

MEDICAL STUDENT ADVOCACY AND REGION CONFERENCE 2019

ISSUE BRIEF: GUN VIOLENCE

America's Gun Violence Epidemic – The Facts

Gun violence is a public health crisis in the United States with firearms and here's WHY:

- Every year, over 36,000 Americans are killed in acts of gun violence and approximately 100,000 more are shot and injured.
- America's gun death rate is 10 times higher than other high-income countries – meaning that by February more Americans are killed with guns than are killed in our peer countries in an entire calendar year.
- 58% of American adults or someone they care for have experienced gun violence in their lifetime – with survivors of gun violence experiencing lifelong medical, economic, and social impact.
- More than 22,000 Americans die from firearm suicide every year, leaving countless Americans to grieve the death of their loved ones.
- Firearms are the second leading cause of death for children and teens and the first leading cause of death for African American children and teens every year – nearly 3,000 children and teens are shot and killed and approximately 15,600 are shot and injured every year.
- Approximately 4.5 million American women alive today have been threatened with a gun by an intimate partner.
- Over 10,300 violence hate crimes involve a gun, totaling more than 28 each day – with the vast majority of hate crimes directed against communities of color, religious minorities, and LGBTQ people.

America's Gun Violence Epidemic – The Solutions

The Bipartisan Background Check Act of 2019 – H.R. 8

The American Medical Association supports the “Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019” ([H.R. 8](#)), introduced by Representative Mike Thompson (D-CA), Rep. Peter King (R-NY), and others. It was passed in the House of Representatives on Wednesday, February 27, 2019.

The bill would require a background check on every gun sale or transfer, with defined exceptions for gifts to family members, hunting, target shooting, and self-defense. Federal law already requires licensed gun dealers to conduct background checks on gun purchasers and transferees, but would also extend such provisions to unlicensed gun sellers by requiring them to sell or transfer firearms through licensed dealers. One key element of reducing gun violence must be ensuring that those who are not legally permitted to purchase firearms are not able to do so. Here are some other facts on background checks:

- According to a recent Quinnipiac Poll, 97 percent of all Americans, including 97 percent of all gun owners support subjecting all gun purchases to a background check.
- The Department of Justice has reported that between 1994 and 2015, 3 million individual applications were denied because of the background check requirement.

THE ASK

- Thank your representative for **voting YAY** on H.R. 8, the “*Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019*”
- Call on your senator to consider sponsorship in the Senate

Gun Violence Research and Funding

A key element of an enhanced public health response to preventing gun violence is improved surveillance and epidemiological research studying the causes and risk factors associated with gun violence, as well as interventions that might work. Determining the root causes—through federally-funded research—of this epidemic is critical to solving it.

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For many years, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has faced threats from powerful opponents of such research who spread fear that the only likely result of such work would be recommendations to severely curtail firearm ownership. Under the threats to defund other critical injury prevention activities, research on gun violence prevention has languished. In recent years, however, following a string of highly visible mass shootings in the United States, a greater awareness of the need to better understand the epidemiology of gun violence and how it can be prevented has arisen.

Though legislative riders generally prevent CDC from advocating “gun control,” the agency itself has recently confirmed that there is no prohibition on the conduct of such research—only a lack of funding. Public health is focused on preventing disease and injury in communities and populations on a larger scale and promoting public safety. Addressing the high number of gun-related homicides, suicides and injuries—many of which are preventable—is as much a public health issue as is addressing tobacco use, underage drinking, alcohol and substance use disorders, vaccinations, safety belt use, pool safety, and helmet use for bicyclists and motorcyclists.

The AMA strongly believes that a specific funding allocation for federal gun violence research, including for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is a necessary first step to reversing the course on gun violence.

THE ASK

- Urge your senators and your representatives to support specific funding for the CDC to conduct epidemiological research on gun violence as part of Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations process