



Statement for the Record
American College of Physicians
Hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
On
Addressing the Public Health Emergency of Gun Violence
March 7, 2019

The American College of Physicians (ACP) is pleased to submit this statement and appreciates that Chair DeLauro has convened this hearing about gun violence. We applaud your commitment to efforts to reduce firearms-related violence. As an organization representing physicians who see first-hand the devastating impact firearms-related injuries and deaths have on the health of their patients, we have a responsibility to be part of the solution for mitigating firearms-related tragedies. We wish to assist the Committee on Appropriations and the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies by offering our input and suggestions about how to reduce gun-related violence in our communities. ACP stands ready to work with you moving forward.

The American College of Physicians is the largest medical specialty organization and the second-largest physician group in the United States. ACP members include 154,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge and clinical expertise to the diagnosis, treatment, and compassionate care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness.

On October 30, 2018, the Annals of Internal Medicine published ACP's updated position paper on reducing firearms injuries and deaths. Entitled, "[Reducing Firearm Injuries and Deaths in the United States: A Position Paper from the American College of Physicians](#)," the policy recommendations in the paper build on current ACP policies and are based on analyses of common-sense approaches that the evidence suggests will be effective in reducing deaths and injuries from firearm-related violence. The paper was an update and expansion of ACP's 2014 position paper. The new paper reaffirms many of ACP's 2014 recommendations, such as banning sales of assault weapons, requiring universal background checks, and funding firearms research and also proposes new policies on issues including extreme risk protection orders, domestic violence, child access prevention, and others that are found to be effective in reducing gun-related injuries and deaths. A summary of the paper can be found [here](#).

ACP's paper presents reasonable and evidence-based proposals to stem firearm-related violence, consistent with the Second Amendment that could help move and guide the discussion in Congress on ways to address this growing epidemic. It also reaffirms the reality that physicians are indeed on the front lines of encountering patients who have been subjected to firearm-related violence and that this issue is very much a threat to the public health. This prompted a strong negative reaction from the National Rifle Association (NRA) through social media where physicians were told to "stay in their lane." Physicians and other supporters from across the nation quickly took to Twitter in a sharp rebuke to share personal stories of treating and caring for victims of firearm violence through a campaign known as #ThisIsOurLane. This social media maelstrom caught the attention of

major media outlets and garnered substantial coverage, including from The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Time, the Associated Press, and National Public Radio.

GUN VIOLENCE AS A PUBLIC HEALTH THREAT

For more than 20 years, ACP has advocated for the need to address firearm-related injuries and deaths in the United States. The preventable loss of nearly 40, 000 lives per year, the preventable injury of approximately 81, 000 persons per year due to firearms, and the resulting pain, suffering, cost, and consumption of human and health care resources demand that firearm injuries be considered a public health issue requiring immediate attention and demand bipartisan intervention from Congress. ACP is concerned about not only the alarming number of mass shootings in the United States but also the daily toll of firearm violence in our neighborhoods, homes, workplaces, and other public and private places across the country.

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, which 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.

In its October 2018 paper, ACP reaffirms its recommendation that a public health approach be taken to firearms-related violence and the prevention of firearm injuries and deaths:

- According to the Institute of Medicine, “a public health approach involves three elements: a focus on prevention, a focus on scientific methodology to identify risk and protective factors, and multidisciplinary collaboration to address the issue”
- The College supports the development of coalitions that bring different perspectives together on the issues of firearm injury and death. These groups, comprised of health professionals, injury prevention experts, parents, teachers, law enforcement professionals, and others, should build consensus for bringing about social and legislative change.
- A national public health effort to reduce firearm-related injuries and deaths would need to address cultural, behavioral, educational, and safety issues related to firearms.
- Availability of good data and adequate funding for analyses of the data are essential in order to obtain a greater understanding of the issue and better assess and target interventions.
- Other actions include education on safe practices to reduce the risk for accidental or intentional deaths in homes; physician counseling of patients on such risks and how to mitigate them; advocacy for public health interventions, including access to mental health, treatment for substance and alcohol abuse, screening for depression, and child-proofing guns; changing social norms, including the way that firearm violence is depicted in advertising, television, and video games; and educational campaigns to reduce firearm violence, suicides, and unintentional deaths and to recognize persons at risk for harming themselves or others.

In addition, the College has specific policy recommendations for Congress at the federal level, including gun violence prevention research, as discussed below.

WHAT CAN AND SHOULD BE DONE ON THE FEDERAL LEVEL?

Firearms Research

The College strongly believes that more research is needed on firearm violence and on intervention and prevention strategies to reduce injuries caused by firearms. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 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. As data-driven decision makers, ACP has long advocated for robust research about the causes and consequences of firearm violence and unintentional injuries as well as for strategies to reduce firearm-related injuries. The College strongly supports allocating at least \$50 million each fiscal year for the CDC and other federal agencies to fund research on the prevention of firearms-related injuries and deaths to support at least 10 to 20 multi-year studies and help rebuild lost research capacity in this area of study. Access to data should not be restricted, as gaps in data are a major barrier to robust scientific research. **ACP strongly supports the Subcommittee and the full Committee providing funding for gun violence prevention research in the fiscal year 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.**

Background Checks

There must be universal background checks, including for private sales and sales at gun shows. ACP supported enacting legislation that 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. To that end, ACP strongly [supported the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019 \(H.R. 8\)](#), legislation to expand and enhance the NICS, and was greatly pleased by its passage by the House of Representatives on February 27, 2019. H.R. 8 will 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. With some exceptions, the legislation would also expand background checks to cover all private and commercial firearm transfers and sales, including those at gun shows, over the internet, or in classified ads.

- ***Domestic Violence Loopholes*** in the background check system that allow domestic violence offenders to buy and own guns should be closed. Domestic violence offenders include dating partners, cohabitants, stalkers, those who victimize a family member other than a partner or child, and those with temporary restraining orders. Close loopholes in the background check system that enable many domestic violence offenders to obtain firearms: Federal law prohibits abusers who have been convicted of domestic violence misdemeanors and abusers subject to certain domestic violence protective orders from purchasing or possessing guns. However, federal laws intended to prevent access to firearms by domestic abusers have significant limitations, in that they do not apply to many abusers who victimize non-spouse partners or family members other than a child, and they do not apply to persons with temporary, versus permanent, domestic violence restraining orders. ACP calls on these domestic violence loopholes to be closed by prohibiting sales and possession of firearms by persons convicted of domestic violence offenses on persons outside of their own household, as well as for any person with a temporary restraining order during the time when the restraining order is in effect. States can also work to address this loophole through state-level legislation.

Assault Weapons and Large Capacity Magazines

Sales of semiautomatic firearms that are designed to increase their rapid killing capacity (often called “assault weapons”) should be banned to reduce lethality in mass shootings. Large capacity magazines and bump stocks that allow shooters to continue firing without reloading should also be banned. ACP, therefore, supports enacting legislation to ban the manufacture, sale, transfer, and subsequent ownership for civilian use of semi-automatic firearms that are designed to increase their rapid killing capacity (often called “assault weapons”) and

their large capacity magazines, and retaining the current ban on automatic weapons for civilian use. 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. Accordingly, [ACP supports the Raise the Age Act, H.R. 717](#), legislation that would prohibit anyone under 21 from buying semiautomatic rifles, with exceptions for active duty personnel and some police officers.

Concealed Carry

Congress should not pass any legislation which would require any state to accept concealed carry permits from other states with weaker standards to obtain such permits. Despite ACP's [objections](#), we were disappointed in 2017 that the House passed the Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act of 2017, H.R. 38, which we believed would have been a serious setback to much-needed efforts to reduce firearms-related injury and death in this country. For instance, a state that requires gun safety training should not have to accept permits from ones that don't. Concealed carry reciprocity makes it possible for individuals who would not meet the requirements in states with more restrictive firearms safety concealed carry laws to carry hidden, loaded firearms in public and poses a threat to public health and safety. For example, 27 states and the District of Columbia currently prohibit individuals convicted of misdemeanor violent crimes from carrying concealed firearms in public. Reciprocity would allow individuals from the other 24 states that do not prohibit individuals convicted of misdemeanor violent crimes to carry firearms into states and jurisdictions that do, making their residents less safe and undermining federalism and state rights. In addition, reciprocity would pre-empt stronger state laws requiring training in firearm safety as a condition of obtaining a permit, weaken background checks and endanger victims of domestic violence by pre-empting state laws that prohibit individuals who have had restraining orders or been charged with domestic violence from obtaining concealed weapon permits. A 2017 study by Stanford University researchers estimated that weak 'shall issue' permitting laws were associated with a 13-15 percent increase in violent crime rates after 10 years.

Conclusion

There are many steps that can and should be taken by Congress and the states to address this growing public health crisis. ACP will continue to speak out on the need to address firearm-related violence and is committed to advancing reasonable, evidence-based policy reforms to curb such violence. We remain committed to this endeavor and we call on Congress to pass the measures and recommendations stated above as a necessary first step in addressing the public health crisis created by firearms violence. ACP sincerely appreciates Chair DeLauro for convening this hearing and for the commitment to ensure that Congress addresses firearm violence. We stand ready to continue to serve as a resource and welcome the opportunity to continue to work with you as you develop policy about this issue during the 116th Congress. Please contact Jared Frost, Senior Associate, Legislative Affairs, by phone at (202) 261-4526 or via email at jfrost@acponline.org with any further questions or if you need additional information.