SAFE STATES

POLICY STATEMENT: PREVENTING FIREARM-RELATED VIOLENCE & INJURIES

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy statement is to outline the official position of the Safe States Alliance on policies and programs that can effectively, comprehensively, and sustainably prevent firearm-related violence and injuries. The policy statement presented here has been developed through the Safe States Alliance Policy Committee and adopted through a vote of the full Safe States Alliance membership.

BACKGROUND

Firearm-related violence and injuries are a public health epidemic. In a year, firearms result in nearly 74,000 injuries and more than 30,000 deaths, including homicides, suicides, and unintentional fatalities. Every 17 minutes, a person is killed by a firearm, and every three hours, one of those deaths is a child.[1]

Firearms often escalate impulsive acts of interpersonal violence and increase the lethality of suicide attempts. In 2010, firearms were involved in 50% of suicides, resulting in over 19,000 deaths.[1] That same year, 68% of homicides involved firearms, resulting in 11,000 deaths – more than all U.S. troops killed in the last decade in Iraq and Afghanistan.[1,2] More disturbingly, the 26 tragic and untimely deaths that occurred in the Newtown, Connecticut mass shooting represent only a fraction of firearm-related homicides that occur on average in the U.S. each day.[2]

However, firearm-related violence and injuries are *preventable*. Given the multiple and complex factors that contribute to firearm-related violence and injuries, there is not one approach or one agency alone that can effectively address these issues. Rather, a comprehensive and coordinated "public health approach" is needed to align efforts in all sectors and at all levels.

The public health approach involves using data to identify populations at greatest risk and implementing evidence-informed programs that effectively address violence and injuries at four levels: society, community, relationship, and individual. These four levels are reflected in the *Social-Ecological Model* [3,4] (Figure 1), which provides a framework for effectively and sustainably preventing violence and injuries. However, to be maximally effective, this framework requires coordinated and complementary prevention efforts by public health, education, justice, public safety, social services, community organizations, businesses, faith-based institutions, and others.
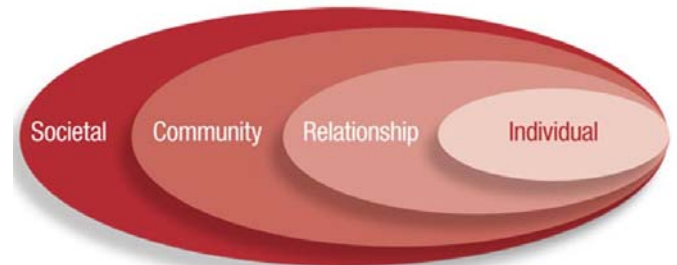

Figure 1. The Social-Ecological Model [3,4 5]

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to effectively and sustainably address the national burden of firearm-related violence and injuries, solutions must be multifaceted, comprehensive, and implemented across all levels of the Social-Ecological Model. As such, the Safe States Alliance offers the following recommendations:

Societal: Appropriations, Policies, and Norms Changes

Federal Appropriations

- Strengthen public health surveillance of violence-related deaths by increasing funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) for all states, ensuring that funding to states is proportional to the volume of state data and that this increase in funding is *in addition to* existing funding currently allocated to the CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC).
- Appropriate sufficient funds to the CDC and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to conduct research and public health surveillance related to firearms, conduct evaluations of firearm-related policies and programs, and use the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) to better understand firearm safety and storage practices.
- Completely remove the Tiahrt Amendments from federal appropriations bills, as these restrictions limit the ability of law enforcement officials to identify and arrest individuals that buy and sell illegal firearms.
- Appropriate funds to states and communities to help them hire and retain sufficient numbers of police officers, school resource officers, counselors, and

mental health professionals, as well as provide sustained and coordinated services for children, adults, and families in need of mental health services, support, and treatment.
- Appropriate funds to the CDC to support research grants that encourage the private sector to develop innovative safety technologies that can prevent the misuse of firearms.

Federal and State Policies
- Enact federal policies that create a culture of safety, prevention, and responsible firearm ownership, including (but not limited to): universal background checks for all firearm sales; strengthening the background check system; banning military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines; enacting stronger firearm trafficking laws; and prohibiting high-risk individuals from purchasing firearms.
- Enact state and federal policies that improve the living and working conditions of communities, including policies to increase and enhance: economic development in high-risk communities; available jobs; fair and equitable pay; unemployment benefits; fair, safe, and affordable housing; safe workplaces and community environments; affordable and equitable education opportunities; and health care services. These policies have been consistently linked to reducing and preventing violence in families and communities.
- Enact policies that empower states with waiting periods to send a letter to every firearm purchaser reminding them of their legal responsibilities and obligations.
- Ensure that state policies do not prohibit health care providers from talking to their patients about firearm safety, gathering information on the availability and storage of firearms on patient history forms, and counseling patients on firearm safety practices.

Societal Norms Changes
- Change depictions of firearm-related violence in advertising, television, movies, video games, and other media and develop broad media and spokesperson campaigns on the consequences of firearm violence.
- Develop and implement sustained, multi-platform media and educational campaigns to reduce firearm-related violence, suicides, and unintentional fatalities, including how to recognize at-risk persons.

Community and Relationships: Programs for Communities, Schools, and Families
- Implement universal, evidence-informed violence prevention programs in *all* communities. These programs can include school-based programs designed to promote healthy interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, and emotional development, as well as

community-wide street outreach and interruption programs.
- Supporting and sustaining afterschool programs in communities to engage youth and encourage youth leadership and social connectedness.
- Implement successful reentry programs for individuals that have been incarcerated or detained to reduce recidivism and to ensure they have needed services and support.
- Implement programs, such as home visitation and positive parenting programs, to reduce young children's exposure to violence in homes and communities.

Individual
- Encourage owners of firearms to use common-sense safety measures and safe storage practices, such as using safes and trigger locks, separately storing firearms and ammunition, and immediately reporting lost or stolen firearms to law enforcement.

CITATIONS
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