



## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### *Gun Violence and Injury Prevention Policy*

**Mission:** NYSACHO supports, advocates for, and empowers local health departments in their work to promote health and wellness and prevent disease, disability, and injury throughout New York State.

**Vision:** NYSACHO is recognized as the collective voice leading policy, education, and advocacy to create healthy, safe communities in New York State.

#### **Problem statement**

Public health is the science of reducing and preventing injury, disease, and death and promoting the health and well-being of populations using data, research, and effective policies and practices. New Yorkers are impacted by various forms of gun violence – including suicide, homicide, and unintentional deaths, as well as nonfatal gunshot injuries, threats, and exposure to gun violence in communities and society. A public health approach to prevent gun violence is a population level approach that addresses both firearm access and the factors that contribute to and protect from gun violence. This approach brings together institutions and experts across disciplines in a common effort to 1) define and monitor the problem, 2) identify risk and protective factors, 3) develop and test prevention strategies, and 4) ensure widespread adoption of effective strategies.<sup>1</sup> Gun violence requires a comprehensive approach to prevention and treatment. While acknowledging an individual’s right to own and use firearms for legal purposes, there is consensus across the medical and public health communities that countermeasures to this national epidemic do exist and can be implemented through enacting laws or improving public policy. By using a public health approach, we can prevent gun violence in all its forms and strive towards health equity.

#### **Position Statement**

The public health approach has been successfully applied to tackle a wide variety of complex health problems at the population level. Gun violence is a public health epidemic that requires a public health solution. NYSACHO supports the following strategies to prevent firearm-related injury and death:

- ***Better data collection:*** Federal, state, and local governments should collect more comprehensive gun violence data for fatal and non-fatal firearm injuries, shootings that may not involve physical injuries, and firearm-involved crimes where no shots were fired, including domestic violence-related threats.

Federal, state, and local governments should make data publicly available where possible and particularly to researchers studying gun violence and its prevention.

- **Research funding:** In 2019, Congress specifically allocated funds to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for firearm research for the first time in more than 20 years. Enhanced research funding is key for advancing knowledge and improving public health interventions and outcomes. Federal, state, and local governments, in addition to foundations and universities, should dedicate funding to research gun violence and injury prevention.
- **Resources for LHDs:** For LHDs that have the capacity to address this public health emergency, flexible funding, technical assistance, and other necessary resources should be made available for jurisdictions who are able to engage in work around gun violence and injury prevention.
- **Evidence-based policies and practices:** Gun violence takes many forms and is a multifaceted problem that requires a multitude of data-driven solutions. Gun violence prevention policies and practices should be evidence-based. Existing policies addressing public safety and the impact of these policies on violence should be routinely evaluated.
- **Education on gun violence:** Educate the public on dangers associated with firearms and the need for firearms safety through safety education, health communication, social norms campaigns and school curricula to reduce the potential for children, adolescents, and young adults to be injured or killed in gunfire and includes gang violence interruption activities. Clinicians have an essential role in enhancing the health and safety of their patients and should serve as sources of information on gun safety.
- **Firearm safety for children:** Policies that consider the safety of children regarding firearms should be reviewed and considered by the state (i.e., storage, educational campaigns).
- **Resources to address trauma:** Services to minimize the traumatic impact of gun violence, such as mental health resources and community-based violence intervention programs, should be promoted and offered, particularly among communities exposed to elevated levels of violence and immediately following firearm-related events.<sup>2</sup>
- **Implementation and evaluation:** Policies and practices should be continuously monitored and evaluated to ensure they are not contributing to increased rates of gun violence and/or illegal firearm activity. Additionally, policies and practices to promote gun safety and violence prevention should be monitored to ensure equitable implementation and ongoing effectiveness.
- **Cross-sector strategies:** Policies and practices should be identified, developed, and evaluated in conjunction with community stakeholders, including (but not limited to) public health, social services, faith-based organizations, law enforcement, mental/behavioral health services, and organizations representing firearm owners.

### **Justification**

Gun violence, as many Americans see through television, social media, and other news outlets, is often perceived as random, mass shootings in public places, including educational and occupational settings. While mass shootings are a national concern – with 418 mass shootings occurring in 2019 alone, causing 464 deaths and 1,710 injuries<sup>3</sup> – they display only a portion of the impact of gun violence has on communities.

Compared with other high-income countries, the homicide rate in the United States is 7.5 times higher, which can be attributed to the firearm homicide rate that is 24.9 times higher.<sup>4</sup> Each year in the United States, more than 39,000 people die because of gun violence, making firearm-related injuries a leading cause of death for adults and children.<sup>5</sup> Tens of thousands more suffer non-fatal gun injuries. In both the United States and the State of New York, suicide is the number one cause of firearm-related deaths, with guns accounting for half of all suicide deaths in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Between 2010 and 2020, 5,125 people in New York died by gun-related suicide (Table 1).

Table 1. Firearm-Related Deaths by Intent in New York State, 2010-2020<sup>3</sup>

	Number	Percent (%)
Suicide Deaths	5,125	51.65
Homicide Deaths	4,534	45.70
Legal Intervention	143	1.44
Unintentional	76	0.77
<b>Total Deaths</b>	<b>9,921</b>	<b>100</b>

All forms of violence are a health equity issue, as certain populations have accumulated risk factors without gaining resiliency due to decades of institutional policies and practices.<sup>6</sup> Gun violence is no exception: in the United States, black Americans are 10 times more likely than white Americans to die by gun homicide.<sup>7</sup> In New York State, between 2010 and 2020, the burden of firearm-related deaths fell disproportionately on black New Yorkers (Figure 1).

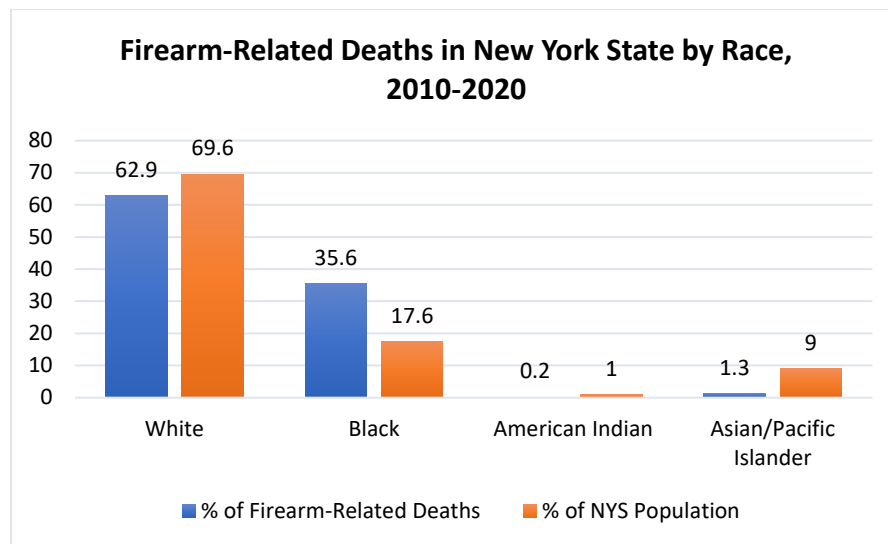


Figure 1. Firearm-Related Deaths in New York State by Race, 2010-2020.<sup>2</sup>

Gun violence is an urgent and complex problem that presents itself differently between communities of both urban and rural classifications. It requires evidence-based, multifaceted solutions to address the unique needs across the State of New York. Prevention of violence and injury occurs along a continuum that begins in early childhood with programs to help parents raise emotionally healthy children and ends with efforts to identify and intervene with individuals who are threatening violence at home, in the community, or against themselves. The public health community must advocate for community-based collaborative problem-solving models to address gun violence.

## **References**

- <sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). The Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/publichealthapproach.html>
- <sup>2</sup> Everytown Research & Policy. (2022). Invisible Wounds: Gun Violence and Community Trauma Among Black Americans. Retrieved March 11, 2022, from <https://everytownresearch.org/report/invisible-wounds-gun-violence-and-community-trauma-among-black-americans/#traumatic-impact-on-black-children>
- <sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System. Accessed March 2022. Atlanta, GA: CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. [https://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/dataRestriction\\_inj.html](https://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/dataRestriction_inj.html)
- <sup>4</sup> Grinshteyn, E. & Hemenway, D. (2015). Violent Death Rates: The US Compared with Other High-Income OECD Countries, 2010. The American Journal of Medicine, 129(3), 266-273. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2015.10.025>
- <sup>5</sup> Amnesty International. Gun Violence – Key Facts. Retrieved March 10, 2022, from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/arms-control/gun-violence/>
- <sup>6</sup> Prevention Institute. Fact Sheet: Violence and Health Equity. Retrieved March 10, 2022, from <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/unity/publications/fact-sheet-links-between-violence-and-health-equity>
- <sup>7</sup> Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence. Gun Violence is a Racial Justice Issue. Retrieved March 10, 2022, from <https://www.bradyunited.org/issue/gun-violence-is-a-racial-justice-issue>