

41,000

PERSONS DIE by suicide annually in the United States.

FIREARMS
account for over

50%

OF DEATHS
BY SUICIDE.

How to Address Firearm Safety in Your Suicidal Patient: A Research Brief

Gun ownership is a normal part of life in America. In rural areas, a high percentage, if not all, of your patients will have guns in their home. Having a conversation with suicidal persons about temporarily removing firearms from the home has great promise to save lives.

Emerging research suggests:

- Primary care providers are hesitant to discuss firearms with patients.
- Firearm owners find questions about guns in the home invasive and resist answering questions truthfully on intake forms.
- Data entered into electronic health records during patient contact time raises patients' suspicion that data will become part of a federal registry of gun owners.
- Trust is critical to having an effective conversation about temporarily removing access to firearms.

DATA INDICATE:

- **Rural areas have higher rates of suicide.**
- **Firearms are the most common method of death by suicide.**
- **64% of people who die by suicide see their primary care provider within a year of dying.**
- **Reducing access to firearms lowers suicide rates.**

Tips for putting research into practice:

- Suggest with a tentative tone rather than asking directly about firearms, for example, say:
"If you have guns in the home, now might be a good time to talk about it."
- Ask generally:
"What can we do to keep you safe?"
Normalize gun ownership by asking:
"Can we talk about your guns?"
- If the patient tells you they have firearms, tell them that you respect their 2nd amendment rights and you want to find a way to keep them safe.
- Make a safety plan that includes a plan for temporarily removing firearms. Bring a trusted friend or family member into the conversation, if the patient is willing.
- Suggest that:
"Now might be a good time to have a friend or family member hold your guns temporarily."
- Move away from your computer while talking. Stop entering information into the EHR. Patients may feel their rights are being compromised.

If you would like support while talking with a suicidal patient, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273 TALK (8255) for 24/7 assistance.

TAKE YOUR TIME. SUICIDE IS A LIFE OR DEATH ISSUE.