READI Chicago Early Analysis

READI Chicago is a violence reduction initiative providing two years of intensive, innovative programming to men at the highest risk of gun violence involvement. It offers 18 months of paid employment and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in addition to other supportive services that continue six months after the job ends. READI identifies eligible participants through three sources: community partners, reentry from the criminal justice system, and a data-based risk assessment.

This document shares results from an early analysis of the READI randomized controlled trial, focusing on a subset of study members for whom we can measure outcomes over at least one year. These results are still highly preliminary and subject to change for three reasons: the early analysis measures effects over only half of the two-year initiative; the early analysis sample is only 40% of the full study sample; and the early analysis reflects the least mature version of READI Chicago to date.

READI Chicago is finding and engaging the right participants.

Referrals to READI Chicago are at extremely high risk of involvement in gun violence. Previously, analysis showed that men referred to READI Chicago have extensive prior criminal justice system contact and experienced high rates of victimization. New data confirm that READI Chicago is identifying the right individuals. Over 12 months, men in the control group — whose outcomes represent what would happen to READI participants in the absence of services — were shot or killed at 72 times the rate of the average Chicagoan. This level of risk for violence involvement is truly staggering. Outside of the criminal justice system, very few, if any, organizations can claim to serve a population at as elevated a risk of serious violence victimization as the population READI Chicago is serving.

Despite this high risk, participation in READI Chicago is higher than anticipated. Fifty percent of all individuals eligible to start work do so within 12 months. Over 50% of those who start the initiative are still engaged after 12 months, attending over three quarters of the weeks available for them to work. These rates of engagement are twice what we anticipated and comparable to those of in-school programming for young people who are much more attached to services. Interviews with participants indicate that they are initially attracted to the paycheck but stay engaged because of the relationships with staff and access to CBT.

READI Chicago may help keep participants safer.

Men eligible to participate in READI Chicago were 30% less likely to be shot or killed within 12 months than men in the control group. This difference is statistically significant at the 0.1 level, meaning that the decline in victimization is unlikely to be due to chance variation between the treatment and control groups. This lower rate of serious violence victimization reflects 10 fewer non-fatal shootings and 4 fewer homicides among those offered READI compared to those men who had access to all other services in Chicago. There is no statistically significant change in serious violent-crime arrests.

READI Chicago is building stronger communities.

READI Chicago goes beyond directly offering intensive services to a population at extremely high risk of serious violence involvement: it is building local capacity to continue serving this group in the communities where it operates. The initiative created over 100 jobs while focusing on staff professional development, encouraging cross-organizational collaboration, and requiring high standards of accountability.

Implications of research so far

In the absence of intervention, the men referred to READI experience a level of serious violence that is extraordinary. Victims, their families, their communities, and Chicago as a whole all bear the cost of this violence and would benefit from an intervention that could reduce it. These early results indicate that READI Chicago may reduce the number of participants who are shot or killed. If these results persist, and given the high social cost of gun violence, preliminary calculations suggest that READI Chicago may already be close to paying for itself.

The research team is also conducting large-scale qualitative data collection to better understand this population’s experiences, needs, aspirations, and perceptions of READI Chicago. These data will inform the design of future services for men at the highest risk of gun violence involvement.