



The Council for Health and
Human Service Ministries

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Gun Violence is a Public Health Emergency

An Advocacy Toolkit

In 2017, the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries wrote a resolution for the 31st General Synod of the United Church of Christ calling on the denomination to Recognize and Study Gun Violence as a Public Health Emergency. This resolution was studied in hearings and debated on the floor of the Synod. It was passed with an over-whelming majority.

The Biblical foundation for this resolution comes from the Book of John: *“Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’ Pilate asked him, ‘What is truth?’”* (John 18:37-38). As followers of a truth-seeking, truth speaking Christ, we have a responsibility to search for informed, reasoned and rationale solutions to the problems that plague our nation and world. People of faith and goodwill cannot willingly avoid the best possible solutions when it comes to protecting ourselves and our neighbors from the horrendous rates of gun violence.

This toolkit provides key information and useful resources for CHHSM members, partners, and friends to advocate for the recognition of gun violence as a public health emergency and call for sensible gun safety reform.

For more information contact [Rev. Danielle Bartz](#), Associate for Advocacy/Leadership Development

Key Facts

- In 2016 (the most recent year with accurate data) deaths as a result of gun violence increased for the second year in a row¹
 - In 2016 there were 38,658 gun-related deaths of which 14,925 were homicides
 - In 2015 there were 36,252 gun-related deaths of which 13,463 were homicides
 - In 2014 there were 33,594 gun-related deaths of which 11,472 were homicides
- Black men are 13 times more likely than non-Hispanic white men to be shot and killed by guns²
- The risk of a woman being killed increases five times when a gun is present in a situation of domestic violence³
- In 1996 The Dickey Amendment was introduced by pro-gun members of Congress in an all-out effort to eliminate the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Although they failed to defund the center, the House of Representatives removed \$2.6 million from the CDC's budget—precisely the amount the agency had spent on firearm injury research the previous year. Funding was restored in joint conference committee, but the money was earmarked for traumatic brain injury. The effect was sharply reduced support for firearm injury research. Furthermore, to ensure that the CDC and its grantees got the message, the following language was added to the final appropriation: ‘none of the funds made available for injury prevention and control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention may be used to advocate or promote gun control.’⁴
- In 2012, Congressman Dickey, the man responsible for the Dickey Amendment co-authored an op-ed in the Washington Post with Mark Rosenberg of the CDC which read in part, "We were on opposite sides of the heated battle 16 years ago, but we are in strong agreement now that scientific research should be conducted into preventing firearm injuries and that ways to prevent firearm deaths can be found without encroaching on the rights of legitimate gun owners. The same evidence-based approach that is saving millions of lives from motor-vehicle crashes, as well as from smoking, cancer and HIV/AIDS, can help reduce the toll of deaths and injuries from gun violence."⁵
- In 2016 over 100 medical organizations signed a letter to Congress asking it to lift the Dickey Amendment⁶
- Following the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, President Obama signed an executive order directing the NIH to fund research into gun violence but that program has since ended⁷

¹ <https://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate.html>

² <https://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate.html>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1447915/>

⁴ <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-104publ208/pdf/PLAW-104publ208.pdf>

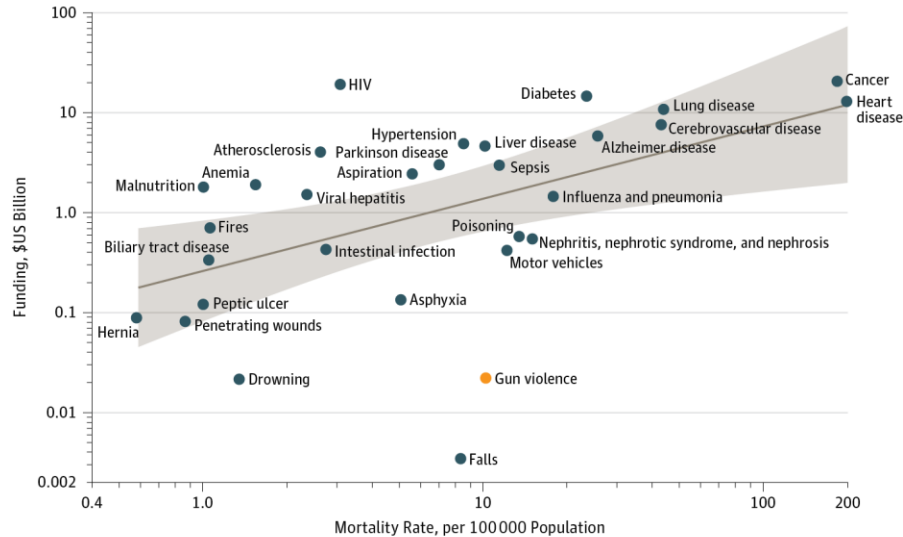
⁵ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/we-wont-know-the-cause-of-gun-violence-until-we-look-for-it/2012/07/27/gJQAPfenEX_story.html?utm_term=.7637c5abfc6e

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/06/cdc-congress-research-gun-violence-public-health>

⁷ <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/09/nih-quietly-shelves-gun-research-program>

General Resources

A graphic showing funding for gun violence research as compared to other leading causes of death in the United States from 2004-2015⁸



<https://everytownresearch.org/>

Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund seeks to improve understanding of the causes of gun violence and the means to reduce it.

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031914-122509>

A 2015 journal article for the Annual Review of Public Health entitled ‘Cure Violence: A Public Health Model to Reduce Gun Violence’. The abstract reads:

“Scholars and practitioners alike in recent years have suggested that real and lasting progress in the fight against gun violence requires changing the social norms and attitudes that perpetuate violence and the use of guns. The Cure Violence model is a public health approach to gun violence reduction that seeks to change individual and community attitudes and norms about gun violence. It considers gun violence to be analogous to a communicable disease that passes from person to person when left untreated. Cure Violence operates independently of, while hopefully not undermining, law enforcement. In this article, we describe the theoretical basis for the program, review existing program evaluations, identify several challenges facing evaluators, and offer directions for future research.”

⁸ <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/11/15/564384012/what-if-we-treated-gun-violence-like-a-public-health-crisis>

General Resources

<https://youtu.be/M2S9uEUBJmQ>

A 1 minute 22 second video from the American Public Health Association explaining the problem of not having scientific, public health research on solving the problem of gun violence.

<https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/gun-violence>

The American Public Health Association's page devoted to understanding more about gun violence and the need for public health research. There are links to: fact sheets, informational videos, scholarly journal articles, news articles, APHA policy statements, violence prevention advocacy organizations, and research/data on gun violence.

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/1487470>

A 2013 article from JAMA (Journal for the American Medical Association) entitled 'Silencing the Science on Gun Research.' It reads in part:

"Injury prevention research can have real and lasting effects. Over the last 20 years, the number of Americans dying in motor vehicle crashes has decreased by 31%.¹ Deaths from fires and drowning have been reduced even more, by 38% and 52%, respectively.¹ This progress was achieved without banning automobiles, swimming pools, or matches. Instead, it came from translating research findings into effective interventions.

Given the chance, could researchers achieve similar progress with firearm violence? It will not be possible to find out unless Congress rescinds its moratorium on firearm injury prevention research. Since Congress took this action in 1997, at least 427 000 people have died of gunshot wounds in the United States, including more than 165 000 who were victims of homicide.¹ To put these numbers in context, during the same time period, 4586 Americans lost their lives in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁰

The United States has long relied on public health science to improve the safety, health, and lives of its citizens. Perhaps the same straightforward, problem-solving approach that worked well in other circumstances can help the nation meet the challenge of firearm violence. Otherwise, the heartache that the nation and perhaps the world is feeling over the senseless gun violence in Newtown will likely be repeated, again and again."

Speaking Out Publicly

Suggested Posts for Facebook and Twitter

- Gun violence is a public health emergency & the scientific community needs funding to research ways to reduce this violence! #enough #neveragain #OneVoiceCHHSM
- People of faith must seek the best possible solutions to protect ourselves and our neighbors from the horrendous rates of gun violence. Congress must fund scientific research on the effects of gun violence. #enough #neveragain #OneVoiceCHHSM
- Gun violence is a public health emergency. As followers of a truth-seeking, truth speaking Christ, we must search for informed and rationale solutions to the problem of gun violence. Congress must fund this scientific research. #neveragain #enough #OneVoiceCHHSM
- Allow the NIH and CDC to study gun violence. Release the funds for this vital scientific research to save lives! #neveragain #enough #OneVoiceCHHSM
- Declare gun violence a public health emergency and allow the scientific community to study the effects and make recommendations to save people's lives. #neveragain #enough #OneVoiceCHHSM

Sample Letter to the Editor

In 2016, over 38,000 people were killed by a gun. It was the second year in a row gun deaths rose in the United States, including the rates of gun homicides. This is clearly a public health emergency, yet the scientific communities are not given funds to research this crisis. Without evidence-based research, experts are not able to make informed suggestions to prevent gun violence and deaths.

In 1996 Congressman Dickey of Arkansas introduced legislation to restrict funding for this vital research. But just 16 years later he co-authored an op-ed in the Washington Post with Mark Rosenberg of the CDC stating that "scientific research should be conducted into preventing firearm injuries."

As a person of faith, I want to speak out on behalf of myself, my neighbor, and all children and youth. I call on Congress to provide funding for the CDC and NIH to study the public health effects of gun violence. By studying the health effects on the public gun violence is having, these scientific communities will be able to provide evidence-based suggestions to improve gun safety and save lives. If nothing is done, people will continue to be hurt and killed by guns. We are in the midst of a public health emergency and action must be taken.

Respectfully,
Your Name, Hometown or Organization

Talk to Your Elected Officials

How to Find the Contact Information for Your Representatives

- www.callmycongress.com
Simply type your zip code into the search page and you will be given your Senator's and Congressperson's contact information and a link to their voting record
- <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
Provides information on your Congressional Representative with links to their email and website
- https://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm
Provides information on your US Senators with their office phone numbers and links to the contact pages on their websites

Suggested Phone Message

**Calling your elected officials is the most effective way to provide feedback and advocate for issues. Often you will be speaking to a staffer or leaving a message. Either way, all calls and their topics are logged and information is provided to the elected official*

Hello, my name is _____ and I am calling from *City/State or Organization*. As a person of faith, I am deeply concerned about the increasing gun violence in our country. I am asking *Senator/Congressperson* _____ to introduce legislation that would provide funding to the NIH and the CDC to study the public health effects of gun violence. This research will then lead to evidence-based suggestions to increase gun safety and reduce deaths. I believe this issue must be acted on immediately. Please follow up with me about the *Senator's/Congressperson's* thoughts on this. Here is my contact information _____. Thank you for your time.

Sample Email Message

Subject Line: Constituent Concern – Gun Violence is a Public Health Emergency

Body of the Email: “My name is _____ and I am from *City, State/Organization*. I am a person of deep faith and I am concerned about the increasing gun violence and resultant deaths in the United States. I am asking you to propose legislation to lift the Dickey Amendment and allow our scientific communities to study the effects of gun violence so they can make evidence-based suggestions to increase gun safety and save lives. Just as they have done with car safety, HIV/AIDS, and immunizations, the CDC and NIH can save thousands of lives with common-sense suggestions. Please follow up with me about your thoughts on this issue. Thank you for your time. *Sign with your name and address*