

How to Keep Crime Low When We Stop ‘Sheltering in Place’

By **Danielle Soto** | April 24, 2020



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Crime rates have plummeted throughout the United States. This isn't surprising: Most Americans are hunkering down at home, which makes them less vulnerable to certain types of crimes.

Criminologists anticipate crime will remain low while we continue to shelter in place. History shows us that most serious crime typically decreases or at least remains steady in the midst of crises, even one that has a serious negative effect on the economy.

During the Great Recession of the late 2000s, for example, violent crime continued on a downward trend. It was already on a steady decline since the mid-'90s.

But beyond crime trends while people remain largely indoors, we should be asking ourselves: What happens when we begin to fill the streets again?

Will crime bounce back up to where it was before the global pandemic made us shutter inside? With staggering unemployment numbers that continue to rise, will we see crime rates rise in accordance?

What we're currently experiencing provides a unique opportunity to keep crime rates low even after we're allowed to leave our homes again.

The good news is that we already have existing models that we can scale up. These innovative solutions have been proven to reduce offending, connect people with needed mental and behavioral health services, and truly satisfy crime survivors' need for a sense of justice.

For example, proven community-based strategies break cycles of crime by helping people to take accountability and heal. Violence prevention and intervention programs like [Youth Alive!](http://www.youthalive.org/) (<http://www.youthalive.org/>) in Oakland, CA and restorative justice programs like Impact Justice's [Restorative Justice Project](https://impactjustice.org/impact/restorative-justice/) (<https://impactjustice.org/impact/restorative-justice/>) work to interrupt and repair harm.

They center the needs of survivors in ways that the traditional court system does not.

Restorative justice programs in particular almost always have higher survivor satisfaction rates than those who go through our traditional court system.

Equally important are innovative law enforcement approaches like [Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion in Seattle](https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/community-human-services/mental-health-substance-abuse/diversion-reentry-services/lead.aspx) (<https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/community-human-services/mental-health-substance-abuse/diversion-reentry-services/lead.aspx>), and [Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets](https://www.communityaccess.org/storage/images/Miscellaneous/Community_Feedback_Forum_2019/3_Crisis_Assistance_Helping_Out_on_the_Streets_CAHOOTS_presentation.pdf) (https://www.communityaccess.org/storage/images/Miscellaneous/Community_Feedback_Forum_2019/3_Crisis_Assistance_Helping_Out_on_the_Streets_CAHOOTS_presentation.pdf) (CAHOOTS) in Portland, Or. In both cases, law enforcement or civilians partner with local police to divert offenders to needed resources *without* making an arrest. This allows officers to use their resources more strategically and keep communities safe.

These community intervention and law enforcement strategies are two sides of the same coin, and both need to work in concert—not in isolation or at odds with one another.

We also need government at all levels to strengthen that social safety net we talk about but often fail to provide. Supports and services ranging from expanded unemployment insurance, to free childcare especially for essential workers, to accessible health care, can prevent the kind of financial desperation and emotional duress that can fuel mental and behavioral health issues, and underlie most crimes.

What we're seeing now should only be considered the start.

This is the time for bold vision, the courage to be innovative, and the motivation to build the future that we want to see. I work at an organization where we believe we can do better than the status quo. We challenge investments into the same system that *isn't working*.

As social life begins to come back, we should not lose this opportunity to make change. We all deserve to feel safe in our communities. We all deserve a system that truly works to make things right when harm is done.

As challenging as this time is, there is also an opportunity to rethink our approach to justice—and dare to dream of a system that is truly fair to all of us.

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