READI Chicago is a community violence reduction initiative that provides two years of intensive programming to men at the highest risk of gun violence involvement. The initiative offers 18 months of paid employment, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and wrap-around services, with an additional six months of job coaching support after the work component of the program ends. READI identifies eligible men through three sources: community partners, re-entry from the criminal justice system, and a data-based risk assessment.

The randomized controlled trial of READI Chicago is still in progress, but this document reports interim results. This analysis includes 82% of the full study population—a total of 2,014 men for whom we can measure outcomes over a pre-specified follow-up period of 20 months. For the typical participant, these 20 months represent two months of initial engagement and recruitment, and 18 months of eligibility for paid work and other services. Since this is a partial sample, these results are preliminary and may change.

The right people are entering READI. The men referred to READI experienced unusually high rates of gun violence and justice system contact. Of the 2,014 men in this early analysis, for instance, 35% had been shot at least once. They also had an average of 17 arrests prior to the study. These men continued to be at an extremely high risk of gun violence involvement after referral. Over 20 months, men in the control group—whose outcomes represent what would happen to READI-eligible men without access to READI services—were shot or killed at 45 times the rate of the average Chicagoan. They were over 11 times more likely to be shot or killed than their neighbors in some of Chicago’s highest-violence neighborhoods. Even compared to other men in their same age group and neighborhoods, READI referrals were more than twice as likely to be shot or killed during the outcome period. These rates of violence victimization are astonishingly high and consistent across the three referral pathways, representing the status quo faced by the men offered READI Chicago.

Despite facing considerable barriers to participating, men offered READI are also highly engaged. Fifty-five percent of all referrals eligible to start work do so within 20 months, working an average of 569 hours in subsidized jobs over this period. The rates of starting work are even higher for community and reentry referrals—79% and 70%, respectively—compared to 38% for risk assessment referrals. One explanation for such high take-up rates may be the income READI provides, though according to staff focus groups and participant interviews and surveys, men stay connected because of the skills they are learning and relationships they are building.
We Measure Serious Violence Involvement in Several Different Ways

Because we cannot directly observe the behavior of men in the READI study, we currently rely on two types of data from the Chicago Police Department to measure their serious violence involvement: arrests for serious violent offenses and victimizations for shootings and homicides. To improve the integrity of this research, we pre-specified an index combining these measures as the study’s primary outcome. However, we also report results below on specific components of this index—such as arrests for lethal violence, or shootings and homicides—to provide a more complete picture of how READI may be changing participants’ behavior.

We measure serious violence involvement in several different ways.

Arrests for lethal violence—shootings and homicides—show large and statistically significant declines. Combined with shooting and homicide victimizations, overall involvement in lethal violence appears to decline. These results are most consistent for community referrals. In contrast, estimated effects on arrests for non-lethal serious violence are imprecise, as are effects on the pre-specified index of serious violence involvement.

Shooting and homicide arrests. Men offered the chance to participate in READI—including those who participated as well as those who could not be found or declined the offer—are 59% less likely to be arrested for a shooting or homicide. Men who participated in READI—defined as attending at least one orientation—are 79% less likely to be arrested for a shooting or homicide. Both estimates are statistically significant.

Shooting and homicide victimizations. There is some indication of large reductions in shooting and homicide victimizations for community referrals as compared to men through the risk referral pathway; however, these effects are not statistically significant.

Combined measure of shooting and homicide involvement. Involvement in lethal violence—defined as arrests and victimizations for shooting and homicide—declined by 19% for men offered READI and by 32% for men who participated in READI. Neither estimate is statistically significant. However, community referrals who participated in READI were 51% less likely to be involved in lethal violence, a statistically significant estimate.

These results suggest that READI may reduce involvement in lethal violence, particularly for men referred to the program by community outreach partners. If these results persist, it would signal a potentially major READI-driven improvement in the lives of both participants and their communities.

Endnotes

1 For more information on the risk assessment, please see our corresponding "Service Provision Risk Assessment Overview."
2 See the READI Pre-Analysis Plan: https://osf.io/ap8fj/
3 The lower take-up rate for risk assessment referrals partly reflects the fact that many fewer of these men are ever located by outreach workers, with whom they often have no prior relationship, unlike community referrals.
4 For more on our early qualitative findings, please reach out to the research team for more information.
5 We are in the process of obtaining additional data from the Illinois State Police and the Illinois Department of Public Health that would broaden our measures of serious violence involvement.
6 Serious violence offenses include homicide, manslaughter, aggravated assault, aggravated battery, robbery and criminal sexual assault. For each of the arrest and victimization measures, we count the number of times a person experienced that event.
7 We characterize shootings as lethal violence because, in most cases, the act of shooting someone is the same whether the victim survives or not, which usually depends on such factors as the assailant’s aim and ambulance response times.