

Gun Violence Prevention Research

RECOMMENDATION

The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) recommends that Congress address gun violence as a national public health epidemic and appropriate \$50 million in fiscal year 2020 to conduct public health research into firearm morbidity and mortality prevention.

Background

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) more people died from firearm injuries in the United States in 2017 than in any other year since at least 1968. Nearly two-thirds were suicides. The AAFP sees gun violence as an epidemic that threatens public health and is urging Congress and the administration both to provide the federal funding needed to support evidence-based research showing the scope of the problem and ensure its public reporting.

Last February, the AAFP was one of more than 160 medical, public health and research groups to contact the [Senate](#) and the [House](#) to request \$50 million in fiscal year 2020 to conduct public health research into firearm morbidity and mortality prevention. The AAFP appreciates that the House Appropriations Committee Labor-HHS-Education fiscal year 2020 funding bill provides \$25 million to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and \$25 million to the National Institute of Health (NIH) to research how to prevent firearm injury and death.

The AAFP supports primary prevention strategies to reduce the injuries and deaths associated with gun ownership and violence. The AAFP believes that federal and state policies can balance the right to own firearms with health, safety, and societal well-being. Appropriate gun violence research funding and public health surveillance are essential prevention strategies.

Physicians play an important role in counseling patients about injury prevention, including safe storage practices. Counseling is important for raising awareness for at-risk patients, particularly for child and adolescent patients, and individuals who experience suicidal ideation. In 2015, the AAFP, along with seven other professional organizations including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Physicians, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Public Health Association, and the American Bar Association, [published](#) a call to action on gun violence in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. The recommendations included laws to advance gun safety, such as improved background checks and elimination of so-called “gag laws” prohibiting physicians from counseling patients on firearm safety.

Public health research into automobile deaths and injuries played a major role in helping to guide public policy to adopt seat belt and speeding laws. It has also led to advances in motor vehicle technology to ensure modern vehicles are safer to operate. Currently, the limited research into gun violence is uncovering important information that can help prevent mass shootings and other violence. Researchers are [learning](#) that there is a connection between domestic violence and those who conduct mass shootings. Also, gun access in the home is [associated](#) with higher levels of suicide completion.

The AAFP’s position paper [Prevention of Gun Violence](#) is available online. *For more information, contact the American Academy of Family Physicians’ Government Relations Department at 202-232-9033.*

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