

## **Fund For a Safer Future: Identifying Barriers to Human Capital Accumulation**

### **Background**

The United States' rate of gun violence ranks among the highest in the world, with the greatest prevalence of gunshot wound injuries among young men of color. While reducing this gun violence would bring obvious health benefits, it may also bring economic benefits to individuals and communities by encouraging greater investment in human capital development. Human capital, defined as skills or knowledge embodied in an individual, is accumulated through initial investments of time during which they forgo current income for future income. Examples of human capital accumulation include postsecondary education and workforce training programs. Given that gun violence increases the risk of death, disability, and incarceration, thereby preventing or hindering one's ability to best apply their human capital, individuals living in violent communities may perceive a low rate of return on human capital investment and choose to opt out. Improved understanding of gun violence's effect on human capital decision-making is needed to identify and implement policies that advance economic mobility among young people who reside in communities that experience prevalent gun violence.

### **Objective**

The research team is conducting interviews with several constituents of the impacted population to better understand the relationship between gun violence and human capital attainment. Health Lab is conducting interviews with current and former gunshot wound (GSW) patients, community members who have experienced varying levels of exposure to gun violence, and the healthcare professionals who treat GSW patients. This research will provide a more holistic perspective on perceptions of neighborhood safety and human capital attainment as well as the landscape of existing and potential resources that assist GSW patients—as well as their families—in their mental and physical recovery.

### **Focus Population**

The research team has identified three research groups: 1) young men on the South Side of Chicago who have been victims of gunshot wounds, 2) young men on the South Side of Chicago who live in high-crime neighborhoods who have observed gun violence, and 3) hospital administrators, nurses, and violence intervention workers at UChicago Medicine. Interviewees from Groups 1 and 3 are being recruited from the University of Chicago Medicine Trauma Care hospital several days after their final medical procedure. Interviewees from Group 2 are being recruited through community partners. In developing and advancing this project, Health Lab is developing an approach to support other evaluations within the UChicago Trauma Care Center and beyond.

### **Project Goals**

- **Goal 1:** Conduct interviews with the three aforementioned groups.
- **Goal 2:** Conduct qualitative analysis on interview transcripts to develop a richer understanding about how individuals exposed to gun violence perceive the incentives related to human capital investment.
- **Goal 3:** Identify and select potential interventions to assist individuals and their families who have been exposed to gun violence.
- **Goal 4:** Disseminate findings in peer-reviewed scientific journals as well as outreach efforts, webinars, and presentations with policymaker and practitioner audiences.

In later phases of this work:

- **Goal 5:** Conduct a rigorous evaluation on the intervention(s) identified in Step 3 and disseminate these findings.

## **About Health Lab**

Health Lab partners with civic and community leaders to identify, rigorously evaluate, and help scale programs and policies that improve health outcomes and address systemic barriers to achieving health equity. Health Lab aims to identify, test, and provide strategies to implement the most promising solutions to issues facing low income or otherwise vulnerable people within the larger healthcare system. The soaring cost of healthcare in the United States has created an urgent need to improve the efficacy and efficiency of the nation's healthcare system. Healthcare in the U.S. remains compartmentalized and often fails vulnerable patients—particularly those with multiple chronic health problems—in addition to straining government resources. Healthcare reform has created exciting new opportunities in healthcare access and healthcare delivery, but policymakers and practitioners are still working to understand how it can sustainably and reliably improve health outcomes for underserved populations including people experiencing homelessness, seniors, and those impacted by the criminal legal system. Health Lab leverages rigorous research methods such as randomized controlled trials, large datasets, and partnerships with government agencies and nonprofits to test novel healthcare delivery models and improve public health outcomes for underserved populations in Chicago and beyond.