

# Preventing Sexual Violence in Colorado

## Strengthening Communities to Stop Sexual Violence BEFORE it Occurs

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is using an innovative approach to prevent rape and other forms of sexual violence across the state. With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) **Rape Prevention and Education (RPE)** program, Colorado is working collaboratively with diverse stakeholders, including the state sexual violence coalition, educational institutions, law enforcement entities, rape crisis centers, and community organizations **to stop sexual violence BEFORE it occurs**. These collaborations have strengthened the state's sexual violence prevention efforts by **leveraging resources** and **enhancing prevention opportunities**.

### WHAT IS COLORADO DOING TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

All states, including Colorado, use multiple programs and tools to implement and sustain prevention efforts that ultimately decrease the number of individuals who **perpetrate sexual violence** and the number of individuals who are **victims of sexual violence**. Colorado is maximizing the impact of its work by exploring the commonalities between sexual violence and other types of violence, and working with partners to stop sexual violence, suicide, bullying, and other forms of violence before they occur. As part of its efforts, the Colorado Sexual Violence Prevention (SVP) Program funds eight community-based organizations and seven schools to implement research-based activities related to topics such as **comprehensive sexual health education, suicide prevention, and bullying prevention** among youth. In addition, Colorado has identified **lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth** as priority populations for engagement in RPE activities.

### WHY IS COLORADO WORKING TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Colorado high school students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, as compared to those who identify as heterosexual, have been prioritized for RPE activities because they are more than:

**2X**

as likely to report being bullied

**4X**

as likely to report suicidal thoughts

**5X**

as likely to report having ever been raped

The CDC RPE program has been strengthening our communities and striving to reduce the burden of sexual violence since 1994. CDC provides RPE funding to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.

### WHAT IMPACT IS THIS RPE PROGRAM INTENDED TO HAVE IN COLORADO?

The Colorado RPE program is preventing sexual violence by promoting **non-violent social norms, attitudes, beliefs, policies, and practices**.



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### WHAT IF YOU COULD PREVENT SUICIDE AND BULLYING WHILE YOU PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

That's exactly what Colorado is doing with funding it receives through **CDC's RPE program**. Research has increased our understanding of factors that make some populations more or less vulnerable to violence, also known as risk and protective factors.

**Risk factors** increase the likelihood that a young person will become violent. Examples of risk factors include:<sup>1,2</sup>

- Low commitment to school and school failure
- Exposure to violence and conflict in the family
- Exposure to sexually explicit media
- Attitude of hostility towards women

**Protective factors** buffer young people from the risks of becoming violent, and increasing protective factors can lower the likelihood of involvement in violence. Examples of protective factors include:<sup>3,4</sup>

- Connectedness to family or adults outside the family
- Commitment to school
- Feeling safe in their neighborhood
- Ability to discuss problems with parents

The Colorado SVP Program provides grants to community-based organizations to conduct **prevention** activities throughout the state. Rather than requiring grantees to implement a specific sexual violence prevention program, the SVP Program allows grantees the **flexibility** to determine which sexual violence prevention strategies will work best within their **unique** settings as long as the strategies are focused on **shared risk and protective factors** with other forms of violence and are based on a strong research foundation.

How will we know if this approach is working? The SVP Program, in collaboration with Colorado State University, has developed an **evaluation tool** to measure shared risk and protective factors and has implemented the evaluation tool over the past three years. The evaluation tool will allow Colorado to develop reports examining the impact of these varying innovative approaches to prevent sexual violence.

### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR COLORADO?

Thanks to funding from the CDC RPE program, efforts are underway across the state to:



For additional information or to locate contact information for the state RPE program, please visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/rpe/states.html>

<sup>1</sup> Lipsey MW, Derzon JH. Predictors of violent and serious delinquency in adolescence and early adulthood: a synthesis of longitudinal research. In: Loeber R, Farrington DP, editors. *Serious and violent juvenile offenders: risk factors and successful interventions*. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications; 1998. p. 86–105.

<sup>2</sup> Resnick MD, Ireland M, Borowsky I. Youth violence perpetration: what protects? What predicts? Findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2004;35:424.e1–e10.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). *Youth violence: a report of the Surgeon General* [online]; 2001. Available at: <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/youthviolence/toc.html>

<sup>4</sup> Lösel, F, & Farrington, D P. Direct protective and buffering protective factors in the development of youth violence. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 2012; 43(2), S8-S23.