CRIME IN INDIANAPOLIS:
Trends, Sources, and Opportunities for Change

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In Indianapolis, homicides and non-fatal shootings reached a four-year high in 2015. In Marion County, homicides are the leading cause of death for 18-to 24-year-old males, and the second leading cause of death for 25-to 34-year-old males.

Many social issues are related to crime, but finding consistent, evidence-based causes and solutions that reduce violent crime can be complicated. The actions of criminal offenders are reinforced by their communities and the criminal justice system, in addition to the actions of offenders.

Preventing criminal activity, rehabilitating offenders, and addressing underlying social challenges requires addressing each of these areas: offenders’ actions, communities, and the criminal justice system. These multiple influences suggest that no single policy or program may reduce crime, especially more violent ones. Crime is a complex and multi-dimensional problem, requiring a complex, multi-dimensional approach in order to be reduced.

This overview of crime and related issues examines local trends and national research on causes and solutions to crime-related concerns:

- Recent trends in Indianapolis crime
- General issues associated with crime
- Strategies to address crime-related issues

This research and subsequent conversations with the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) inform the following strategies and potential responses included in this report.
From 2012 to 2015:
- Indianapolis averaged 126 homicides and 394 non-fatal shootings per year (Figure 1).
- The number of non-fatal shootings increased by 11 percent.
- The number of homicide victims increased by 56 percent (Figure 2).
- The number of individuals suspected of homicides increased by 48 percent (Figure 2).

In 2014, the city of Indianapolis and the Department of Public Safety identified six areas of Indianapolis with higher crime rates than other areas of the city. These locations—referred to as focus areas—are particularly prone to violent crimes (Figure 3).

The focus areas only make up 4.7 percent of Indianapolis’ population, but account for more than a third of non-fatal shootings and homicides from 2012 to 2015 (Figures 4 and 5).

Footnotes:
1 The definition for criminal homicides could change pending UCR Review. Criminal homicides do not include police action shootings, self-defense, or negligent homicides.
2 Numbers are not comparable prior to 2012 due to changes in reporting practices or incomplete data.
3 Typically, homicide and non-fatal shooting rates are calculated using population numbers. The latest population numbers for Indianapolis are from 2013, so rates could not be calculated for 2014 and 2015.
HOMICIDES AND NON-FATAL SHOOTINGS ARE INCREASING, ESPECIALLY DURING THE SECOND HALF OF 2015.

From 2014 to 2015, the areas of Indianapolis outside the focus areas experienced a 4 percent decline in homicides and a 16 percent increase in non-fatal shootings. The focus areas experienced even larger increases in both types of violent crime (Figure 6).

Table 1: Change in crime, January 1 through June 30, 2015 compared to July 1 through December 31, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jan 1 to Jun 30</th>
<th>Jul 1 to Dec 31</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Homicides</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis (Excluding Focus Areas)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Areas</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>107%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Non-Fatal Shootings</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis (Excluding Focus Areas)</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Areas</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second half of 2015 was particularly violent. There were more non-fatal shootings and homicides across the entire city from July 1 to December 31, 2015, compared to January 1 through June 30, 2015. The number of homicides doubled in the focus areas (from 13 in January through June to a total of 40 by the end of 2015).

Overall, these trends support the perception that violent crimes have worsened recently, and that additional attention is needed in the focus areas to reduce crime.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS TO CRIME: CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND COMMUNITIES

Several issues exist within communities and the criminal justice system that may be associated with crime. Effectively reducing violent crime involves addressing issues with both individual offenders and the communities in which they live.

Offenders who have criminal histories, mental health issues, and substance abuse problems have all been associated with criminal activity. These issues also persist within at-risk communities.
**RE-OFFENDERS AND RE-ENTRY ENVIRONMENTS**

The problem: Many re-entrants—ex-offenders who recently return to their communities—continue criminal activity after being released from a correctional facility. The criminal justice system may not effectively rehabilitate offenders before they are released, and communities may not be equipped to prevent criminal activity after offenders are released.

Past criminal behavior is strongly linked to violent crimes in Indianapolis. In 2015, 84 percent of homicide suspects in Indianapolis had a criminal history—an increase from 70 percent from 2012. Seventy-four percent of homicide suspects had a previous arrest for committing a crime against another person. From 2005 to 2009 (most recent analysis available), nearly half of offenders from Indiana’s most populous counties returned to prison after having been released. IMPD estimates that about 9,000 ex-offenders will be released into Indianapolis in 2016.

Reducing the number of recidivists—offenders who return to correctional facilities after being released—should lead to reduced costs. Marion County would save $1.55 million by preventing just 46 ex-offenders from returning to prison within three years of being released.

Reducing recidivism includes preventing youth from being criminally active at early ages. The younger an individual who commits a crime, the more likely he is to re-offend as an adult, and remain the system.

The potential for future criminal activity among Indiana youth is unclear. Nearly 20 percent of high school students in Indiana have reported carrying a gun, knife, or other weapon. Worse, the number of homicide victims and suspects under the age of 18 increased over the past four years (Figure 7), with youth offenders averaging 8 percent of all homicide victims and 7 percent of homicide suspects from 2012 to 2015.

At the same time, Marion County has experienced a 93 percent decline in youth offenders in the Department of Correction, dropping from 840 in 1998 to 63 in 2014. This decline may be due to more youth being recommended to serve home detentions rather than serve time in facilities.

Another issue with re-offenders is limited use of re-entry programs and facilities. The Indiana Department of Correction allows ex-offenders to develop work-related and personal management skills before their release. These facilities often rely on government grants and local donations, which can make operations inconsistent. An Indianapolis re-entry facility, Liberty Hall Re-entry Facility, has experienced a decline in the number of ex-offenders there. Ex-offenders are often required to pay re-entry services, which may be difficult for an individual with limited financial resources.

Marion County Community Corrections also offers work release and home monitoring programs. Currently, 2,000 individuals participate in the work release program, and 5,000 participate in home monitoring programs. Even with these programs, ex-offenders may be more likely to commit violent crimes if they return to communities that do not offer educational and job opportunities to ex-offenders.

**STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS RE-OFFENDERS**

- Increase the number of quality arrests, instead of increasing the total quantity of arrests. Determine relationships between offenders and ex-offenders in the community may lead to arrests that remove persistent criminals from at-risk communities.
- Reinstate community data meetings. The meetings will identify potential offenders and inform community leaders and stakeholders about ongoing issues and allow them to enhance the efforts of IMPD.
- Increase availability of healthy and affordable food options in high-poverty areas and consistent housing options for re-entrants and homeless ex-offenders.
- Address sources of substance use and abuse among repeat offenders.

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**Table 2: Homicide suspects with local adult criminal histories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percent of Homicide Suspects with Adult Criminal History</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>84%</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Prepared by IMPD Crime Analysis Section

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**Figure 7: Number of homicide victims and suspects under 18, 2012 to 2015**

Source: HomiStat.mdb, Prepared by IMPD Crime Analysis Section
STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

- Improve the mental health treatment of incarcerated offenders by Marion County correctional staff.
- Provide additional mental health trainings for public safety personnel.
- Offer sufficient bed space to house the mentally ill in correctional and re-entry facilities.
- Invest in short-term beds, case workers, mental health courts, and other mental health experts, based on the number of offenders.
- Train all public safety personnel for effective interactions with community members who suffer from mental illness.

Recent estimates classify 30 percent of inmates (600 to 650 individuals) in the Marion County Jail as mentally ill. From 2013-2014, the six focus areas experienced a high rate of mental health incidents that required calls to Indianapolis Emergency Medical Services (IEMS). The rate in the focus areas was higher than the entire IEMS coverage area, which includes the focus areas (Figure 8). The cost of not treating mental illness affects the operations of the correctional system. Mental health services total nearly $8 million a year in the Marion County Jail. These costs include care and treatment ($5 million), security ($2 million), and $650,000 for medications.

Those costs cover the tools that are effective for treating mental illness among offenders. Mental health courts have helped offenders suffering from mental illness, but the courts can only afford to meet once a week instead of daily. Case workers, who manage and support mentally ill offenders, often have high caseloads and little time to work with individual offenders. Within correctional facilities, mentally ill offenders do not always live in areas that support effective rehabilitation and often share space with non-mentally ill offenders.

MENTAL HEALTH

The problem: Mental illnesses—which affect a person’s thinking, mood, ability to relate to others, and/or function on a daily basis—increase the chance that an individual will commit a crime if that illness remains untreated.10 Worse, criminal offenders may have undiagnosed mental illnesses, which are often only detected among offenders after they enter the criminal justice system.

The communities to which offenders return play a major role in reducing the number of crimes committed in the future. Violent offenders are likely to live in or have experienced poverty, have low educational attainment, and live in communities with few employment opportunities.

Figure 8: Number of mental health incidents per 1,000 population reported by IEMS, Indianapolis and focus areas, 2013 to 2014

Source: Department of Public Safety, City of Indianapolis

INDIRECT CONTRIBUTIONS TO CRIME: TRENDS IN INDIANAPOLIS COMMUNITIES

The communities to which offenders return play a major role in reducing the number of crimes committed in the future. Violent offenders are likely to live in or have experienced poverty, have low educational attainment, and live in communities with few employment opportunities.

SUBSTANCE USE AND ABUSE

The problem: Individuals who commit crimes, including violent ones, are likely to have used drugs or alcohol.11 Alcohol abuse is involved in half of homicides in Marion County.2 In 2015, 60 percent of homicide suspects had a previous drug arrest, and 28 percent of murders were motivated by drugs.12 Worse, individuals that use or abuse substances often suffer from mental health issues.

Eighty-five percent of inmates in the Marion County Jail have reported some type of substance use or abuse. Like reported mental health incidents, the rate of reported overdoses in the focus areas is higher than in Indianapolis (Figure 9).

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SUBSTANCE USE AND ABUSE

- Expand existing substance abuse programs for criminal offenders.
- Address sources of substance use and abuse in communities that are at-risk for violent crime.
- Treatment of both substance abuse and co-occurring mental health issues among offenders.
- Ensure quality treatment for offenders with mental health and substance abuse-related issues, especially if the Criminal Justice Center is completed.
Another poverty-related issue is hunger, especially food insecurity. Marion County has the highest food insecurity rate of counties in the state, with 19 percent of its population unable to access adequate or nutritionally acceptable food. Though there are numerous food banks and organizations dedicated to hunger relief, many food insecure individuals who live in poverty may be uninformed about available resources.

**STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS POVERTY-RELATED ISSUES**

- Provide safe and quality housing options for community residents, especially in focus areas.
- Enable area food banks to help reduce hunger, through funding and operational support.

**POVERTY**

*The problem:* Poverty leads to reduced opportunities in education and employment for youth and adults. The lack of opportunity can lead to individuals seeking crime-related activities for income. Without quality employment or higher education levels in their communities, ex-offenders are more likely to be released into impoverished communities. These factors perpetuate the cycle of re-offending.

About 20 percent of Marion County’s population lives in poverty—nearly double the rate from 2000 (11.4 percent). In the aggregate, slightly more individuals live in poverty in the six focus areas compared to the rest of Indianapolis, particularly among households with children (Figure 10).

One issue associated with poverty is housing. Once ex-offenders are released, they may be unable to find stable housing for multiple reasons:

1. Monthly average rental prices in the focus areas range from $485 to $744, which may be excessive for ex-offenders with a minimum-wage job.
2. The Indianapolis Housing Authority may deny applicants who have been convicted of drug, theft, violent, or sex crimes in the past 10 years, so public housing may not be attainable.
3. Unemployment can lead to homelessness for ex-offenders. As of 2015, 25 percent of the homeless population in Marion County reported a previous felony conviction. Eleven percent of convicted felons who were homeless were unemployed due to a lost job or history of previous incarceration, among other reasons.

**UNEMPLOYMENT**

*The problem:* Among Indiana’s most populated counties, unemployment is strongly related to offenders returning to prison. In Indiana, nearly half of released offenders were unemployed, and forty-two percent of those unemployed offenders returned to prison. In the most populous counties in Indiana, most ex-offenders were unemployed for the first year after they were released.

Worse, few employment opportunities may exist within some Indianapolis neighborhoods to prevent individuals from turning to crime. Among those actively seeking employment, the average unemployment rate in the six focus areas (23 percent) is nearly twice that of Marion County (12 percent) as of 2013 (Figure 11).
Ex-offenders may face several barriers when they attempt to find or maintain a job:

1. **Information on a resume may cue employers to a criminal background, such as listed employment at a correctional facility, which may allow employers to discriminate against an applicant’s criminal history.**
2. **Even when ex-offenders are employed, they tend to have low quality of employment. Among employed ex-offenders in Indiana, most found jobs in low-skill hourly and seasonal jobs, such as waste management and food services. During the recession, more than 60 percent of employed ex-offenders in Indiana earned less than $10,000 a year, with many earning around $5,000 annually.**

Some opportunities exist for ex-offenders in Marion County.

1. Several agencies, including RecycleForce, Goodwill Industries, and Public Advocates in Community Re-Entry (PACE), offer workforce training and job placement for ex-offenders.
2. The Work Opportunities Tax Credit provides tax credits for employers to hire groups, such as ex-offenders, who may not be able to find work.
3. Indianapolis enacted a “ban the box” ordinance in 2014, which offers some protections for applicants with criminal histories.

**STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS UNEMPLOYMENT**

- **Develop more employment opportunities for residents of focus areas, for individuals with any level of educational attainment.**
- **Develop more opportunities for quality employment (i.e., jobs that pay at least a living wage) for re-entrants and at-risk community residents.**

**Link ex-offenders to unfilled, seasonal government or contracted jobs upon initial release.**

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**EDUCATION**

**The problem:** Lack of education is a major factor in ex-offenders returning to the criminal justice system. Ex-offenders with more education are more likely to be employed, and less likely to return to an IDOC facility. In 2005 (the most recently available data), nearly half of offenders released to Marion County had less than a high school education. Of those ex-offenders with less than a high school education, 88 percent read at a sixth-grade level or lower.

Since individuals with higher levels of education are less likely to commit crime, youth are an important target in early educational efforts. Nationally, school attendance and graduation have been linked to youth not being re-arrested, especially among African-American males. The focus areas are located in the Indianapolis Public School district, which posted a high school graduation rate of 72 percent, well below the state’s 90 percent graduation rate. Even if ex-offenders decide to pursue higher education, offenders with drug convictions are not eligible for financial aid, which may complicate financing a degree.

Again, community trends highlight the role of education in areas with criminal activity (Figure 12). Compared to the rest of Indianapolis, twice the number of residents in focus areas (30 percent) do not have high school diplomas.
Conversely, Indianapolis residents have nearly three times the proportion of individuals with at least a college degree compared to those in focus areas (29 percent and 10 percent, respectively).

**STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS EDUCATION**
- Expand quality educational opportunities from Pre-K to 12, especially in the focus areas.
- Provide opportunities for offenders to earn educational credentials—both while they are incarcerated and after they are released.
- Work with existing groups to provide quality skills training for non-high school graduates and re-entrants.

**OPPORTUNITIES: A COLLABORATIVE, CONSISTENT COMMUNITY APPROACH**

Implementing the long-term and short-term strategies in this report must include methods that engage communities and local organizations. School districts, nonprofit organizations, and correctional facilities, among other groups, each have special skills, expertise, and networks that allow them to uniquely address the crime-related issues discussed in this report. Through the ongoing responses below, strategies to address Indianapolis’ crime-related issues should focus on involving communities through consistent and collaborative approaches that use data to help inform decisions.

**ONGOING RESPONSES TO CRIME-RELATED ISSUES**

| COMMUNITY | • Develop and maintain in-depth understanding of communities that are at risk for violent crime.  
| | • Involve community members in efforts to reduce crime. For example, Crime Stopper tips increased—even in focus areas—due to attention and support from public safety personnel. |
| CONSISTENCY | • Provide ongoing programs to reduce crime and related issues. When programs are inconsistent in content or frequency, the lapse prevents communities from benefiting from the full effects of the program. Ongoing programs or policies should benefit re-entrants and the communities to which they return. |
| COLLABORATION | • Parties dedicated to crime reduction—the criminal justice system, the community, nonprofit organizations, and other groups—should collaborate with individuals and organizations who best understand the needs and people within a given community. |
| DATA-DRIVEN APPROACHES & INITIATIVES | • Implement and maintain quality data collection, management, and analysis for both criminal justice-related agencies and community partners.  
| | • Evaluate programs and policies designed to help offenders and communities, especially within the focus areas.  
| | • As of 2012, over 60 percent of Indiana law enforcement agencies received requests for information on at least a weekly basis. Quality data collection and analysis can be coordinated among organizations and the criminal justice system for better information about trends and what issues should be addressed. |
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