

AMERICANS IN CRISIS: ACCESS TO GUNS INCREASES DEATHS BY SUICIDE

We can all help prevent suicide. Please note: some may find the issues discussed in this report triggering. If you or anyone you know is in crisis, the Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

1-800-273-8255

Every day in America, 93 people die from gun violence. Fifty-eight of those deaths, or nearly two-thirds, are suicides with guns. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data shows suicide with a gun is the most common and by far the most deadly suicide method. Just the availability and presence of a gun in the home is a strong predictor of gun suicide.

A new legislative tool, known as an **Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO)**, gives families, intimate partners, and law enforcement the chance to intervene by temporarily restricting access to guns for people at risk of harming themselves.

Nearly half (49.6 percent) of all suicides in the United States are gun deaths, making guns the most common means of suicide. As in previous years, suicide with a gun is particularly com-

mon among men. In women, it is the second most prevalent method, after poisoning.

The demographics of suicide and gun violence overall skew heavily toward white men, who make up 79 percent of all firearm suicide victims and about 60 percent of total gun deaths in the US. People of color account for less than 8 percent of firearm suicide victims.

While mass shootings garner considerable press attention and shock the conscience of our nation, suicides with guns are much more common than homicides. The age-adjusted rate of suicides is 6.48 per 100,000 Americans, while the rate of homicides is 4.29.

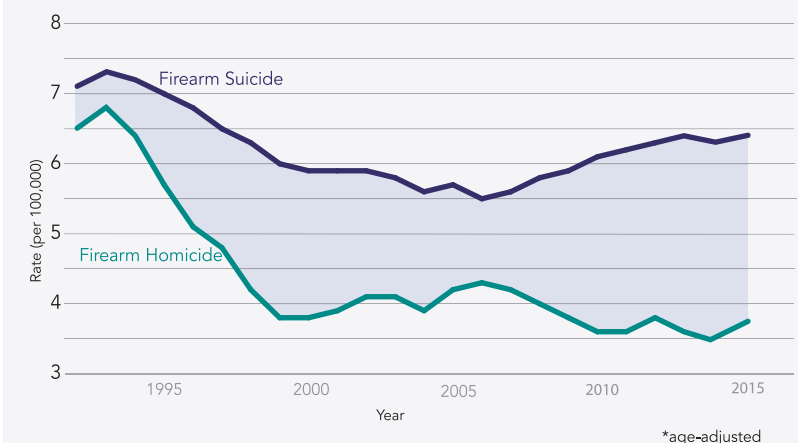
This highlights the urgent

need to focus on suicide prevention as well as violent gun crimes.

GUN AVAILABILITY AND LETHALITY

In 2015, firearms were the most common method of death by suicide,

Trends in Firearm-Related Death Rates 1992–2015*



accounting for a little less than half (49.8 percent) of all suicide deaths. The next most common methods were suffocation (including hangings) at 26.8 percent and poisoning at 15.4 percent. Firearms, in comparison to other methods, are uniquely lethal.

Often, the factor that determines whether a person in crisis uses a gun in a suicide attempt is whether a firearm is available in the home. Access to firearms in the home triples the risk of suicide.¹ This is true regardless of how the guns are stored or how many there are.² Homes without guns rarely experience gun suicides.³

The connection between guns in the home and suicide fatalities cannot be

overstated: while the vast majority of people (90 percent) who attempt suicide by another method survive, gun suicide attempts are almost always fatal. Nine out of 10 suicide attempts with a gun result in death, compared to just 3 percent for other common methods. People who attempt suicide overwhelmingly report immediate regret, and most never attempt suicide again.^{4,5} Yet suicide attempts by shooting are almost always fatal, meaning the vast majority of Americans who attempt suicide with a gun never get a second chance to get the help they need.

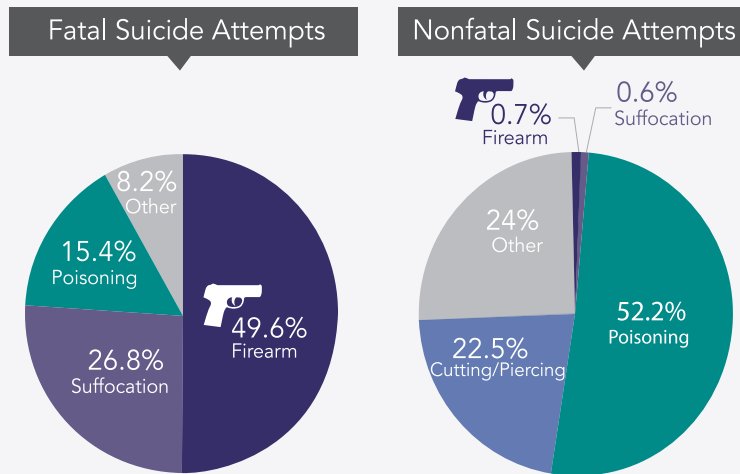
ERPO: A LIFE-SAVING LEGISLATIVE TOOL FOR GUN SUICIDE PREVENTION

violence protection orders, are state laws that allow family members, partners, and law enforcement to petition a court to temporarily remove firearms from individuals in crisis, and prohibit new gun purchases (typically for two to three weeks under an emergency order, followed by a hearing to determine whether a year-long continuation is necessary).

A study of Connecticut's ERPO law found 99 percent of risk warrants resulted in removal of at least one gun, and 44 percent of warrants resulted in respondents receiving psychiatric treatment they might never have received without intervention.⁶ As a solution for individuals in crisis, ERPOs can provide a life-saving buffer.

The high lethality of gun suicide underscores the urgency of efforts to restrict the availability of guns for individuals at risk of dying by suicide. As communities marshal resources to battle the preventable tragedy of suicide, Extreme Risk Protection Orders are emerging as a powerful tool for local law enforcement officials, families, and intimate partners.

Fatal and Nonfatal Suicide Attempts by Method (2015)



One of the current challenges in preventing suicide by gun is the lack of resources available for law enforcement officers, concerned family members, or partners of people in crisis. An Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) is a legislative tool rapidly being adopted at the state level to help individuals at risk of dying by suicide. ERPOs, also known as gun violence restraining orders or gun

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2. Miller, M., Azrael, D., & Barber, C. (2012). Suicide mortality in the United States: The importance of attending to method in understanding population-level disparities in the burden of suicide. *The Annual Review of Public Health*, 33(1), 393-408.
3. Brent, D.A., Perper, J.A., Moritz, G.M., Baugher, M., Schweers, J. & Roth, C. (1993). Firearms and adolescent suicide: A community case-control study. *The American Journal of Diseases of Children*, 147(10), 1066-1071.
4. Miller, M., Azrael D., & Hemenway, D. (2004). The epidemiology of case fatality rates for suicide in the Northeast. *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, 43(6), 723-730.
5. Vyrostek, S.B., Annet, J.L., & Ryan, G.W. (2004). Surveillance for fatal and nonfatal injuries -- United States, 2001. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 53(SS07), 1-57.
6. Swanson, Jeffrey et al., "Implementation and Effectiveness of Connecticut's Risk-Based Gun Removal Law: Does it Prevent Suicides?" *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Sep. 2016 online and forthcoming in print.

Figures 1 and 2: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2017. National Centers for Injury Prevention and Control, Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS). Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisquars/index.html>