

# Firearms, Injury Prevention and Suicide

- Introduction
- Firearms & Firearm Injury
- Approaches to Injury Prevention
- Policy & Clinical Care
- Cultural Factors
- Suicide Prevention

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**Oregon Task Force on Community  
Safety and Firearm Suicide Prevention**

February 3, 2025

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## Firearms, Injury Prevention, and Suicide



Jeff

**Conceptual clarity:** Firearms, injury prevention, and suicide.

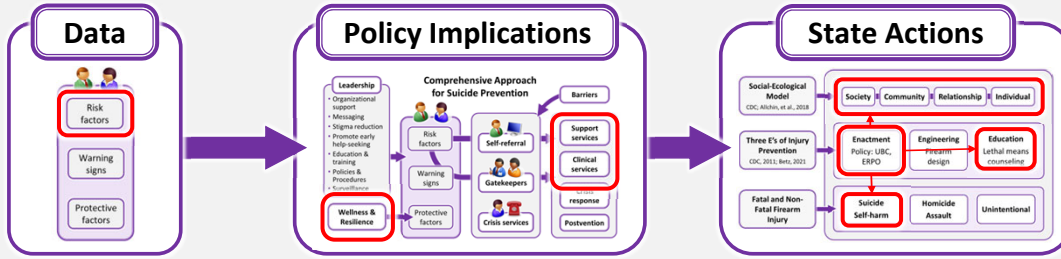
**Precision in language:** Fatal and non-fatal firearm injury attributable to suicide, self-harm, homicide, assault, and unintentional acts.

**Cultural alignment:** Dignity, respect, and compassion in policies, programs, and practices.

**Collaboration:** Working together on the problem.

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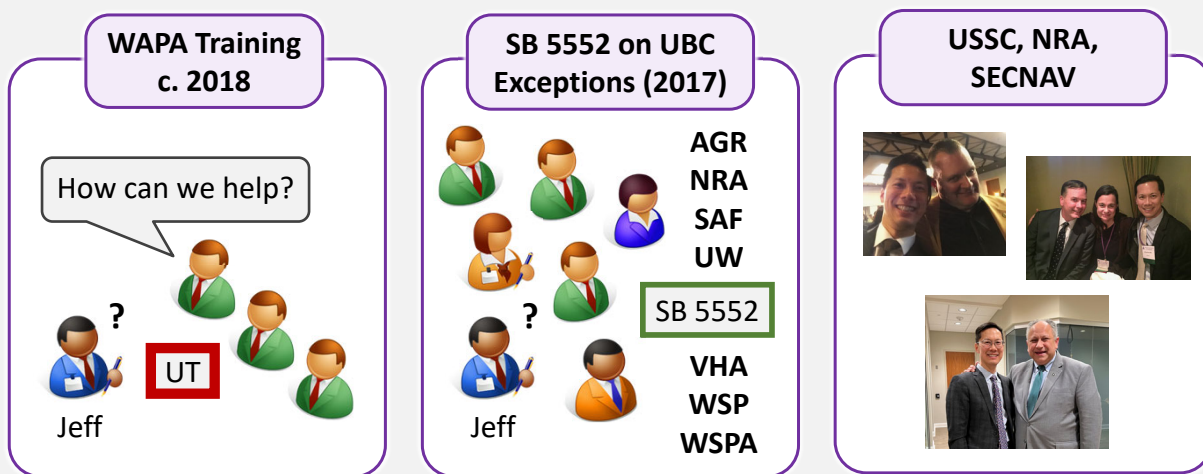
Linking Public Safety And Public Health Data For Firearm Suicide Prevention In Utah (Barber, et al., 2019)



Data	Policy Implications	State Actions
<b>Legal ownership:</b> 92% of decedents would have passed a background check.	Limited effect of UBC's. Focus on community norms and expectations.	Legislative establishment of public-private fund for campaign on social norms.
<b>Concealed carry:</b> 23% of male suicide decedents had a concealed carry permit	Concealed carry permitting process as an avenue for education	Legislation to 1) provide resources for state agencies, 2) gun safe discounts, 3) online video
<b>History of hospital care:</b> 25% of decedents were seen in ED for behavioral health; only 6% for suicide attempt or self-harm	Hospitals as an avenue for education on lethal means safety; attend to patients with any behavioral health issue.	State agencies working to ensure major hospital systems have access to CALM-UT
<b>Arguments:</b> 52% of decedents had marital or family conflict; 62% of youth used long gun.	Sw, clergy, attorneys might engage with lethal means safety; lock EVERY firearm.	LDS Fam. Serv. & CALMI-UT. Legislation for retailers to distribute gun locks with long guns.
<b>Rural counties:</b> Higher suicide rates & similar attempts – deaths driven by firearm use.	Gun shops and shooting clubs as messengers for lethal means safety.	State grants to rural counties for outreach to gun owners on firearm safety for suicide prevention.

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“Gun policy debates are highly polarized in the United States.” (RAND, 2021)



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For decades, gun scholars had confronted gun proliferation using the language of “prevention” to **emphasize the risks that guns posed**, proposing solutions that focused on reducing death in the same way that we would for **disease**.

But I came to realize how scholars like me **implicitly saw guns as potential health risks** and devised policies to prevent untoward effects in ways that were at increasing odds with the ways many gun owners imagined public safety and self-protection.

Public health needs to **better understand the spectrum of meanings** associated with gun ownership and **strategize solutions in language that reflects people’s concerns beyond one-size-fits-all policies**.

### On the limitations of the “public health approach”



Dr. Jonathan Metzler  
*What We’ve Become:  
Living and Dying in a  
Country of Arms*  
(2024)

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#### What is a “firearm”?

Federal law (18 U.S.C., § 921(a)(3)):

1. Any **weapon** (including a starter gun) which will or is designed to or may readily be converted to **expel a projectile** by the action of an **explosive**;
2. The frame or receiver of any such weapon;
3. Any firearm muffler or firearm silencer; or
4. Any destructive device.

#### “Firearm” or “gun”?

A “gun” is a weapon designed to fire a projectile. Some guns, such as air guns, may use compressed air to fire the projectile. Guns that use the action of an explosive (gun powder) to fire the projectile are called “firearms.” All firearms are guns – but not all types of guns are firearms.

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### Handguns

Firearms designed to be used with one or two hands.



#### Pistol

Fixed chamber  
Magazine  
Semi-automatic



#### Revolver

Revolving,  
chambered  
cylinder

### Long guns

Firearms held with two hands and braced at the shoulder.



#### Rifle

Single projectile, grooved bore



#### Shotgun

Single projectile or ball shot,  
smooth bore barrel

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 = 1,000,000

**~400,000,000 privately owned firearms in the U.S.**

326M in 2019 (Berrigan, et al., 2022), 393M in 2017 (SAS)

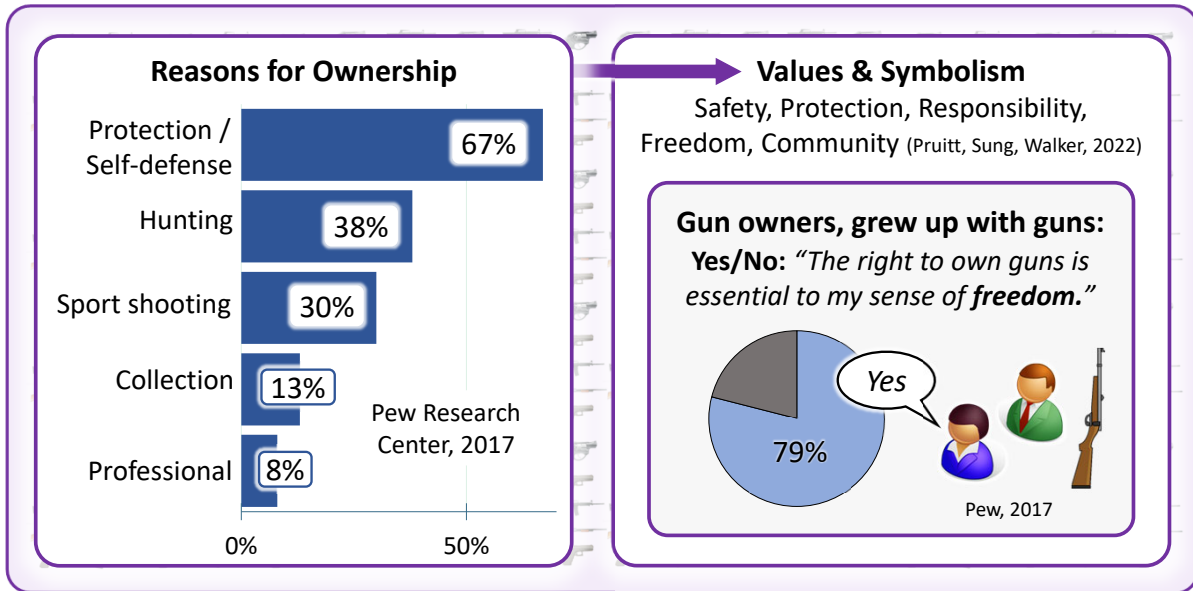


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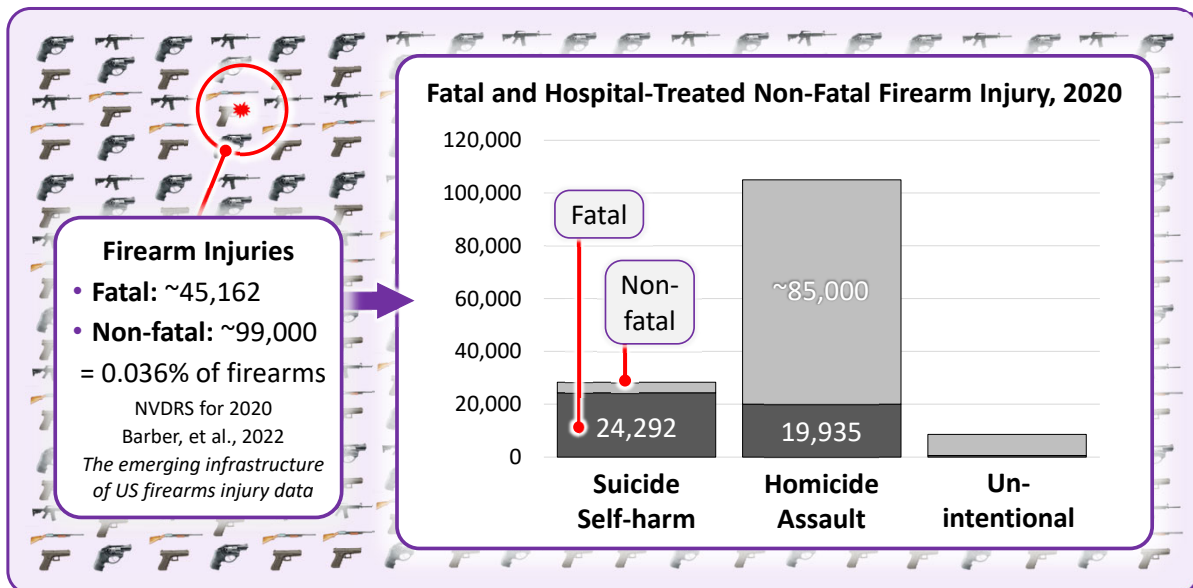


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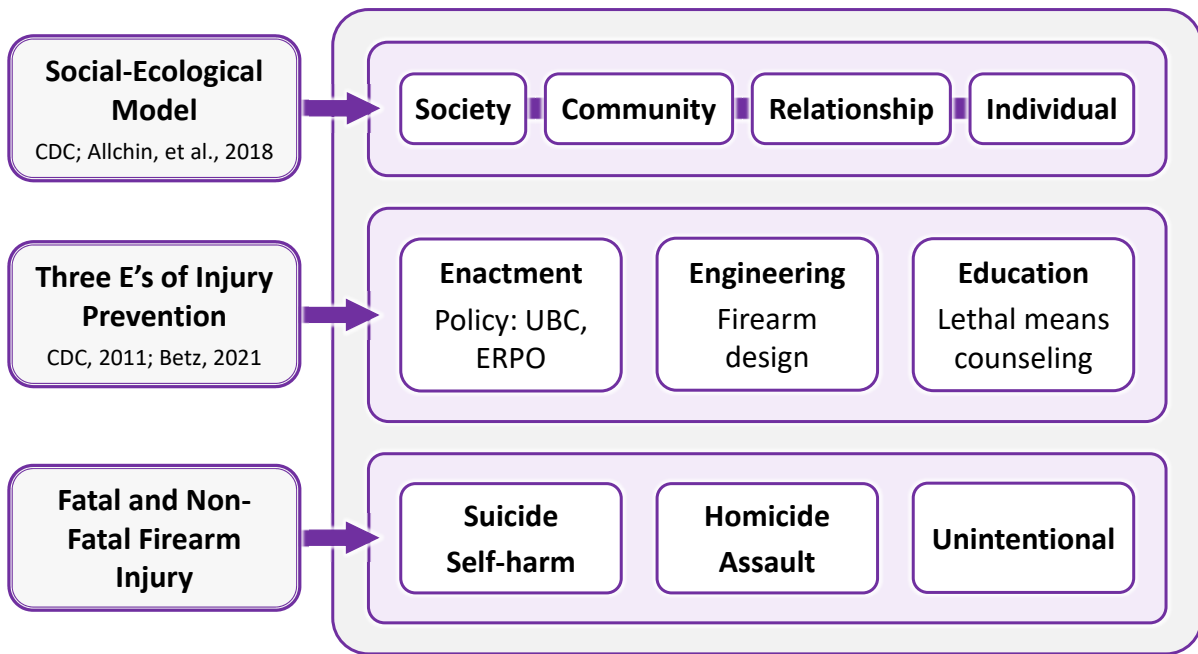
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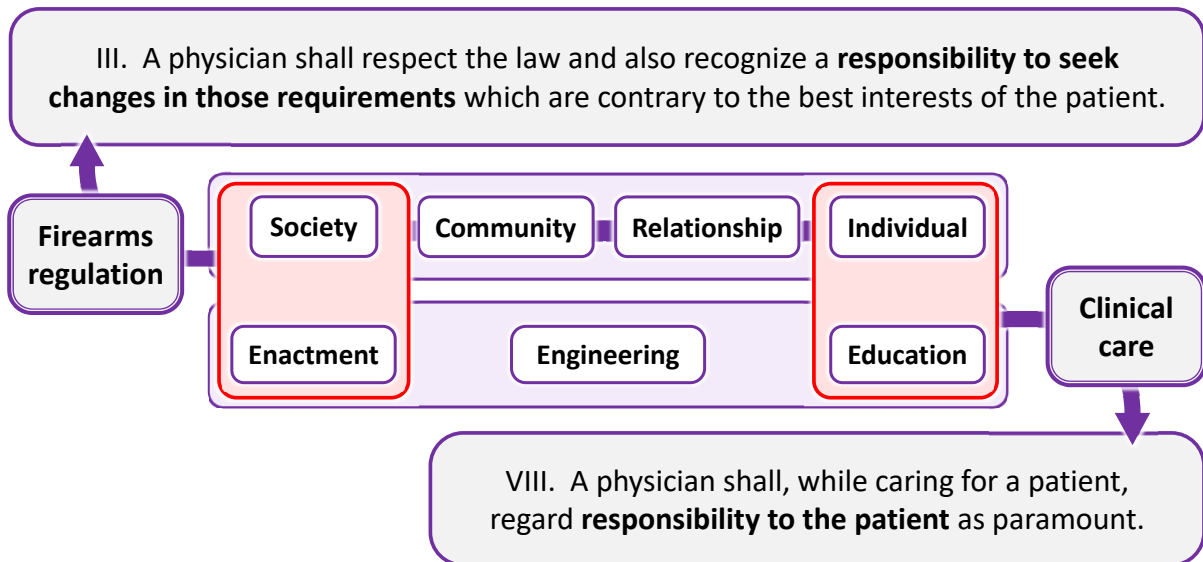
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### Physician Responsibilities in Injury Prevention

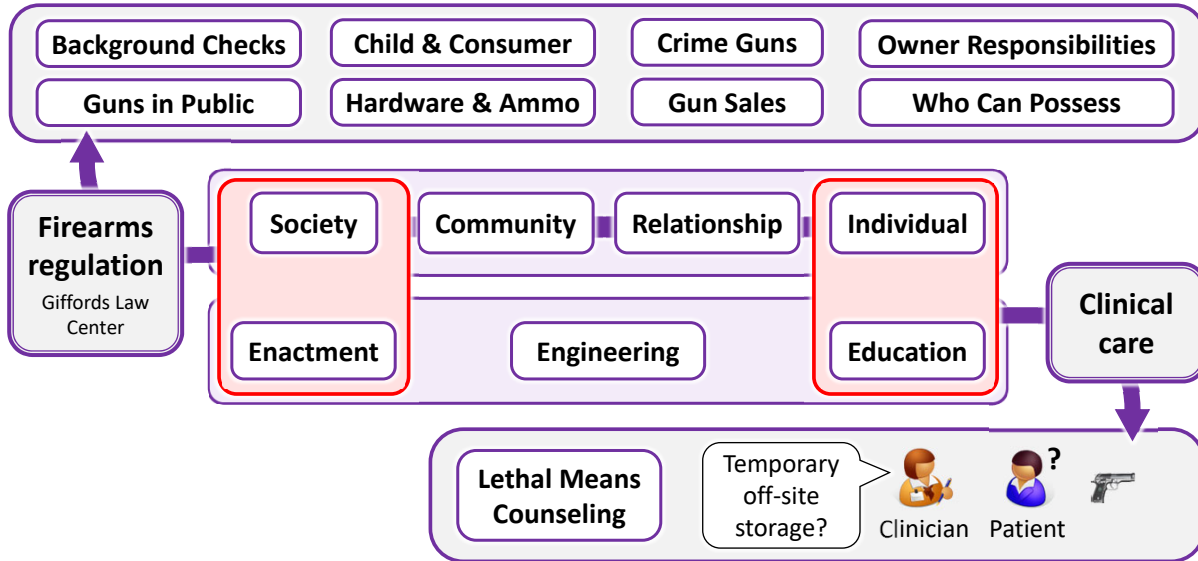
AMA Code of Medical Ethics and a Social-Ecological Model of Injury Prevention (CDC)



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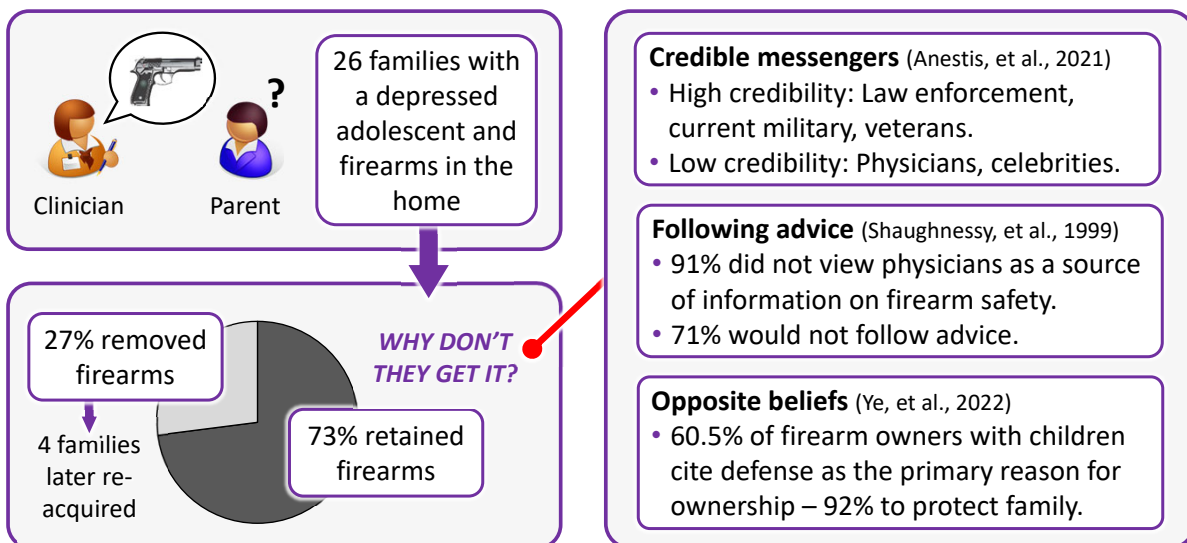
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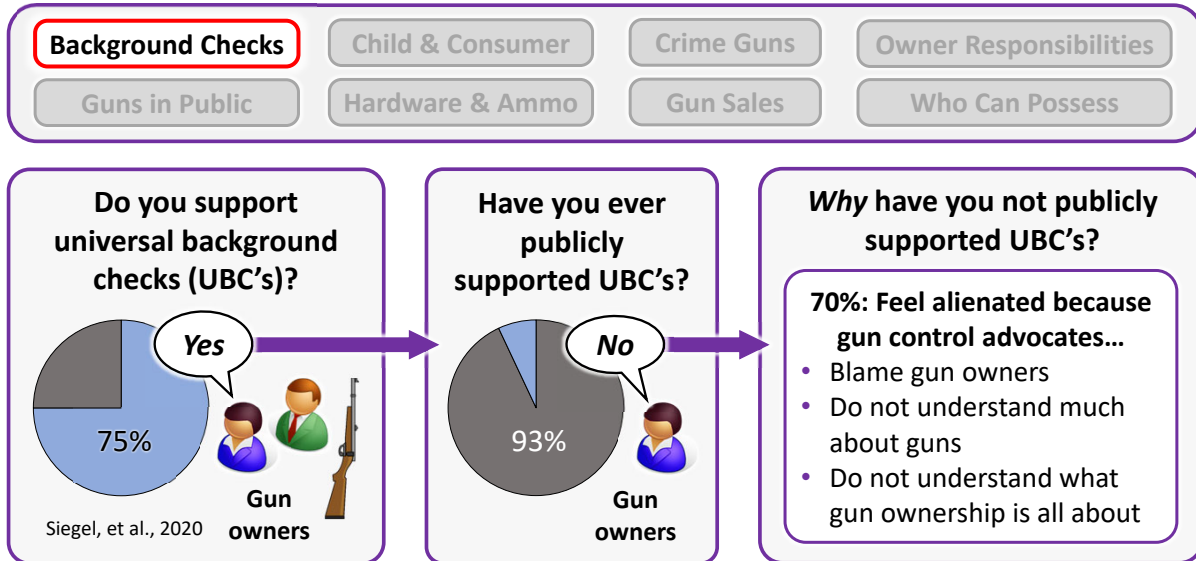
## When Counseling Parents on Guns Doesn't Work: Why don't they get it? (Brent, et al., 2000 & Christoffel, 2000)



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## Physician Responsibilities in Injury Prevention

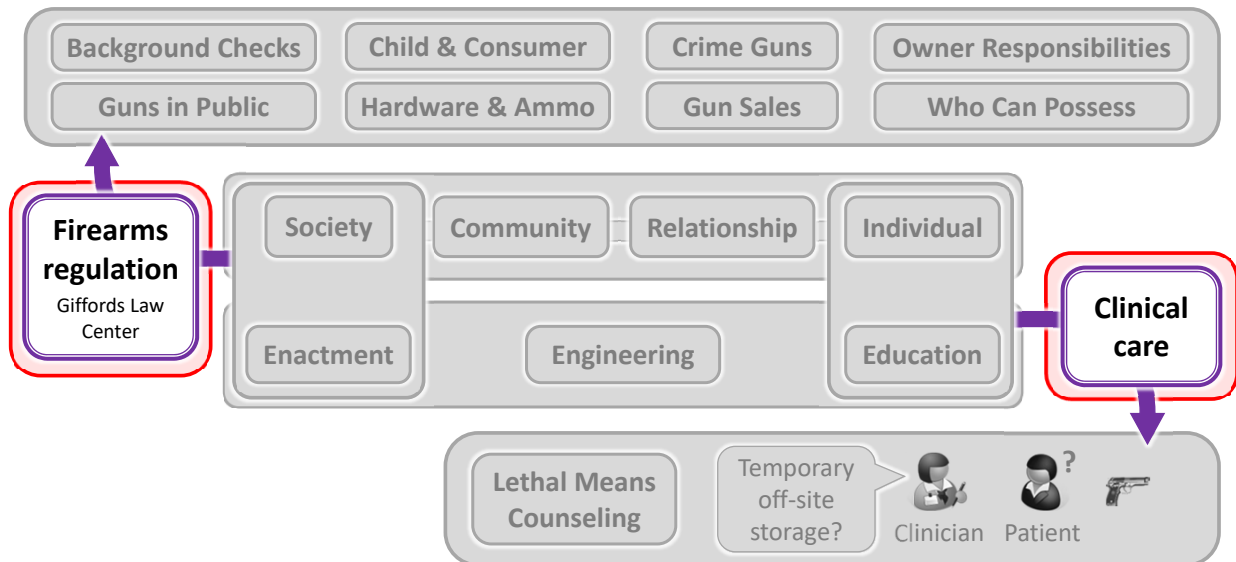
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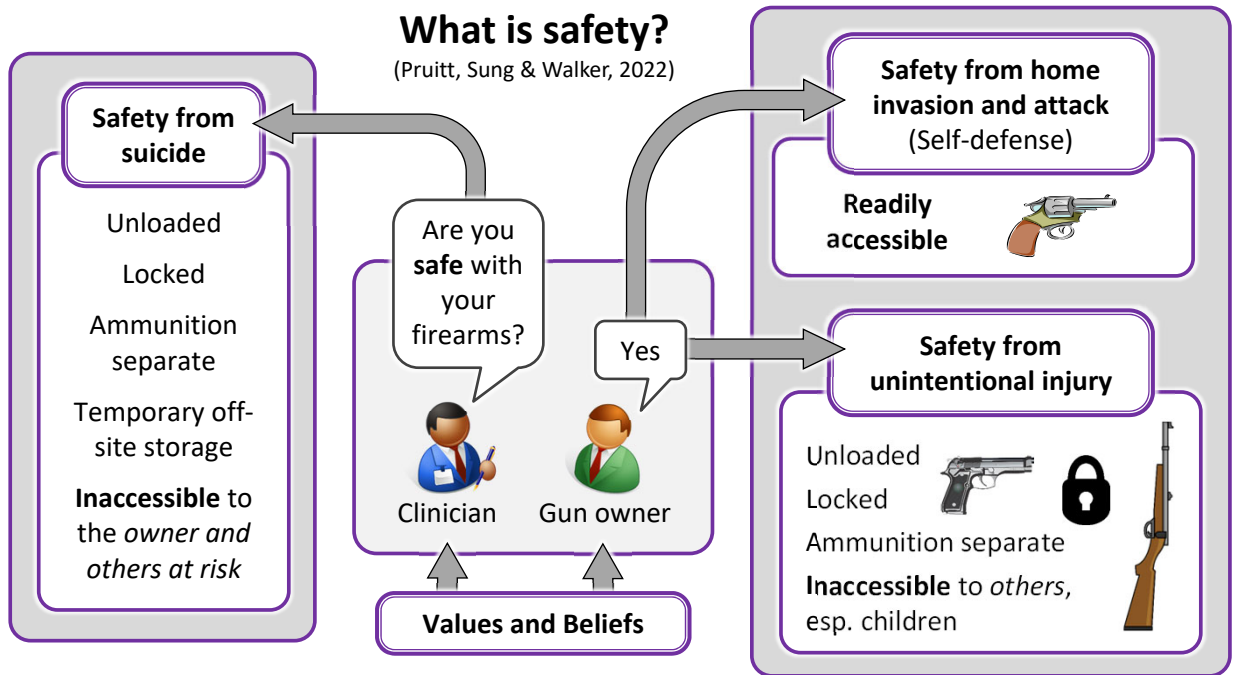
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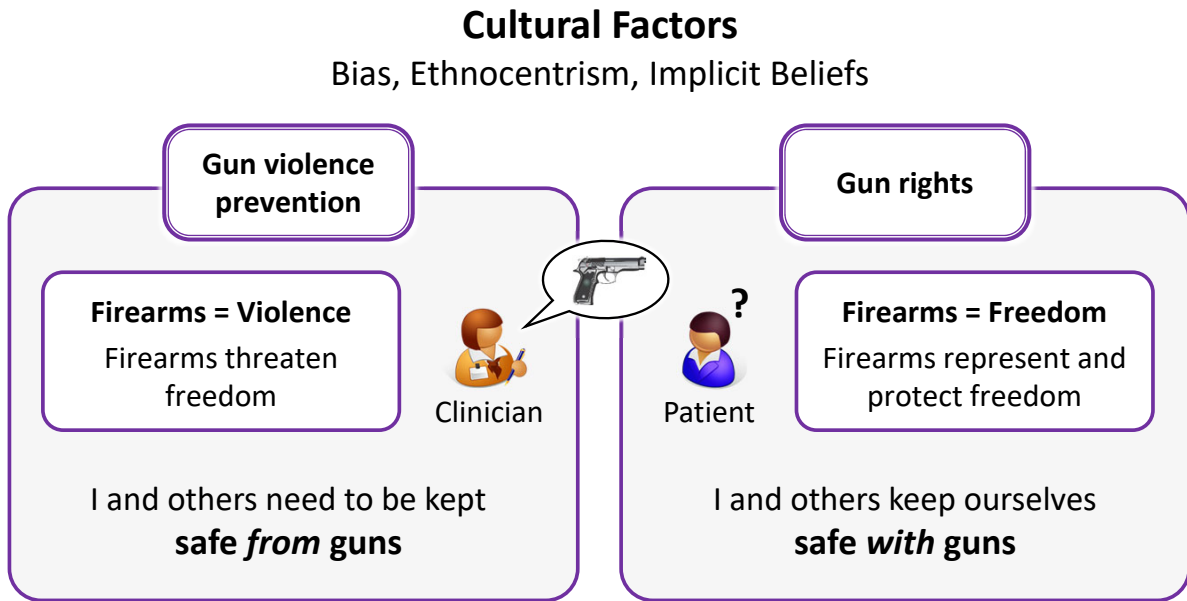


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Stewart & Kuhls, 2016 in JTACS; Yamane, 2017; Yamane, 2020

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**Gun violence prevention**

**Firearms = Violence**  
Firearms threaten freedom

I and others need to be kept **safe from guns**

**Bradford Hill's Criteria for Causation** (1965)

**STRENGTH** of the association (Miller & Hemenway, 2008 in *NEJM*)

"...strong association between guns & suicide."

**CONSISTENCY** of the association (Miller, et al., 2016)

"The consistency of individual-level findings linking firearms and suicide is even more striking."

**SPECIFICITY** of the association (Hemenway & Miller, 2002)

"Rates of depression and suicidal thoughts cannot account for the handgun-suicide connection."

**TEMPORALITY** of the association (Studdert, et al., 2020 in *NEJM*)

"The risk of suicide by firearm among handgun owners peaked immediately after the first acquisition."

**CAUSATION** (Cunningham, et al., 2023 for NAM)

"Firearms are the leading cause of death among U.S. children and teens."

Emphasis on risks of firearms and proposing solutions to reduce death as with disease states.

Policies at odds with how gun owners imagine public safety and self-protection.

A need for public health to understand the meanings of firearms ownership and to strategize solutions beyond one-size-fits-all policies.


**On the limitations of the "public health approach"**



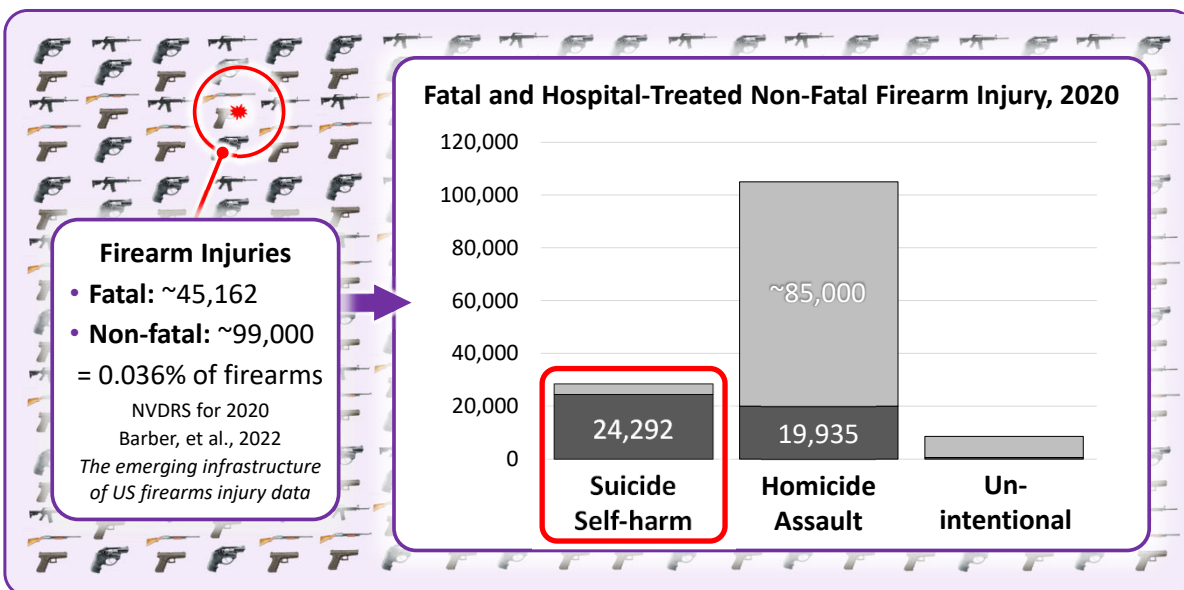
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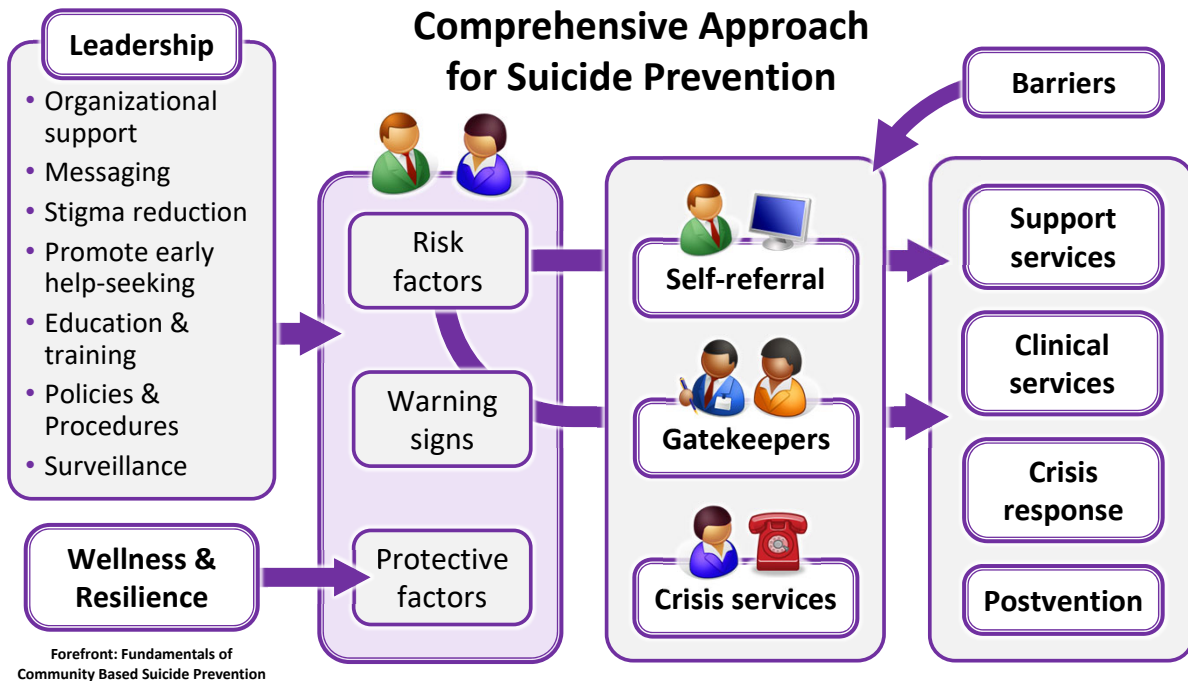
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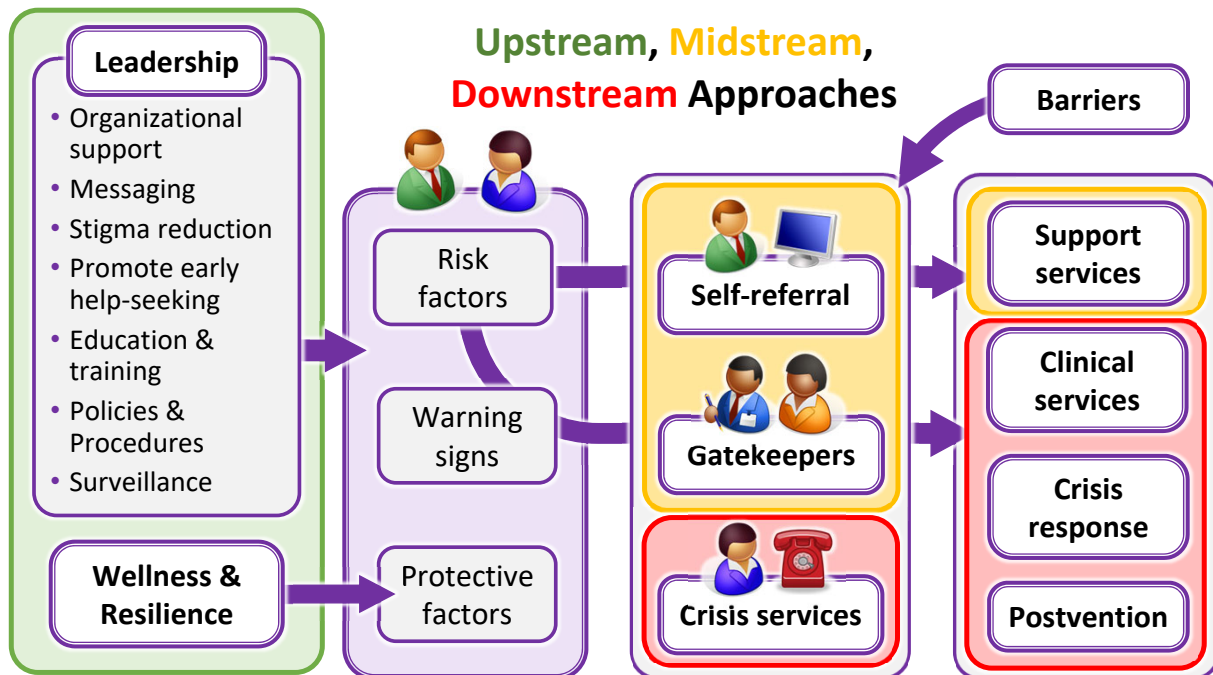
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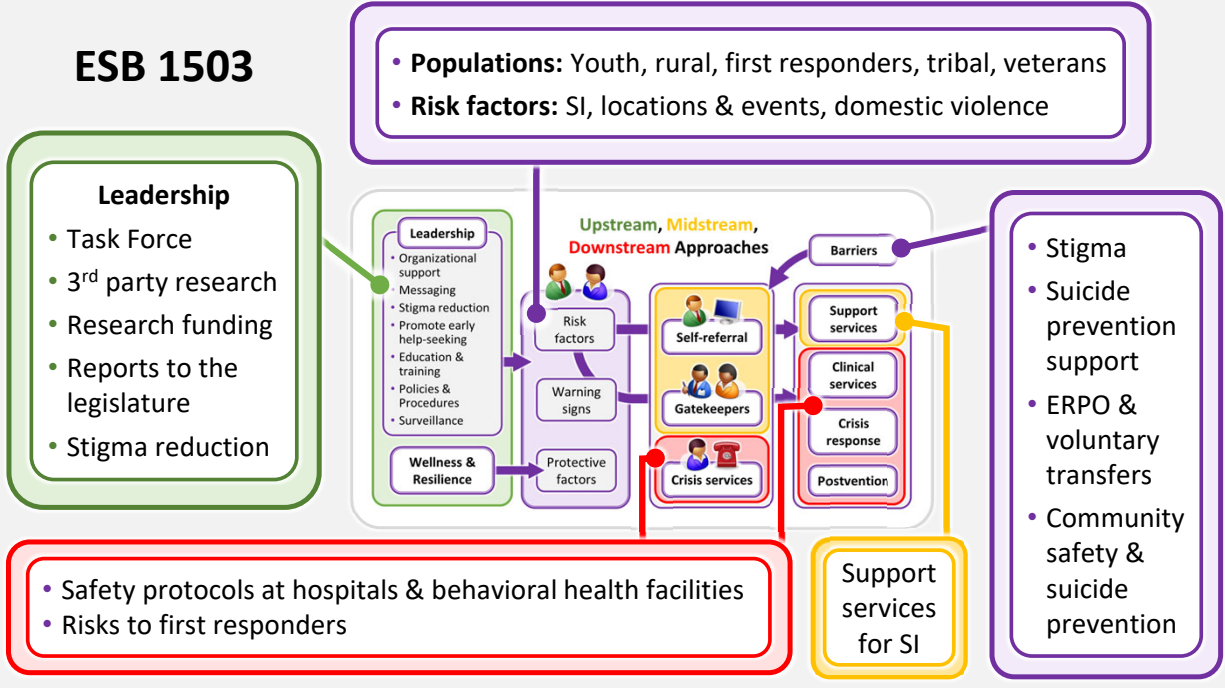


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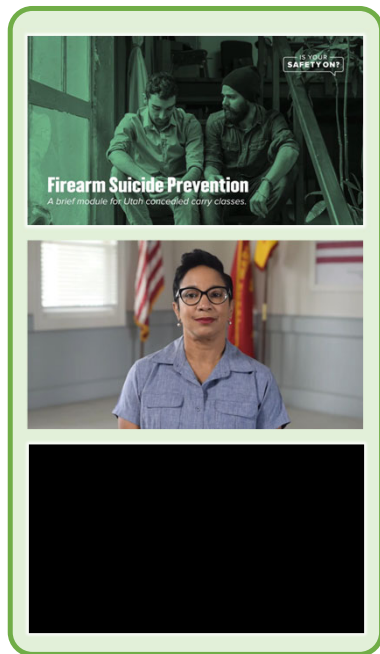


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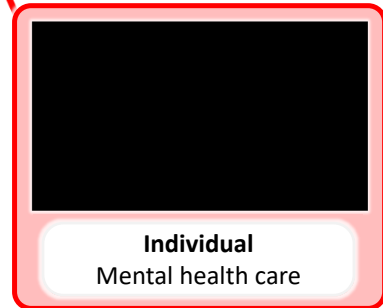
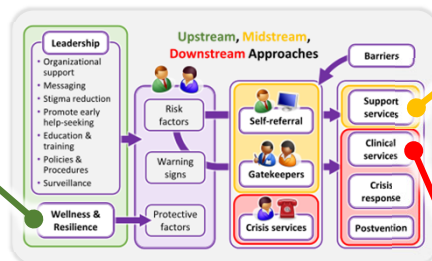
# ESB 1503



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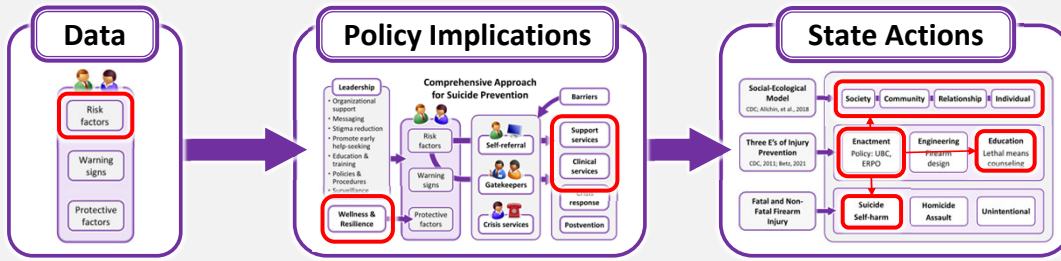
## Firearms, Injury Prevention, and Suicide



**Utah Suicide Prevention Coalition**  
 (Barber, et al., 2019)  
**Firearm Safety for Suicide Prevention – VISION Coalition**  
 (Houtsma, et al., 2023)  
**Saferhomescoalition.org**  
 Firearms Safety, Suicide Awareness & You  
**OVERWATCH + PROJECT**  
**Safer Homes: Targeted Interventions training**

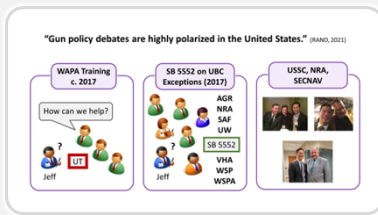
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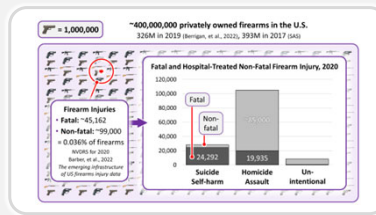


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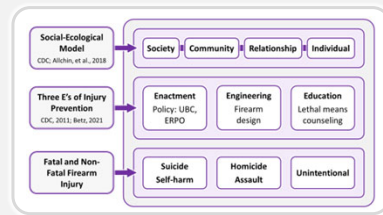
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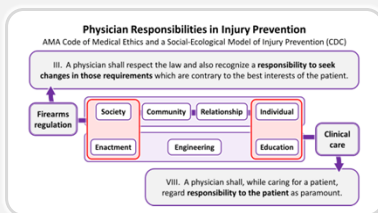
Polarization



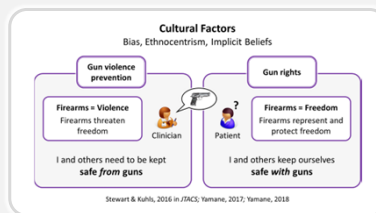
Firearms & Firearm Injury



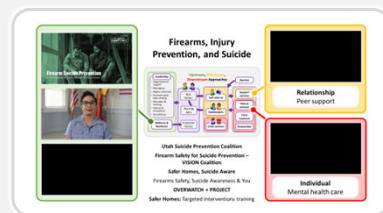
Approaches to Inj. Prev.



Policy & Clinical Care



Cultural Factors



Suicide Prevention

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**Cultural alignment:** Dignity, respect, and compassion in policies, programs, and practices.

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### **H.R. 8361 the Preventing Suicide Through Voluntary Firearm Purchase Delay Act Bill Summary: Led by Representatives Pramila Jayapal (WA-07) and John Curtis (UT-03)**

Gun suicide is a crisis in the U.S. with over 26,000 Americans dying by gun suicide each year, an average of 72 lives lost per day. Suicides account for 56% of all U.S. gun deaths. Firearms are the most lethal means of suicide with 85% of attempted suicides with guns result in death whereas other lethal means, like drug overdose, are only fatal in 3% of attempts.

To combat this crisis, the Preventing Suicide Through Voluntary Firearm Purchase Delay Act creates a novel suicide prevention tool by establishing a system for individuals to voluntarily enroll in a firearm purchase delay database. This tool would help combat the largest driver of gun deaths in the country without infringing upon Second Amendment rights. In a study at University of Alabama, researchers found that 46 percent of patients at high risk of suicide at the medical center would enroll in this system if available.

Washington and Utah have already enacted voluntary purchase delay laws with broad bipartisan support.

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The Second Amendment protects the right of the American people to own and use firearms for safe and lawful purposes. Tragically, unsafe use of firearms for suicide results in the death of ~~Gun suicide is a crisis in the U.S. with over~~ over 26,000 Americans ~~dying by gun suicide~~ each year, an average of 72 lives lost *per day*. Suicides account for 56% of all U.S. ~~gun deaths~~ fatal firearm injuries. Firearm use in suicidal behavior is highly lethal with death resulting almost ~~s are the most lethal means of suicide with 85% of attempted suicides with guns result in death whereas other lethal means, like drug overdose, are only fatal in 3% of attempts~~ 90% of the time.

To ~~combat this crisis~~ address this leading cause of suicide, the Preventing Suicide Through Voluntary Firearm Purchase Delay Act creates a novel suicide prevention tool by establishing a system for individuals to voluntarily enroll in a firearm purchase delay database. This tool would help combat the largest driver of ~~gun deaths~~ fatal firearm injuries in the country without infringing upon Second Amendment rights. In a study at University of Alabama, researchers found that 46 percent of patients at high risk of suicide at the medical center would ~~enroll in this system~~ use this tool to improve their safety if available.

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### **Videos and E-Learning Courses**

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OVERWATCH PROJECT. (2020). OVERWATCH+PROJECT: Army Veteran GABE. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hvth8-4\\_JXA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hvth8-4_JXA)

Safer Homes Suicide Aware. Here's what a Safer Homes conversation looks like. <https://saferhomescoalition.org/>

Safer Homes Suicide Aware. Targeted Interventions: Firearms, Culture & Suicide Care. <https://saferhomescoalition.org/training/medical-providers/>

The Armory Project (TAP). (2022). Firearm Safety for Suicide Prevention | Saving Lives Together | VISION Coalition. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlhuQqnzoaE>

Utah Suicide Prevention Coalition. (2018). Firearm Suicide Prevention Training Video 5 min HD. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLJuDz7sGDE>