

POSITION STATEMENT:

Restore CDC Funding for Firearms and Gun Violence Prevention Research

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The Society of Behavioral Medicine urges restoration of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funding for firearms and gun violence prevention research. Gun violence in the United States is an important and costly public health issue in need of research attention.

BACKGROUND

Firearms injuries are the leading cause of non-medical deaths in America, surpassing motor vehicle accidents for the first time in history¹. Data from five years of CDC statistics estimate that 91 Americans are killed every day by gun violence, over 33,000 deaths per year². The CDC's five-year average of gun-related injury data (2010-2014) found that, on a yearly basis, 78,815 individuals are injured by guns in the United States². Guns also account for nearly 70% of U.S. homicides³. The pervasiveness of this problem is startlingly illustrated in a 2016 study, which found that the likelihood of an American knowing a gun victim within their personal network over the course of their lifetime is between 98 and 99.9%⁴.

Gun violence is a leading cause of injury and death in American children and youth. The Gun Violence Archive, a clearinghouse of gun violence statistics, reports that in 2016 alone 446 children (aged 0-12) and 2,072 teenagers were injured or killed in gun violence incidents³. Gun violence is the leading cause of death among African American males 15-34 years of age⁵. In 2014, firearms caused 88% of teen homicides and 41% of teen suicides^{6,7}.

Firearms deaths and injuries comprise a serious public health problem. Yet, the CDC has not comprehensively funded firearms research since the passage of the 1996 Dickey Amendment^{19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 39}. Though many efforts have been undertaken to restore CDC funding for gun use/gun violence research^{19, 23}, concerns persist in some circles regarding alleged threats to Second Amendment protections and perceived gun control research bias^{10, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27}. Hence, attempts to reinstate CDC funding have failed, despite repeated efforts by various legislators, the spate of American mass shootings in, among other places, Columbine, Aurora, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, and Orlando, and even a reversal of position by former



Representative Jay Dickey (R-Ark), who originally sponsored the Dickey Amendment^{9, 20, 21, 23, 25, 26, 28}.

The United States Courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have made it clear that the Second Amendment is consistent with and does not bar a broad array of sensible laws to reduce gun violence^{29, 41}. Nevertheless, we currently have insufficient evidence or research to inform lawful efforts in this direction.

ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT POLICIES

Lack of funding has resulted in a twenty-year gap in sustained information-gathering regarding the correlates and predictors of gun violence, including what leads to accidental gun deaths, homicides, and suicides. Funding gaps not only impact the financing of straightforward examinations of gun use but also impede studies that utilize gun-related information or examine gun-related factors as part of their investigations.

- * The CDC's National Violent Death Reporting System [NVDRS], a clearinghouse on violence-related data, is seriously underfunded, collecting data from only 32 of 50 states^{10, 23}.
- * The CDC's Injury Center Core State Violence and Injury Prevention Program (Core SVIPP), funds state-level initiatives to reduce injury and violence, yet will not fund investigations on gun-related suicides or gun-related intimate partner homicides³⁰.

Consequently, research efforts on gun violence were dramatically reduced^{10, 21, 31}. In the absence of sustained funding, not enough researchers conduct firearms studies.

A report from the Mayors Against Illegal Guns¹⁰ observed that academic publications on firearms “fell by 60 percent” between 1996, when the Dickey Amendment was enacted, and 2010 (p.6). The funding ban has discouraged new researchers and programs from launching investigations in this area^{10, 31, 37}. Garen Wintemute, MD, a nationally-recognized expert on gun violence research, asserted that “counting all academic disciplines together, no more than a dozen active, experienced investigators have focused their careers primarily on firearms research”^{27, 32, 37}. Moreover, the private sector does not make up for the firearms research funding gap. Wintemute noted that fewer than five private foundations currently fund firearms research³³.

Hence, not enough is known about what contributes to gun violence injuries and deaths and what policies and practices can prevent them.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Without the reinstatement of funding for firearms research, these gaps in knowledge are expected to continue and potentially grow increasingly critical. As such, there is a strong need to better understand the risk factors that contribute to incidents of accidental death, homicide, and suicide. An urgent need also exists for more and better data to guide best practices and policies for safe gun ownership and use. Studies examining the impact of existing laws that aim to curb gun trafficking, ban military-style assault weapons, and restrict firearms in public places are needed⁴³. Research examining current strategies and policies, as they relate to gun-related morbidity and mortality²⁷, especially with respect to child and community health and safety and health disparities^{24, 43}, is particularly needed.

Public health research has a proud and storied history of contributing to reductions in deaths and injuries from, among other causes, motor vehicle accidents, drownings, fires, and tobacco use^{10, 21, 25, 27, 34}. As Kellerman & Rivara²¹ noted, “This progress was achieved without banning automobiles, swimming pools, or matches. Instead, it came from translating research findings into effective interventions” (2013, p.549). Similar public health impacts are possible for gun-related deaths and injuries if researchers are properly funded to conduct meaningful studies on the correlates and predictors of safer gun practices and policies.

SUMMARY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- * To remedy the information-gathering restrictions caused by the bans imposed by the Dickey Amendment, remove ‘policy riders’ on federal appropriations bills that limit firearms research at the CDC¹⁰.
- * Expand NVDRS firearms-related data collection efforts to include all fifty states.
- * Fund CDC research on the risk and protective factors of gun use and gun violence prevention.

- * Fund research on evidence-based primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention and treatment initiatives for communities that are seriously impacted by the effects of gun violence.
- * Support the development of evidence-based policy and prevention recommendations for gun use and ownership.

ENDORSEMENTS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to gratefully acknowledge Dr. David Hemenway of the Harvard School of Public Health for his helpful comments and suggestions as well as the expert review provided by the Society of Behavioral Medicine’s Health Policy Committee, Health Policy Council, Child and Family Health Special Interest Group, and Violence and Trauma Special Interest Group.

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