

Gun Violence Prevention: A Child Health Issue

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is dedicated to protecting children from gun violence by urging Congress to find a way forward on gun safety legislation, support federal research on gun violence prevention and ensure children's access to mental health services.

Find a way forward on gun safety legislation that protects children.

Gun violence is a public health issue that profoundly affects children. Firearm injuries are one of the top three causes of death among youth, and studies show that strong gun laws help significantly reduce injuries, suicides and homicides.

- Enact legislation that strengthens the background check system, reduces gun trafficking, encourages safe firearm storage and reinstates an assault weapons ban.
- Support programs across the federal government that address the needs of at-risk children and those exposed to violence and trauma, including at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Department of Justice (DOJ).

Support a robust federal research agenda on gun violence prevention.

Federal research funding is essential to understand the causes of gun violence and the most effective prevention and intervention strategies.

- Renew efforts to apply science to gun safety; support full funding for the CDC, National Institutes of Health (NIH), and DOJ to conduct evidence-based firearm research without political interference.
- Support the Senate Appropriations Committee's recommendation to provide CDC with \$10 million for gun violence research and \$18.5 million to expand the National Violent Death Reporting System.

Ensure access to mental health screening and services for children.

Exposure to gun violence contributes to toxic stress and harms children's health and development, highlighting the need for children to have access to mental health services. While more than 20% of children have mental health disorders, only 21% of those affected actually receive needed services.

- Renew efforts to pass the *Mental Health Awareness and Improvement Act*, which reauthorizes and improves programs related to awareness, prevention and early identification of mental health conditions and promotes linkages to appropriate services for children and youth. The bill also reauthorizes the *Children's Recovery from Trauma Act* and the *Garret Lee Smith Memorial Act*, which improves suicide prevention programming.
- Provide \$5 million for the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program to address the shortage of mental health providers like developmental pediatricians, pediatric neurologists, and child and adolescent psychiatrists.
- Maintain and expand funding for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the National Institute of Mental Health at NIH to support children with mental illness through early intervention, treatment and research.

AAP Urges Congress to:

1. Find a way forward on common-sense gun violence prevention legislation
2. Support a robust gun violence prevention research agenda
3. Support and fund improved access to mental health services for children

