



## Key Points

### What is it?

Most (90%) of the people who attempt suicide do not eventually kill themselves. This indicates that they really don't want to die, but rather that attempting suicide is the only solution they can come up with at the time to end the pain they are experiencing. Firearms are the most common—and the most lethal—method of suicide. So reducing one's access to a lethal method during a crisis period can make a difference between life and death.

*"It's time for pro-firearms people and health care professionals to lay aside their agendas and work together."*

Ralph Demicco, Former Gun Shop Owner

### Why is this issue important?

Gun owners and their families are at a higher risk of dying if they attempt suicide than non-gun owners. This is *not* because they are at greater risk of having mental health problems or suicidal thoughts, but rather because their access to a gun makes it more likely that they will die if they attempt suicide.

Gun owners and gun organizations have a strong culture of advocating for safety and protecting the family, making them perfect partners in reducing access to lethal means. The gun community can help prevent suicide among their family, friends, and acquaintances by watching for signs of suicide and keeping guns from those at risk of suicide until they have recovered.

### What are the challenges to implementation?

- Gun rights can be a very touchy subject. Both pro-gun and anti-gun agendas can prevent people from working together to prevent suicide.
- It can be difficult to intervene in the emotional lives of others, even family members. It's not easy to know what to say, especially with someone who isn't receptive.
- It might feel uncomfortable to ask if you can hold onto someone's gun for a period of time while he or she is going through a crisis. Also, gun owners may be reticent to give up their guns if they don't think their firearms will be returned.
- State laws vary, and in some states, it is illegal for family or friends without a gun license to hold onto a gun that is owned by someone else.
- Some efforts in the past to reduce lethal means have focused on the issue of gun rights rather than suicide prevention, which has alienated the gun community.
- Historically, the public health field and gun community have not worked together as equal partners on suicide prevention.

### How can we overcome these challenges?

- Make a serious effort to put aside personal agendas (whether pro-gun or anti-gun) and focus on preventing suicide. This won't work if the conversation becomes a gun rights issue.
- Acknowledge the perspective and opinions of gun owners, and let them lead the effort to reduce suicide within the gun community.
- Involve as many gun groups as possible in suicide prevention—gun shop owners, firearms instructors, firing range owners, hunting groups, and gun rights advocates.