

## Child Fatality Task Force



## Child Fatality Task Force Recommendation

### Support new statewide firearm safe storage awareness initiative

Concern about access to **firearms in the context of youth suicide** was brought to the attention of the Child Fatality Task Force by the State Child Fatality Prevention Team. A firearm safety stakeholder group was formed to examine firearm safety education and awareness, and the work of this diverse group of stakeholders in 2017 informed this Task Force recommendation for a new statewide firearm safety initiative. This group determined that gun owners should be the priority target audience and locking guns should be the priority safety strategy for an initiative.

**Outreach and technical assistance to help local communities launch local initiatives tailored to their needs is critical:** Central to this initiative is the need to provide resources, customizable tools, gun locks, and one or more individuals dedicated to providing one-on-one outreach and technical assistance across the state to help local communities launch their own firearm safety initiatives. The stakeholder group that informed this recommendation learned about the effectiveness of various education and awareness prevention strategies and determined that local community mobilization initiatives had the best chance of getting people to engage in safe storage practices. Funding would go to DHHS with an Injury & Violence Prevention Branch in Public Health that can appropriately engage an organization/individual to implement this initiative. (Two-year funding estimate was originally \$155,700 as a minimum; more funding would reach more communities.)

**During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a surge in gun sales, elevating the risks** of even more guns in homes that are not safely stored and therefore accessible to youth who may be at risk for suicide or to curious young children.

#### ED Visits Due to Firearm-Related Injuries Among Children 17 and Younger: Comparing 2019 and 2020



Note: Limited to NC Residents; 2020 Provisional Data as of 1/13/2021. Source: NC DETECT ED Visits, 2019-2020. Analysis by Injury Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit

In the ten-year period of 2010 to 2019, North Carolina lost more than 460 children and youth age 17 and younger to firearm-related injuries.<sup>1</sup>

In the four-year period of 2016 to 2019, there were 437 firearm-related hospitalizations and 1,246 firearm-related emergency department visits for children and youth in North Carolina age 0 to 17.<sup>2</sup>

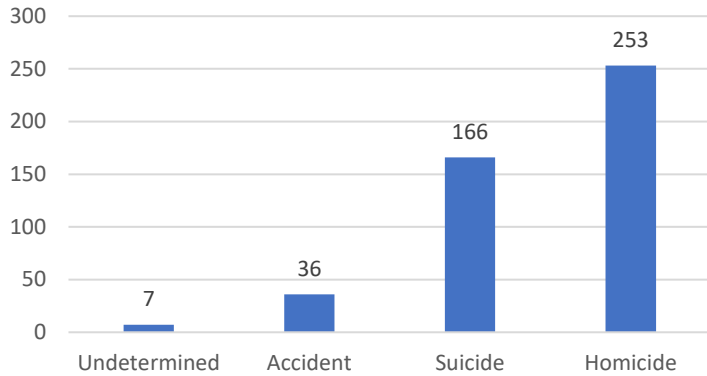
In North Carolina, firearms are used in almost half of youth suicides and more than half of youth homicides.<sup>3</sup>

National studies show that more than half of all gun owners store at least one gun unsafely<sup>4</sup> and most kids know where parents keep their guns.<sup>5</sup>

A national study showed that more than 75% of guns used in suicide attempts and unintentional injuries of kids were stored in the home of the victim, a relative, or a friend.<sup>6</sup>

Guns used in American mass school shootings often come from home.<sup>7</sup>

## Number of Youth Firearm Deaths in North Carolina by Manner 2010 - 2019\*



**Bipartisan support:** This recommendation was addressed in 2019 in House Bill 508 with bipartisan support; it was then included in the 2019 Appropriations Act, which did not become law.

**Educating adult gun owners about safe storage is the target of this initiative:** This recommendation arose from concerns about youth suicide. Efforts to educate youth about gun safety will not be sufficient to prevent access to lethal means by a youth at risk for suicide. Also, studies have shown that teaching young children gun safety does not reduce the likelihood that children will handle guns when they are unsupervised.<sup>8</sup>

**This recommendation was informed by a diverse Firearm Safety Stakeholder Group** who met in 2017 for the purpose of discussing solutions related to firearm safety education in North Carolina. Members, educators, and conveners of the group represented diverse organizations & areas of expertise including:

- City Police Chief
- Department of Public Instruction
- Durham Gun Team
- Hunter educator
- Injury & Violence Prevention Branch, Division of Public Health
- Juvenile Justice Health Services
- National Rifle Association
- NC Child Fatality Prevention Team
- NC Child Fatality Task Force
- NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- NC Department of Justice
- NC Wildlife Officer
- North Carolinians Against Gun Violence
- Pediatrician with expertise in child safety
- Safe Kids NC
- UNC Injury Prevention Research Center
- Academic researcher

**The Child Fatality Task Force** is a legislative study commission that recommends policy solutions to prevent child death, prevent abuse and neglect, and support the safe and healthy development of children.

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<sup>1</sup> Data source: North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, NC Division of Public Health.

<sup>2</sup> Data source: NC State Center for Health Statistics, Hospital Discharge Data (2016 – 2019); NC DETECT (2016 -2019); analysis by Injury & Violence Prevention Branch, NC Division of Public Health.

<sup>3</sup> Data source: North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, NC Division of Public Health.

<sup>4</sup> Crifasi, Cassandra K., et al., Storage Practices of US Gun Owners in 2016, *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 4 (2018). In this study, safe storage practices included storage in a locked gun safe, cabinet or case; locked into a gun rack; or stored with a trigger lock or other lock.

<sup>5</sup> 73% of children under age 10 living in homes with guns reported knowing the location of their parents’ firearms. Baxley F, Miller M. Parental Misperceptions About Children and Firearms. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2006;160(5):542–547. doi:10.1001/archpedi.160.5.542.

<sup>6</sup> Grossman DC, Reay DT, Baker SA. Self-inflicted and Unintentional Firearm Injuries Among Children and Adolescents: The Source of the Firearm. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 1999;153(8):875–878. doi:10.1001/archpedi.153.8.875.

<sup>7</sup> Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence: “A report published by the US Secret Service and the Dept. of Education found that in 65% of school shootings covered by the study, the shooter used a gun obtained from his or her own home or from the home of a relative.” Report: “The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative – Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States.” (July 2004). In addition, A Wall Street Journal report in April of 2018 examining nearly three decades of American mass school shootings stated that the killers in these shootings mostly used guns owned by a family member; the report addressed the big role that a lack of gun safety at home has played in school shootings. [Hobbs, Tawnell D. (April 5, 2018). “Most Guns Used in School Shootings Come From Home,” *Wall Street Journal*.]

<sup>8</sup> This was the conclusion by a Rutgers University study that reviewed ten studies on the effectiveness of strategies for teaching gun safety to children ages 4 to 9. The study noted that although gun safety education for children has value, safe gun storage may be the better choice for protecting children and adolescents from gun injuries. Holly C., Porter S., Kamienski M., Lim A. School-Based and Community-Based Gun Safety Educational Strategies for Injury Prevention. *Health Promotion Practice.* May 2018. DOI: 10.1177/1524839918774571.

\* The homicide number in this chart was previously reported by the OCME as 243 and the OCME has corrected that number to change it to 253.