

Discussion of “Hear Me” And The Prevention of Gun Violence

Scope of the Problem of Gun Violence

- Firearms overtook auto accidents as the leading cause of death in children in 2020.(1)
- In 2022, 2,526 children and adolescents (1-17yo) died by firearm in the US, averaging nearly 7 per day. (2)
- In 2021, there were 48,830 (all ages) firearm related deaths in the US. (3)

Scope of the Problem of Gun Violence

- Surgeon General Vivek Murthy issued an advisory in 2024 that declared gun violence a public health crisis. (4)
- “It is up to us to take on this generational challenge with the urgency and clarity the moment demands. The safety and well-being of our children and future generations are at stake.”
- A public health approach, Murthy said in the report, can guide the nation’s strategy and actions “as it has done in the past with successful efforts to address tobacco-related disease and motor vehicle crashes.”

Recommendations to Prevent Gun Violence (from Murthy's Advisory)

1. More investment in firearm prevention research
2. Investment in interventions and educational programs to support populations of increased risk of gun violence.
3. Increased access to mental health care, substance use treatment and trauma informed resources.

Many Options May Prevent Gun Violence (from Murthy's Advisory)

- Build distance in time and space between firearms and people who are at risk of harming themselves or others.
- Require safe /secure storage of firearms
- Implement universal background checks
- Banning assault weapons and large capacity magazines
- Regulate safety of firearms like any other consumer product
- Red flag laws (removal of firearms from individuals who are at extreme risk of harming themselves or others following judicial approval)

What can Family Physicians do?

(from AAFP Position Paper, September 2024)

- The American Academy of Family Physicians acknowledges that gun violence is a public health epidemic that needs to be addressed with research and evidence-based strategies that reduce morbidity and mortality.(5)
- As part of routine preventative care, ask patients and their families if they have guns in the home or other access to guns.
- If so, discuss safe storage of firearms and ammunition.
- Firearms should be stored unloaded, locked and separate from ammunition to reduce risk.
- Safe storage of firearms decreases immediate access to guns, especially for children who are at increased risk of unintentional firearm injury.

What can Family Physicians Do?

(from AAFP position paper, September 2024.)

- As part of routine preventative care, screen for the following higher risk situations for gun-related injury: depression or anxiety with suicidality, intimate partner violence and alcohol or drug use disorders.
- For patients who have a positive screen, discuss strategies for limiting or removing gun access as part of their management plan.
- Treating the patient's depression and/or referring the patient to appropriate mental health services may be helpful toward the goal of reducing gun violence.

References

1. Current Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States. The New England Journal of Medicine. April 20, 2022.
2. Gun Violence in US 2022. Examining the burden among children and teens. Johns Hopkins. 9-12-24.
3. CDC. National Center for Health Statistics. 11-13-23.
4. Firearm Violence. A Public Health Crisis in America. The Surgeon General's Advisory. Department of Health and Human Services. 2024
5. Gun Violence, Prevention of (Position Paper) The American Academy of Family Physicians. September 2024.