

Office of Gun Violence Prevention

2021 Annual Report

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COLORADO
Department of Public
Health & Environment

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Background and overview

Background

Governor Jared Polis signed House Bill 21-1299¹ into law on June 19, 2021. The legislation established the Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP or the office) in the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE or the department). The purpose of the office is to coordinate and promote effective efforts to reduce gun violence and related traumas and promote research regarding causes of, and evidence-based responses to, gun violence. The responsibilities of the office include:

- Increase the awareness of, and educate the general public about, state and federal laws and existing resources relating to gun violence prevention. Including the following:
 - The availability of, and the process for requesting an extreme risk protection order.
 - The availability of, and the process for requesting a protection order.
 - How to report a lost or stolen firearm.
 - Best practices for safe storage of firearms.
 - Accessing available mental health and substance use resources and how to refer people to needed mental health and substance use treatment services, including suicide prevention.
 - Safe and responsible gun ownership, including increasing awareness of compliance with state and federal law.
- Conduct awareness campaigns directed toward gun owners, parents and legal guardians of children, and professions that provide services to people and communities disproportionately affected by gun violence
- Develop and provide materials and training resources to local law enforcement agencies, health care providers, and educators to assist those agencies, providers, and educators with educating the public about the laws and resources described above and other effective gun violence prevention strategies.
- Administer a grant program, subject to available money, to award grants to organizations to conduct community-based gun violence interventions initiatives that

¹ https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/2021a_1299_signed.pdf

are primarily focused on interrupting cycles of gun violence, trauma, and retaliation by providing culturally competent intervention services.

- Create and maintain a resource bank of regularly updated and accurate materials and resources as a repository for data, research, and statistical information regarding gun violence in Colorado.
- Identify and apply for available federal grants and other funding to further its work to prevent gun violence.
- Report on the activities it has conducted in the preceding 12 months. Issue a report to the General assembly summarizing gun violence prevention measures adopted by local jurisdictions.

Status of the office

The department began setting up the office in the summer of 2021, upon passage of the bill. The department is making operational decisions for the office to determine the best structure within the department, setting the strategic direction for the office, and hiring staff. Since July 2021, the Chief Medical Officer and the Prevention Services Division Director have met with eight different stakeholders to discuss firearm injury prevention and the work of the Office, as well as with staff in the Office of Suicide Prevention and with the Attorney General's office. The work going forward for this Office will begin by focusing on campaigns and public education regarding harm reduction (i.e., safe storage and extreme risk protection orders), building a resource bank for researchers, and a grants program for communities suffering from cycles of gun violence. We plan to post both the Director and Communications positions by the end of the year. We are working with CDPHE's Center for Health and Environmental Data to determine the best structure for the creation of a resource bank that will provide data to outside researchers and information on the latest findings of effective interventions in reducing gun violence. We expect the second half of this year to focus on orienting the new Director, defining and beginning our public campaigns focusing on harm reduction, and setting up the resource bank. We will also do the groundwork for building a grants program which we expect to be available in year two of the Office. Work will be done in close collaboration with the Office of Suicide Prevention at CDPHE.

Data landscape

CDPHE is reviewing a number of data tools and resources to help inform the work of the OGVP. These tools range from fatality surveillance systems, to hospital-related data for injuries, to self-reported access and storage behaviors.

Data from the Colorado Vital Statistics Program, as well as Colorado Violent Death Reporting System (CoVDRS) help the state learn more about firearm fatalities. According to the Colorado Health Information Dataset, 75% of firearm deaths in Colorado were a result of suicide, as opposed to 21% being a result of homicide. See Figure 1 for more details.

Hospital data shows a recent surge in firearm violence. Figure 2 illustrates emergency department visits mentioning injuries due to firearms at acute care hospitals in Colorado (2016-2020), as well as hospital discharges mentioning injuries due to firearms. These data are important to note separately as not all emergency department visits result in hospitalization.

In 2019, the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey asked students about perceived access to firearms. One in five students said it was “sort of easy” (11.1%) or “very easy” (8.8%) to access a handgun, with higher prevalence among male and older-aged youth and differences in racial and/or ethnicity groups. There were geographic differences such that students in schools in more rural areas were more likely to report perceived easy access. Students who had felt sad or hopeless, attempted suicide, or been in a fight were more likely to say they had access to a handgun.²

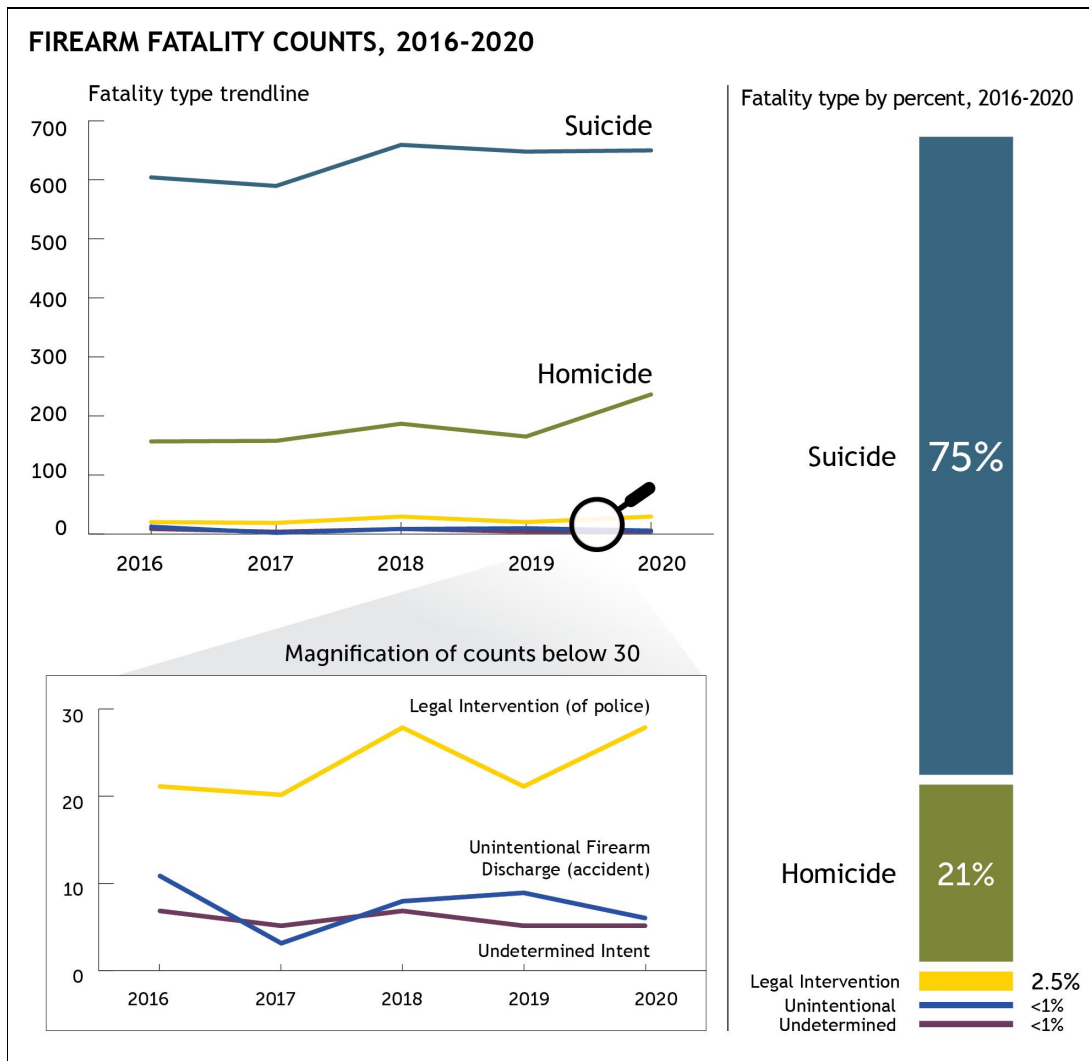
In 2020, the Office of Suicide Prevention supported the addition of three questions concerning firearms ownership and storage practices within the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Of the Coloradans surveyed, 36% indicated they currently had firearms in their home. Of the 36% who reported keeping firearms in their home, 28% reported that their firearms

²Brooks-Russell A, Ma M, Brummett S, et al. Perceived Access to Handguns Among Colorado High School Students. *Pediatrics*. 2021;147(4):e2020015834

were stored loaded. Additionally, 53% of those who reported keeping loaded firearms in their home reported that those firearms were stored unlocked.³

The department is using these data to guide the work and priorities of the OGVP and to identify disparities. View the Firearm Deaths in Colorado 2014-2019 report from CDPHE for more information on firearm deaths in the state.⁴

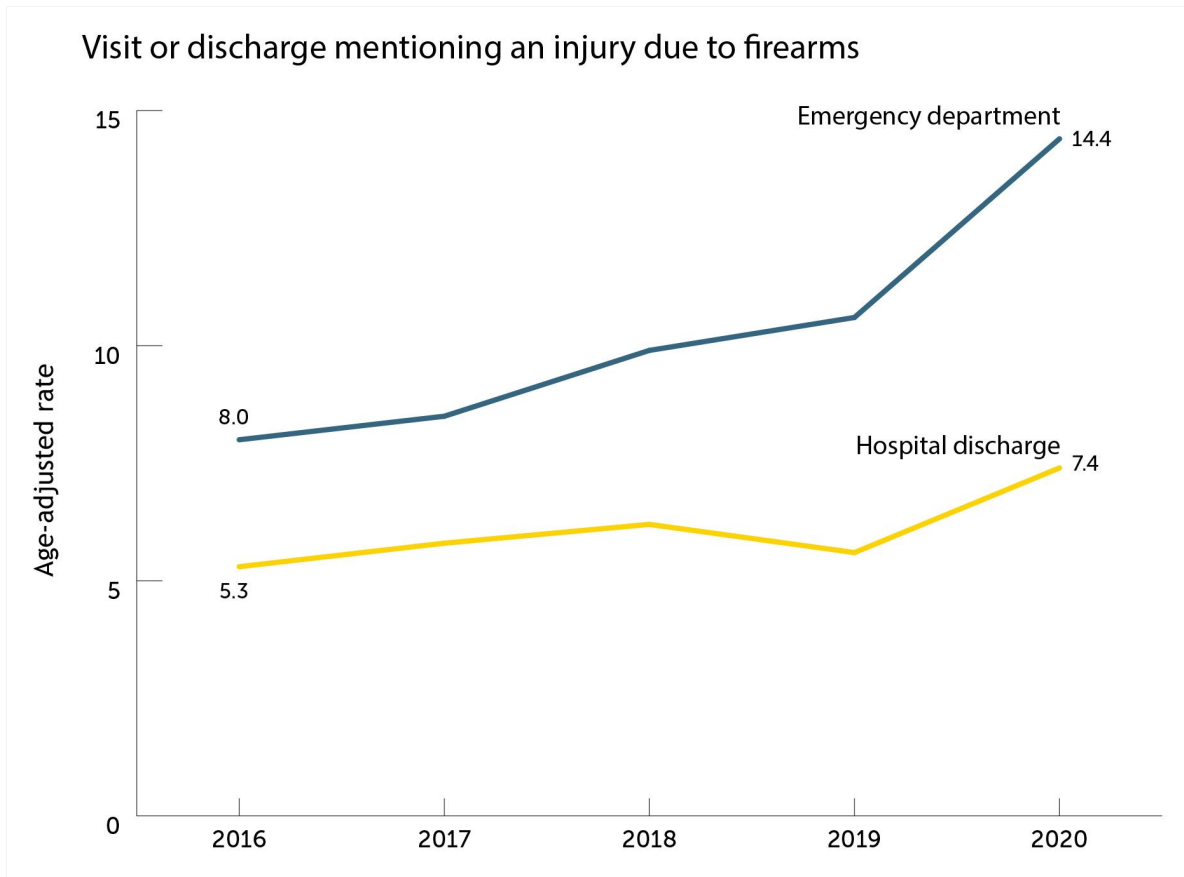
Figure 1: Firearm Fatality Counts, 2016-2020



³ For more information on Colorado’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, please visit <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/center-for-health-and-environmental-data/survey-research/behavioral-risk-factor-surveillance-system>

⁴ Orten K, Jamison E, Bol K. Firearms Deaths in Colorado 2014-2019. *Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Vital Statistics Fact Sheet*. 2021. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_2njACRMUtDcLqrv4QkKCbuEWZwO3uOu/view?usp=sharing

Figure 2: Firearm Violence Reported in Hospital Settings, 2016-2020



Report requirements

As directed by § 25-20.5-1206(2)(a) C.R.S., on or before November 30 of each year, the office shall report to the department on the activities it has conducted in the previous 12 months.

The report must include:

- Information about the awareness and education campaigns conducted by the office.
- Effective gun violence intervention programs identified and conducted by the office.
- Any federal grants or other funding the office applied for and whether the office received those grants or other funds.
- A general summary of new and relevant research included in the office's resource bank and the nature of research assistance provided by the office.

Awareness and education campaigns

Information about the awareness and education campaigns conducted by the office (§ 25-20.5-1206(2)(a)(I) C.R.S.)

The department is in the process of determining the strategic direction and hiring for this office. Once the office has staff on board, they can begin the important work of research and stakeholder engagement that will be necessary to inform an effective awareness campaign to meet the goals of the office and this legislation. No awareness or education campaigns have been run out of this office to date. However, the following efforts are coordinated by the Office of Suicide Prevention within CDPHE: Colorado Gun Shop Project, promotion of provider training on counseling on lethal means during periods of crisis, safe storage material provision to communities and providers, and collaboration with the firearm community and prevention professionals to support firearm suicide prevention activities statewide.⁵ These efforts align with the strategies and requirements of the OGVP.

Gun violence intervention programs

Effective gun violence intervention programs identified and conducted by the office (§ 25-20.5-1206(2)(a)(II) C.R.S.)

No gun violence intervention programs are being conducted out of the OGVP to date. Programs will be identified as the direction of the office is set and staff engages in stakeholder outreach. The Office of Suicide Prevention has priorities that align with those of the OGVP and conducts the following firearm suicide prevention initiatives:

- Colorado Gun Shop Project,
- Promotion of provider training on lethal means counseling,
- Provision of firearm suicide prevention materials to communities,
- Collaboration with firearm suicide prevention activities and partners statewide.

⁵ To learn more please visit <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/suicide-prevention/gun-safety-and-suicide> or read the Office of Suicide Prevention's [Annual Report](#).

Funding

Any federal grants or other funding the office applied for and whether the office received those grants or other funds (§ 25-20.5-1206(2)(a)(III) C.R.S.)

The Office of Gun Violence Prevention has not applied for any gun violence prevention specific funding to date.

CDPHE acknowledges that it may not be the most competitive or appropriate applicant for all funding opportunities. For instance, the Firearm Injury Prevention Initiative within the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus is home to several competitive research grants in the realm of firearm injury prevention. Additionally, the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado, Boulder received a multi-year Centers for Disease Control and Prevention grant to formally evaluate the Colorado Gun Shop Project. The legislation allows the department to partner with other more appropriate entities, which we will do as opportunities arise.

Resource bank

A general summary of new and relevant research included in the office's resource bank and the nature of research assistance provided by the office (§ 25-20.5-1206(2)(a)(IV) C.R.S.)

The department is in the process of determining the best way to operationalize the resource bank. Resources will be included in a new webpage on the department's website dedicated to the Office of Gun Violence Prevention and its work.