

COALITION

for Gun Control / pour le contrôle des armes

www.guncontrol.ca

EFFECTIVE SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGIES INCLUDE STRICT GUN CONTROL

Firearm Control and Suicide prevention

Public health experts across the country have worked together with safety experts, victims and community activists for more than 20 years to reduce the risks of firearm misuse. Over 73% of all firearm deaths in the country are suicides. Rifles and shotguns are the type of guns most commonly used in suicide, including youth suicide, because of their availability. While tragedies can strike anywhere, we know stronger controls on guns make them less likely to happen by making it harder for suicidal or dangerous people to get access to firearms.

The Canadian Paediatric Society, the Canadian Association of Adolescent Health and suicide prevention groups including the Canadian and Quebec Association for Suicide Prevention have argued that the significant decline in suicides is due to an increased sense of personal responsibility and accountability on the part of gun owners who know that registration links them directly to their firearms, reducing impulsive access to firearms by those at risk, particularly teenagers. The Institut de santé publique du Québec has concluded that the Firearms Act has led to 250 fewer suicides and 50 fewer homicides annually in Canada, with no evidence of displacement.

« The significant decline in adolescent suicides in the last 15 years is consistent with the theory that reduced availability of firearms would prevent some adolescent suicides. Journal of Adolescent Health study) confirms that both the firearm suicide rate and the total suicide rate in adolescents declined, along with declines in firearm homicides and unintentional deaths. »

– Dr. Katherine Austin,
Canadian Paediatric Society, May 2010

« Scientific research shows that progressive controls on firearms have resulted in a reduction in firearm death and injury (...) It is true that one cannot easily measure prevention, but we can certainly measure the effects of ignoring it »

– Extract from OpEd signed by 28 public health and suicide prevention groups and 33 public health professionals

The impact of recent legislative changes

The amendments proposed in **Bill C-42** would put Canadians' lives at further risk. This bill weakens controls on guns and would make it easier for legal guns to be diverted to illegal markets. These measures increase the risk of gun-related domestic violence and suicide, particularly youth suicide, and could result in an increased number of gun deaths.

Despite public health and safety experts providing evidence that it is useful, efficient and that it has had concrete impact in reducing firearm deaths and injuries, the government swiftly passed **Bill C-19** in April 2012, ending the registration of rifles and shotguns — allowing a licensed individual to buy as many guns as they want, including powerful semi-automatics, without any records. They further weakened protections by removing the obligation to verify a licence during the sale of a long-gun. checks. The law also required the destruction of all registry data, with the deletion of the records on 7 million rifles and shotguns accross Canada. Incomprehensibly the same MPs who voted for these measures to pass voted for a National Strategy for Suicide Prevention on the same day (in April 2012).

In July 2012, the federal government passed regulations forbidding provinces from requiring dealers to maintain records of sales, a key tool to prevent illegal sales and trace firearms used in gun violence. Later that year, the government again postponed **UN gun marking regulations**, and eliminated gun show regulations against police objections.

Act for safety

Although suicide is an individual act, it fits into a broader context of interactions between the person, his immediate community and society in general. Reducing access to firearms is a critical component of any strategy for suicide prevention.

- **It is the law, all firearms must be stored safely** to avoid the risk that weapons get into the wrong hands or are used impulsively.

- **Know the risk factors.** The presence of at least one of the following factors increases the risk of suicide or homicide by firearms: depression, substance abuse, history of current or previous drug or alcohol abuse, history of violent disputes, recent or ongoing separation, financial problems, problems at work, existence of a criminal record.

- **Do you think you're in the presence of a suicidal person?** Ask family members if firearms are accessible in the home, from friend (s) or family members and recommend that the guns be removed or rendered inaccessible during the crisis.

- If you have a public safety concern related to firearms that is not urgent and does not put your life or others in immediate danger, call 1 800 731-4000.

If imminent risk to self or others : contact your local police service.

Gun control efficiency

- **73%** of all gun deaths in Canada are suicides. Gun control is an important public health issue.

- The vast majority - over 80% - of suicides by firearms were committed with a **hunting rifle** (rifles and shotguns).

- In Canada, **13%** of suicides are committed with a firearm.

- In 2000, 84 young Canadians between 15 and 24 years old committed suicide with a firearm. In 2008, they were 49, a **decrease of 58%**.

- The number of suicides by firearm is considerably **higher in rural areas**.

Facts on gun control and suicide prevention

- The number of gun suicides in the province of Quebec has **dropped 60% between 1995 and 2008**.
- In 1995 – when the **Firearms Act was adopted** – 329 young Canadians from 15 to 34 years old committed suicide. In 2005, the number had **dropped 63%**, counting 124 suicides.
- Approximately one third of people who attempt suicide with a firearm use someone else's weapon. **Gun control protects everyone in a household.**
- The legislative measures introduced in 1995 were associated with a **significant decrease in suicides by firearms without evidence of a movement to other means**. These measures aimed at detecting risk factors for suicide with gun licence applicants, firearms registration to ensure the owner responsibility for their guns, and safe storage for all firearms
- These measures facilitate preventive withdrawal (temporary or permanent) of all firearms when there is a high risk of suicide or violence.
- Suicide attempts by firearms are **fatal in 96.5% of cases**. Men are more likely than women to use a firearm in attempted suicide.
- The mere presence of a firearm in the home **multiplies the risk of suicide by five**.

Founded in the wake of the Montreal massacre, the Coalition for Gun Control is the only national non-profit organization working to reduce gun injury, death and crime in Canada. We are endorsed by more than 300 crime and injury prevention, policing, health, child safety, victims' rights, grassroots and community organizations. These include: the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the YWCA of Canada, just to name a few. CGC was recipient of the Canadian Labour Congress 2011 Making a Difference in People's Lives Award.

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