



News Articles, Advocacy, Firearms

Public health approach needed to reduce firearm deaths, injuries: AAP endorsement

The Academy and 17 additional members of an international epidemiology group endorsed an editorial calling for a public health approach to addressing firearm violence prevention.

Firearm violence has reached pandemic levels, and society cannot be satisfied with reactive responses, according to *The Role of Epidemiology in Firearm Violence Prevention: A Policy Brief*, published April 27 by the *International Journal of Epidemiology* (<http://bit.ly/2rEfqyH>). The editorial is endorsed by members of the International Network for Epidemiology in Policy (<https://www.ijpc-se.org/>), a global consortium of epidemiology professional groups. The AAP Section on Epidemiology, Public Health and Evidence is an associate member.

A greater reliance on surveillance, research and program evaluation by public health entities can help tackle problems of gun violence, the authors wrote. They noted that epidemiologists have unique tools to tackle this issue but have been underfunded.

In 2014, privately owned firearms in the U.S. were tied to nearly 34,000 deaths, of which 63% were suicides, 34% homicides and 2% unintentional shootings. Every year in the U.S., firearm violence results in more than 100,000 fatal and nonfatal injuries. In addition, among high-income countries in 2015, the U.S. had 10 times the number of firearm homicides compared with the combined number of deaths for the next four highest countries by gross domestic product: China, Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom.

The ease of obtaining firearms and their growing lethality are contributing to the rise in deaths and injuries, according to the editorial. It suggests that laws intended to curb such violence often are not enforced, are inadequate or fail to address local crime, poverty or low education.

All of these issues, the editorial asserts, point to "the need for a multi-sectoral approach in which the public health sciences would play a pivotal role in preventing harms relating to firearm violence with a greater focus on causes."

The Academy's recently launched Gun Safety and Injury Prevention Research Initiative (<http://bit.ly/2IYUTvA>) also addresses firearm injuries as a public health issue.

Recommendations

- Epidemiologists and other public health professionals should research firearm violence prevention and evaluate interventions.
- Governments should collect and make available for research epidemiologic and other scientific data on firearm-related morbidity and mortality.
- Global public health and human rights organizations should continue to collect data on firearm deaths, injuries, disabilities and associated costs.
- Research funding for firearm violence prevention should be prioritized.

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