

Public Health Madison and Dane County: Isthmus Safety initiative aims to keep downtown Madison safe

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Public Health Madison & Dane County is leading a new, collaborative approach to preventing crime in downtown Madison.

“The State Street area is a vibrant gathering place where people come to be entertained and enjoy everything that Madison has to offer. We want to keep it that way. That’s where we hope the Isthmus Safety Initiative comes in,” said Cindy Grady, Public Health Violence Prevention Supervisor.

An Advisory Council, coordinated by Public Health, leads this effort. The Council includes community leaders from non-profit organizations, leaders from the University of Wisconsin’s Student Services, downtown business owners, elected officials, and more.

“Each of the members of the Council are representatives of the communities they serve. We asked them to talk to the people they work with to get an idea of the safety issues of highest concern,” said Grady.

“We looked at all of the community input we received, Madison Police crime data and research on the drivers of crime. We found that gun crime and sexual violence are safety priorities. From there we came together to put together a set of strategies and interventions,” said research partner Dr. Abra Vigna of University of Wisconsin Population Health.

The strategies include:

- **Bystander awareness training for State Street area bar and**

restaurant staff. The training is free and includes three sessions. The primary goal is to ensure staff have the tools to stop potential sexual violence, prevent conflict, and to de-escalate and intervene if conflict does happen.

- **Safety Navigators stationed in the State Street** area will promote a sense of community. They will do this by welcoming visitors and offering help to those who need it. This could mean anything from basic first aid, providing “safe walk” services, giving directions, and more.
- **Increased lighting** in the Buckeye parking lot above Peace Park to improve visibility in the lot.

“This initiative mirrors all of the ongoing [violence prevention](#) strategies at Public Health, by putting the focus on the community itself,” said Grady.

A [federal grant](#) awarded to the City of Madison from the Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) is providing the support need to make the Isthmus Safety Initiative happen.