

POSITION STATEMENT

Prevention of Gun Violence

Certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) and certified midwives (CMs) provide care for individuals who may be exposed to gun violence that puts them at risk for personal harm, destruction of the family structure, and loss of financial stability. Gun-related violence in the United States is a major public health crisis.¹ Not only can the cost of violent crime be measured in terms of loss of life, but gun violence also has concrete economic costs for victims, their families, communities, employers, and taxpayers.² While people from all demographics can be affected, people of color—particularly those who live in low-income urban communities—are disproportionately affected by gun violence.³

American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) affirms that CNMs and CMs should:

- Screen at all points of contact for the presence of household firearms and provide client education that enforces safety measures to avoid accidental injury or death. However, midwives should be aware of state and local laws that may prohibit particular questions related to gun possession.⁴ Additionally, while CNMs and CMs should recognize that gun violence disproportionately affects people of color and their families,³ screening should not be based upon race, ethnicity, or gender identity alone.
- Be knowledgeable about screening for intimate partner violence (IPV)⁵ because gun violence is often associated. Midwives should recognize the signs and symptoms of IPV and excessive mental or situational stress. Midwives should be equipped to identify resources and initiate intervention strategies for mental or situational stress, including referral for mental health support.
- Support legislation that requires universal criminal background checks for the purchase of firearms, including those at gun shows and private sales. Furthermore, ACNM opposes state and federal mandates that limit or prohibit health care providers discussing firearm ownership with patients.
- Support legislation that improves access to mental health care services and investment in research that results in evidence-based solutions to improve understanding of the complex issues surrounding gun violence.

- Support public education and antiviolence initiatives that acknowledge and address the role of IPV and firearms in the health and safety of people, including women, gender-diverse individuals, and children.

Background

Gun violence in the United States is a complex national issue with legal, social, and public health consequences. Gun violence led to more than 400,000 deaths and over 1.1 million nonfatal injuries in the United States in 2010-2020.¹ In an average year, gun violence in America has an economic consequence of \$557 billion. That is five times the budget for the US Department of Education. Due to gun-related injury and death, American taxpayers, survivors, families, and employers pay an average of \$7.79 million daily in related health care costs; taxpayers pay \$30.16 million daily for related police and criminal justice costs; and society loses \$1.34 billion daily in quality-of-life costs.²

Women and gender-diverse people disproportionately experience IPV, and the presence of firearms within their relationships is a key risk factor for intimate partner homicide.⁵ According to the FBI Supplementary Homicide Report, “there were 2,059 females murdered by males in single victim/single offender incidents” in the United States in 2020. Seventy-seven percent were killed by someone they knew. Sixty-one percent were shot and killed with guns.³

The majority of gun owners acquire guns for protection against crime; however, a California analysis showed that “purchasing a handgun provides no protection against homicide among women and is associated with an increase in their risk for intimate partner homicide.”³ A 2003 study found that “females living with a gun in the home” were about three times more likely to be victims of homicide than those without a gun in the home.³

The American Academy of Pediatrics,⁶ American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists,⁷ American Psychological Association,⁸ American Public Health Association,⁹ and many other organizations support an evidence-based, public health approach to gun violence that emphasizes education, prevention, and safety. In recognition that firearm-related violence is a complex, multifaceted issue that significantly affects health, ACNM supports efforts to continue research, promote policy change, and develop effective prevention strategies at individual, community, and national levels. Furthermore, ACNM supports all efforts by health care providers to institute universal screening policies to assess for the presence of household firearms, or risk of actual or potential threats of gun violence.

REFERENCES

1. WISQARS™ — Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. Updated February 9, 2023. Accessed December 16, 2022. <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/>
2. The economic cost of gun violence. Everytown Research & Policy. Everytown For Gun Safety website. Published July 19, 2022. Accessed December 16, 2022. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence>
3. When men murder women: an analysis of 2020 homicide data. Violence Policy Center website. Published September 2022. Accessed December 16, 2022. <https://vpc.org/when-men-murder-women/>
4. McCourt, AD, Vernick, JS. Law, ethics, and conversations between physicians and patients about firearms in the home. *AMA J Ethics*, 2018;20(1):69-76. doi:10.1001/journalofethics.2018.20.1.hlaw1-1801
5. Intimate partner violence. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. Updated October 9, 2021. Accessed December 16, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/index.html>
6. Gun safety and injury prevention. American Academy of Pediatrics website. Updated July 27, 2022. Accessed December 16, 2022. <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/gun-safety-and-injury-prevention/>
7. Statement of policy: gun violence and safety. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists website. Updated February 2023. Accessed December 16, 2022. <https://www.acog.org/clinical-information/policy-and-position-statements/statements-of-policy/2019/gun-violence-and-safety>
8. Gun violence: Prediction, prevention, and policy. American Psychological Association website. Accessed December 16, 2022. <http://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/gun-violence-prevention.aspx>
9. Gun violence. American Public Health Association website. Accessed December 16, 2022. <https://www.apha.org/Topics-and-Issues/Gun-Violence>

Note: Midwifery and midwives as used throughout this document refer to the education and practice of certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) and certified midwives (CMs) who have been certified by the American Midwifery Certification Board (AMCB).

Source: ACNM Midwives of Color Committee, ACNM Ethics Committee, and the Clinical Practice and Documents Section of ACNM's Division of Standards and Practice
Approved by ACNM Board of Directors: March 2016
Revised 2023