

Prevention Institute's Recommendations for Preventing Gun Violence

Time and again, we are heartbroken by the news of another mass shooting. Part of our healing must be the conviction that we will do everything in our power to keep these tragedies from happening in a nation that continues to face a pandemic of gun violence. It's not only the high-profile mass shootings that we must work to prevent, but also the daily death-by-guns that claims more than 30,000 lives every year.

We know that these deaths are a predictable outcome of our country's lack of political will to make a change and an underinvestment in prevention approaches that work. Through a public health approach that focuses on drawing from evidence and addressing the factors that increase or decrease the risk of gun violence, particularly in communities that are disproportionately impacted, we can save lives.

Each time a major tragedy occurs, the discourse tends to focus on addressing a specific venue. In the wake of the deadly shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas School in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018, there is an understandable focus on school safety. We strongly support broad engagement of community members, including young people and other survivors of gun violence, policymakers, and others, in insisting that schools be safe. We must also insist on that same level of safety for our places of worship, shopping malls, movie theaters, concert venues, nightclubs, workplaces, neighborhoods, and homes.

We are listening to young people from all races, classes, and sexualities, in Florida, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and throughout the country, who are unifying to speak truth to power. We have renewed hope that, together, we can prevent gun violence— not just in the case of mass shootings but also in the case of domestic violence, suicide, community violence, and violence involving law enforcement. We first developed this list after the Sandy Hook tragedy in 2012. The public health approach has evolved since then, and we have now updated it, including more attention to addressing multiple forms of gun violence.

The recommendations below begin with attention to reducing immediate risks related to guns, broaden to address the underlying contributors to gun violence, and then address the prevention infrastructure necessary to ensure effectiveness. We also include recommendations related to new frontiers for research and practice, to ensure that we continue to learn, innovate, and increase our impact over time. The set of recommendations illustrate that one program or policy alone is not going to significantly reduce gun violence, but rather, through comprehensive strategies, we can achieve safety in our homes, schools, and communities.

Gun safety: Part of a public health approach to gun violence is about preventing the imminent risk of lethality through sensible gun laws and a culture of safety.

1. **Sensible gun laws: *Reduce easy access to dangerous weapons*** by banning [high capacity magazines](#)¹ and bump stocks, requiring [universal background checks](#)² without loopholes, instituting [waiting periods](#),³ and [reinstating the assault weapons ban immediately](#).⁴
2. ***Establish a culture of gun safety:*** As the nation on earth with the most guns, we must make sure people are safe.

- a) ***Reduce firearm access to youth and individuals who are at risk of harming themselves or other.***^{5,6,7,8} This includes keeping guns out of the hands of those who have been violent toward their partners and families, and those with previous violent convictions, whether through expanding lethality assessment and [background checks](#) or supporting [domestic violence bills](#), and [gun violence restraining orders](#).
- b) ***Hold the gun industry accountable and ensure there is adequate oversight over the marketing and sales of guns and ammunition.*** Five percent of gun dealers sell 90% of guns used in crimes, and must be held accountable to a [code of conduct](#).⁹ Further, states can pass laws requiring sellers to obtain state licenses, maintain records of sales, submit to inspections and fulfill other requirements. Unlike other industries, gun companies have special legal protections against liability leaving them immune from lawsuits. There is a need to [repeal gun industry immunity laws](#) in states that have them, and resist their enactment in states without current immunity laws. Increasingly, in the absence of legislative action, organizations are divesting from companies that manufacture firearms, and consumers are pressuring companies directly.
- c) ***Engage responsible gun dealers and owners in solutions.*** For example, some gun dealers and range owners are already being trained in [suicide prevention](#).¹⁰
- d) ***Insist on mandatory training and licensing for owners.***¹¹ This training should include recurring education to renew permits, with a graduated licensing process at least as stringent as for driver's licenses.
- e) ***Require safe and secure gun storage.*** For example, in King County, Washington, public health has teamed up with firearm storage device retailers. In addition to safe storage being tax exempt in Washington, through the [LOCK-IT-UP initiative](#), residents can learn about the importance of safe storage, purchase devices at discounted rates and learn how to practice safe storage in the home.¹²

Underlying contributors to gun violence: Risk and resilience. A public health approach to preventing gun violence expands solutions beyond gun access to reduce additional risk factors associated with gun violence and bolster resilience in individuals, families, and communities.

- 3. ***Public health solutions: Recognize gun violence as a critical and preventable public health problem.*** Gun violence is a leading cause of premature death in the country.^{13, 14} Yet, unlike other preventable causes of death, we haven't mustered the political will to address it. Gun violence is most noticed when multiple people die at once, but it affects too many communities and families on a daily basis whether through suicide, domestic violence, community violence, or other forms.¹⁵ Data shows that risk for firearm violence varies substantially by age, race, gender, and geography, in patterns that are quite different for suicide and homicide.¹⁶ Through a public health approach, we have learned that violence is preventable across all of its forms.^{17,18} The public health approach studies data on various forms of violence and who is affected and identifies the biggest risk factors and what's protective,¹⁹ and develops policy, practice, and program solutions in partnership with other sectors and community members. Many communities and groups have adopted a public health approach to preventing violence such as

Prevention Institute's [UNITY City Network](#) and [Cities United](#), a growing network of over 100 mayors.

4. **Comprehensive solutions: *Support community planning and implementation of comprehensive [community safety plans](#) that include prevention and intervention.*** A growing research base demonstrates that it is possible to prevent shootings and killings through approaches such as [hospital-based intervention programs](#),²⁰ the [Cure Violence model](#),^{21,22} and [Advance Peace](#).²³ A growing number of safety plans across the country include upstream strategies such as youth employment,²⁴ neighborhood economic development, safe parks,²⁵ restoring vacant land,²⁶ and reducing alcohol outlet density.²⁷ Following the implementation of [Minneapolis' Blueprint for Action to Prevent Youth Violence](#), which prioritized prevention and upstream strategies, the City experienced a 62% reduction in youth gunshot victims, a 34% reduction in youth victims of crime, and a 76% reduction in youth arrests with a gun from 2007-2015.²⁸ Yet too many communities lack the resources to do what is needed. We must commit to helping communities identify and implement solutions.
5. **Trauma, connection, and services: *Expand access to high quality, culturally competent, coordinated, social, emotional, and mental health supports and address the impact of trauma.*** Too often gun violence is blamed on mental illness, when in fact in most cases people who carry out shootings do not have a diagnosable mental illness.²⁹ However, throughout a community, members often recognize individuals who are disconnected and/or otherwise in need of additional supports and services. It is critical to reduce the stigma associated with mental health needs and support our children, friends, family members, and neighbors in seeking and obtaining appropriate supports. For this to work, communities need resources to assess and connect individuals at a high risk for harming themselves or others to well-coordinated social, emotional, and mental health supports and services, particularly in critical times of crisis and high need. Further, trauma can have damaging effects on learning, behavior, and health across the life course, especially during key developmental stages such as early childhood and adolescence, and can increase the risk for multiple forms of violence.³⁰ We need to do more to recognize trauma, develop trauma-informed protocols, including for law enforcement, and support healing and treatment.

Prevention Infrastructure: Beyond addressing the risk and underlying factors of gun violence, a public health approach also entails building a prevention infrastructure with mechanisms for scale, sustainability, and effectiveness. The UNITY RoadMap is a tool to support prevention infrastructure.

6. **Support firearm injury and mortality prevention research: *Ensure that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have robust and sustained resources for gun violence prevention research.*** Up until 2019, CDC, the nation's leading public health agency, had [been restricted](#) from conducting research that could support solutions to reduce gun violence. In FY20 and FY21, Congress appropriated \$25 million for gun violence prevention research evenly split between the [CDC](#) and [NIH](#). This initial investment has been used by CDC and NIH for projects to improve our understanding on how to keep communities safe and reduce firearm-related injury and death. Gun violence prevention advocates and researchers strongly recommend doubling this funding. Increased funding would support the creation of additional, large-scale, multi-year, public health supported studies, and accelerate rebuilding the gun violence prevention research community.

7. **Health system: Establish a comprehensive health system in which violence prevention is a health system responsibility and imperative.** The [*Movement towards Violence as a Health Issue*](#), which consists of over 400 individuals representing more than 100 organizations across the country dedicated to a health and community response to violence has proposed a framework for addressing and preventing violence in all of its forms. Moving away from the current, fragmented approach to violence that leans heavily on the justice system, this unifying framework encourages and supports extensive cross-sector collaboration. The framework includes 18 system elements such as public health departments, primary care, behavioral health care, law enforcement and the justice system, schools, and faith-based institutions.³¹

New Frontiers: A public health approach includes continuous learning and innovation to increase impact through research and practice. These emerging areas require further examination and are important additions to reducing the impact of gun violence in our society.

8. **Community healing: Prevent community trauma.** Community trauma can result from experiencing violence and it can also increase the likelihood of violence. Let's support healing and resilience through strategies that rebuild social relationships and networks, reclaim and improve public spaces, promote community healing, and foster economic stability and prosperity. Prevention Institute's [*Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience Framework*](#), provides an approach to address and prevent community trauma.^{32,33}
9. **Mental health and wellbeing: Invest in communities to promote resilience and mental health and wellbeing.**³⁴ Mental illness is not at the root of our country's high rate of gun violence, in fact, people with mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators.³⁵ However, we know we can do more to foster mental health and wellbeing in the first place. Through our national initiative, [*Making Connections for Mental Health and Wellbeing Among Men and Boys*](#), with communities across the US, we're learning that there are pillars of wellbeing that promote wellbeing which is supportive of efforts to prevent multiple forms of violence, including belonging/connectedness, control of destiny, dignity, hope/aspiration, safety and trust.³⁶ We are also seeing community members come together to change their community environments to promote mental health and wellbeing, including as a suicide prevention approach.^{37,38}
10. **Support healthy norms about masculinity: Explore the pathways between gun violence and harmful norms that have been about maintaining power and privilege.**³⁹ The majority of men do not perpetrate gun violence; however, the majority of people who use guns against others and themselves are boys and men.⁴⁰ For instance, the majority of the mass shooters over decades have been men.⁴¹ How do expectations about masculinity in different cultural contexts that promote, domination, control, and risk-taking connect to distress, bias and discrimination, and gun violence perpetration? How do gaps in expectations of power and privilege versus reality play into this? Why does our dominant culture permit a destructive desire for power over others? Answering questions like these can glean important insights and help us move toward a culture of equitable safety.
11. **Impulsive anger: Explore the linkages between anger and gun violence.**⁴² More research is needed to examine patterns of impulse control, empathy, problem solving, and anger management across shootings, as well as interactions of these functions with the harmful norms

described in the previous recommendation. Through a public health approach, we want to understand who is at a greater risk for violence as a means to creating long-term solutions to stop the issue in the first place. Further analysis may provide answers regarding particular linkages and what to do when functions are compromised.

12. **Economic development: Reduce concentrated disadvantage and invest in employment opportunities.** As Rev. Gregory Boyle has long said of his work in East Los Angeles, “Nothing stops a bullet like a job.”⁴³ Lack of employment opportunities increases the risk for gun violence,⁴⁴ and on the other hand, economic opportunity protects against violence.⁴⁵ Promoting equitable access to education programs, job training, and employment programs with mentorship for residents of neighborhoods with concentrated disadvantage, especially young people can be effective in reducing gun violence.⁴⁶ For example, a study of One Summer Chicago Plus, a jobs program designed to reduce violence and prepare youth from some of the city’s most violence neighborhoods for the labor market – saw a 43% drop in violent-crime arrests of participants.⁴⁷ Further, neighborhood-based economic development strategies such as Business Improvement Districts have also been shown to reduce violence, including gun violence.⁴⁸
13. **Law enforcement violence: Establish accountability for sworn officers and private security.** Ensure that police and security industries examine disparities regarding who they protect versus who is most often harmed as a result of their actions. With this information, these sectors should develop effective approaches to reduce harm in those populations, including unarmed African American men and people with mental illnesses. Current approaches being explored include implicit-bias training,⁴⁹ [problem-oriented policing](#), and [restorative justice](#). Moving forward, it’s important to determine and understand the most effective strategies.
14. **Technology: Advance gun safety and self-defense technology.** As the call for gun safety continues to increase, we must consider the role of [new technologies](#).⁵⁰ Just as cars continue to have new safety measures embedded in the technology, from fingerprint scanners to PIN codes and RFID chips, there are ongoing developments to increase the safety of guns and gun storage that require further analysis to assess effectiveness. In addition, technologies that are alternatives to guns are being developed to support self-protection to reduce the perceived need for a firearm for self-defense.



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Learn more about preventing gun violence from other organizations and resources we've found helpful:

[American Journal of Public Health](#)

[American Public Health Association](#)

[American Psychological Association](#)

[Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence](#)

[Everytown for Gun Safety](#)

[Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence](#)

[Harvard T.H. School of Public Health](#)

[Hope and Heal Fund](#)

[Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence call to action](#)

[International Firearm Injury Prevention and Policy](#)

[Movement towards Violence as a Health Issue](#)

[Pew Research Center Americans' views on guns and gun ownership](#)

[RAND Corporation](#)

[Smart Tech Challenges Foundation](#)

[Speak for Safety campaign for Gun Violence Restraining Order](#)

[States for Gun Safety Coalition](#)

[The Joyce Foundation](#)

[University of California, Davis – Violence Prevention Program](#)

[Violence Policy Center](#)

If you have additional resources we should add to the list, email prevent@preventioninstitute.org.

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