

To respond to changes in gun violence, we need accurate measures of nonfatal gun injuries.

Simple, affordable changes to existing data systems can dramatically improve our ability to understand and mitigate gun violence.

Current data does not account for more than 60 percent of gun injuries.

- An estimated 80 percent of firearm assaults, 95 percent of firearm accidents, and 10 percent of self-inflicted firearm injuries are nonfatal.
- While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) collects detailed data on firearm deaths, there is no reliable source of data on firearm injuries.

Protecting public safety and public health requires good data.

The rate of fatal shootings changes over time. Without data on nonfatal shootings, it is impossible to know what drives that change. Possible drivers include:

- A change in the number of shootings.
- A change in the fatality rate caused by:
 - changes in trauma care
 - changes in types of shootings
 - changes in types of weapons
- A change in the rate at which robberies and assaults become shootings.

Modest changes and investments can solve the problem.

- **Fix the coding glitch in the National Emergency Department Sample (NEDS).** NEDS is assembled by the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP), the nation's most comprehensive source of inpatient and outpatient hospital care data. NEDS already provides reliable national estimates for all medical and injury-related ED visits, and the Statewide Emergency Department Databases and Statewide Inpatient Databases from which NEDS is drawn, provide a full census of these visits in participating states. But because of a glitch in the coding process that hospitals use, a large proportion of firearm injuries (mostly assaults) are misclassified as accidents. Fixing this glitch will make HCUP data much more useful.
- **Improve the sampling methodology for the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS).** Run by the CDC and the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the NEISS has well-established coding processes for accurately classifying injuries as assaults, accidents, and self-harm. But the small sample size and problems with sample design hamper its ability to get an accurate fix on the count of firearm injuries. Implementing an expanded and recently redesigned sampling methodology will improve the reliability of NEISS firearm injury data.

- **Expand hospital participation in the National Syndromic Surveillance Program (NSSP)**

and make the data more widely available. Run by the CDC's Division of Health Informatics and Surveillance, the NSSP is an early warning system for monitoring and responding to emerging health events, like infectious disease outbreaks and overdose clusters. The brand-new Firearm Surveillance Through Emergency Rooms (FASTER) program, sponsored by CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, is testing use of NSSP for monitoring firearm injuries in ten states. If successful, expanding FASTER to all states will give the nation near real time monitoring of surges or declines in gun violence. Currently about 70% of emergency department visits are to hospitals that participate in NSSP. But participants aren't evenly distributed; some states are almost entirely unrepresented. Involving all emergency departments in NSSP and providing funding and authority for CDC or Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists to make rapid state, local, and national data on firearm injuries available online will strengthen this resource.

NORC at the University of Chicago

NORC at the University of Chicago conducts research and analysis that decision-makers trust. As a nonpartisan research organization and a pioneer in measuring and understanding the world, we have studied almost every aspect of the human experience and every major news event for more than eight decades. Today, we partner with government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world to provide the objectivity and expertise necessary to inform the critical decisions facing society.

Arnold Ventures

Arnold Ventures is a philanthropy dedicated to tackling some of the most pressing problems in the United States. We invest in sustainable change, building it from the ground up based on research, deep thinking, and a strong foundation of evidence. We drive public conversation, craft policy, and inspire action through education and advocacy. Our core objective is to maximize opportunity and minimize injustice.

Expert Panel on Firearms Data Infrastructure

In October 2019, NORC at the University of Chicago announced launched an independent expert panel, funded by Arnold Ventures, to address the current gap in firearms data. The panel is composed of 14 subject-matter scholars who leveraged their experience and expertise to create a blueprint for developing an objective, sustainable firearms data infrastructure for use by local, state, and federal policymakers and their constituents and the research community.

For more information:

Eric Young
NORC at the University of Chicago
young-eric@norc.org
(703) 217-6814

