

COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MORE EQUITABLE SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION

When you work to build social connectedness within communities, you are simultaneously working toward more equitable sexual violence prevention. Community connectedness is considered an evidence-based protective factor against sexual violence. It is the degree of cohesion, trust, and support between community members. In communities with stronger connectedness, it is less likely that people will choose to be violent. Connectedness can be built in workplaces, clubs, neighborhoods, and with families and friends. It can also be built within communities united by a shared identity. The conditions necessary to build and maintain connection vary widely.

People hold many intersectional social identities, such as race/ethnicity, disability, gender, and sexuality, which together affect the forms of oppression and inequality they face. Approaching sexual violence prevention (SVP) with an anti-oppression, intersectional lens helps organizations, communities, and individuals to name root causes and to more effectively support communities that are most impacted and least resourced. In Michigan, there is a critical need for such equity-focused attention on SVP in our Black, Native/Indigenous/American Indian, LGBTQ+, and Disability communities*. The Michigan Community Sexual Violence Prevention Assessment (CSVPA), led by Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI), was a first step to listen and learn from these core communities about what sexual violence looks like in their communities, how risk and protective factors for violence unequally affect them, and what their prevention resources and needs are.

This brief focuses on major findings and recommendations for community connectedness as a key protective factor for SV.

For those unfamiliar with this idea, *risk and protective factors* make it more likely (*risk factors*) or less likely (*protective factors*) that individuals, relationships, communities, and societies will experience violence. Personal or relationship factors could include someone's past experiences with violence, or a teen's connection to school or a caring adult. Community or societal factors could include the lack of good-paying jobs in a neighborhood or widely held beliefs about violence. Each factor affects Black, Native, LGBTQ+, and Disability communities in Michigan in similar and unique ways depending on their diverse identities, histories, and contexts. Community connectedness is considered an evidence-based protective factor against sexual violence. In communities with more support, trust, and unity, it is less likely that people will choose to be violent. Connectedness can be built in workplaces, clubs, neighborhoods, and with families and friends. It can also be built within communities united by a shared identity. The conditions necessary to build and maintain connection vary widely.

**IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE are very complicated. The authors of this report intentionally use terms endorsed by the project's Advisory Council to describe the core communities and their members. We recognize that identity language is always evolving and that not all identity terms are captured here. As a reflection of the varied preferences within the disability community, we will use both person-first language (e.g., "people with disabilities") and identity-first language (e.g., "disabled people").*

BACKGROUND & METHODS



The 2022 Michigan Community Sexual Violence Prevention Assessment (CSVPA) was inspired by Michigan Public Health Institute’s (MPHI) 2019 statewide survey about SV prevention which revealed critical gaps in how Black, Native/Indigenous, LGBTQ+, and Disabled communities experience sexual violence.

The 2019 survey highlighted that community connectedness, economic supports, community safety, and bodily autonomy are important protective factors for sexual violence prevention but that more is needed to understand how these impact our most vulnerable communities. The 2022 CSVPA aimed to explore what these core communities need to prevent sexual violence in relation to each of these protective factors.

The CSVPA used a participatory, community-engaged process.

An Advisory Committee made up of compensated representatives with expertise on sexual violence and one or more core communities provided guidance and feedback throughout the project. In Spring 2022, MPHI conducted virtual semi-structured interviews with twenty-six individuals familiar with the experiences of the four core communities in Michigan, many representing the experiences of more than one core community themselves. MPHI also conducted a review of existing literature and data related to protective factors in each community. The citations can be found in **Appendix B** but should not be considered a complete list of references on this topic. Themes and trends across data sources were shared and interpreted alongside the Advisory Committee through a series of sensemaking sessions. This process resulted in the key assessment findings and recommendations outlined in this brief. For more details on project methods, visit **Appendix A**.

COMMUNITY-INFORMED RECOMMENDATIONS

Our communities know what work is needed to prevent violence. The community-informed recommendations below are organized into two categories: 1) Connectedness inside the four core communities, and 2) Connectedness between the core communities and the broader community. Each recommendation is followed by examples of the kinds of actions you can do to support this work.

NOTED AT THE END OF EACH EXAMPLE are the specific communities where that action was supported by data from the assessment. Just because a core community is not listed does not necessarily mean that the example is not relevant or important for that core community; it simply means it was not mentioned by interviewees or found in the literature review.

CONNECTEDNESS INSIDE THE CORE COMMUNITIES

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Create and sustain safe, accessible physical spaces for members of the core communities to be together to build connectedness without fear.

- + Offer more flexible use of physical spaces for community groups to meet and be themselves, without fear of being policed or facing discrimination. **ALL**
- + Create community and educational centers where people can build long-term community through formal or informal activities that do not require money. **LGBTQ+, DISABILITY**
- + Financially support community organizations and businesses to be able to afford rent and property costs of permanent locations, particularly in expensive markets. **LGBTQ+**
- + Ensure community-specific spaces are developed with universal design principles, inclusive bathrooms, accessible transportation, and communication technology so they are accessible to all members of that community. **ALL**
- + Invest in the creation of more green spaces within Black neighborhoods. **BLACK**

CONNECTEDNESS INSIDE THE CORE COMMUNITIES

Expand on existing opportunities for connectedness and collective care within the core communities.

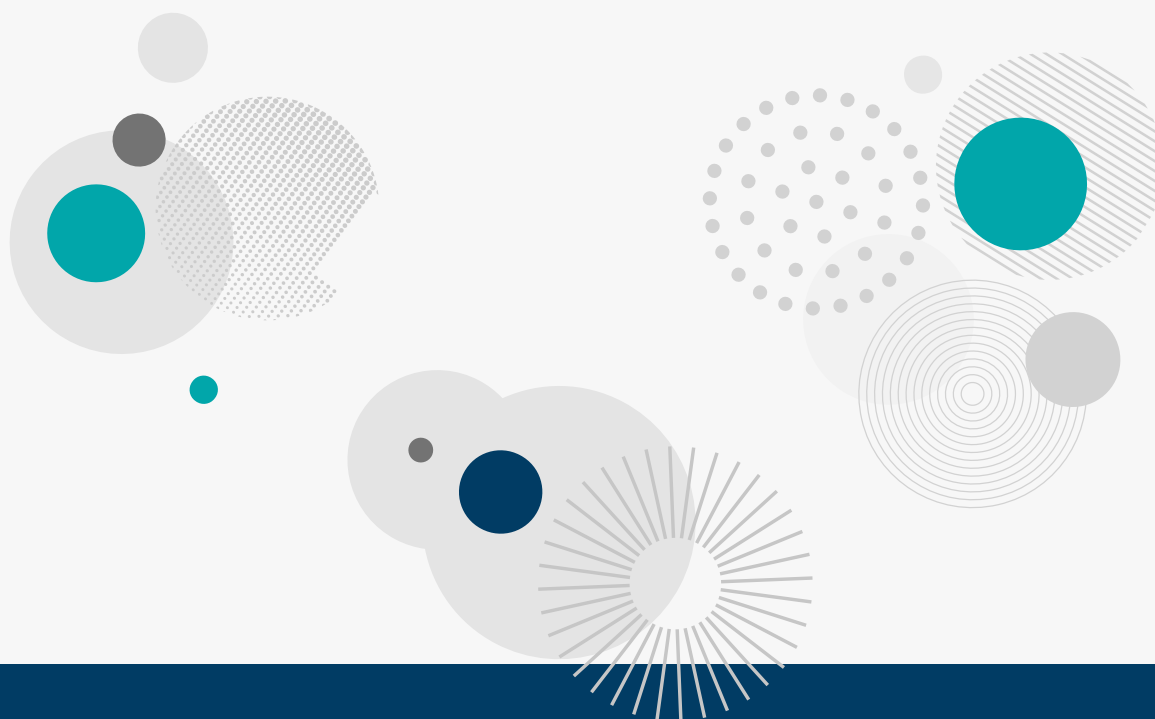
- + Support community mobilization efforts that keep the community engaged in meeting collective needs. **ALL**
- + Offer events to promote connection to culture, e.g., through identity-focused food, music, games, and fun. **ALL**
- + Tangibly support nonprofits and businesses that offer welcoming culturally-specific environments, community education, resource sharing, and other social engagement. **ALL**
- + Offer intersectional support groups for individuals experiencing challenges, such as addiction, violence and abuse, and other physical and mental health issues. **ALL**
- + Provide community recreational activities, including outdoor activities, sports, and hobbies such as music, writing, gardening, and crafting. **BLACK, LGBTQ+, DISABILITY**
- + Create youth-focused spaces and activities to promote a sense of belonging, such as identity-specific gatherings and events, clubs and student organizations, proms, and peer mentorship. **NATIVE, DISABILITY, LGBTQ+**
- + Curate social media groups, virtual educational programs, and email information sharing, for safe online connection. **ALL**
- + Support connection to culturally tied spiritual communities and faith-based nonprofits that offer spiritual education, ceremonies, and other culturally-specific practices. **BLACK, NATIVE**
- + Curate information sources about existing connection opportunities that have been vetted by community members and make it accessible to different ages and computer literacy levels. **DISABILITY, BLACK, LGBTQ+**



CONNECTEDNESS INSIDE THE CORE COMMUNITIES

Invest in additional opportunities for core communities to learn about their heritage and history, and to practice their cultural traditions.

- + Organize opportunities for communities to learn about their history, culture, and traditions to promote a sense of collective identity. **ALL**
 - + Organize Native cultural workshops, events, teachings, and opportunities to connect with elders and knowledge holders, including opportunities for Tribal members living outside the Native community. **NATIVE**
 - + Develop ways to unite all generations within the LGBTQ+ community to learn about LGBTQ+ history and culture. **LGBTQ+**
 - + Offer local talks, webinars, and support groups for people with disabilities and their supporters to connect around Disability Justice and shared experiences. **DISABILITY**
 - + Push back against the disruption of Black culture that began with slavery by connecting communities to a sense of collective identity. **BLACK**
- + Promote diverse participation and commitment to cultural activities among long time attendees, newcomers, and youth by communicating that culture is wellness and preventive while addressing barriers to participation. **NATIVE**



CONNECTEDNESS INSIDE THE CORE COMMUNITIES

Support collective and individual healing from trauma to establish healthier patterns in relationships.

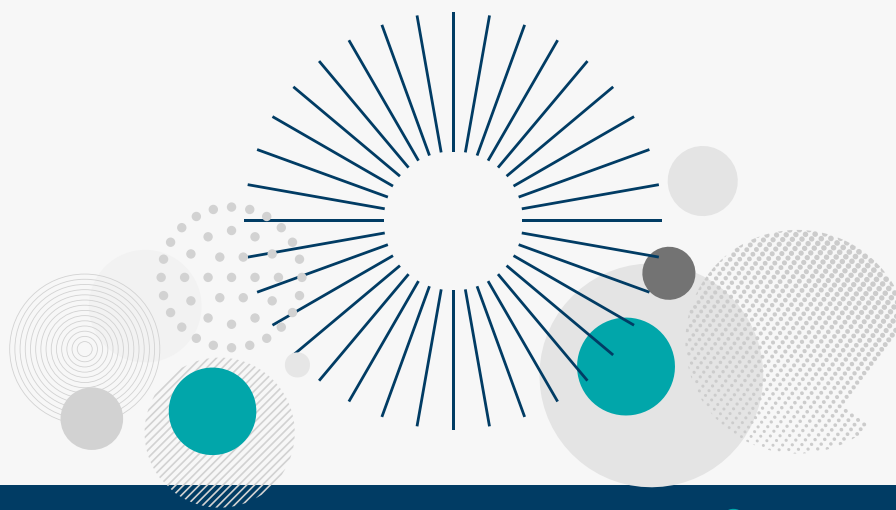
- + Invest in programs that support community healing from historical and ancestral trauma resulting from colonization and slavery. **BLACK, NATIVE**
- + Develop strategies for strengthening safe, stable, and nurturing family relationships such as incorporating family into LGBTQ+ events or clubs and encouraging development of welcoming faith-based communities. **LGBTQ+**
- + Promote healthier romantic relationships by challenging gender stereotypes and victim-blaming attitudes toward survivors of violence. **BLACK, NATIVE**
- + Regulate practices among caregivers and caregiving institutions that result in isolation and a sense of powerlessness among people with disabilities. **DISABILITY**
- + Expand and normalize support for mental health and substance use challenges that interfere with relationships. **NATIVE, DISABILITY**



CONNECTEDNESS INSIDE THE CORE COMMUNITIES

Build acceptance and support for diverse, intersectional identities and experiences within the core communities.

- + Challenge oppression within community-focused organizations and spaces by accepting intra-community diversity, establishing shared goals on key issues, strengthening cooperation, and sharing knowledge. **DISABILITY, NATIVE**
- + Actively work against racism, colorism, ageism, ableism, and heterosexism within community spaces, that limit participation from members with intersectional identities. **ALL**
 - + Develop welcoming practices in mainstream/predominately white LGBTQ+ and trans organizations for queer people of color. **LGBTQ+**
 - + Develop inclusive practices in community spaces so that mixed race individuals don't feel forced to choose one racial identity over another. **NATIVE, BLACK**
- + Develop connection opportunities that address the unique intersectional needs of community members.
 - + Provide services and support for aging LGBTQ+ community members who may not have family members or a partner to aid them as they grow older. **LGBTQ+**
 - + Recognize not all people with disabilities are the same; they may not want or need the same type of community connectedness opportunities. **DISABILITY**
 - + Recognize that the connection needs of Native people living in Native communities might be different from those living outside of them, and plan engagement opportunities accordingly. **NATIVE**



CONNECTEDNESS BETWEEN THE CORE COMMUNITIES AND THE BROADER COMMUNITY

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Change prejudicial attitudes toward the core communities in the mainstream community.

- + Implement efforts to increase broader awareness and appreciation of the core communities, including championing their leadership, talents, and contributions. **ALL**
- + Build broader mainstream empathy for and understanding of the culture, history, and experiences of the core communities. **ALL**
 - + Provide ongoing education about slavery, colonialism, and racism, and the resulting present-day experiences of violence, over-policing, stolen land, healthcare discrimination, economic inequality, and other realities. **BLACK, NATIVE**
 - + Provide education on the culture, language, and norms of the LGBTQ+ community to challenge myths and stereotypes and to counter harmful heterosexism and homophobia. **LGBTQ+**
 - + Provide ongoing education about the historical and present-day culture of ableism and the resulting stereotypes, devaluing, and discrimination against people with disabilities. **DISABILITY**



CONNECTEDNESS BETWEEN THE CORE COMMUNITIES AND THE BROADER COMMUNITY

Make new and existing spaces, services, and systems inclusive and accessible to the core communities.

- + Ensure efforts to be more inclusive are guided by members of the core communities through the lens of lived experience but avoid asking a select group to represent the entirety of their community. **ALL**
- + Intentionally include core communities in developing, messaging, and advertising planned community activities. **LGBTQ+, DISABILITY**
- + Select spaces that use universal design principles, include accommodations, communication support, and transportation to ensure community activities are accessible to people with disabilities. **DISABILITY**
- + Demand and confirm public and private gathering places have policies that protect individuals' right to use restrooms aligned with their gender and/or offer All-Gender bathrooms. **LGBTQ+**

Engage in anti-oppression work to cultivate trust between the mainstream community and the core communities.

- + Support individuals, social groups, and institutions to develop a shared understanding of systemic oppression, power and privilege, and diversity/equity/inclusion.
- + Advocate for community commitment to anti-oppression practices as individuals, and as members of social groups.
- + Demand and implement anti-oppression practices and policies in organizations, businesses, and government.
- + Boost positive representation of core community members in leadership positions and in media.
- + Demand mainstream leaders publicly support efforts to address oppression and task them with promoting connectedness between mainstream and core communities.



What's Next

Community-driven strategies and strong partnerships will help Michigan meet the needs of communities most impacted by sexual violence. We hope this information helps you to:

- + See how your work contributes to sexual violence prevention by building and strengthening community connectedness.
- + Expand current perspectives and explore new community-driven prevention solutions.
- + Center community-informed recommendations, like those outlined above, to guide SVP work.
- + Prioritize partnership with leaders, programs, organizations, and systems that serve under-resourced communities, specifically Black, LGBTQ+, Native, and Disability communities.

For more information on the CSVPA assessment, detailed briefs on the other protective factors, and updates on how the Michigan Rape Prevention & Education program is enacting some of these recommendations, visit our [website](https://mph.org/svp/) (<https://mph.org/svp/>).

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SUGGESTED CITATION:

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Appendix A: Methods

Appendix B: Citation List

