

Gun Violence: Safe Storage

NAMI Public Policy Position



Where We Stand:

NAMI believes that gun violence is a public health crisis that endangers the life, safety and mental health of people throughout the U.S. NAMI supports laws and public policies that promote the safe storage of firearms to prevent unwanted use and self-harm.

Why We Care:

Gun violence is a public health crisis, endangering the lives, safety and mental health of communities across the country. In 2020, firearm-related injuries rose to the [highest number on record](#) and became the [leading cause of death](#) for children and adolescents. Specifically, self-inflicted gun violence is a significant concern as it relates to suicide, with suicide accounting for more than [half of all gun related deaths \(over 24,000\)](#) in 2020. This contributes to the ongoing suicide crisis in this country, with suicide being a leading cause of death. Firearms are the most [common method used](#) in suicide, and nearly [90%](#) of suicide attempts with a gun result in death.

Limiting access to means of suicide can [play a significant role](#) in prevention, especially when focused on such lethal means as a firearm. Having a gun in the home has been found to be associated with a greater risk for firearm suicide, with an increased risk in homes where guns are kept [loaded or unlocked](#). Limiting access to guns when they are not in use by their owners can help prevent unwanted use, making safe storage a critical component to reducing self-inflicted gun violence. Safe storage might include locking a gun in a secure safe or cabinet, storing a firearm unloaded with the ammunition held in a separate location or using safety devices, such as trigger or cable locks.

Having guns stored safely in the home is associated with a [reduction](#) in youth firearm deaths. In fact, some experts estimate that locking all firearms in the U.S. could reduce the number of gun related accidental deaths and suicides among children and

teens by [as much as one third](#). Limiting access can also support prevention in the veterans' and law enforcement communities. Veterans have a [greater risk](#) of suicide and are more likely than the general population to use firearms as a means for suicide: in 2019, [70%](#) of all male veterans' suicides and [50%](#) of all female Veteran suicides resulted from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Law enforcement officers are [more likely](#) to die by suicide than in the line of duty.

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Many gun owners use responsible gun ownership practices on their own. However, [fewer than half](#) of U.S. gun owners report storing all guns safely. Federal law currently does not regulate securing or storing firearms and only [13 states](#) have laws that regulate safe storage of firearms. Suicides are preventable, and a comprehensive public health approach to firearm safety can help reduce the number of the tragedies we see each year. Laws that help incentivize or enforce safe gun storage should be part of a comprehensive public health strategy to reduce and prevent suicide.