

# Homicides take a large financial toll on a city

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It is a sad truth that Rochester is intimately aware of the emotional costs of gun violence.

There is the loss of life — of children, friends, partners, parents, extended family and colleagues — and the unquantifiable grief that follows. There are the life-altering injuries and the mental scars of trauma. There is the shock and fear and anger that ripples through neighborhoods and disrupts community.

We know less about the financial impact: How much does a single homicide cost taxpayers — and why should we care?

One estimate? Roughly \$1.2 million spent on every homicide.

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform published a national cost of gun violence report last year after studying the government response to shootings in over 25 cities. NICJR's executive director, David Muhammad, said understanding the economic cost of gun violence might help fuel more investment in preventative work.

"The government response to every shooting is necessarily significant and

therefore expensive," he said. "It is important to calculate these costs so the government and the public are clear about how much we are spending on each shooting and how adequate investment in effective community intervention services can both save lives, but also reduce taxpayer spending on responding to shootings."

**Each fatal shooting costs taxpayers \$1.2 million, study says**

Researchers from NICJR broke down the unit cost of homicides and non-fatal shootings by looking at what happens after the trigger is pulled, from the immediate police and EMT response to the medical costs, efforts at prosecution and victim support services that come together in the days, weeks and months that follow.

This calculation includes things like the money spent to clean up a crime scene, salaries paid out to police and court personnel, the cost of incarcerating someone who was convicted of a shooting, and funds that pay for funerals or help a family recoup lost wages. It also includes the lost tax revenue for the government when an individual is killed or injured and can no longer work.

The researchers calculated two num-

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bers: A unit cost that includes all of those fees and an average cost that considers that certain costs are not incurred for every incident. They found:

- A single gun homicide could cost more than \$1.2 million. The average national cost of a homicide was about \$625,000.
  - Each non-fatal shooting could cost taxpayers \$700,000. The average cost was \$337,000.
  - Combined, gun violence costs American taxpayers over \$20 billion every year.
- The true cost could be even higher.

City-specific data calculated in 25 cities found costs as high as \$4 million per homicide and \$1.5 million per non-fatal shooting.

And researchers used conservative estimates and did not include indirect expenses like decreased property values in neighborhoods that see frequent shootings or how just living near gun violence can leave you predisposed to broader health issues.

**What does this mean for Rochester?**

Rochester has made great strides in reducing gun violence over the last few years since the city hit a record high for homicides in 2021. Non-fatal shootings and gun deaths both fell about one-third in 2023, and we are continuing on a downward slope.

2023 ended with 58 homicides (though not all were gun deaths) and about 289 shooting victims.

If we use the national NICJR data, that means taxpayers here *could have spent* over \$200 million on the city, county, state and federal response to gun violence in Rochester last year alone.

We have reached out to the city to see if they have ever attempted a cost analysis of gun violence in Rochester.