

APA RESOLUTION on the Secure Storage of Firearms and Lethal Means Safety Strategies to Prevent Suicides

FEBRUARY 2024

Consistent with the American Psychological Association's mission to promote the advancement, communication, and application of psychological science and knowledge to benefit society and improve lives, this Resolution on the Secure Storage of Firearms and Lethal Means Safety Strategies has the primary goal to encourage psychologists to respond to the public health crisis of suicide by promoting secure storage of firearms and lethal means safety strategies for individuals at elevated risk.

WHEREAS our nation is facing a suicide public health crisis.

WHEREAS firearms are the means utilized in the majority of suicide deaths, with firearms used in 54.6% of suicides in 2022 (CDC, n.d.), 72% of suicides completed by veterans in 2021 attributed to firearms (Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, 2023), and the most common suicide method among U.S. youth aged 10–19 years historically being by firearms (CDC, 2020); and

WHEREAS 90% of suicides attempted with a firearm are fatal (Conner, Azrael, & Miller, 2019), making it rare that individuals attempting suicide with a firearm will get a second chance to reconsider their decision, even as suicidal crises often represent a conflicting wish to live or die (Bryan, Rudd, Peterson, Young-McCaughan, & Wertenberger, 2016) and two-thirds of those who survive an attempt will never try again (Owens, Horrocks, & House, 2002); and

WHEREAS most survivors of nonfatal suicidal behaviors using firearms report that the availability of firearms at home is the primary reason for their method choice (de Moore, Plew, Bray, & Snars, 1994; Peterson, Peterson, O'Shanick, & Swann, 1985); and

WHEREAS the high-risk, acute phase of many suicidal crises arises quickly and is fleeting, and putting time and distance between a person in crisis and their chosen method for suicide — such as by temporarily removing ready access to a firearm—has been shown to prevent suicide (Lubin, Werbeloff, Halperin, Shmushkevitch, Weise, & Knobler, 2010); and

WHEREAS safety planning—a collaborative intervention that consists of recognizing warning signs, identifying individual coping strategies, and pinpointing external resources for help—is an evidence-based strategy for reducing suicidal ideation and behaviors (Rudd et al., 2001; Stanley & Brown, 2012); and

WHEREAS the Department of Veterans Affairs and other health care institutions have comprehensive, evidenced-based trainings and curricula to inform psychology students, psychologists, health care professionals, and the general public on voluntary secure storage options to prevent suicide (Lemle, 2020); and

WHEREAS health care associations such as the American Medical Association (AMA, 2022), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 2024), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2021), and the American Psychiatric Association (ApA, 2018) advocate for secure firearms storage practices, trainings, and policies; and

WHEREAS studies show that patients experiencing suicidal thoughts have a substantial reduction in attempts and/or death when clinicians inquire about their access to firearms (Boggs, Beck, Ritzwoller, Battaglia, Anderson, & Lindrooth, 2020);

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the American Psychological Association encourages graduate clinical and counseling psychology programs and continuing education programs to rigorously train psychology students, psychologists, and other public health providers in evidence-based lethal means safety and secure firearms storage to prevent suicide; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the American Psychological Association encourages secure firearms storage trainings, initiatives, and research to be culturally responsive in considering and addressing the distinct lived experiences of individuals with diverse backgrounds across the lifespan and to attend to the impact of secure firearm storage on groups that are most disproportionately impacted. These efforts to prevent firearms injuries, fatalities, and deaths by suicides should take an intersectional approach that is inclusive of gender, persons of color, children and adolescents, older adults, military and veterans, persons with disabilities, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ persons; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the American Psychological Association encourages promoting knowledge in secure firearms storage strategies and lethal means safety; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the American Psychological Association seeks to develop training in secure firearms storage as part of safety planning, an evidence-based suicide prevention strategy; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the American Psychological Association highlights in its materials and website information the range of methods for secure in-home and out-of-home firearm storage; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the American Psychological Association promotes training of interprofessional team members in lethal means safety; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the American Psychological Association advocates for federal, state, and local funding to promote secure firearms storage strategies and lethal means safety trainings for firearms owners and firearms users as a public health measure to prevent suicides; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the American Psychological Association advocates for federal, state, and local funding to train health care providers on secure firearms storage strategies and lethal means safety trainings; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the American Psychological Association advocates for federal, state, and local funding for suicide prevention research including research in topics such as the evaluation of trainings, curricula, and initiatives in secure firearms storage.

REFERENCES

- AAP. (2024, January 26). *Safe storage of firearms*. American Academy of Pediatrics. <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/state-advocacy/safe-storage-of-firearms/>
- AMA. (2022, December 13). AMA advocates to prevent gun violence and to increase gun safety. <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/ama-advocates-prevent-gun-violence-and-increase-gun-safety>
- ApA. (2018). *Position statement on firearm access, acts of violence and the relationship to mental illness and mental health services*. American Psychiatric Association. <https://www.psychiatry.org/getattachment/8b32e119-1995-4ac6-bc66-5c3972cb221f/Position-Firearm-Access-Acts-of-Violence-and-the-Relationship-to-Mental-Health.pdf>
- Boggs, J. M., Beck, A., Ritzwoller, D. P., Battaglia, C., Anderson, H. D., & Lindrooth, R. C. (2020). A quasi-experimental analysis of lethal means assessment and risk for subsequent suicide attempts and deaths. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 35(6), 1709-1714. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-020-05641-4>
- Bryan, C. J., Rudd, M. D., Peterson, A. L., Young-McCaughan, S., & Wertenberger, E. G. (2016). The ebb and flow of the wish to live and the wish to die among suicidal military personnel. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 202, 58-66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2016.05.049>
- CDC. (2020, February 20). *WISQARS - Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System*. CDC. <https://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate.html>
- CDC. (2023). *Fast facts: Firearm violence and injury prevention*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved December 11, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/firearms/fastfact.html>
- CDC. (n.d.). *Suicide data and statistics*. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/suicide.htm>
- Conner, A., Azrael, D., & Miller, M. (2019, December 17). Suicide case fatality rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014: A nationwide population-based study. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 885-895. doi:10.7326/M19-1324
- Deisenhammer, E. A. (2009). The duration the suicidal process: How much time is left for intervention between consideration and accomplishment of a suicide attempt. *Journal for Clinical Psychiatry*, 70(1), 19.
- Karp, A. (2018). Estimating global civilian-held firearms numbers [Briefing Paper]. *Small Arms Survey*. Retrieved February 27, 2024 from <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-BP-Civilian-Firearms-Numbers.pdf>
- Miller, M., Azrael, D., & Hemenway, D. (2006, February). Belief in the inevitability of suicide: Results from a national survey. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 36(1), 1-11. doi:10.1521/suli.2006.36.1.1
- NASW. (2021, March 26). New social justice brief from NASW: Tools for social workers to prevent gun violence. *National Association of Social Workers*. <https://naswcanews.org/new-social-justice-brief-from-nasw-tools-for-social-workers-to-prevent-gun-violence/>
- Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. (2023, November). *2023 national veteran suicide prevention annual report*. <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2023/2023-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-FINAL-508.pdf>
- Owens, D., Horrocks, J., & House, A. (2002). Fatal and non-fatal repetition of self-harm: Systematic review. *181*, 193-199.
- RAND. (2018). *The relationship between firearm availability and suicide*. Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved December 11, 2023 from <https://www.rand.org/research/gun%20-policy/analysis/essays/firearm-availability-suicide.html>
- Rudd, M. D., Joiner, T. E., & Rajab, M. H. (2001). *Treating suicidal behavior: An effective, time-limited approach*. Guilford Press.
- Stanley, B., & Brown, G. K. (2012). Safety planning intervention: A brief intervention to mitigate suicide risk. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, 19(2), 256-264.
- Wiebe, D. (2003, June). Homicide and suicide risks associated with firearms in the home: A national case control study. *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, 41(6), 771-782. <https://doi.org/10.1067/mem.2003.187>