

Understanding “Very High-Risk Individuals”

According to the Memphis Gun Violence Problem Analysis undertaken by the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform in 2025, individuals most likely to currently be involved in a homicide or a nonfatal shooting in Memphis are men, between 18 - 34 years old, have a gang affiliation, and a record of prior incarceration. For the purposes of Memphis’ People Based Strategies, a VHRI is identified as having at least four (4) of the following six risk factors:

- Male
- Age 18-34
- Gang/group affiliation
- Five (5) or more previous arrests or on probation/parole for a violent offense using a gun
- Has been shot and/or seriously injured from violence within the past 2 to 3 years
- Has had a close peer, friend, or family member shot and/or killed in the last 3 years

NICJR estimates that approximately 800 individuals in Memphis meet the above VHRI criteria. VHRI are identified by and referred to the GVRI through four critical sources: the weekly Memphis Police Department (MPD) Shooting Review, Hospital Violence Intervention Programs (HVIP), the court system and Tennessee Department of Corrections (TDOC), and community safety specialist (CSS). These referral pathways are essential for identifying and engaging individuals most vulnerable to future shootings, which are often retaliatory in nature.

Understanding “Adjacent High-Risk Individuals”

Adjacent High-Risk Individuals (AHRI) are people who do not meet the full Very High-Risk criteria but are closely connected to violence through their social networks, households, or recent incidents. They sit between Intervention and Prevention and represent a critical opportunity for early engagement before risk escalates. AHRI often include siblings, close friends, classmates, romantic partners, or neighbors of VHRIs, as well as individuals present during violent events or involved in emerging conflicts. While they may not have extensive criminal histories or documented gang involvement, they are embedded in the same environments and networks that drive retaliatory violence in Memphis. Identifying AHRI allows the city to intervene earlier, stabilize families and peer groups, and prevent elevation into VHRI status. For the purposes of Memphis’ People-Based Strategies, an AHRI is identified as an individual between the ages of 14 to 24 and have at least four (4) of the following six (6) risk factors:

- Age 14-24
- Lives in the same household as someone recently shot, incarcerated, or identified as VHRI
- Close friend, partner, or sibling has been shot or killed within the last 3 years

- Regular association with a peer group or informal crew known to be involved in violence
- Two to four prior arrests OR currently on probation for a non-gun violent offense
- Documented involvement in fights, group conflicts, or public disputes escalating toward violence

(Additional indicators such as school disciplinary actions, household instability, exposure to domestic violence, or caregiving burdens may strengthen the risk profile but are not required to meet the AHRI threshold.)