

<p>ATS POSITION STATEMENT 2022-01</p> <p><i>Firearm Violence</i></p>

Background

Firearm violence is a major national emergency and a public health crisis. The American Trauma Society (ATS) believes it is time for all, including our legislators, to get involved, advocate for new research into this problem, and work towards a shared resolution of this national issue. Expressing our grief and outrage alone has not been an effective tactic for change. We must be proactive instead of reactive, avoid assigning blame, and join together to meet this challenge. Our response must be consistent and continuous until we see an end to the violence.

The ATS issued statements on firearm violence in 2013 and 2018. Unfortunately, we are in a position not only to re-issue the initial recommendations, but to expand them to reflect the evolution of the issues and the multi-faceted nature of the situation before the nation. We understand the issues we face today as Americans are more than just about firearms, and our recommendations were developed with that premise in mind.

Gun violence in the United States is a major public health problem that results in tens of thousands of deaths and injuries annually. Firearm-related suicides and homicides were the fourth and fifth leading causes of injury and death in the United States in 2020 and together accounted for 44,222 fatalities and more than 71,000 non-fatal gunshot injuries (1). The combined number of suicide and homicide deaths by firearms have overtaken motor vehicle crashes (MVC) as the leading cause of death by trauma in the United States since 2017 (2). From 2019 to 2020, the firearm homicide rate increased approximately 35%, and the firearm suicide rate stayed high. In 2020, 79% of all homicides and 53% of all suicides involved firearms. The firearm homicide rate in 2020 was the highest recorded in over 25 years (3).

According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in 2019, “There is no complete information on the health care costs of gun injuries. The GAO estimated that the initial hospital costs of firearm injuries were just over \$1 billion annually. However, physician costs not captured in the data could add around 20 percent to that total” (4). The Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence recently testified before Congress, “Researchers estimate that gun violence costs the American economy \$229 billion annually through direct costs like medical transport, law enforcement costs, and medical and mental health treatment. 87 percent of these direct costs are borne by taxpayers—or about \$700 per person per year” (5). More than money is at stake. Considering the economic burden alone minimizes the intense personal tragedy of lives lost, families shattered, people devastated, and social fabric eroded.

The ATS especially recommends limiting civilian access to high-capacity, magazine-fed, semi-automatic rifles. What makes these firearms unique? The answer does not lie in their appearance. The

answer lies in the unique and devastating nature of the injuries caused by-high velocity ammunition. Quite simply, these firearms are designed for battlefield killing. They can be fired automatically, as found in military versions, or semi-automatically, as found in those sold to civilians, from easily and rapidly exchanged high-capacity magazines that can contain 50-100 bullets before the shooter needs to reload (6). The most popular semi-automatic civilian version firearms today are the AR-15 (ArmaLite Rifle, invented in the 1950s). The current U.S. military automatic version of this firearm is the M-16. Automatic versions of similar firearms have been banned from civilian sales in the United States since the 1930s (7).

It is because of the lethality of this type of firearm that we recommend it not be sold in the United States and that high-capacity magazines be banned. In addition, there should be severe penalties if these firearms or magazines are used in the commission of a crime. Buy-back programs should be instituted to reduce the number of these firearms in circulation.

The American Trauma Society continues to endorse a number of specific measures to reduce the destructive effects of firearm injury through the implementation of the following recommendations:

- **Collaboration of medical, private, public, and government groups and citizens to work together actively and urgently toward a common goal of reducing and ultimately eliminating the preventable injury and death resulting from firearms, including mass shootings, homicide, suicide, and unintentional injury.**
- **Provide public education on gun safety including safe storage, collaborative training with law enforcement and sporting organizations.**
- **Enhance mandatory and thorough background checks for the purchase of firearms, including at guns shows and auctions.**
- **Ban high-capacity, magazine-fed, semi-automatic rifles and any device that enables a shooter to fire a large quantity of ammunition over a short period of time.**
- **Active shooter training and drills in all public settings in collaboration with state and local law enforcement agencies.**
- **Gun buy-back programs to assist in reducing the number of firearms in circulation.**
- **Increase funding to expand and strengthen the nation's mental health/behavioral health services.**
- **Protect the rights of health care providers to talk to their patients about gun safety.**
- **Increase funding for teaching and supporting non-violent conflict resolution.**

- **Encourage federal and non-governmental agencies to perform and fund firearm research to determine the most effective interventions to reduce gun violence.**
- **Support Stop the Bleed, a national awareness campaign intended to cultivate grassroots efforts that encourage bystanders to become trained, equipped and empowered to help in a bleeding emergency before professional help arrives.**

References

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