

Rigorous and Policy-Relevant: Building a New Generation of Gun Research

The United States is experiencing a historically unprecedented rate of gun violence. In 2017, 39,773 people were killed by guns—the highest gun violence death toll in the last 50 years.ⁱ Driven in large part by a spike in suicides, gun violence is a leading cause of death for Americans, with an average of 106 people dying each day. Despite substantial public concern, we are struggling to effectively address this epidemic because the federal government, our biggest research funder, has significantly underinvested in gun research for more than two decades.

39,000

people are killed by guns per year. Almost two-thirds of these deaths are suicides

115,000

people are injured from firearms per year

\$100 M

per year is what the government should spend on gun violence research, compared with spending for other leading causes of death

i The Trace, “13 Statistics That Tell the Story of Gun Violence in 2018.” <https://www.thetrace.org/2018/12/gun-violence-facts-statistics-2018/>

ii Stark, David & Shah, Nigam. Funding and Publication of Research on Gun Violence and Other Leading Causes of Death. *JAMA*. 2017;317(1):84–85. doi:10.1001/jama.2016.16215



We need to treat gun violence like a public health crisis and invest in rigorous research to save lives.

The Problems

We lack rigorous research on key questions related to firearms: use, storage, legal and illegal markets, domestic violence shootings, urban shootings, the high rates of veteran suicides, intersections with mental illness. We simply don't have high-quality research that tells us many basic things about how we could make gun use safer to reduce violence. The issues are ripe for study, but a long-standing lack of federal funding and support have shriveled the field. Without this research, it's hard to craft evidence-based, bipartisan solutions.

Guns have devolved into one of America's most contentious issues, despite the fact that a broad consensus of Americans support greater gun safety measures and more robust research. Numerous polls show the American public is united when it comes to addressing gun violence. There is widespread support for increased research on gun safety and common-sense interventions to reduce violence. And many Americans understand we can make progress on gun safety while continuing to protect individual liberties.

Even if there was political will to change policy and practice, lawmakers lack the information needed to craft fair and effective gun policies. Even if Congress signaled a willingness to pass new gun policies, there is little evidence showing us which policies are most effective at saving lives. That's because for decades, basic questions about how to prevent gun violence have gone unresearched. For instance, we often don't know things such as where the guns used to commit shootings come from, or which laws and policies are most effective at curbing gun violence.

Our Approach

Build the evidence base by funding a broad, diverse research at a scale commensurate with the problem. Arnold Ventures launched the National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research, in partnership with RAND Corp., a nonpartisan and widely-respected research institution, with a \$20 million commitment over five years. The mission of the Collaborative is staunchly nonpartisan and scientific: it funds policy-relevant research on issues that can increase public safety while protecting individuals' constitutional rights.

Bring diverse stakeholders to the table, establish trust and respect, and develop a research agenda collaboratively. The National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research aims to support rigorous, nonpartisan research that can provide policymakers with the data-driven solutions they need to make a real and lasting impact on reducing gun violence. To that end, the Collaborative adheres to the highest standards of transparency and rigor, and brings a number of perspectives to the table, taking into consideration the research priorities of a diverse group of stakeholders from across the ideological spectrum.

Address the urgent problems Americans want solutions to through research-informed gun policy. Research is the key to identifying and developing policy solutions that reduce gun violence and protect individual liberties. It is possible to make gun use, storage, and access safer and to simultaneously respect Second Amendment rights. Research is crucial to finding this middle ground. In addition, it is essential that gun policies and practices are backed up by a strong evidence base that demonstrates their effectiveness.