



Capitol Fund

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2014 Rise in Colorado Gun Deaths Linked to Record Suicide Rate

Recently-released 2014 fatality data from the Colorado Department of Health and Environment (CDPHE) show that firearms fatalities rose to 638, up from 611 in 2013. According to the data, the rise was entirely due to an increase in firearms suicides (from 490 to 527), as the number homicides actually fell. Approximately half of all suicides in Colorado are by firearms.

“This is a call to action for the state of Colorado to act more aggressively to prevent firearm suicides,” said Eileen McCarron, president of the Colorado Ceasefire Capitol Fund. “This is a complicated mental health issue, but addressing easy access to guns could make a huge difference.” Researcher have shown that the following firearms laws are significantly associated with lower rates of firearms suicide: waiting periods, background checks, handgun locks, and restrictions on the open carrying of handguns.¹ Of those, Colorado has a background checks law on its books.

An increasing proportion of gun deaths in Colorado are from suicides. In 2014 82.6% of gun deaths were suicides, a record level. In 1992 suicides comprised 69.7% of gun deaths. Homicides, which were the second leading cause of gun deaths, dropped from 2013 to 2014. As noted in Health News Colorado², the record suicide numbers are attributable to access issues: too easy access to guns and insufficient access to mental health assistance.

“People largely have guns in their homes for protection, yet studies have shown that, in actuality, firearms can make the home less safe,” said Tom Mauser, spokesperson for Colorado Ceasefire. A classic study in King County, Washington found that for every self-defense homicide in the home, there were 1.3 accidental deaths, 4.6 criminal homicides, and 37 firearm suicides.³

Firearm suicide attempts are fatal approximately 90% of the time. Because suicide attempts are usually impulsive acts, easy access to firearms is a significant factor in suicide fatalities. Dr. David Hemenway (Harvard School of Public Health) analyzed 10 academic studies spanning 20 years and noted that “all find that firearms in the home are associated with substantially and significantly higher rates of suicide.”⁴

Colorado Ceasefire urges gun owners to always store their firearms locked, unloaded and with ammunition locked separately. It also supports a program by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment that works with hospitals and gun retailers to try to keep guns away from people who are depressed by distributing a flyer about the “11th Commandment” of gun ownership: temporary off-site storage of guns if a family member is suicidal

1 Bakalar, Nicholas, New York Times, “Gun Laws Associated with Lower Suicide Rates,” August 19, 2015.

2 McCrimmon, K.M., Health News Colorado “Guns, poor mental health system lead to record suicide toll.” http://www.healthnewscolorado.org/2015/08/19/guns-poor-mental-health-system-lead-to-record-suicide-toll/?utm_source=Health+News+Colorado&utm_campaign=542bbfb605-0819158_19_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_12ed436cd7-542bbfb605-212023669

- 3 Kellermann, A. J. and Reay, D. T., Protection or peril? An analysis of firearm-related death in the home. New England Journal of Medicine 314:1557-60.
- 4 DeFlippis, E. Do More Guns Cause More Suicide?, Huffington Post, 3/27/2014.

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Colorado Ceasefire Capitol Fund is a statewide organization that works to reduce gun violence through legislation and education.