based services. Educators have long recognized that children with supportive parents achieve better academically. The Juvenile Crime Prevention Demonstration Project has proven that solving family problems can increase student performance and decrease criminal and delinquent behaviors.

After-school programs. Juvenile crime triples after 3 p.m., and more than half of all youth offenses are committed between 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. After-school programs can reduce crime and enhance student performance. But even with increased federal and state support, 70,000 children are on waiting lists.

Community centers. Schools can be the locus for a variety of neighborhood services. The San Francisco Beacon Initiative, a partnership of public and private sponsors, has transformed eight schools into youth and family centers that have become “beacons” of activity in neighborhoods.

Leadership. Teachers and administrators can be powerful role models in neighborhoods. Their concern for children, awareness of their needs, and familiarity with public agencies allow educators to be catalysts for strong community-based efforts to improve health and well-being, while reducing violence.

Putting These Assets to Work

- The Youth Violence Prevention Coordinating Council recommended in Finding 2 of this report should focus first on streamlining application and funding rules for school-based programs. The council also should identify for policy-makers financial incentives to encourage school districts to use their facilities to partner with other organizations to provide community-based services.
- The prevention institute recommended in Finding 3 should work with schools to identify emerging leaders, mentor them and provide them with the support necessary to be neighborhood beacons.
- The Institute’s clearinghouse should provide policy-makers with the best models for using available federal, state and private resources to fund and operate school-based services to families.

But the gravity of these events and the continued high levels of juvenile violence in some California communities warrant immediate and meaningful action – steps taken today that will save lives tomorrow.

As a society we must better respond to our young people who show signs of trouble. Parents can be taught to listen to their children and look for clues of anger and hurt. Schools can become places where the emotional health and safety of students is a priority – integrated into the curriculum and a part of the school culture.

The potential for school-based programs is revealed at Seeds University Elementary School at UCLA, where anti-harassment lessons are integrated into the academic curriculum. The staff seize “teachable moments” – opportunities to show students how to respect and care for each other. The program teaches the value of group harmony and helps youth develop the internal resources to deal with stressful experiences like bullying or put-downs.

Recommendations 2 through 6 advocate steps the State can take to provide the leadership and organizational structure to make prevention the primary response to youth violence. But California also can take steps for the young people – and their victims – who need help now, while long-term and sustainable reforms are developed.

Recommendation 1: California policy-makers should make prevention the primary policy for reducing youth crime and violence. As an immediate step, the Legislature and Governor should ensure that parents, educators and community leaders have the latest information on the root causes of violence and strategies to promote the emotional health and well-being of youth. Policy-makers should allocate resources for the following:

- ❑ ***Information gathering and dissemination.*** Information on the causes of youth violence and effective prevention and intervention strategies should be gathered and disseminated to parents, schools and community leaders. Information should be provided on how to identify and effectively respond to youth who are experiencing difficulties. Responses should be non-threatening and should not result in youth being labeled, excluded or alienated. Effective youth development strategies should be emphasized and encouraged. Because families are the institution with the primary responsibility for positive youth development, particular emphasis should be placed on disseminating information to them.

Immediate Steps

The Governor and the Legislature could rely on one or more of the following agencies and organizations to implement this recommendation:

- ❑ **School/Law Enforcement Partnership.** This partnership brings the Attorney General and Superintendent of Public Instruction together to prevent violence.
- ❑ **Private Foundations.** The California Wellness Foundation, David and Lucille Packard Foundation, California Endowment, and Foundation Consortium are all potential partners.
- ❑ **State Board of Education.** The board, in cooperation with the Superintendent of Public Instruction and Secretary for Education, could champion these activities and rally local school districts to the cause.

❑ **Professional development.** Educators and other professionals who work with youth should be educated to quickly identify and respond to youth who are struggling emotionally. Professionals should be able to make referrals to appropriate community resources. Professionals should learn to develop effective interagency partnerships.

❑ **A state summit and community meetings.** The Governor should sponsor a youth violence prevention summit as soon as possible to focus attention on and widely disseminate the latest information about youth development and youth violence prevention. The State should challenge and assist every California community to convene community forums to hear firsthand the latest research regarding the root causes of youth violence and effective preventive strategies, and to develop local action plans to prevent violence.

The Opportunity of this Generation

Finding 2: California has a historic opportunity to align scientific knowledge, community commitment and public resources to promote and establish prevention as the primary policy response to youth violence.

A growing body of evidence suggests that the brains of young children who are neglected or traumatized develop differently than those of children who grow up in nurturing environments, and these differences place neglected children at higher risk for later violent behavior.

The evidence also is mounting about the potential to prevent and intervene in at-risk circumstances. Home visits by public health nurses have been highly successful in reducing child abuse, dependence on welfare and later delinquent behavior by children. Programs like Boys & Girls Clubs and Big Brothers/Big Sisters have been documented to prevent violence. Anti-truancy campaigns are getting students back in school and dramatically reducing daytime crime.

This evidence has increased support for prevention among policy-makers, law enforcement, educators, and the public. In a 1999 nationwide poll of police chiefs, 69 percent said that after-school and educational programs are the most effective way to reduce juvenile crime.¹⁰ And a statewide poll

revealed that 78 percent of voters think investment in youth crime prevention should be a higher state priority than spending for new prisons.¹¹

The 1999 report of the Congressional Bipartisan Working Group on Youth Violence put a priority on prevention and early intervention programs, emphasized the importance of parents and communities in the lives of children, and supported childhood health and mental health services.

Since 1994, this Commission and others have urged policy-makers to make prevention a priority in addressing youth crime and violence. In reviewing child care, juvenile justice and foster care programs, the Commission concluded that top policy-makers need to coordinate the State's disparate efforts to help endangered children and manage those programs to improve results.

Some progress is being made. *Shifting the Focus*, a partnership among state agencies that administer youth violence prevention programs, is attempting to reduce fragmentation and duplication. The Attorney General and the Secretary of the Health and Human Services Agency have assigned senior staff and resources. But some key departments – including the Office of Criminal Justice Planning – are not consistently participating. The effort has yet to transition from discussion to policy, and leadership is needed for this venue to fundamentally improve the administration of programs.

Similarly, the National Crime Prevention Council has an initiative – *Embedding Prevention in State Policy and Practice* – that encourages states and communities to make prevention the policy of choice for reducing crime, violence and drug abuse. The initiative stresses executive leadership and coordination among state agencies.

As before, the Commission believes that improving outcomes for children will require the commitment of top leaders, and a structure that organizes and aligns California's child-related efforts to prevention goals. Absent persistent pressure, large state bureaucracies are slow to change. Community leaders can be the necessary catalysts, if provided the venue for effectively advocating for improvements in state operations.

Recommendation 2: To make prevention the primary policy response to youth crime and violence, the State needs to create the organizational infrastructure to define goals, establish strategies and implement programs, as outlined below.

A community-focused Youth Violence Prevention Coordinating Council should be established to define and advocate for a youth violence prevention policy agenda that meets the needs of California communities. Specifically, the council should:

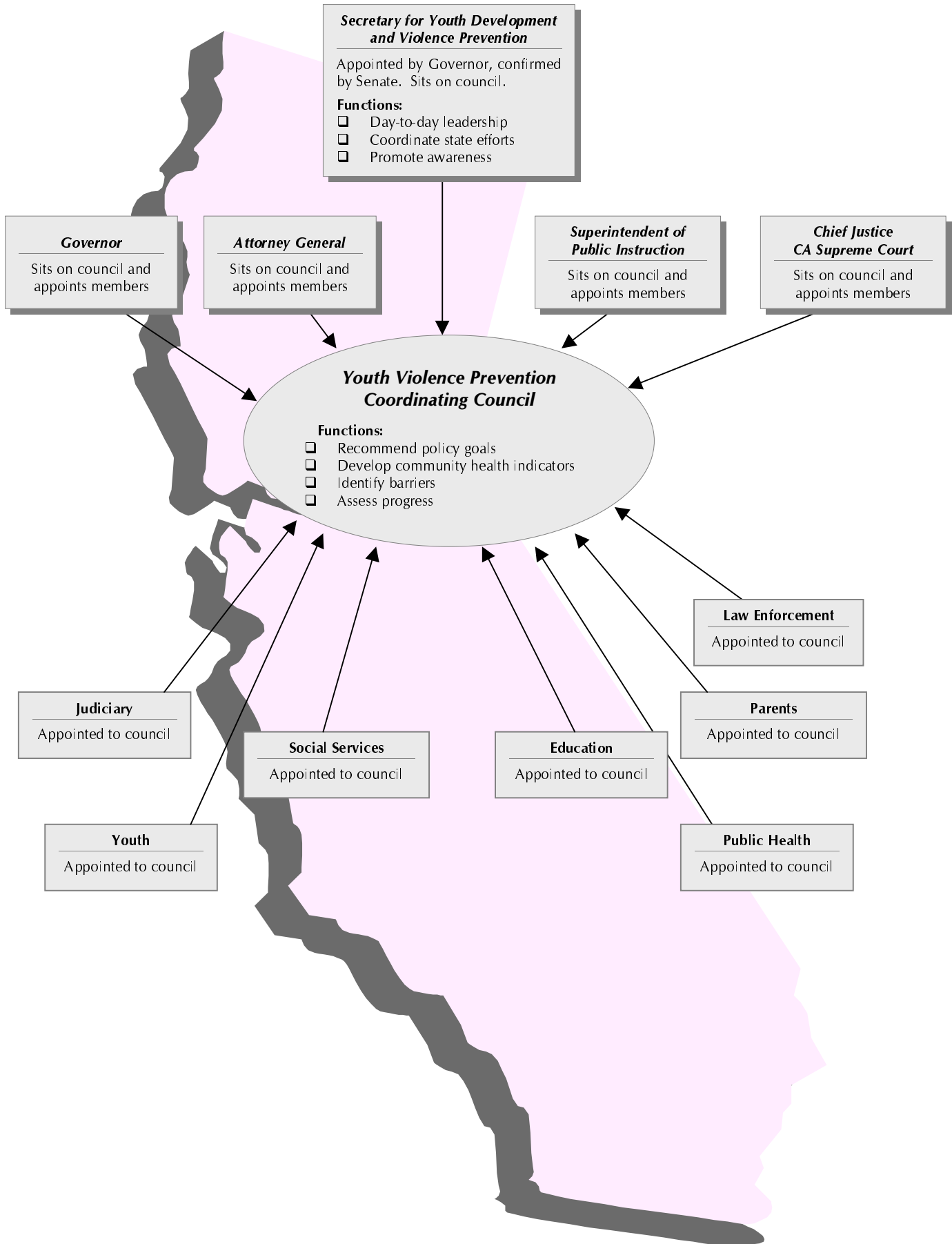
- ❑ **Be appointed by top policy-makers.** Community members representing schools, law enforcement, social services, public health, the judiciary, parents and youth should be appointed by the Governor, Attorney General, Superintendent of Public Instruction and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.
- ❑ **Develop community indicators and set goals.** Community health indicators, outcome measures that reflect the well-being of families and young people, should be developed in cooperation with state agencies that have a role in prevention. The council should use these indicators to set prevention goals, assess needs, craft prevention strategies, evaluate performance, and document progress and trends for the public. It should propose expenditures to support an effective continuum of youth violence prevention strategies.
- ❑ **Identify barriers.** The council should identify organizational, funding and procedural barriers to accomplishing California’s goals for prevention and recommend ways to overcome them. It also should recommend ways to ensure that juvenile justice, education, child welfare and other policies are not undermining those goals by excluding children from the treatment necessary to heal trauma and prevent future violence. The council should identify statutory, regulatory and operational changes that need to be made. It should identify ways to streamline, standardize or consolidate applications and accounting forms.
- ❑ **Assess progress.** The council should annually report to policy-makers and the public on the progress California has made toward prevention goals, including trends in community health, the embedding of prevention in state policies, and improvements in the administration of state programs.

The Governor should appoint a Secretary for Youth Development and Violence Prevention with the authority and responsibility to advance a community-focused youth crime and violence prevention strategy. The secretary should:

- ❑ **Provide day-to-day leadership.** The secretary should serve as a member of the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinating Council. The secretary should serve as the liaison between the council, “Shifting the Focus” and the Legislature.

- ❑ **Coordinate state efforts.** The secretary should be charged with formalizing “Shifting the Focus” and should serve as its chairperson. The secretary annually should recommend to the Governor and Legislature ways to improve the coordination, integration or consolidation of the funding and administration of youth violence prevention programs. Over time, the secretary should identify ways that other children’s services could be improved to make them more effective at improving the health, well-being and resiliency of the Californians they serve.
- ❑ **Promote public understanding.** The secretary should promote public-private partnerships to educate Californians on the cost and public safety benefits of prevention and promote citizen action and involvement in violence prevention.

The graphic on the following page shows the proposed Youth Violence Prevention Coordinating Council and Secretary for Youth Development and Violence Prevention.



A Funding Mechanism that Supports Communities

Finding 3: State funding streams for local efforts are fragmented and uncoordinated. They do not support cooperative local efforts, ensure all communities have some resources, or prioritize funding to communities with the greatest needs.

Prevention efforts work one child at a time, one family at a time, one neighborhood at a time. As a result, effective efforts involve everyone who shares responsibility for troubled youth – law enforcement, schools, mental and physical health providers, parents and young people themselves. The efforts are organized and managed by community leaders and public servants, and are supported by a range of public and private funding sources.

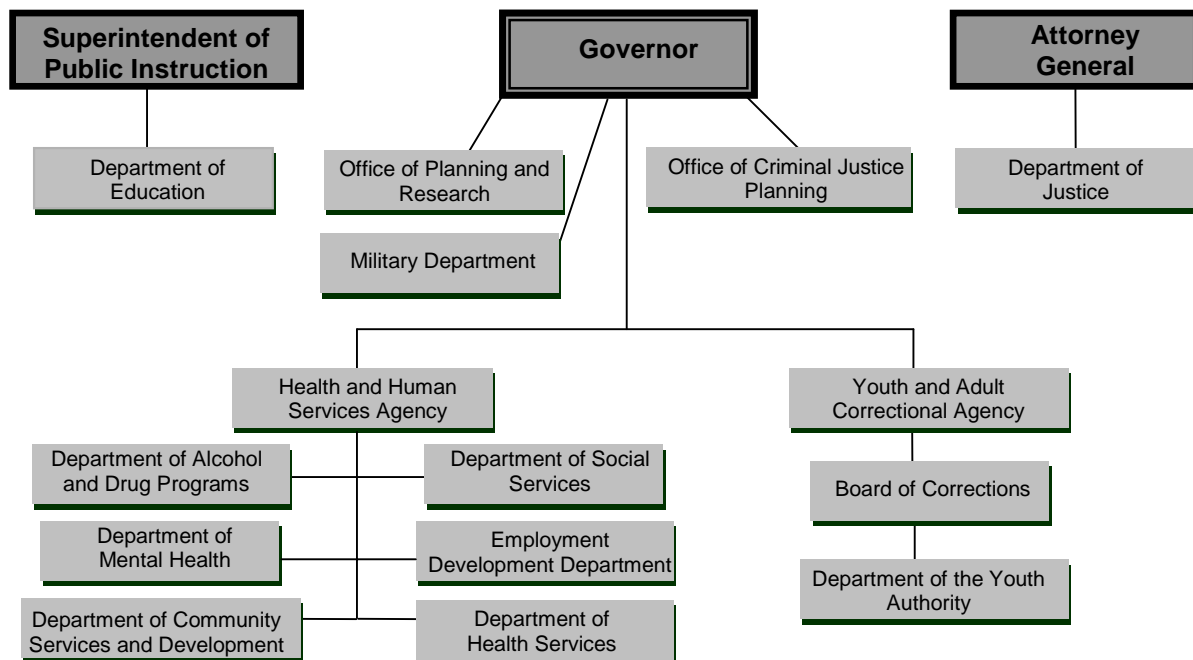
State agencies – understanding the value of this multi-disciplinary approach – often require local agencies to form partnerships as a condition of state funding. The strongest programs appear to be those built on true partnerships between public safety, public health, education and social services agencies.

But the State’s management and funding of prevention programs is not coordinated. Multiple state agencies administer prevention programs in near isolation from one another. More than 50 different programs are scattered across more than a dozen departments. Each program has its own lengthy and complicated grant procedures that many organizations – particularly rural ones – have difficulty navigating. From the State’s perspective, fragmentation thwarts the ability to quantify its investment and manage it as a comprehensive portfolio of programs.

In addition, the State awards much of its funding through competitive grants, partly because funds are limited and partly because prevention programs are still sold as unproven “pilots.” But state administrators and local service providers concede that competitive grants reward communities with the best grant writers, rather than those with the greatest needs. The process encourages communities to establish programs that will win funding, rather than pursue community priorities. And grants often come with inappropriate conditions, such as denying services to some children to prove the effectiveness of common-sense programs like after-school tutoring.

Many of the state grants only provide funds for a couple of years. The hope is communities will assume financial responsibility for successful programs. But communities say that they do not have the necessary funds, so promising programs often shrivel and die – and have to be started over from scratch when more funds become available.

Agencies That Administer Prevention Programs



Finally, with few exceptions, resources are not allocated to meet two fundamental needs: All communities need to be able to establish basic prevention programs, and communities with the greatest juvenile violence problems need additional resources.

The Juvenile Crime Prevention Act of 2000 allocated \$121 million among counties on a per-capita basis. But the majority of resources are not allocated in ways that help all communities protect their youth, that encourage communities to pursue proven strategies for addressing their priorities, and that target the neighborhoods with the biggest problems.

Other states have aligned funding mechanisms with policy goals. Pennsylvania provides financial incentives to communities to adopt proven, cost-effective programs. In Oregon, agencies are developing a common planning and single grant application for local agencies. Oregon is “braiding” together funding streams that support common purposes.

Previously, this Commission and others urged the State to consolidate the disparate programs into a single agency. This solution would require agencies to relinquish programs, which they resist. But it also discounts the value of involving many disciplines in the cause of prevention.

As it stands, the benefits of involving education, public safety and social services agencies are compromised by disparate, complicated and uncoordinated management. Why should community organizations have to

struggle to identify funds, fill out multiple applications that ask for much of the same information, and redefine the needs of their communities to fit the State's definition of the problem? Why should reporting procedures, data definitions and evaluation requirements vary from one program to another?

The Commission believes California should streamline, simplify and truly integrate the funding for youth violence prevention and manage it like any other investment. It should begin with an inventory of programs whose primary purpose is to prevent youth crime and violence. It should provide flexible funding to encourage community-crafted responses to youth violence. And it should inform policy-makers about statewide violence prevention needs, the adequacy of current funding, and effectively target resources to the problems.

Recommendation 3: The State should reorganize the way it funds youth violence prevention to permit smart investments in community efforts. Specifically, the State should create a funding strategy that would:

- ❑ ***Streamline, coordinate and integrate state programs.*** Funding for youth violence prevention programs should be coordinated and, where appropriate, consolidated. Youth violence prevention appropriations to state agencies should be contingent upon their coordination with other state agencies. The State should develop simplified grant applications based on single, comprehensive needs assessments and, over time, single applications for joint and simultaneous consideration by state agencies with grant programs.
- ❑ ***Provide some funding to all communities.*** The funding mechanism should provide all communities with base funding for community-crafted prevention efforts. Local juvenile justice coordinating councils should develop and submit to county boards of supervisors and the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinating Council plans for prevention expenditures. The plans should identify the community health indicators to be addressed and the prevention strategies to be implemented. Communities should document what

Immediate Steps

- ❑ The Governor and the Legislature could direct agencies to develop a single application that provides common and basic information for all prevention programs, and if necessary a second form for unique information required by a specific program.
- ❑ A pilot project could be created involving one county or one region in which a single application is submitted to the State. All state agencies with prevention programs could review the application and determine which programs could support the community's efforts. The county could be given priority to available state funds that support its goals.
- ❑ The State should not renew any expiring prevention programs without a clear plan for how that program will be integrated into a coordinated prevention effort in terms of a unified planning and application process, streamlined reporting and effective evaluation.
- ❑ Review programs administered by OCJP to determine if they could be better administered by another agency.
- ❑ Develop an inventory of programs to meet the needs of state policy-makers and local communities.

strategies are likely to be successful. Incentives, such as reduced evaluation requirements for strategies showing strong evidence of success, should be provided. Rewards also should be provided to prevention providers who develop new approaches that are proven to be cost-effective and are utilized.

- ❑ **Provide additional resources to communities with the greatest needs.** Additional funding should be available to communities with the greatest needs. To receive additional funding, communities should be required to target prevention efforts to youth most at-risk for violence or victimization and implement strategies with strong evidence of effectiveness. Funding to communities with special needs should be of adequate duration and not summarily terminated once programs show success.
- ❑ **Include an inventory of state programs.** An effective funding strategy should include an inventory of programs managed to inform the budget process, the policy-making process and the grant-making process. An on-line inventory of programs should be available to communities statewide.

Invest in Leadership

Finding 4: Successful youth violence prevention efforts are driven by dynamic and talented leaders who develop collaborative strategies tailored to their communities.

How Leaders are Developed

Public & private organizations recognize the need to identify potential leaders and develop their skills to motivate people, build partnerships and solve problems. Some examples of organizations investing in leadership:

- **American Leadership Forum.** Selects individuals from communities across the country and provides them with a yearlong, intensive leadership development program.
- **California Attorney General’s Youth Corps Program.** Youth between the ages of 18 and 25 are selected to provide public safety awareness, conflict resolution and mentoring to “at-risk” middle and high school students.
- **Law Enforcement Command Colleges.** Provides intensive leadership development to law enforcement professionals with leadership characteristics and goals.
- **Youth as Resources Program.** The National Crime Prevention Council helps young people to identify community problems and design projects to solve them.

In prevention, policy-makers strive to identify successful “programs” – and then devote energy and resources to replicating those programs. The Commission believes that an essential component of success is the leadership – tenacity, courage, and organizational skills – of individual program managers.

Even when replicating proven programs, studies show the chief administrator is often the key to its success. In communities the Commission visited, the common denominator of successful prevention efforts was the unwavering leadership of one or more individuals. Those individuals believed passionately in preventing youth violence, and they had the skills to convert vision into outcomes. They built cooperation among the organizations and individuals. They assessed the youth-related problems in their communities and tailored appropriate responses. They leveraged resources, authority and influence.

In the Boyle Heights neighborhood of East Los Angeles, a Jesuit priest leads a multi-faceted effort to prevent gang violence. In Fresno, a well-developed collaboration among schools, law enforcement, social services, mental health and the faith community has flourished under the leadership of the juvenile court judge.

While leadership seems like an intangible ingredient, the results are measurable. In Monrovia, the Safe City/Safe Campus Task Force – where community members have assumed the mantle of leadership – an anti-truancy ordinance has contributed to a 39 percent reduction in truancy and 40 percent reduction in daytime crime.

But the State does little to develop leaders and help communities build the capacity to implement collaborative strategies to solve community problems. Absent talent and leadership, the best programs can fail. When they do fail, resources and opportunities are wasted.

As a statewide enterprise California should invest in developing local youth and adult leaders and build the capacity of communities to forge successful strategies. This investment could dramatically improve community programs in ways that can withstand budget shortfalls.

A state-sponsored nonprofit institute could be established to provide leadership training and perform other functions, including maintaining a resource center and developing a strategy for evaluating prevention efforts, functions described in detail in Findings 4 and 5.

An institute sponsored and influenced by the State – but not run solely by the State – could elicit the participation and expertise of multiple public and private organizations that have a stake in youth violence prevention. It could seek foundation and other private sector money as well as public funds, and could build partnerships with state and private universities. To align the work of the institute with the State's goals for youth violence prevention, it could be governed by the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinating Council.

Why a Nonprofit Institute?

Governments have long turned to publicly sponsored, nonprofit organizations to provide services. The National Academy of Sciences, for instance, was created by Abraham Lincoln. But governments are rediscovering the value of quasi-public organizations. The California Council on Science and Technology and the Virginia Center for Innovative Technology are two recent efforts to use nonprofits to achieve public goals. Among their attributes:

- ***Funding is performance-based.*** These organizations compete for public and private grants. Their success depends on the value they provide to clients.
- ***Designed to be partners.*** State agencies with regulatory or enforcement responsibilities have trouble partnering with local agencies, community-based service providers, and even other state agencies. A publicly chartered nonprofit does not have these conflicts.
- ***Representative Governance.*** The board of a non-profit organization can be crafted to provide equal representation to sponsors and clients.

Recommendation 4: The State should help communities fortify youth violence prevention strategies by establishing a Youth Violence Prevention Institute which should, among other functions, develop emerging youth and adult leaders. The institute should:

❑ **Be non-profit and multi-disciplinary.** The institute should be established as a California non-profit organization. The Youth Violence Prevention Coordinating Council should serve as the board of directors of the institute and should hire an executive officer to administer the institute.

❑ **Provide knowledge.** The institute should educate youth and adult leaders about individual, family and community risk and resiliency factors. Training should provide the latest information about violence as learned behavior, brain development and other underlying causes of youth violence. It should assist community leaders to collect, share and use data to further their prevention goals. The institute should forge partnerships with high schools and colleges to provide leadership training.

Tapping Local Talent

California is endowed with many successful leaders – school principals, police chiefs, ministers, doctors, business and community officials.

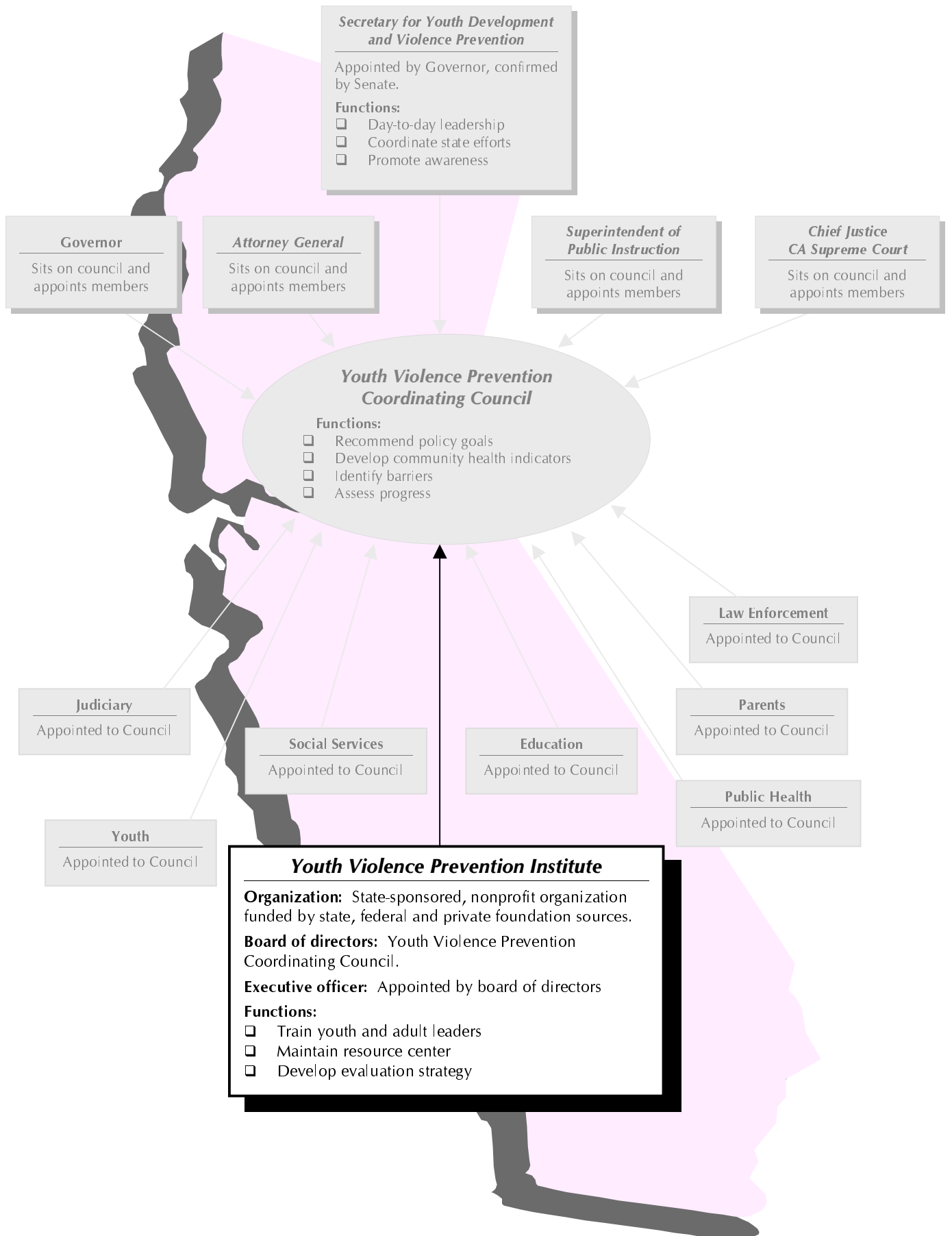
The goal of the institute should be to encourage the development of emerging leaders. The Commission is unsure precisely how this should be done. But these efforts should be creative, and informed by those Californians who have distinguished themselves by improving their organizations and the communities they serve.

This leadership development may involve apprenticeships, formal education, or an energetic and growing network of those making a difference.

It should not be limited to classroom training or one-time seminars. It should be field-based, practical, intense and enduring.

❑ **Build skills needed for success.** The institute should work with emerging youth and adult leaders to identify and overcome barriers to collaboration and provide them with facilitation skills. Youth and adult leaders should be taught how to develop, implement and sustain effective prevention strategies. They should learn how to develop effective partnerships, identify alternative funding sources, and develop skills in others.

The graphic on the following page shows the proposed institute and its relationship to the Youth Violence Prevention Council recommended earlier.



Understanding and Using New Knowledge

Finding 5: While the knowledge of violence is evolving, the State does not effectively acquire, assess and incorporate into policy the latest research on brain development, violence as learned behavior and effective prevention and intervention measures.

As science can explain more completely why people do what they do, strategies for preventing violence improve. The potential for research on brain development to inform policy-makers and practitioners is growing significantly. More will be known five years from now, and even more in a decade. The existing body of scientifically evaluated prevention initiatives also will grow.

This knowledge is developed and kept in many different places – in policy institutes and research centers, in university libraries and on Web sites. This information also is needed in many different places – in legislative committees, by public and private agencies, and in neighborhoods across California. But the people who need the latest information – to make policies, implement programs and evaluate effectiveness – have difficulty finding and understanding it. As a result, many of the potential benefits are not captured and progress is limited.

California has no centralized source for the latest information on youth crime and violence prevention. The Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs maintains resource centers and clearinghouses containing substance abuse prevention and mentoring materials. The Attorney General's Office develops and distributes some youth violence prevention information and wants to expand its community policing research and resource center. The Public Policy Institute of California, the California Policy Research Center, and the California Research Bureau occasionally inform policy-makers on criminal justice issues.

Absent factual information, public policy is often driven by myth, bias and the ability of a particular proposal to garner support. Pilot programs and other experiments are funded – and persist. Many have no evidence of success. Some, like boot camps, have been shown to be ineffective, yet funding has been continued and even increased.

Easy access to the latest information is particularly important because effective prevention strategies are tailored to local circumstances. Without reliable information on best practices, community practitioners cannot make the most of limited resources.

California needs an entity charged with obtaining, assessing and disseminating youth violence prevention information. This entity should expand upon and institutionalize the immediate steps to distribute information

that are recommended in Finding 1. It should provide “one-stop shopping” for policy-makers, program managers and community leaders so research findings can be incorporated into policy and practice.

Recommendation 5: Within the Youth Violence Prevention Institute, a resource center should be created to acquire, assess and disseminate research findings that impact youth violence prevention policy. Specifically, the center should:

- ❑ ***Advance knowledge.*** The center should obtain and assess the latest research in human development, social science and other disciplines and identify how state violence prevention policies could be changed to reflect the most current understanding of these issues. It should identify gaps in current knowledge and sponsor needed research.
- ❑ ***Disseminate information.*** The center should provide policy-makers, practitioners, and community leaders with information on proven and promising ideas and foster the exchange of information across disciplines. It should make the latest research available to the public and sponsor community forums to encourage discussion. It should include information about funding sources, training and technical assistance opportunities and provide links to other resources and clearinghouses.

Rethinking the Role of Evaluation

Finding 6: Rigid and ineffective evaluation practices inappropriately drive programs and hinder the development of effective and efficient prevention initiatives.

Policy-makers and the public need good evaluations to know whether resources invested in prevention programs are achieving the desired results and whether they are cost-effective.

But in prevention, as in many policy areas, the State struggles with how to evaluate the effectiveness of programs. As a result, evaluation requirements for state-funded programs differ widely. Some programs, like Healthy Start, which is administered by the Department of Education, include an independent statewide evaluation. Others, like the School Safety and Violence Prevention Act, which also is administered by the department, have no evaluation component.

An emphasis on outcome measures has resulted in rigorous evaluation expectations for many programs. For example, most of the 48 Challenge Grant programs administered by the Board of Corrections have experimental research designs.

The Commission has identified several problems with the State’s evaluation policies:

First, as researchers and practitioners assert, the State often expects evaluations to provide definitive information that cannot be easily obtained. Methodologies that are appropriate for narrowly defined programs cannot be used to reliably evaluate complex prevention strategies, where multiple factors may be responsible for change. Researchers simply cannot isolate the effect of one intervention on the life of a child who has many influences. As a result, evaluations cannot always prove or disprove cost-effectiveness and they cannot always distinguish bad concepts from poorly managed programs.

Second, scientific evaluations also are expensive. The California Wellness Foundation, after spending \$6 million to evaluate the first five years of its Youth Violence Prevention Initiative, concluded that it did not get the irrefutable evidence it was looking for. The foundation now believes there are many ways to gauge effectiveness, besides statistical outcome measures. For instance, it expects to rely more on the personal experience of participants and program managers. The foundation also has decided to commit no more than 5 percent of grant-making dollars to evaluation.¹²

Third, most evaluations are intended to prove whether a program “works,” rather than provide program managers with information on how they could operate their programs more effectively.

Fourth, because of the overemphasis on experimental designs, many children who need and want help are turned away from clearly beneficial programs, such as mentoring, to be part of control groups.

Finally, program managers at the community level often do not have the ability to design or manage evaluations, further frustrating their efforts to help children.

The inadequacy of evaluation methodologies should not be used as an excuse for not funding prevention programs. Rather, it is a reason for developing effective methodologies and practices.

Unlike many other public safety policies, the State often expects prevention programs to prove that they work to reduce crime and violence, and often expects them to prove they are more cost-effective than other approaches to public safety. This higher standard has many consequences.

Clearly, policy-makers and programs managers – in all public programs – should be focused on improving outcomes for the citizens they serve. But to do so in the area of prevention, the State needs to develop more realistic

sophisticated approaches to evaluation – ones that provide policy-makers, community leaders, program managers and parents more information about what to fund, what to do, and what to do differently. In some cases, this will require aligning methodologies with the information that is needed. In other cases, this will require developing new methodologies to assess and understand “community change.”

Recommendation 6: To inform policy-makers, practitioners and the public, the State should adopt a strategy for evaluating prevention efforts. Specifically, the Youth Violence Prevention Institute should:

- ❑ ***Develop and recommend effective evaluation methods.*** The plan should distinguish between the level of evaluations that are needed to test experimental strategies, versus those that can determine if proven programs are being faithfully replicated. Experimental programs – particularly those that represent significant public expenditures – should be rigorously evaluated. Proven programs should only be evaluated for fiscal accountability, program implementation and management effectiveness.
- ❑ ***Help develop community indicators.*** Prevention providers need to be accountable to their communities and the State for improving the lives of young people. The institute should work with the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinating Council to develop indicators of community health that will assist communities to identify problems and measure progress.
- ❑ ***Provide a way to understand community change.*** The evaluation strategy should advance methodologies to assess complex efforts and effectively measure community change, based on goals and indicators of community health. The strategy should include exploration of more efficient ways to conduct evaluations.
- ❑ ***Develop evaluation tools for program management.*** Local service providers need and want to use evaluation to assess progress and improve services. The Institute should develop tools to help communities evaluate and improve program management.

