

Leadership Day, May 14-15, 2019

The Epidemic of Firearms-Related Injury and Death

Congress should pass legislation to provide dedicated funding for research by federal agencies on prevention of firearms-related injuries and death, strengthen the criminal background check system, protect domestic violence victims from firearms-related assault, and ban assault weapons and high capacity magazines as described below in the “What is ACP Asking of Congress” section.

What’s it all about?

An epidemic of firearms-related injury and death has created a public health threat that requires the immediate attention and bipartisan intervention of Congress. Deaths and injuries from firearms are a daily occurrence in our neighborhoods, homes, work places, and communities. According to data released in 2018 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2017 marked a record-high for firearms-related deaths in the U.S. in nearly four decades, with nearly 40,000 people killed by firearms that year—suicides, homicides, and accidental shootings combined. This represents an increase of more than 10,000 compared to the 28, 874 recorded in 1999. More than 70,000 people experience non-fatal injuries from firearms each year, often resulting in a lifetime of treatment for associated physical and mental health conditions and disabilities. The U.S. also is experiencing an unprecedented series of mass shootings resulting in devastating injuries and loss of life to thousands of people annually [The FBI defines a mass shooting as an incident in which four or more people, not including the suspect, are killed]. It is estimated that there was at least one deadly mass shooting per month in 2018.

As an organization representing physicians who have first-hand experience with the devastating impact on the health of patients resulting from firearms-related injuries and deaths, ACP for over 20 years has championed policies to mitigate firearms-related tragedies. On Oct. 20, 2018, the *Annals of Internal Medicine* published “[Reducing Firearm Injuries and Deaths in the United States](#),” an update and expansion of a 2014 ACP position paper. The paper reaffirms many of ACP’s 2014 recommendations, such as requiring universal background checks and banning assault weapons and high capacity magazines, and proposes new policies on issues including extreme risk protection orders, banning domestic violence offenders from owning firearms, child access prevention laws, and others that are found to be effective in reducing firearms-related injuries and deaths. The paper presents reasonable and evidence-based proposals to stem firearms-related violence, consistent with the Second Amendment. View a [summary](#) of the paper. In a tweet directed at ACP and the *Annals of Internal Medicine* for publishing the paper and associated content, the National Rifle Association told physicians to “stay in their lane”— spawning a massive, grassroots movement by physicians to inform the public that addressing the public health consequences of firearms-related violence is in the profession’s lane.

In 2015, ACP was [joined](#) by the American College of Surgeons, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Public Health Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Emergency Physicians, and American Bar Association in a call to action to address gun violence as a public health threat. That call to action was subsequently endorsed by 52 organizations, including clinician organizations, consumer organizations, organizations representing families of gun violence victims, research organizations, public health organizations, and other health advocacy organizations.

What’s the current status?

In 2018, Congress passed and the president signed into law a measure, the Fix NICS Act, which enhanced the accuracy of the national criminal background check system by requiring federal agencies to improve their standards for reporting NICS data. It also provided incentives for states to update record sharing systems related to firearms data. ACP supported that measure. The Trump administration also took executive action in 2018 to ban “bump stocks,” the attachments that allow semi-automatic weapons to fire like machine guns; bump stocks were used in the worst mass

shooting in modern history in Las Vegas in 2017. That ban went into effect in April 2019. In the new 116th Congress, hearings have already taken place in several committees as lawmakers explore ways to mitigate firearms-related violence. In 2019, ACP submitted testimony to the House [Appropriations Subcommittee](#) on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and well as to the Senate [Judiciary Committee](#) in order to provide the physician perspective on the health impacts of this epidemic and recommendations on how to address it. Moreover, in the initial first months of this 116th Congress, the House has already passed two bills addressing firearms-relating violence, the *Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019*, and the *Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2019*, as discussed below.

Why and how should Congress address this issue?

Legislation has been introduced this year, with ACP's support, to address firearms-related injuries and deaths:

- **The *Gun Violence Prevention Research Act (H.R. 674/S. 184)***, which would authorize funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to study firearms safety and gun violence prevention. More research is needed on firearm violence and on intervention and prevention strategies to reduce injuries caused by firearms. The CDC, National Institutes of Health, and National Institute of Justice should receive adequate funding to study the impact of gun violence on the public's health and safety. Accordingly, there must be dedicated and increased federal funding for research on gun violence; current restrictions should be lifted. ACP supports the \$50 million in combined funding for gun violence prevention research at the CDC and NIH, as included in the House FY2020 Labor, HHS, Education appropriations bill, but urges lawmakers to show their tangible support by cosponsoring the *Gun Violence Prevention Research Act*.
- **The *Violence Against Women (VAWA) Reauthorization Act of 2019 (H.R. 1585)***, which includes provisions to prohibit persons convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence, including violence against persons outside their own household, from possessing firearms as well as prohibits persons who are subject to a temporary or permanent court order of protection from possessing firearms. ACP applauds the House for passage of this legislation and urges Senate leadership to expedite its consideration in the Senate.
- **The *Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019 (H.R. 8)***, which would strengthen the accuracy and reporting of the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) as well as expand Brady background checks to cover all firearm sales, including unlicensed firearms sellers currently not required to use background checks. ACP applauds the House for passage of this legislation and urges Senate leadership to expedite its consideration in the Senate.
- **The *Assault Weapons Ban of 2019 (S. 66/H.R. 1296)***, which would prohibit the sale of semi-automatic assault weapons and large capacity ammunition feeding devices. ACP supports banning semiautomatic firearms that are designed to increase their rapid killing capacity (often called "assault weapons"). Only as an interim step toward a complete ban, ACP supports increasing the minimum age to purchase semi-automatic firearms to 21, consistent with the federal requirement for handguns.

What is ACP asking of Congress?

Congress should support the following bills to address the public health consequences of firearms:

Representatives and senators should cosponsor and pass the *Gun Violence Prevention Research Act (H.R. 674/S. 184)*, which would provide at least \$50 million for the CDC and other federal agencies to fund research on the prevention of firearms-related injuries and deaths.

Senators should follow the action taken by the House and pass the *Violence Against Women (VAWA) Reauthorization Act of 2019 (H.R. 1585)*, which would provide protections for domestic violence victims by restricting access to firearms by those deemed a threat to them.

Senators should follow the action taken by the House and pass the *Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019 (H.R. 8)*, which would expand background checks to all firearms sales in the United States.

Representatives and senators should cosponsor and pass the *Assault Weapons Ban of 2019 (S. 66/H.R. 1296)*, which would ban the sale of semi-automatic weapons and high capacity magazines.

Who can I contact to learn more?

advocacy@acponline.org; Digital version of this issue brief can be found at: <https://www.acpservices.org/leadership-day/policy-priority-issues>