

GUN VIOLENCE IS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS



In the United States, gun violence is a major public health problem and a leading cause of premature death. Preventing death, disability and injury from gun violence requires a public health approach that involves data collection and surveillance, research to understand which policies and programs are effective in decreasing gun violence, initiatives to implement those measures that are shown to work and continued surveillance and evaluation.

Burden of Gun Violence

The burden of gun violence in the United States vastly outpaces that in comparable countries:

- Of all firearm deaths in nearly two dozen populous, high-income countries including Australia, France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom, 83.7% occur in the U.S., and 96.7% of children ages 0-4 killed by firearms in this group of nations were from the United States.¹
- In 2020, more than 45,000 people in the United States died as a result of gun violence, and tens of thousands more suffered non-fatal gun injuries, an increase of nearly 15% over the previous year.²

Gun violence affects people of all ages and races in the U.S. but has a disproportionate impact on young adults, males and racial/ethnic minorities:

- The firearm homicide rate among Black males aged 10-24 years was 21.6 times as high as the rate among white males of the same age in 2020.³

Guns are a weapon of choice for homicide and suicide:

- In 2020, American Indian and Alaskan Native people had the highest firearm suicide rate of any ethnicity group.
- Guns are the leading method of suicide in the U.S., accounting for half of all suicide deaths. 61% of firearm-related deaths in the U.S. are suicides. Attempts of suicide by firearm result in death about 90% of the time, compared to just 3% for other methods such as drug overdose. This is significant because nearly 70% of people who survive an attempted suicide do not attempt suicide a second time.⁴
- While most gun violence does not involve a mass shooting, in 2021 there were 693 mass shootings, killing 703 people and injuring another 2,842.⁵

Gun violence costs the U.S. \$280 billion annually:⁶

- The societal costs of firearm assault injury include work loss, medical/mental health care, emergency transportation, police/criminal justice activities, insurance claims processing, employer costs and decreased quality of life.

Gun Violence is Preventable

Gun violence is not inevitable. It can be prevented through a comprehensive public health approach that keeps families and communities safe.

A public health approach to preventing gun violence recognizes that violence is contagious and can become epidemic within a society.^{7,8} Primary prevention involves the use of core public health activities to interrupt the transmission of violence: (1) conducting surveillance to track gun-related deaths and injuries, gain insight into the causes of gun violence and assess the impact of interventions; (2) identifying risk factors associated with gun violence (e.g., poverty and depression) and resilience or protective factors that guard against gun violence (e.g., youth access to trusted adults); (3) developing, implementing and evaluating interventions to reduce risk factors and build resilience; and (4) institutionalizing successful prevention strategies.^{9,10}

Importantly, prevention does not require predicting who will be violent. Just as aviation safety regulations make air travel safer for everyone, commonsense measures to prevent gun violence make communities safer for everyone.

What Can We Do?

To enhance the nation's public health response to gun violence, we need:

- **Continued Surveillance.** In fiscal year 2022, Congress provided \$24.5 million to the National Violent Death Reporting System to fund all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. Data from surveillance of all 50 states, Puerto Rico and D.C. will provide a more complete picture of gun violence in the United States. Congress should increase funding for NVDRS to \$50 million by FY 2027.
- **More Research.** Several laws have effectively restricted federally funded research related to gun violence, as well as access to complete crime gun data,^{11,12,13} which has resulted in a significant gap in available research into the causes of gun violence. For example, there is: almost no credible evidence that right-to-carry laws increase or decrease violent crime; almost no empirical evidence to support dozens of violence prevention programs for children; scant data on the effects of different gun safety technologies on violence and crime; and scant data on the link between firearms policy and suicidal behavior.^{14,15} We are extremely pleased that from FY 2020 to FY 2022, Congress provided a total of \$25 million annually to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health for gun violence prevention research. We must expand the collection of data and research related to gun violence and other violent crime deaths and injuries in order to better understand the causes and develop appropriate solutions. In FY 2023, Congress should increase its investment in this research by providing \$35 million to CDC and \$25 million to NIH for research into the causes of gun violence.
- **Commonsense Gun Policies.** APHA supports requiring criminal background checks for all firearms purchases, including those sold at gun shows and on the Internet. Currently unlicensed private firearms sellers are exempt from conducting criminal background checks on buyers at gun shows or over the Internet, giving felons, the severely mentally ill and others prohibited from owning firearms access to weapons. APHA also support reinstating the federal ban on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines, which expired in 2004. In March 2021, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 8, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act, which would expand background checks for all firearm purchases with limited exceptions. We strongly urge the Senate to pass this important legislation without further delay.
- **Extreme Risk Protection Orders.** ERPOs allow family members or law enforcement to petition a judge to temporarily remove a firearm from a person deemed at risk of harming themselves or others. Nineteen states and the District of Columbia have laws authorizing courts to issue an ERPO. Incentivizing more states to enact ERPO laws could prevent further gun violence.

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