



## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### Prevent Firearm Injury and Death

**Mission:** The mission of NYSPHA is to promote and protect the public's health through professional development, networking, advocacy, and education.

**Vision:** Strengthening public health and taking action to make New York the healthiest state.

### Problem Statement

Firearm use is associated with injury and death; these injuries and deaths are preventable. The American Public Health Association (APHA), advocacy groups including those representing victims' families, and groups comprised of clinical and public health professionals consider this a major public health issue.

U.S. firearm injuries and death vary by race, gender, and geography. While injuries from the unintentional discharge of a firearm do occur, the vast majority of firearm injury and death is comprised of homicide, suicide and mass shootings. More Americans die by individual shootings, though mass shootings have a widespread community impact. People who experience injury by firearm are at risk of long-term consequences such as physical disability, paralysis, chronic mental health problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, and death. In addition, firearms are the most common and lethal means of suicide. Suicides account for 60% of all firearm fatalities nationally. Among all suicides, firearms are the most common method used, and the most lethal. Firearm violence also has an economic impact costing billions of dollars each year in medical costs and lost productivity.

### Policy Statement

NYSPHA, as an advocate for public health in New York State, recognizes the complex landscape of firearm injury and death and is committed to education and advocacy for firearm injury prevention.

NYSPHA recommends the following:

1. Create a National Bureau of Firearm Injury Prevention to address firearm violence and unintentional shootings and to promote firearm safety through research and research-based interventions for regulation of industry, for raising awareness, and for education
2. Support a broad platform of research to better understand risk factors for intentional and unintentional firearm injury and death
3. Fund violence interrupter programs: data-driven interventions delivered by community members with lived experience, which aim to prevent gang-related shootings in communities at risk for violence (Justice Collaborative Institute, 2020)
4. Focus efforts specifically on prevention of suicide by firearms by:

- Providing basic suicide prevention education and the connection with firearms
- Partnering with behavioral health providers, clinical providers, public health professionals, gun retailers, and those in the gun-owning community to share information on suicide prevention, warning signs, and how to help connect someone who is at risk to care
- Providing routine screening for mental health and suicide risk in health and behavioral health care settings. For those identified at risk, providing counseling on access to lethal means
- Including suicide prevention and firearm safety in medical, behavioral health, and nursing school curricula
- Educating gun owners and gun shop owners on safe storage of firearms and providing free gun locks or other safe storage devices
- Supporting the Extreme Risk Protection Act which enables temporary removal of firearms for people in crisis

At the New York State level, NYSPHA supports:

- Require firearm registration and liability insurance for all firearms in New York State
- Require a health examination for all prospective firearm purchasers to ensure they have the capacity to handle firearms

At the federal level, NYSPHA supports:

- National implementation of elements of the New York State SAFE Act, including an assault weapons ban; background checks; safe storage mandates; restrictions on magazines; restrictions on ammunition sellers; and license renewal at a minimum every five years. New York's Safe Act, enacted in 2013, aims to reduce gun violence by safely securing guns and making them inaccessible to those not allowed to use them (New York State, 2021).
- Implementation of federal anti-trafficking laws to reduce illegal gun sales which could reduce trafficking from states with lenient laws to those with more stringent laws
- The Firearm Retailer Code of Conduct Act of 2020 that establishes requirements for gun dealers to minimize diversion of firearms to the illegal gun market
- Universal background checks for gun transactions and removal of all loopholes that may circumvent the law
- Permit to Purchase laws which complement universal background checks

## **Justification**

In 2019, there were 39,707 firearm deaths due to suicides and homicides in the U.S. Injuries related to firearms are one of the five leading causes of death for individuals through age 64. Males account for 86% of all firearm deaths. Rates also vary according to age and race/ethnicity and by homicide and suicide. Homicides disproportionately affect young adults 15 to 34 who are Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaskan Natives, while suicides disproportionately affect middle-aged White men (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Firearm deaths by mass shootings are significantly less frequent 373 in 2018 (Gun Violence Archive, 2021).

The U.S. accounts for just 4% of the world's population but 35% of global firearm suicides and 8% of global firearm homicides (Naghavi et al., 2018). While New York State has the second lowest firearm death rate in the nation at 3.9/100,000 people in 2019, there were 803 deaths of which 56.5% were suicides, 40.6% were homicides, 1.6% were legal intervention, and the remaining were unintentional and undetermined (CDC, 2019). In 2019, in New York State, there were 914 firearm-related hospitalizations (4.7/100,000) and 1307

emergency department (ED) visits (6.7/100,000), resulting in hospitalization and emergency department charges of over \$95 million (New York State Department of Health, 2021)

The total cost of gun violence in the United States is close to \$229 billion and includes firearm related lifetime cost of homicides and injuries, medical expenses and loss of productivity (Doucette et al., 2021). In New York State the total cost of gun violence including all health care costs, law enforcement and criminal justice expenses, costs to employers, lost income and reduced quality of life attributable to pain and suffering is approximately \$5.6 billion annually (Giffords, 2021).

Homicides by firearm take a disproportionate toll on communities of color (CDC, 2019). In 2017, black New Yorkers made up 20% of the population but accounted for two-thirds of all firearm homicide victims. Latin residents experienced firearm killings at four times the rate of white residents. Firearm homicides are also highly concentrated geographically in New York where 70 % of murders in 2018 took place in New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse (Giffords, 2021).

Suicides account for 60% of total firearm deaths. Suicide rates are highest among white males, both middle age and those 85 and above, in New York State and nationally (CDC, 2021). In rural areas of New York, where gun ownership is more common, more than 50% of suicides are by firearm and are over five times more common than in NYC, In 2014 (New York State Department of Health, 2021). Firearms are also the most lethal means of suicide, making suicide rates significantly higher in rural than in urban areas. Considering there is often a short period of time between a suicidal urge and acting upon that urge, it is critical to identify ways to safely store firearms and reduce access to them during a suicidal crisis.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, firearm purchases, incidents, victims, and deaths have increased. The number of firearms in homes increased due to a fear of interpersonal violence and have been stored unsafely (Lyons et al, 2021). In New York City, this trend has continued and, according to the New York Police Department, the annual number of shooting incidents and victims increased 100% and 99% respectively, in 2021 (as of July) compared to 2019 (New York Police Department, 2021).

Firearm crossfire in affected communities have an impact on children's play and sleep. Parents report constraining their children's outdoor play, and children report being kept awake (Agrawal, 2018). Similar reports note the long-lasting effects of firearm violence and mass shootings on child survivors (Cox, 2021).

Among firearm owners, safe storage reduces suicide and unintentional death among children. The safest, most effective way to prevent firearm homicides, suicides, and accidental death is the absence of guns in the home. Safely storing firearms is recommended in homes where children under 18 reside and could result in a 32% decrease in suicide and unintentional deaths (Monuteaux et al, 2019). If firearms are in the home, the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines recommend locking firearms in safe storage devices with cable locks or lockboxes and unloaded guns and ammunition in separate locked locations (Beidas et al., 2020).

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**Record of Action**

8/11/21 – Adopted by the NYSPHA Policy and Advocacy Committee (PAC)

8/25/21 – Approved by NYSPHA Board of Directors