

Office of Gun Violence Prevention

2022 Annual Report

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COLORADO
Department of Public
Health & Environment

Table Of Contents

Table Of Contents	2
The Office of Gun Violence Prevention: Executive Summary	3
Office of Gun Violence Prevention’s approach to statewide, comprehensive gun violence and firearm injury prevention	3
Office of Gun Violence Prevention’s highlights during the reporting period	4
Conclusion	4
Data landscape	5
Report requirements	8
Awareness and education campaigns	9
Gun violence intervention programs	11
Funding	11
Resource bank	11
Conclusion	12

The Office of Gun Violence Prevention: Executive Summary

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 OGVP is required to report on its activities by November 30 of each year (§ 25-20.5-1206(2) C.R.S.).

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.

Office of Gun Violence Prevention's approach to statewide, comprehensive gun violence and firearm injury prevention

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.

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

- 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 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.

Office of Gun Violence Prevention's highlights during the reporting period

- Made operational decisions for the office to determine the best structure within the department.
- Hired and onboarded Director and Communications Specialist.
- Met with several different stakeholders to discuss firearm injury prevention and the work of the office.
- Made progress on cross-division collaboration in order to expand the reach of gun violence prevention activities.
- Finalized statement of work and contract with the University of Colorado's Injury and Violence Prevention Center to build and maintain the resource bank.
- Established an initial grant program to distribute \$450,000 in funding to community organizations in Colorado.
- Finalized vendor selection, statement of work and contract for the office's first statewide communications campaign.

Conclusion

The Office of Gun Violence Prevention is working to implement innovative data-driven initiatives, expand collaborations with other departments and agencies, fund gun violence

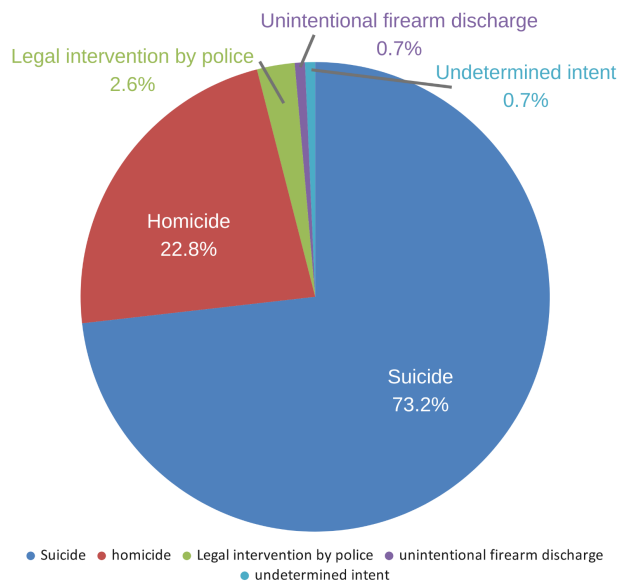
prevention and firearm safety programs across the state, and decrease the impact of gun violence and accidental firearm injuries across Colorado. The next report will focus on activities in FY 2022-23. Those activities will include continued focus on the resource bank, the launch of the public education initiatives, and building a larger grant program.

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, over 73% of firearm fatalities in Colorado are due to suicide (Figure 1). Firearms are the most used methods to inflict fatal self-injury, and suicides by firearm continue to account for a large percentage of Colorado suicide fatalities.²

Figure 1: Fatality Type of Colorado Firearm-related Deaths, 2017-2021

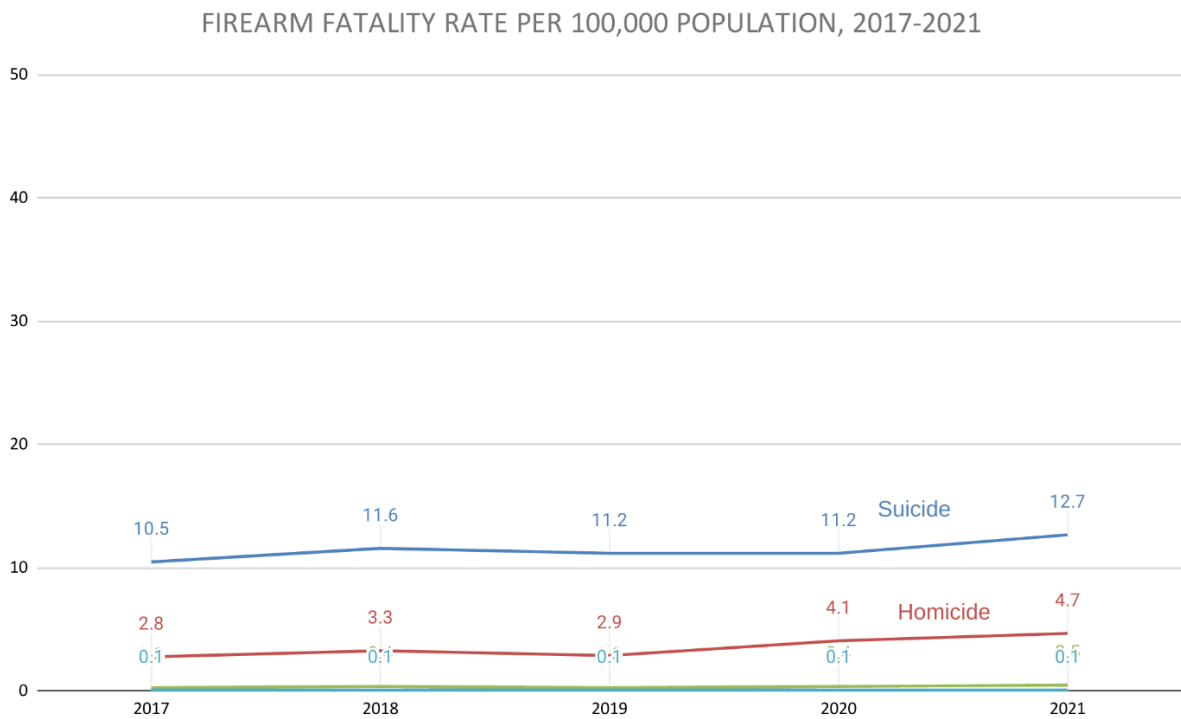


² For more information on suicide deaths in Colorado, please visit <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/colorado-suicide-statistics>

As Colorado’s population grows, simple fatality counts will go up. Adjusted firearm mortality rates per 100,000 population by year as well as statistics surrounding percentage of suicides involving firearms allow us to more fully understand the impact of gun violence experienced by Colorado Residents. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of firearm injury deaths in Colorado was greater than deaths due to motor vehicle crashes, opioid overdoses, colon cancer, and influenza.³

The annual number of firearm deaths reflect small year-to-year increases, with a statistically significant increase observed between 2020 and 2021.⁴


Figure 2: Firearm Fatality Rate per 100,000 Colorado Population, 2017-2021

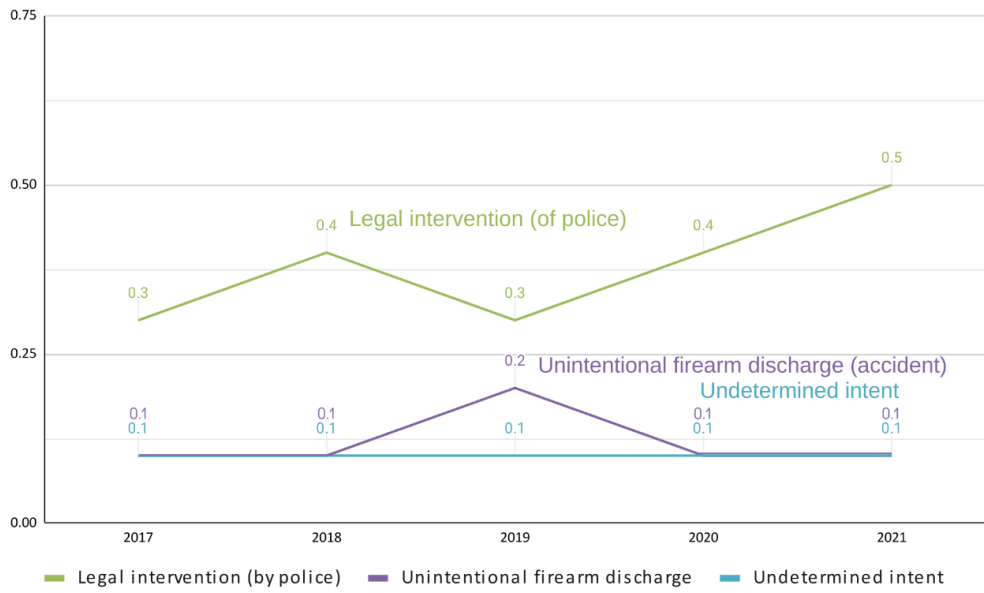


³ Orten K, Jamison E, Bol K. Firearms Deaths in Colorado 2016-2021. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Vital Statistics Fact Sheet. 2021.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AFaAQBo27qBa76d_WsLumOg101C32MyH/view?usp=sharing

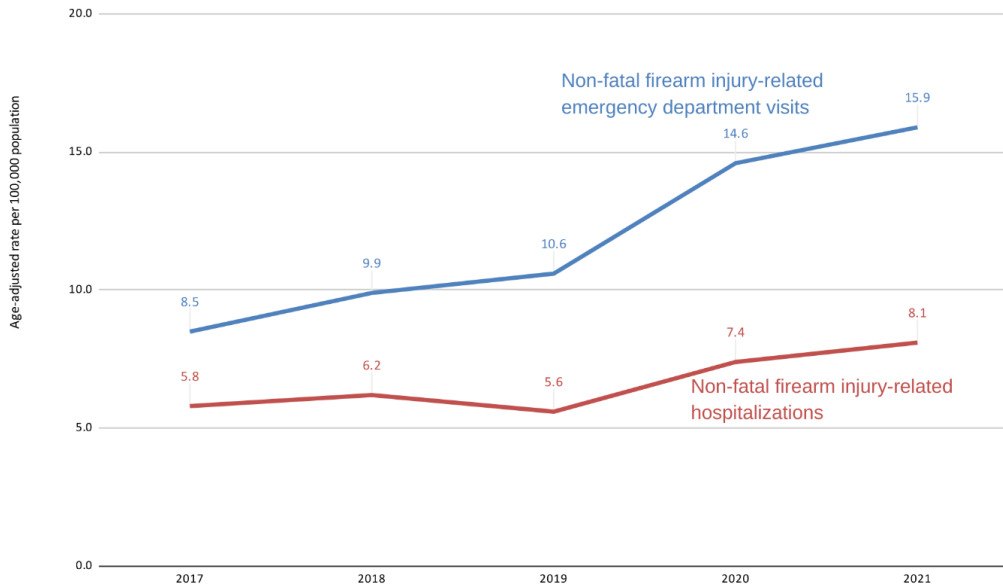
⁴ *Ibid.*

Magnification of counts below 1% 
 FIREARM FATALITY RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION, 2017-2021



Hospital data shows a recent increase in firearm violence. Figure 3 illustrates emergency department visits mentioning injuries due to firearms at acute care hospitals in Colorado (2017-2021), as well as hospital discharges mentioning injuries due to firearms. These data points are important to note separately as not all emergency department visits result in hospitalization.

Figure 3: Non-fatal firearm injury-related hospitalizations & ER Visits, 2017-2021



In 2021, the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey asked students about perceived access to firearms. 16.8% of students said it was “sort of easy” or “very easy” 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.⁵

Three questions concerning firearms ownership and storage practices measure safe gun ownership practices within the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Thirty-seven percent of adult Coloradans indicated they currently had firearms in their home. Of those who kept firearms in their home, 29% stored their firearms while loaded. Additionally, 57% of those who kept loaded firearms in their home reported that those firearms were stored unlocked.⁶ This means that one out of every twenty (~6%) adult Coloradans have a loaded gun stored unlocked in their home.

The department is using these data to guide the work and priorities of the OGVP and to identify disparities. View the Colorado Violent Death Reporting System [website](#) from CDPHE for more information on firearm deaths in the state.⁷

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.

⁵Brooks-Russell A, Ma M, Brummett S, et al. Perceived Access to Handguns Among Colorado High School Students. *Pediatrics*. 2021;147(4):e2020015834

⁶ 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>

⁷ For more information on firearm deaths in Colorado, please visit <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/center-for-health-and-environmental-data/registries-and-vital-statistics/colorado-violent-death-reporting-system>

- 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.)

As outlined in the legislation creating the Office of Gun Violence Prevention, the department aims to reduce gun violence and firearm injury through the development and implementation of programs designed: to educate Coloradans on existing resources relating to gun violence prevention, including

- Safe and responsible gun ownership / storage best practices, including increasing awareness of compliance with state and federal law;
- The availability of, and the process for requesting, extreme risk protection orders (ERPOs);
- The process to report lost or stolen firearms, including reporting requirements in state law;
- Available mental health and substance misuse resources and the process to refer people to needed mental health and substance use treatment services, including suicide prevention.

The office wants to positively impact the lives of all Coloradans, particularly priority audiences that will be necessary to reach in order to interrupt the cycles of gun violence and accidental injury in our state:

- Gun owners and their households;
- Parents, care givers, legal guardians; and
- Professionals who provide services to people and communities disproportionately impacted by gun violence, i.e. suicide prevention professionals, law enforcement and

criminal justice professionals, educators, domestic violence prevention/intervention professionals and youth violence prevention/intervention professionals.

The office has selected a vendor for its first statewide education campaign. The vendor has been informed that messaging should be in both English and Spanish and may include other languages as deemed appropriate in collaboration with the department based on community feedback and departmental data.

The November 2023 report will focus on activities in FY 2022-23. Those activities will include a research study to help the office and the vendor understand attitudes and existing knowledge surrounding the subjects outlined above, especially in Colorado households with firearms. Activities will also include the vendor reviewing existing documentation and research regarding gun violence in Colorado and completing a new research study to inform campaign development and communication strategies. The OGVP's existing partnership with the Colorado School of Public Health's Injury & Violence Prevention Center will prove valuable as the vendor completes this review and establishes relevant research protocols.

The next report will also focus on implementation of comprehensive and targeted public awareness and education media campaigns using paid, earned, and owned media as well as community outreach activities and training resources.

As this is a kickoff campaign for a new office, expected results include:

- Descriptive research findings related to gun violence in Colorado;
- Creation of research findings memo that illustrates the key learnings from research;
- Increased awareness of existing resources relating to gun violence prevention as well as state and federal laws as outlined above in "Topics;"
- Creation of a minimum of one public education campaign website;
- Vendor is responsible for tracking effectiveness, including increasing available resources and web traffic to the campaign website.

Campaigns in future years will use data from monthly and campaign-end evaluations as an initial benchmark to determine metrics for continued growth and expansion.

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.)

The office has established an initial grant program to distribute approximately \$450,000 to community organizations in Colorado, with a planned application period beginning in winter of 2022/2023. The OGVP will also provide additional funding opportunities in 2023.

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.

OGVP is maintaining awareness of upcoming funding opportunities as appropriate in conjunction with the Office of the Governor and Office of the Attorney General. OGVP Director McMillan has been appointed to the Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Board to assist in applying for and distributing Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which includes dedicated funding for evidence-informed, community-based violence intervention programs, mental health services, supportive services in schools, and support for the expansion of awareness and use of Extreme Risk Protection Orders.

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 office has finalized a contract with the University of Colorado's Injury and Violence Prevention Center to build and maintain a resource bank that will provide data to outside researchers as well as information on the latest findings of effective prevention strategies

interventions in reducing gun violence. The office is also collaborating with CDPHE’s Center for Health and Environmental Data to inform the structure for 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.

Conclusion

Within the next year, the office will continue to implement and expand programs in line with the fulfillment of its goals, including launching the resource bank and the first statewide education campaign. The office will also expand grant funding opportunities to Colorado organizations for the purpose of conducting community-based gun violence intervention initiatives focused on interrupting cycles of gun violence, trauma, and retaliation that are evidence-informed and have demonstrated promise at reducing gun violence without contributing to mass incarceration.

The core programs of the office will increase the capacity of Coloradans to become educated about gun violence prevention measures, safe firearm ownership practices, protective and risk factors for gun violence, and extreme risk protection orders. The office will also increase knowledge of and access to mental health and substance use resources, including suicide prevention.

