

Arizona Public Health Association (AzPHA)

Resolution: Preventing Firearm Violence in the Community and Schools

Effective Date: **October 3, 2018**

Updated: **September 20, 2019**

Approved by Members: **October 18, 2019**

Background and Summary

Since the 1999 massacre at Columbine High School, some 208,000 children at 212 schools have experienced gun violence on school campuses. School-based rampage shootings took 13 lives at Columbine High School, 26 lives at Sandy Hook Elementary School, 17 lives at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, and most recently 10 lives at the Santa Fe High School.

Aside from the loss of life and the pain these events inflict on survivors and the community, there are monetary costs to the community and to schools. Those costs include funerals, trauma counseling, reconstructing or refurbishing buildings, and investing in new security measures. To the broader community, there's a growing concern about the safety of children and what steps can be taken to reduce the risk and prevent violence. The toxic stress of exposure to gun violence affects the developing brain, causing damaging effects for these children across the lifespan.

While these events captured the attention of the media, public, and politicians, they occur in a larger context of gun violence. Gun violence is a leading cause of premature death in the United States. Guns kill more than 38,000 people and cause nearly 85,000 injuries every year. In 2016, 36 children under the age of 18 in [Arizona died from](#) firearms. Twenty-nine of the 36 were between the ages of 15-17.

The causes of gun violence are complex and deeply rooted in our culture, which is why we must take a public health approach to keeping our schools and communities safe. This effort should begin with supporting the social and emotional development of children from early childhood. We must place a renewed emphasis on improving research into firearm injuries and violence. Ongoing work must increase to ensure that firearms do not fall into the wrong hands, including preventing access by children. Mental health services must be available to help those who need it most. We need a change in mindset and policy from reaction to prevention.

Whereas, the Arizona Public Health Association recognizes growing public concern over issues around gun violence and public safety, especially at schools; and

Whereas, some of the deadliest incidents have happened in the past six years resulting in loss of life and trauma for the surviving victims;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Arizona Public Health Association supports:

Interventions to improve the safety of students in the school environment:

- The creation and evaluation of community- and school-based programs (including coalitions) targeting the prevention of firearm injuries including homicides and suicides.
- A national requirement for all schools to assess school climate and maintain physically and emotionally safe conditions that protect all students and adults from bullying, discrimination, harassment, and assault.
- Ongoing training and support for school-based, multi-disciplinary threat management teams that utilize behavior and facts to determine the credibility of threats of violence and evidence-based strategies to manage situations of potential violence.
- Reform of school discipline to reduce exclusionary practices and foster positive social, behavioral, emotional, and academic success for students.
- Funding for Mental Health First Aid and Youth Mental Health First Aid training in Arizona schools and communities. The funding for this program needs to be ongoing to reach new teachers and administrators every year.
- Adequate funding to provide staffing for school-based counseling services for the early identification of student behavioral health concerns with referral for treatment as necessary.
- Adequate funding to provide Suicide Prevention Training in schools because, as the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention reports, suicide is the leading cause of death for children ages 10-14 and the second leading cause of death for those aged 15-34.

Interventions to improve safety in the community environment:

- Promoting a higher level of safety for gun ownership by supporting a multi-step approval process with criminal background checks for all firearm purchases including those at gun shows, on the internet and other private sales; waiting periods; and gun safety training.
- Implementation of a process such as a Domestic Violence Order of Protection (including judicial review) in Arizona wherein a gun would be removed from

individuals identified as dangerous and a potential threat to individuals or the community. As with the Order of Protection, these determinations should be based on the behavior of the individual, not on a diagnosis of mental health or substance use disorder and can be initiated by law enforcement or family members.

- Raising the age for purchasing a firearm and ammunition to 21.
- Banning the purchase of assault-style weapons and implementing a buy-back and disposal program.
- Prohibiting the sale of large capacity magazines.
- Licensing of firearm dealers and close oversight for compliance with the law.
- Supporting use of gun trigger locks and safes to prevent unauthorized gun access and misuse, including unintentional shootings.
- Amending current Arizona law to limit open carry and to allow businesses to opt-in rather than opt-out for concealed firearms brought into their establishments.
- Fully fund targeted interventions addressing the intersectional dimensions of gun violence, including community-based urban violence reduction programs, suicide prevention programs, domestic violence prevention programs, mental and behavioral health service programs and programs to address police violence in our communities.

Interventions to improve the body of evidence to improve overall student safety:

- The creation and evaluation of comprehensive national, state, and local data collection systems to facilitate research on the prevention of firearm fatalities and injuries and the movement of firearms within the population, particularly youth.
- Urging schools of public health to offer curricula in violence prevention that includes the epidemiology of firearm-related violence, intervention design and evaluation.
- Urging schools of medicine and nursing and other health care professions to educate future health care providers about interpersonal violence, the role of firearms in violence, and how to intervene with patients to recognize risk factors and prevent the effects of violence.