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Community Public Health and Safety Networks: Case Studies and Governance Structure

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background: In 1994, the Washington legislature passed a comprehensive Violence Prevention Act (E2SHB 2319), with a primary purpose of reducing the rate of violence—particularly youth violence—in the state.

The legislature also directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to evaluate the impact of these policy changes on reducing the rates of violence and associated at-risk behaviors. (RCW 70.190.050) Of parallel concern is evaluating whether those factors that protect society against violence and at-risk behaviors have been enhanced. The 1995 Legislature reiterated this evaluation assignment by providing funding in the 1995-97 biennial budget.

The Institute issued its evaluation plan,¹ as directed, in July 1995, its analysis of trends in at-risk behaviors² in January 1996, and issue briefs on related topics in February 1996.³ Regular reports to the Washington Legislature and to the public will be integral to this evaluation assignment.

This Report: The creation of Community Public Health and Safety Networks, to engage communities throughout Washington in reducing violence, was an important part of the 1994 Violence Prevention Act. Across the state, **53** networks have been created—most encompassing entire counties, some covering small, local communities. Most are in their formative stage, as they will complete their plans in the summer of 1996.

The Institute's evaluation plan outlined an assessment of this new process for coordinating interventions in the community. This report gives *preliminary* information on these networks, discusses their initial activities, and compares their responsibilities with those of other decentralized social service systems in Washington. Using a case study approach, we selected seven networks to illustrate Washington's geographic and population diversity: Clallam County, S'Klallam Community Network, Kittitas County, Mason County, Snohomish County Federated, South King County and Spokane County.

¹ Steve Aos and Roxanne Lieb, *A Plan for Evaluating Washington State's Violence Prevention Act*, July 1995.

² Steve Aos, Roxanne Lieb, and Robert Barnoski, *Trends in At-Risk Behaviors of Youth in Washington*, January 1996.

³ See Issue Briefs from the Institute's Violence Prevention Study, issued in February 1996 and ongoing.

Findings: These case studies show that:

1. Networks have approached their assignments with creativity and commitment.
2. Network activity has generated substantive citizen involvement.
3. Networks have selected different at-risk behaviors of youth for priority attention.
4. Half of the non-tribal networks selected county government as their fiscal agent. Educational Service Districts and city government represented the next highest categories.
5. The networks' statutory authority was compared with other state efforts intended to decentralize services in early intervention, mental health, and aging services. The networks have more detailed requirements for activities, outcomes, performance, and program evaluation; lack major responsibilities for managing services in their communities; and are obligated to serve a broader population. Networks are expected to accomplish these responsibilities through a volunteer effort rather than through permanent paid staff.
6. Statutory requirements for the networks appear concise and straightforward. The state Family Policy Council's planning guidelines for the networks set more detailed and complex expectations.
7. Indecision in the 1995 Legislature about the networks' future called into question their standing in the community, as well as slowed momentum in their implementation of the 1994 Act.