

U.S. BURDEN OF FIREARM-RELATED SUICIDE DEATHS

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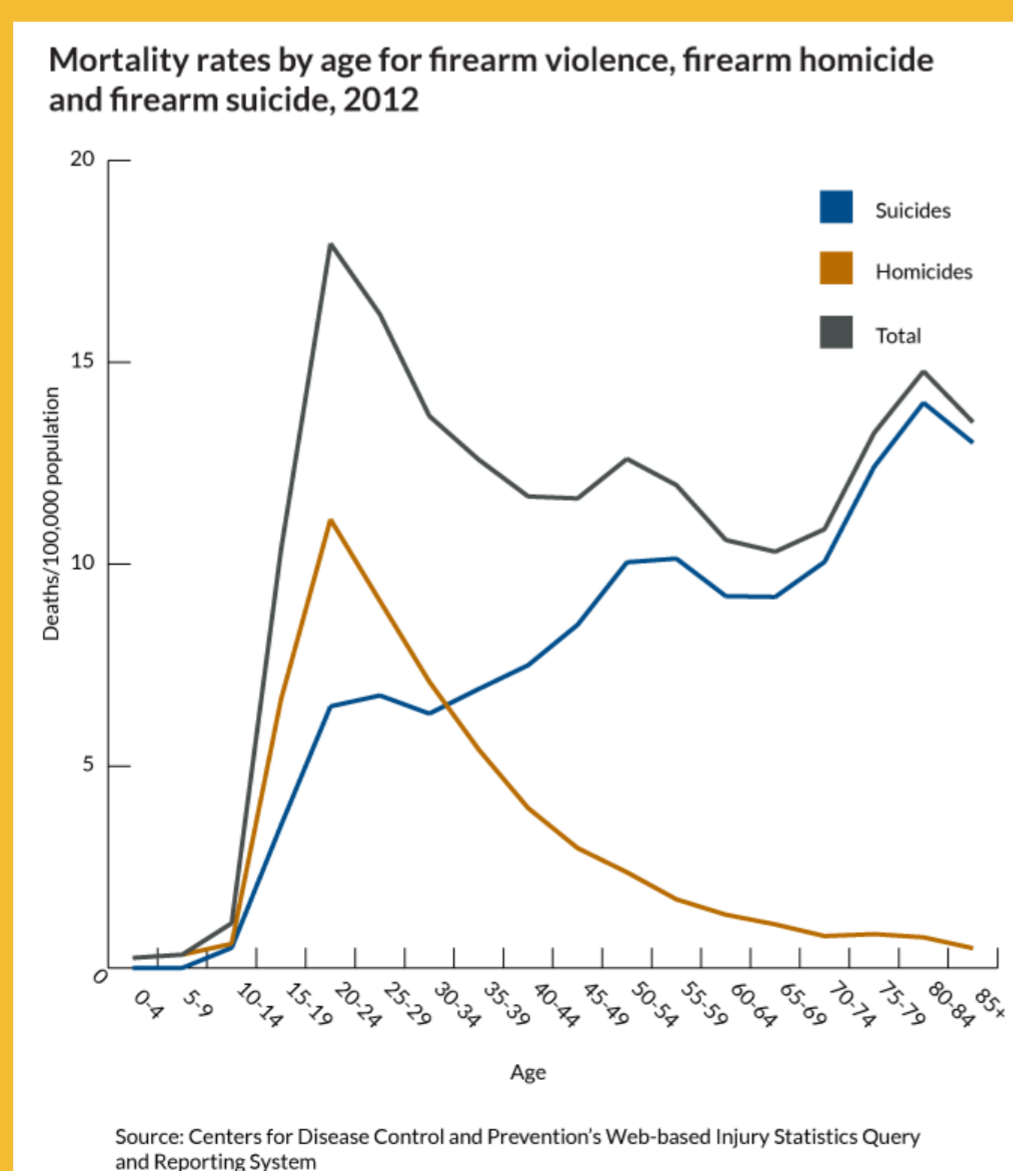
Many Americans associate gun deaths with gang violence and mass shootings. While these focusing events are often the first to break news, **suicide accounts for more than half of all firearm deaths** ("Suicide").

There is a public expectation for mental health treatment facilities to prevent firearm suicides. However, since the deinstitutionalization of mental health care in the 1960s and the movement towards poorly funded community-based behavioral health clinics, fewer individuals with a serious mental illness have been involuntarily committed (Koyanag). Because current gun law restricts gun access specifically for individuals who have been involuntarily committed, **many persons with severe mental illnesses have legal access to firearms** (Swanson et al.). Individuals diagnosed with mental illnesses are at a higher risk for suicide than those without a diagnosis ("Possession").

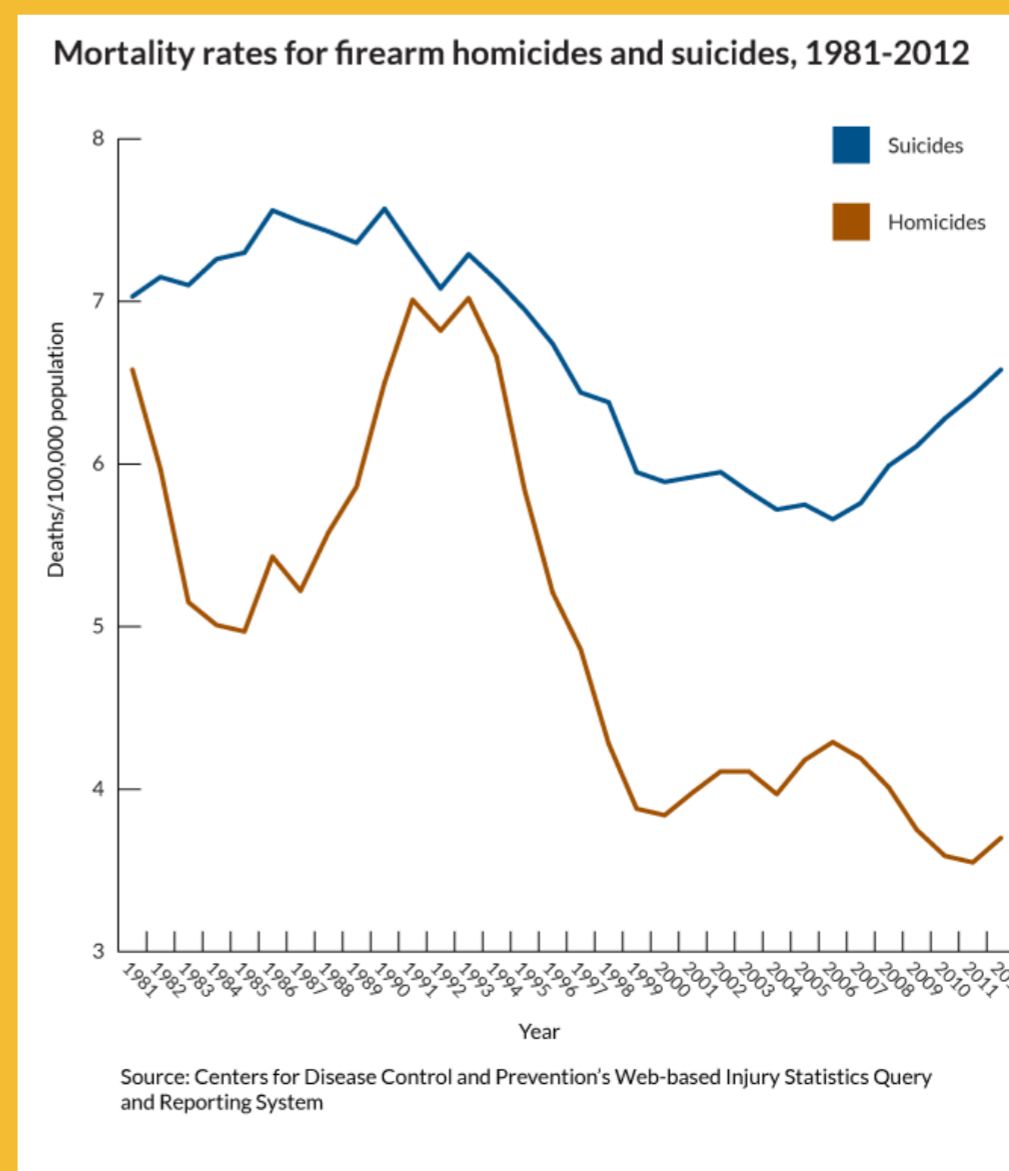
WE CANNOT EXPECT TO FIX BROKEN PEOPLE WITH A BROKEN SYSTEM

Not only is this injustice an area of great public health concern, but there are serious economic impacts related to firearm suicide death. This growing public health crisis has cost the United States more than **\$58 BILLION** annually (2013). 97 percent of this cost is related to lost productivity resulting from affected individuals being taken out of the workforce (Shepard et al.).

FIREARM SUICIDE RISK RISES WITH AGE



FIREARM SUICIDE RISK IS ON THE RISE



HOW IS THIS RELATED TO GUN ACCESS?

Firearm-related suicide rates are higher in areas of greater regional availability.

Individuals who live in a household with a gun are more likely to commit suicide than those who do not.

Individuals who live in a household with an improperly stored gun are more likely to commit suicide than those who live with a properly stored gun.

("The Relationship")

WHAT DOES CURRENT LEGISLATION MANDATE?

THE GUN CONTROL ACT OF 1968 has set much of the current precedent regarding gun access. The act mandates that those individuals being medically treated with a mental illness or substance use disorder have restricted gun access (Silver et al.).

Each state enforces the Gun Control Act in addition to any additional legislation they have passed. For example, Wisconsin has extended the scope of enforcement by legislating that possession of a firearm as an individual being treated for a mental illness is classified as a felony ("Possession"). The state of California has implemented a policy known as the Gun Violence Restraining Order which allows close family members who are concerned about the safety of an individual to court order the individual to relinquish their firearms ("Gun Violence").

HB-8: THE BIPARTISAN BACKGROUND CHECKS ACT OF 2019

In February 2019, the U.S. House of Representatives passed The Bipartisan Background Checks Act, an act that would mandate all gun dealers to conduct background checks before selling or transferring firearms. Current law only requires background checks to be conducted when purchasing a firearm through a licensed dealer. If passed, this law would expand this requirement to unlicensed dealers online and at gun shows ("H. R. 8:").

HB-8 is an important movement towards safer gun access. Research has shown that up to 80 percent of firearms used criminally have been obtained without a background check ("H. R. 8:"). By enforcing the process of background checks, gun trafficking will be reduced and law enforcement will better be able to trace gun crimes. Individuals who have previously been involuntarily committed will no longer have access to firearms through unlicensed dealers. While HB-8 will not erase the risk of suicidal patrons obtaining firearms, the bill will slow the process of gun transfer and allow more time for mental health intervention to occur ("H. R. 8: "). Additionally, the passage of such a bill will bring about further discussion regarding the health risks of firearm access.

According to recent polls, 97 percent of Americans, 97 percent of gun-owners, and 97 percent of Republicans support universal background checks for firearm purchase ("H. R. 8:"). Despite the overwhelming bipartisan support, HB-8 has stalled in the U.S. Senate. Many competing interests, including gun lobbyists, have slowed this process and are likely to make it difficult for the Senate to pass this bill (Edmondson).

**TELL YOUR U.S. SENATOR THAT SUICIDE IS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS.
PASS HB-8 AND DEMAND AN AMERICA THAT VALUES PUBLIC SAFETY.**

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