



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
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Chair

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Vice Chair

TOBY EWING
Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners

FROM: Courtney Ackerman, M.A., Research Scientist
Impacts of Firearm Violence Staff Lead

RE: Impacts of Firearm Violence Project Update

DATE: September 18, 2023

CC: Keyondria Bunch, Commissioner and Subcommittee Chair
Bill Brown, Commissioner and Subcommittee Vice Chair
Toby Ewing, MHSOAC Executive Director
Andrea Anderson, MHSOAC Chief of Communications

Under the leadership of Commissioner and Subcommittee Chair Keyondria Bunch, and Commissioner and Subcommittee Vice Chair Bill Brown, the Commission's Impacts of Firearm Violence (IFV) project was launched in August 2022 in response to an increase in mass shootings and interpersonal violence involving firearms. The goals of the project are:

1. To create a holistic understanding of firearm violence and the context in which it occurs, including who is at risk, what factors are involved in firearm violence, and how it interacts with mental health.
2. To identify partners and promote collaboration in firearm violence prevention.
3. Create an action agenda with recommendations for addressing the factors driving the risk and harm caused by firearm violence, particularly those factors which also negatively impact mental health.

Progress:

Since August 2022, the Subcommittee has made substantial progress toward these goals, particularly in developing a broad understanding through research and review of existing literature, data, programs, policies, and other information about firearm violence. The Commission has invested substantially in community engagement for this project, conducting many hours of interviews with academic leaders, law enforcement, school psychologists and administrators, experts in threat assessment and management, state and

local government officials, community-based organizations, mental health providers, and firearm owners. The Commission has also engaged with people directly impacted by firearms, including veterans, incarcerated youth, survivors of suicide and mass shootings, and those who have lost a loved one to firearm violence.

The Commission has facilitated a variety of engagement events to explore on a deeper level the challenges, opportunities, and tensions surrounding firearm violence through the lens of community partners. These events include:

- **Subcommittee Meeting #1** (September 2022): General overview of the project
- **Site Visit** (November 2022 and May 2023): Los Angeles REACH Team
- **Subcommittee Meeting #2** (January 2023): Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) in schools
- **Site Visit** (May 2023): Suicide prevention strategies at the Sacramento Gun Range
- **Commission Meeting Hearing #1** (May 2023): Framing the cycle of trauma and violence
- **Community Engagement** (May 2023 and July 2023): Meeting with Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health Providers
- **Site Visit** (August 2023): National 4-H Shooting Sports Teen Leadership Institute
- **Listening Session** (August 2023): Sacramento Youth Detention Facility

Summaries of many of these events can be found on the Commission's website under the [impacts of Firearm Violence Initiative page](#).

Emerging Themes:

While findings continue to evolve through this process, the Subcommittee would like to highlight some of its key learnings thus far.

1. **Firearm violence impacts all Californians, but in different ways.** Risk varies by population and type of firearm violence. Young men of color living in urban areas face the highest risk of homicide, while older white men living in rural areas are impacted most by suicide. In all cases, low-income communities are hurt most by firearm violence.
2. **Firearm violence and mental health coexist in a cycle of trauma and violence.** Mental health diagnosis alone is an unreliable predictor of violence. Rather, the risk of mental health issues and firearm violence—whether as a perpetrator or victim—is shaped by social, economic, and environmental factors that both underlie and reinforce cycles of violence and trauma.
3. **Misunderstandings and lack of awareness about the root causes of firearm violence limit opportunities for prevention and recovery.** Overreliance on punitive strategies to address firearm violence can further disparities in firearm risk, but other promising approaches and effective solutions exist.
4. **We need to embrace a public health framework for understanding and addressing firearm violence.** Strategies that promote safety and wellbeing in communities while helping people exposed to firearm violence heal physically and mentally are critical for disrupting the cycle of trauma and violence.

Next Steps:

With thoughtful consideration of these learnings, the Subcommittee is planning a **follow-up panel to be held at the October 2023 Commission** meeting in San Francisco. This panel will focus on solutions through a public health framework, with attention on disparities and strategies that disrupt cycles of violence and trauma. These lessons and more will be shared and expanded upon in the **final report for the IFV project, expected in 2024.**

Sincerely,

Courtney Ackerman
Research Scientist
Impacts of Firearm Violence Staff Lead