



POSITION STATEMENT

Prevention of Gun Violence

Certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) and certified midwives (CMs) provide care for women who may be exposed to gun violence that puts them at risk for personal harm, destruction of the family structure, and loss of financial stability. Gun related violence in the United States is a major public health crisis,¹ and the cost of violent crime can be measured in terms of loss of life and concrete economic costs for victims, the families of those who lose their lives, communities, and taxpayers.² While women and families from all demographics can be affected, women of color, particularly those who live in low income urban communities, are disproportionately affected by gun violence.³

American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) affirms the following:

- Screening at all points of contact for the presence of household firearms and client education that enforces safety measures to avoid accidental injury and/or death. However, CNMs and CMs should be aware of state and local laws that may prohibit particular questions related to gun possession.⁴ Additionally, while CNMs and CMs should recognize that gun violence disproportionately affects women of color and their families,³ screening should not be based upon race and ethnicity alone.
- Because gun violence is often associated with intimate partner violence (IPV),⁵ CNMs/CMs should be knowledgeable about screening and should recognize the signs and symptoms of IPV and excessive mental and or situational stress among women and family members. CNMs/CMs should be equipped to identify resources and initiate intervention strategies for mental and or situational stress, including referral for mental health support.
- Support for legislation that requires universal criminal background checks for the purchase of firearms, including those at gun shows and private sales. Furthermore, ACNM opposes state and federal mandates that limit or prohibit health care providers discussing firearm ownership with patients.
- Support for legislation that improves access to mental health care services and investment in research that results in evidence-based solutions to improve understanding of the complex issues surrounding gun violence.

- Support for public education and antiviolenence initiatives that acknowledge and address the role of IPV and firearms in the health and safety of women and children.

Background

Gun violence in the United States is a complex national issue with legal, social, and public health consequences. Gun violence leads to more than 31,000 deaths and 78,000 nonfatal injuries every year.¹ Although the rate of gun homicide has declined slightly since the 1990s, US rates remain at least 7 times greater than those in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and many other countries.¹ Additionally, estimated direct costs for medical care and incarceration related to gun violence are close to \$80 billion yearly.²

Women disproportionately experience IPV, and the presence of firearms within those relationships is a key risk factor for intimate partner homicide.^{2,5} IPV can also cause emotional harm by inducing anger, anxiety, and depression, and is linked to negative health outcomes and harmful health behaviors.⁵

The psychological and social costs to women and children who are harmed or left without partners or parents extend beyond the morbidity and mortality associated with gun-related accidents, homicides, and suicides.³ The sequelae of gun violence may leave a woman alone to complete a pregnancy or raise a child, which contributes to economic, social, and psychologic instability.³

The American Academy of Pediatrics,⁶ American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists,⁷ American Psychological Association,⁸ American Public Health Association,⁹ and many other organizations support an evidence-based, public health approach to gun violence that emphasizes education, prevention, and safety. In recognition that firearm-related violence is a complex, multifaceted issue that significantly affects women's health, ACNM supports efforts to continue research, promote policy change, and develop effective prevention strategies at individual, community, and national levels. Furthermore, ACNM supports all efforts by health care providers to institute universal screening policies to assess for the presence of household firearms, or risk of actual or potential threats of gun violence.

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