



## ISSUE

# Working to prevent firearm death and injury

## MMA Position

To prevent firearm death and injury, the MMA supports common sense changes to gun laws, better research and evidence-based strategies to reduce morbidity and mortality, and increased attention to the fatal link between firearms and suicide

## Background

Gun violence and firearm-related accidents and suicides kill more than 30,000 Americans each year. Firearm death and injury is a public health crisis. Strategies needed to prevent and address this crisis include advocacy for firearm death and injury research funding, common sense gun laws at the state and federal level, as well as equipping physicians with the necessary tools to discuss firearm death and injury prevention in the exam room.

In Minnesota, there were more than 450 firearm-related deaths in 2019, with more than 75 percent of these deaths being suicides. According to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, about 85 percent of suicide attempts nationwide with a firearm end in death. Furthermore, guns are an irreversible solution, and individuals who use other means to attempt suicide have time to reconsider their actions or ask for help. In addition, firearms are also the leading method of suicide for adolescents aged 15 to 19.

Among developed nations, the U.S. has the most gun violence against women, with females being nearly 16 times more likely to die by firearm. Many of these deaths are the result of intimate partner violence, also referred to as domestic violence.

Appropriate research funding is needed to 1) gain a better understanding of firearm death and injury, and 2) develop programs that will assist in the prevention of premature deaths from firearms. Epidemiologic data is not consistently collected, and much of this is due to not all U.S. states reporting their surveillance data to the National Violent Death Reporting System. This creates a barrier for public

health researcher's ability to study firearm-related deaths and injuries.

The MMA considers firearm death and injury a public health crisis and calls on policymakers at the state and federal level to step up and protect the health and safety of Minnesotans. Four strategies to prevent firearm death and injury in Minnesota include: 1) expanding criminal background checks to all firearm transfers and sales; 2) enacting a "red flag" law to allow law enforcement to protect those who may be a danger to themselves or others; 3) authorizing the use of firearm ownership data for public health research or epidemiologic investigation; and 4) raising awareness of the role that firearms play in suicides

## Talking Points

- Putting an end to this public health crisis will require a multi-pronged approach, including:
  - Enacting laws and policies that will reduce firearm death and injury, and
  - Providing physicians with the tools necessary to have open and honest conversations about the risk of firearm death and injury with their patients.
- The link between firearms and suicide needs to be reframed, acknowledging that suicide is a silent epidemic we can no longer ignore.