

Guns have the potential to greatly amplify violence, as they can inflict serious — often deadly — injuries on many people in a short time. In the United States, gun violence is a major public health problem and a leading cause of premature death.

Burden of Gun Violence

THE BURDEN OF GUN VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES VASTLY OUTPACES THAT IN COMPARABLE COUNTRIES

- 82% of all firearm deaths in nearly two dozen populous, high-income countries, including Australia, France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom, occur in the U.S., and 91% of children ages 0-14 killed by firearms in this group of nations were from the United States.¹
- Each year, more than 39,000 people in the United States die as a result of gun violence, and tens of thousands more suffer non-fatal gun injuries.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

- Among U.S. residents ages 15-24, homicide is the fourth leading cause of death for non-Hispanic whites. For those 15-34, homicide is the second leading cause of death for Hispanics and the leading cause of death for non-Hispanic blacks.³

GUNS ARE A WEAPON OF CHOICE FOR MASS HOMICIDES AND SUICIDE

- While most gun violence does not involve a mass shooting, in 2018 there were 340 mass shootings, killing 373 people and injuring another 1,346.⁴
- Guns are the leading method of suicide in the U.S., accounting for half of all suicide deaths. Attempts of suicide by firearm result in death 85% of the time, compared to just 3% for other methods such as drug overdose. This is significant because nearly 90% of people who survive an attempted suicide do not attempt a second time.⁵

GUN VIOLENCE COST THE U.S. \$229 BILLION IN 2015, OR AN AVERAGE OF \$700 PER GUN IN AMERICA⁶

- 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, common-sense measures to prevent gun violence make communities safer for everyone.

What is Needed?

To enhance America's public health response to gun violence we need:

Continued Surveillance

In 2017, the National Violent Death Reporting System collected data from only 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.¹¹ In fiscal year 2018, Congress provided \$23.5 million to expand the NVDRS to all 50 states. Data from surveillance of all 50 states would provide a more complete picture of gun violence in the United States.

More Research

Several laws have effectively restricted federally funded research related to gun violence, as well as access to complete crime gun data,^{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 limited data on the link between firearms policy and suicidal behavior.^{14,15}

We must expand the collection of data and research related to gun violence and other violent crime deaths in order to better understand the causes and develop appropriate solutions. Congress should provide unrestricted funding to federal agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for research into the causes of gun violence.

Common-Sense 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 mentally ill and others prohibited from owning firearms access to weapons. APHA also supports reinstating the federal ban on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines, which expired in 2004.

Additional Actions

Funding for Continued Surveillance

We need to maintain funding for nationwide implementation because the data collected would prove invaluable for the design of targeted gun violence prevention strategies.

Resources for School and Community-Based Prevention

APHA supports comprehensive measures in community and school-based prevention, early intervention strategies and preparedness initiatives to prevent gun violence and prepare our communities and schools in the event of an emergency. We support providing on-site mental health services, including through school-based health centers, a common-sense approach to ensure that children and youth are able to access appropriate treatment and services. SBHCs also support all students' mental health by creating school-wide programs that address bullying, violence, anger, depression and other social and emotional issues that impede academic achievement.

Gun Safety Technology

Although specialized gun trigger locks and safes are on the market today,¹⁶ there is little ongoing investment and research into gun safety technology - more needs to be done. APHA supports innovative technology that can prevent unauthorized gun access and misuse, including unintentional shootings.

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