

# Gun Violence Prevention, Rural Health, and Vulnerable Populations: A Call to Action

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## Gun Violence: A Public Health Epidemic

Over 100 professional health care organizations, including the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, the American Nurses Association, the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, and the American Association of Nurse Practitioners have defined gun violence in America as a public health epidemic and have called for increased funding and a focused national response.

- There are 30,000 firearm deaths and 60,000 firearm injuries each year in the United States.
- Guns are the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of injury-related death in the United States, with close to the same number of people dying from gun-related death as motor-vehicle accidents.
- 40% of all guns purchased in the United States occur without any form of background checks.

## Health Care Providers: Interventions in the Clinical Setting

- Screen for the presence of firearms in the home where all children and teens live.
- Teach the importance of safely storing and disposing of guns.
- Screen all patients, especially women in pregnancy and the postpartum period, for domestic violence on a routine basis.
- Screen all patients who present in the clinic or acute care setting reporting depression or domestic violence for the presence of guns in the home or access to guns.
- Be proactive: 64% of gun owners who were counseled about safe use and storage of guns reported that they improved their gun safety practices.

## Gun Violence: Vulnerable Populations

### Gun Violence: The Elderly

- The suicide rate in men ages 45-64 increased 43% in the past 15 years, which is the highest rate in three decades.
- The suicide rate in women ages 45-64 increased 63% in the same time period.
- 50% of all male suicide deaths and 30% of all female suicide deaths are gun-related deaths.

### Gun Violence: Women

- The presence of a gun in the home in a domestic violence situation makes it five times more likely that a woman will be killed.
- Women in the United States are 16 times more likely to be killed by a gun than in any other developed nation.
- 51 women are shot to death by their partners each month in the United States. One million women living in the United States have been shot at or by an intimate partner. 4.5 million report having been threatened with a gun by an intimate partner.

### Gun Violence: Infants, Children and Teens

- Homicide is the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death in children ages 1-4.
- Suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death in teens and young adults ages 15-24, and homicide is the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death.
- 87% of firearm deaths in children under the age of ten occur in the home.
- 82% of firearm suicides in youth under the age of 18 use a firearm belonging to a family member, usually a parent.

Photo of Dylan Hockley, one of the children killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School; used with permission of his parents, Ian and Nicole Hockley



## Gun Violence: Rural Health

- The gun homicide rate in rural states (4.14 deaths per 100,000 residents) was 27% higher than the gun homicide rate in urban states (3.26 deaths per 100,000 residents) (2011-2015).
- The gun suicide rate in rural states (8.24 deaths per 100,000 residents) was 54% higher than the gun suicide rate in urban states (5.35 deaths per 100,000 residents) (2011-2015).
- 80% of states defined as urban states have passed universal background check laws, compared to 13% of rural states.

## Health Care Providers and Advocacy

- Universal background checks: 46% reduction in gun-related domestic violence deaths and a 48% reduction in law enforcement deaths in states where universal background checks implemented.
- Responsible gun ownership: training and licensing
- Expanded research on gun safety and violence prevention
- Removing weapons from people ruled dangerous to self or others (California and Indiana, 30-day period)

### Sources:

Statistical data on injury and death comes from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) databases: the National Center for Health Statistics, National Electronic Injury Surveillance System —All Injury Program (NEISS-AIP), and the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS).

### More Information:

Suicide-Proof Your Home Initiative: [suicideproof.org](http://suicideproof.org)

Asking Saves Kids: [askingsaveskids.org](http://askingsaveskids.org)

Be SMART: [besmartforkids.org](http://besmartforkids.org)

Harvard School of Public Health Information for Clinicians:

[hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter](http://hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter)

