**HOT TOPICS**

**Combating Gun Violence in Cities**

The 108th Congress has introduced a number of bills on gun violence, including legislation to ban assault weapons. With support from the National Institute of Justice, RAND addressed the gun violence issue by adapting the Boston Gun Project—which reduced youth homicides in Boston by two-thirds in the mid-1990s—for Los Angeles, where criminal justice authorities are more decentralized and gang violence is more entrenched. Analyses of the Los Angeles intervention show it succeeded in reducing gang and violent crime in the targeted area, it helped focus criminal justice resources on violence in the targeted area, and it received high levels of community support. Nevertheless, implementation was not entirely successful. Participating agencies did not adopt the intervention as their own; as a result, the intervention did not survive beyond the end of the demonstration project. Successful dissemination of violence interventions like the Boston Gun Project requires overcoming barriers to their institutionalization in law enforcement agencies. Increasing agency accountability for program success and demonstrations of the cost benefits of these programs could further this goal.

**READ MORE ► Adapting Gun Violence Interventions to Los Angeles**

**Analyzing State Medical Marijuana Laws**

Although the federal government opposes using marijuana for medical purposes, 27 states permitted medicinal use under specific circumstances as of December 31, 2000. This is many more states than are commonly recognized. New analyses of all 27 sets of state laws reveal important variations in their scope. Laws passed since 1995 are significantly broader: They provide a legal defense to both physicians and patients tried in state courts, they permit use of marijuana for a broad range of symptoms, and most enable home marijuana cultivation. Except for California, home cultivation in these recent laws is limited to no more than three mature plants. The analyses highlight the need for states to establish legitimate marijuana supply mechanisms that do not increase the availability of marijuana to recreational users. In addition, patients face uncertainty about whether federal courts will recognize a medical necessity defense.

**READ MORE ► How State Medical Marijuana Laws Vary**

**Prisoner Reentry: The Public Health Challenges**

In the past 20 years, the number of released ex-offenders has increased threefold. Today, almost 650,000 ex-offenders return to communities every year, bringing with them a host of medical needs. A paper by RAND researchers, which examines the changing demographic and health profiles of the reentry population in state prisons, reveals that the prison reentry population is disproportionately sicker on average than the U.S. population in general, with substantially higher burdens of infectious diseases (e.g., HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis), serious mental illness, and comorbidities. These ex-offenders are released into communities and neighborhoods with limited health care resources and an already severely strained “safety net” because of a weakened U.S. economy. This raises key public safety and health challenges, including the need for improved screening, prevention, and treatment programs for state prison inmates; better tracking systems and databases to allow for effective coordination between the correctional health care and public health systems; and improved discharge and transitional planning for ex-offenders with special health care needs.

**RESEARCH BRIEF ► Prisoner Reentry: Public Health Challenges**

**PROJECTS UNDERWAY**

- **Combating terrorism**: lessons from other Western democracies on the organization of police and intelligence agencies.
- **How to manage terrorism risk**, and the consequences of different risk-management strategies.
- **Is racial profiling by police really occurring?** Analysis of evidence from Oakland, California.

**FORTHCOMING REPORTS**

- **Practical steps** individuals can take to prepare for terrorist attacks.
- **A nationwide survey** of first responder emergency preparedness since the September 11, 2001, attacks.

RAND Public Safety and Justice conducts research, analysis, and demonstrations that help policymakers, government agencies, and communities to improve public safety. To access our research, please visit our website at www.rand.org/psj/index.html.