

WISCONSIN PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL

*Assure safe and healthy people by monitoring progress on the state health plan
and on the readiness for public health emergencies.*



August 1, 2025

Position Statement: Gun Violence is a Public Health Issue

Overview

The Wisconsin Public Health Council (PHC) acknowledges the fact that gun violence has had a significant impact on the health and well-being of all Wisconsinites, including the effects resulting from the most recent school shooting at Abundant Life Christian School on December 16, 2024. We recognize that this tragedy is the latest in what is now becoming a history of mass shootings in the United States and, more specifically, the state of Wisconsin. The PHC supports the messaging from the Wisconsin [Public Health Association](#) and the [Governor](#) that gun violence is a public health and safety crisis in Wisconsin. It touches all populations, regardless of income, race, or geography. Beyond those directly injured or killed by guns, each act of violence leaves behind trauma and suffering for the friends, family, and communities of those who have been harmed. Gun violence also has a disparate impact on Wisconsin communities; not all communities are impacted the same way.

The Scope of the Problem

Gun violence is a public health epidemic that affects the well-being and public safety of all Americans. In 2023, 46,728 Americans were killed by gun violence¹ The rate of gun-related deaths has continued to increase in the state of Wisconsin, too. Since 2018, the gun-related death rate has increased from 10.1 in 2018 compared to 14.0 per 100, 000 persons in 2022² During this same year, 57% of all Wisconsin gun-related deaths were due to suicide (CDC infographic). Certain groups, like the elderly, veterans, indigenous, men, rural communities, and youth, are disproportionately impacted by gun suicide. In fact, firearm injuries are the leading cause of death among Wisconsin youth since 2020, highlighting the urgent need for preventative measures³ These disproportionate impacts among specific Wisconsin communities perpetuate the ongoing cycle of trauma, increased barriers, and fewer resources to navigate current and historical stressors⁴

Public Health Perspective

Gun violence is preventable, but gun violence research is historically underfunded. Significant funding would address these gaps and improve public health capacity to support violence intervention and prevention programs. As health and well-being are the result of community conditions, historical experience, policies, systems, and environments, addressing this issue requires a collective approach involving both government and non-government entities. The PHC recognizes the current and historical harm produced by our systems that has perpetuated violence throughout Wisconsin's communities.

By addressing these policies, systems, and environments that create inequities, and by centering the voices of those who have experienced gun violence in its many forms, Wisconsin can reduce firearm injuries and deaths. A strategic approach can re-frame the representation of who is impacted by gun violence and develop new solutions. Emergency preparedness in partnership with community violence intervention programs is a key component of a public health approach. These programs are most effective when cities and states invest in comprehensive intervention and prevention efforts that engage a wide range of interest holders and community leaders⁵

¹ Center for Gun violence Solutions. "Annual Gun Violence Data | Center for Gun Violence Solutions." Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/annual-gun-violence-data#an-overview-of-US-gun-deaths-in-2023>. Accessed 28 July 2025.

² Center for Gun Violence Solutions. (2025, July 14). *State Data Wisconsin*. Retrieved from John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health:

<https://publichealth.jhu.edu/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/gun-violence-data/state-gun-violence-data/wisconsin>

³ Snooks, Kellie C., et al. "Gun Violence in Children: A Public Health Crisis and an Upstream Approach to Our Response." *WMJ*, vol. 123, no. 6, 2024, pp. 543-545. <https://wmjonline.org/123no6/snooks/>

⁴ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund. (2025, July 14). *Impact of Gun Violence on Historically Marginalized Communities*. Retrieved from Everytown Research & Policy: <https://everytownresearch.org/issue/impact-of-gun-violence-on-historically-marginalized-communities/>

⁵ Center for Gun Violence Solutions. "Community Violence Intervention | Center for Gun Violence Solutions." Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/solutions/community-violence-intervention>. Accessed 7 March 2025.

Call to Action

In Governor Evers' 2025-2027 budget request, he called for the creation of the Office of Violence Prevention, utilizing federal dollars. This funding can support communities that have fewer resources to navigate daily stressors, which can lead to gun violence. Wisconsin should make meaningful progress toward reducing gun violence by prioritizing the areas outlined in the [Wisconsin State Health Plan](#), in particular, *social and community conditions, physical, mental and systemic safety, social connectedness and belonging, mental and emotional health and well-being*.

1. [Priority Area: Social and community conditions](#) (Economic wellbeing, healthy housing)

A root cause of gun violence is low or no economic opportunity. Safe and stable housing is essential to prevent and support victims of violence.

- Invest in an economy that benefits all Wisconsinites, improve the financial stability of all Wisconsinites.
- Improve systems of support for people seeking to rent or buy a home

2. [Priority Area: Physical, mental and systemic safety](#)

Another root cause of gun violence is structural and institutional barriers that keep people from feeling safe, such as safe neighborhoods and safe institutions, including libraries, parks, and community centers.

- Build systems that support and protect the physical safety of people and communities.
- Build systems and institutions that ensure legal protection from harm for all Wisconsinites.

3. [Priority Area: Social connectedness and belonging](#)

People who are often excluded from society because of poverty, ageism, racism, classism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination can also be a root cause of gun violence.

- Improve community connections, social support, and belonging of all Wisconsinites.
- Enable the development of supportive interpersonal relationships.

4. [Priority Area: Mental and emotional health and well-being](#)

Structural barriers such as inadequate insurance coverage, provider bias, stigma, and underinvestment in community-driven mental health solutions disproportionately impact marginalized communities and can further exacerbate gun violence.

- Pursue population-level prevention and intervention for mental health and substance use issues.
- Support the delivery of mental health and substance use prevention and treatment services that meet the unique needs of all Wisconsinites.

As public health professionals, the Public Health Council recognizes gun violence as a multifaceted crisis that demands immediate and sustained action. Together, we advocate for equitable, evidence-based solutions that prioritize the health, safety, and well-being of all Wisconsinites.