

June 22, 2022

Dear Members of the United States Senate:

As the leading voice of academic public health, the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) urges you to pass *The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act*, legislation that will take meaningful steps to reduce the epidemic of gun violence. Gun violence is a public health emergency because it touches every community and leaves long-lasting ripple effects that can be devastating.

ASPPH represents over 130 schools and programs of public health accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). Our membership includes over 10,800 faculty and over 72,000 students. ASPPH strives to strengthen the capacity of members by advancing leadership, excellence, and collaboration in public health education, research, and practice.

Researchers have estimated that for every one person killed by a firearm, two people are injured and survive, and many others live with the consequences of gun violence in their community.¹ Survivors of firearm injuries experience psychological trauma, physical disabilities, loss of work, and a decreased quality of life. Community members indirectly impacted similarly experience trauma, may require medical and mental health care, and struggle to maintain employment.

In recent weeks, our communities have been coping with the Uvalde, Texas and Buffalo, New York mass shootings as well as multiple others within the same time span. Unfortunately, these devastating events are not a new phenomenon, and the human toll of gun violence is well documented:

- In 2020, 45,222 people died in the U.S. from gun violence with about 54% of those deaths being suicides.²
- Gun violence has become the leading cause of death among children and teens.³
- While mass shootings draw more attention, they only account for 1 to 2% of gun-related deaths.⁴
- Gun violence is estimated to cost the U.S. \$280 billion annually.⁵
- Gun violence affects people of all backgrounds and identities, but disproportionately affects young adults ages 15 to 24, especially racial minorities. Homicide is the second leading cause of death for Hispanic young adults and the leading cause of death for non-Hispanic Black young adults.⁶
- Guns are the leading method of suicide in the U.S., accounting for half of all suicide deaths. 60% of firearm-related deaths in the U.S. are suicides. Attempts of suicide by

¹ <https://academic.oup.com/aje/article/185/7/546/3062213?login=false>

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/03/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>

³ <https://www.everydayhealth.com/public-health/gun-violence-in-america-is-a-public-health-crisis/>

⁴ <https://www.sandrogalea.org/healthiestgoldfish/2022/5/26/the-killing-we-continue-to-fail-to-stop-the-healthiest-goldfish>

⁵ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>

⁶ https://www.apha.org/-/media/files/pdf/factsheets/200221_gun_violence_fact_sheet.ashx

firearm result in death 85% of the time, compared to just 3% for other methods such as drug overdose. This is significant because nearly 90% of people who survive an attempted suicide do not attempt suicide a second time. ([APHA](#))

- The burden of gun violence in the United States vastly outpaces that in comparable countries: Of all firearm deaths in nearly two dozen populous, high-income countries including Australia, France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom, 82% occur in the U.S., and 91% of children ages 0-14 killed by firearms in this group of nations were from the United States. ([APHA](#))
- The United States has a gun homicide rate 26 times that of other high-income countries, according to the research and policy organization Everytown. There are more than 400 million guns in this country — more guns than people

A carefully designed public health approach to preventing gun violence can reduce the incidence of suicide, address mental health issues at the community level, reduce the speed and lethality of guns, safeguard society from impulsive actions that have permanent consequences, and still protect the rights of law-abiding gun owners. The U.S. Senate has a chance right now to implement such interventions and take the first step in decades on the federal level to address the gun violence epidemic.

We urge Members of the Senate pass *The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act*, so that we can quickly implement interventions to address the factors that lead to gun violence, including expanded mental health services, age-appropriate restrictions on gun purchases, state incentives to implement red flag laws, and gun purchase restrictions and penalties for individuals with criminal records.

Sincerely,

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