

FUNDING FEDERAL GUN VIOLENCE RESEARCH

Each year, gun violence kills more than 36,000 Americans and injures nearly 90,000 others. But for over two decades, Congress and the federal government have stifled federal research into the causes and effects of this uniquely American crisis. With the number of gun deaths reaching a 40-year peak in 2017, it is clear that this must change. Congress must invest in federal gun violence research at the CDC and NIH.

THE DICKEY AMENDMENT

The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control was established at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 1992 as the lead federal organization for violence prevention. In order to fulfill its statutory mandate, the Injury Center conducts and funds research to prevent injury; this included a 1993 study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* titled *Gun Ownership as a Risk Factor for Homicide in the Home* led by Dr. Arthur Kellermann. This research found that individuals with a gun in the home are 2.7 times more likely to become a homicide victim.

Threatened by the potential policy and market implications of the study, the gun lobby moved to discredit its findings, launching a campaign to investigate and eliminate the Injury Center altogether. In 1996, self-described “NRA point person” Representative Jay Dickey (R-AR) sponsored an amendment to the FY97 Omnibus that stated, “**None of the funds made available for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention may be used to advocate or promote gun control.**” In that same bill, \$2.6 million was earmarked for research on traumatic brain injury—the exact amount the CDC had budgeted for firearms research the year before. The Dickey Amendment has been included in each funding bill since, extending to the National Institutes of Health in FY12.

A TWO-DECADE DEFICIT

As the nation’s premier institutions for public health, the CDC and NIH continue to make lifesaving progress in subjects other than gun violence—and such lifesaving progress leads to lifesaving public policy. After scientists and engineers were able to identify risk factors for motor vehicle accidents, for example—the federal government spends roughly \$35 million each year researching car crashes—Congress passed the Highway Safety Act in 1966, which included new automobile safety laws to prevent people from driving while intoxicated and discourage drinking underage. As a result, car-crash deaths fell from over 50,000 in 1967 to 38,659 in 2017. Gun deaths, on the other hand, which receive less than \$2 million each year for research, have reached a 40-year high, killing 39,773 people in 2017.

In the absence of federal investment into the causes of America’s gun violence epidemic, states and private researchers have tried to step up to the plate. [The University of California, Davis received \\$5 million from the state of California](#) to establish a firearms research center—the first of its kind nationwide—while schools of public health at Harvard and Johns Hopkins have invested heavily in research on gun suicide and various other forms of gun violence. Still, due to the scope of the American gun violence epidemic, such efforts remain insufficient in comparison to a comprehensive federal response.

FEDERAL GUN VIOLENCE RESEARCH IS LEGAL

The Dickey Amendment's language does not prohibit research into gun violence. Instead, it is CDC's lack of appropriated funding that has so significantly hamstrung this lifesaving research. Following the shooting at Sandy Hook, President Obama issued a presidential memorandum instructing the Department of Health and Human Services and CDC to "conduct or sponsor research into the causes of gun violence and the ways to prevent it"—subject "to the availability of appropriations." Despite a request for \$10 million in funding to do so, no money was appropriated.

Agreement that the Dickey Amendment does not legally limit CDC's ability to conduct research has grown in recent years: since Sandy Hook, the late former Representative Dickey removed his support from the restrictive language and began advocating for research to continue. Now-Ranking Member of the House Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, Representative Tom Cole (R-OK), said CDC was "free to research anything they care to research" and no language prevented that; Chairman of the same Senate subcommittee Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO) echoed this statement, saying CDC has "the authority to do gun violence research ... if they want to." Recently, the FY18 Omnibus bill included report language stating that, "While appropriations language prohibits the CDC and other agencies from using appropriated funding to advocate or promote gun control, the Secretary of Health and Human Services [Alex Azar] has stated the CDC has the authority to conduct research on the causes of gun violence." In October 2018, CDC Director Robert Redfield said the institution is "poised to be able to do the research in this area if Congress chooses to give us additional funding."

SOLUTION

With gun violence claiming the lives of nearly 40,000 Americans in 2017 and costing over \$229 billion in direct and indirect costs, there is no time to waste. Congress must act now to fund this life-saving research at CDC and NIH: a \$50 million annual investment will allow for 10-20 research studies to be funded per year along with reviving the infrastructure of the Injury Center's firearm research.

ABOUT GIFFORDS

Giffords is a nonprofit organization dedicated to saving lives from gun violence. Led by former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and her husband, Navy combat veteran and retired NASA astronaut Captain Mark Kelly, Giffords inspires the courage of people from all walks of life to make America safer.