

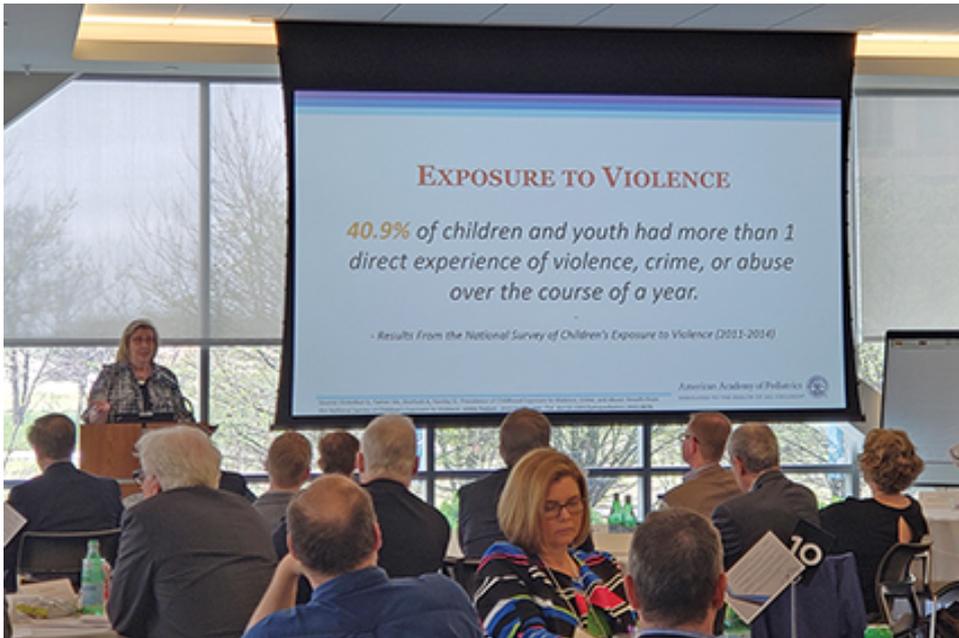


THE OFFICIAL NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

AAP News

Gun safety summit: Education, research, advocacy needed to reduce deaths

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor



AAP Chief Medical Officer Fan Tait, M.D., FAAP, speaks at the summit.

Stemming the tide of gun deaths plaguing America's youths will require education, research, advocacy and collaboration, experts said as they gathered for a summit led by the AAP in partnership with the de Beaumont Foundation, which focuses on public health.

"Participants in this interdisciplinary summit discussed new action plans that we hope they will implement when they return to their organizations and communities," said AAP Chief Medical Officer Fan Tait, M.D., FAAP, who chaired the summit planning committee.

The Summit on Gun Injury Prevention: Mobilizing for Action to Protect Children and Youth brought together 74 experts from health care, public health, law enforcement, business, education, faith and community, who also represented a range of experience with guns and gun ownership.

The summit took place at AAP headquarters in Itasca, Ill., 25 miles outside Chicago, where in some neighborhoods gun violence is a constant threat and on the same afternoon in which a student was killed and eight others were injured in a school shooting in Colorado.

In 2016, 3,143 youths ages 1-19 years died from firearms. Of those, 59% were homicides, 35% were suicides and 4% were unintentional, according to data presented by Rebecca Cunningham, M.D., associate vice president for research-health sciences at the University of Michigan. Thousands more were injured, and untold numbers of youths suffer the trauma of losing friends and family members to gun violence.

"Regardless of your personal opinion about firearms and gun rights, I hope we all can agree that those more than 3,000 children and families deserve much better, and that one preventable child death due to firearms is one too many," said Brian C. Castrucci, Dr.P.H., president and CEO of the de Beaumont Foundation. "And that we need practical solutions because children's right to grow up healthy should be our most important priority."



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Gun violence prevention has been a consistent priority for the AAP and has regularly appeared in the Annual Leadership Forum top 10 resolutions. In April, participants at the AAP Legislative Conference **visited 264 congressional offices**, calling for universal background check legislation and \$50 million to fund research.

"Every day pediatricians treat children injured by firearms," said AAP President Kyle E. Yasuda, M.D., FAAP. "... Children (are) exposed to gun violence in their communities, and adolescents commit suicide. For pediatricians, gun safety is not a question of politics, it is personal."

During the two-day summit, participants discussed keeping guns out of the hands of people at risk of injuring themselves or others, encouraging safe storage of guns, implementing programs that can prevent gun injuries and building community resilience. They acknowledged the challenge of seeking policy changes while respecting regional and cultural differences in the way guns are viewed and used.

Researchers lamented the dearth of research on gun injury prevention since 1996, when Congress passed the Dickey Amendment, which prohibited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from using public health money to advocate for gun control. The prohibition was not intended to end research into gun violence, but it impeded it.

"We don't have answers to these problems not because they're too socially complex to figure out," said Dr. Cunningham, a leader of the Firearm Safety Among Children and Teens consortium. "Figuring out how to reduce firearm deaths is not more complicated than curing HIV or reducing childhood cancer. We simply haven't applied the resources to it."

Amid the limited pool of research, the strongest evidence that the **RAND Corporation has found** is that child access prevention laws are effective in reducing firearm self-injury, including suicides and unintentional firearm injuries/deaths, according to Sierra Smucker, Ph.D., M.Sc., associate policy researcher at the nonprofit research organization.

But one of the participants noted there is resistance to these laws, which some see as infringing on the rights of people in their own homes.

RAND has found that experts on gun laws from across the political spectrum tend to agree on mental illness prohibitions, media campaigns to prevent child access, surrender of guns by prohibited possessors and required reporting of lost firearms.

Experts at the summit worked together to create potential steps forward. Ideas included devoting resources to the root causes of gun violence such as poverty and lack of education; advocating for federal standards to prevent child access to guns; increasing collaboration across sectors; and educating pediatricians, teachers, faith leaders and others about the basics of firearms and safe storage so they can counsel families.

The AAP will refine the list of ideas and work with participants on next steps.

"It was a privilege to work with passionate, committed, caring and knowledgeable leaders who are trying to make a difference for children and families," Dr. Tait said. "It is critical that the partnerships established or strengthened during this meeting build on the action agenda discussed during this timely summit."

- [AAP policy statement "Firearm-Related Injuries Affecting the Pediatric Population"](#)
- [How Pediatricians Can Advocate for Children's Safety in Their Communities](#)



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- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on reducing gun injuries](#)
- [AAP News stories about firearms](#)
- [Pediatrics collection on firearms](#)