

Office of Firearm Safety and Violence Prevention 2021 report



Biennial report per [RCW 43.330A.020](#)

OFFICE OF FIREARM SAFETY
AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

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Report to the Legislature

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Executive summary

Overview

The Legislature created the Washington Office of Firearm Safety and Violence Prevention (OFSVP) in the Department of Commerce (Commerce) to support and coordinate the implementation of evidence-based firearm violence intervention and prevention strategies across the state. [RCW 43.330A.020](#) details the scope of work for this new office, including reporting requirements:

- (1) The Washington office of firearm safety and violence prevention is created within the department for the purposes of coordinating and promoting effective state and local efforts to reduce firearm violence.
- (2) The duties of the office include, but are not limited to:
 - (a) Working with law enforcement agencies, county prosecutors, researchers, and public health agencies throughout the state to identify and improve upon available data sources, data collection methods, and data-sharing mechanisms. The office will also identify gaps in available data needed for ongoing analysis, policy development, and the implementation of evidence-based firearm violence intervention and prevention strategies;
 - (b) Researching, identifying, and recommending legislative policy options to promote the implementation of statewide evidence-based firearm violence intervention and prevention strategies;
 - (c) Researching, identifying, and applying for nonstate funding to aid in the research, analysis, and implementation of statewide firearm violence intervention and prevention strategies;
 - (d) Working with the office of crime victim[s] advocacy to identify opportunities to better support victims of firearm violence, a population that is currently underrepresented among recipients of victim services;
 - (e) Contract [Contracting] for a statewide helpline, counseling, and referral services for victims, friends, and family members impacted by gun violence and community professionals and providers who engage with them;
 - (f) Contract [Contracting] with the University of Washington to develop a best practice guide for therapy for gun violence victims;
 - (g) Administering the Washington firearm violence intervention and prevention grant program as outlined in RCW 43.330A.050.
- (3) The office shall report to the appropriate legislative policy committees by December 1st every odd-numbered year on its progress and findings in analyzing data, developing strategies to prevent firearm violence, and recommendations for additional legislative policy options. The first report must be submitted by December 1, 2021.

This is the first report submitted to satisfy the reporting requirements in subsection (3).

Progress

Since [launching OFSVP](#) in March 2021, Commerce:

- Formed an OFSVP Advisory Committee
- Partnered with the [Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence](#) to establish a peer network of state violence intervention offices
- Partnered with the University of Washington [Firearm Injury & Policy Research Program - Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center](#) to:
 - Compile an inventory of over 30 existing Washington firearms-related data sources.
 - Convene owners and users of the data systems to share information and assist in identifying preliminary steps to improve access to and usefulness of data collected.

- Responded to an invitation from the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs to inform and participate in a national [Community Violence Intervention Collaborative](#).
- Partnered with the Department of Children, Youth and Families Office of Juvenile Justice to bring together representatives from existing state-funded community violence intervention and prevention programs to share best practices.
- Reached out to and met with many state and local stakeholders.

Next steps

Successfully meeting the goals the Legislature established for OFSVP will require stable, ongoing funding for the office and the grant program, solid relationships between the office and government entities, law enforcement agencies, community-based organizations and other stakeholders, and improved collection and sharing of firearm-related data across state criminal justice and public health agencies. Below are initiatives OFSVP will pursue to accomplish these goals:

- Commission a landscape analysis to better understand existing firearm violence prevention and intervention efforts across the state to identify and inform how to best secure and direct resources to communities most impacted by firearm violence.
- Continue efforts to identify, implement and build consensus around needed steps to improve the linkage, availability and quality of firearm-related data, particularly between the criminal justice and public health systems.
- Collaborate with other states, the congressional delegation and the Biden administration to ensure continued federal support for firearm violence data collection and research and continued funding for community violence intervention efforts.
- Listen to stakeholders from across the state to understand community needs and deliver the tools and support to implement evidence-based community firearm violence intervention and prevention.
- Secure ongoing, stable funding to support communities through the OFSVP grant program.

Recommendations

To support the goal of reducing firearm violence in Washington, policymakers could:

- Continue to improve incentives for and support outreach and education efforts regarding the safe storage of firearms.
- Improve outreach and education regarding risk-based tools to protect intimate partners and families at risk for firearm violence.
- Provide ongoing funding to support the OFSVP grant program.
- Continue to support, explore and identify steps to improve the availability and quality of firearm data in Washington through information collection and data sharing.
- Engage with the congressional delegation and the Biden administration to ensure continued federal support for firearm violence data collection and research and funding for community violence intervention efforts, while leveraging newly-created flexibility to use federal programs and resources for firearm violence response.

Stakeholder outreach

Overview

This section describes OFSVP's work to improve data collection and sharing, and develop and implement recommendations and strategies. This involves stakeholders identified in statute and others per [RCW 43.330A.020\(2\)\(a\)](#).

Broad outreach and stakeholder input is a foundation for this community-based work. The work of OFSVP has generated a high level of interest.

Engaging partners

The formation of an OFSVP Advisory Committee provided Commerce with a body of experts to consult as direction and focus for this work emerge. Community organizations and leaders are also key partners in the work of OFSVP. Community partners stay in touch with the neighborhoods they serve, building trust with residents and offering opportunities for families and businesses to help realize strategies for better public safety.

Through budget provisos in fiscal years 2021 and 2022, the Legislature directed operating funds to Commerce and the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) Office of Juvenile Justice to support firearms violence intervention programs in particular communities and for particular purposes. These funds support a violence intervention program in south King County serving middle and high school youth at high risk for gang involvement and participation in gun violence. Funds were also distributed in Yakima to support a program identifying youth most at risk of perpetrating gun violence, then providing them with alternatives to continued violence.

Finally, in fiscal year 2021, state funds were directed to DCYF to support community-based violence prevention and intervention services to individuals identified through the King County Prosecuting Attorney's "shots fired" social network analysis.

On June 15, 2021, OFSVP partnered with DCYF to convene a virtual gathering of representatives from community violence intervention and prevention programs in the state. All of the invited programs received funding from the Legislature through DCYF or Commerce. The event was designed as a space for the leaders of active programs to share best practices and challenges.

The 2020 legislation created an OFSVP grant program, but the program has yet to be funded. Last year's operating budget contained a proviso for \$421,000 "to continue starting up the [OFSVP] including the creation of a state and federal grant funding plan to direct resources to cities that are most impacted by community violence," but again did not fund the grant program. The one-time \$421,000 in the state fiscal year 2022 operating budget will allow Commerce to gather information necessary to most effectively support community programs, target intervention and stand up the OFSVP grant program.

In the future, funds should be allocated directly to the OFSVP grant program, allowing for a more strategic, equitable and intentional deployment of resources to support promising or successful efforts and programs in at-risk communities across the state. Funding will enable the department to implement a grant program to meet the requirements of [RCW 43.330A.050](#), including providing the longevity needed for measurable success and

supporting programs in communities most vulnerable to firearm violence. State funding will also provide leverage to attract federal investments in these community programs. The community initiatives and programs the OFSVP grant program will support are more important than ever given recent increases in firearm homicides and firearm-related injuries.

Other budget provisos and statutory provisions have been – and likely will continue to be – directed at related community safety programs. One example is the Community Law Enforcement Partnership Program created in 2021 under [Chapter 327, Laws of 2021](#) (SSB 5353). The federal Byrne-JAG grant program is another.¹

It will be prudent to coordinate and align the design and implementation of public safety programs with OFSVP's work in the future – particularly if Commerce administers those programs. To make this easier, Commerce merged OFSVP with the agency's other public safety programs in August 2021, forming the Office of Firearm Safety and Violence Prevention - Public Safety Unit under the Community Services and Housing Division.

Recommendation:

Provide ongoing funding to support a statewide OFSVP grant program as envisioned by the statute creating OFSVP.

Emerging national opportunities

While the laws, regulations, state government organization, local culture and existing capabilities vary considerably among states, there is significant benefit in forming inter-state alliances. OFSVP has worked with the Giffords Law Center to form a national network of leaders from the approximately 10 state-level programs comparable to OFSVP. This peer network regularly meets for small conversations, during which leaders from each state can learn about other programs, share best practices, challenges and opportunities, and leverage their collective voice. Among other things, states are exploring how to best leverage support and funding that has emerged at the federal level.

In a detailed statement released in April, the Biden administration laid out strong support for “historic investments in” community intervention to combat gun violence.² To enable this investment, the administration has adjusted federal guidance for many existing funding programs, including expressly allowing American Rescue Plan funds to be used by states and communities to respond to gun violence that spiked during the pandemic.³

At the invitation of the director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, OFSVP is the only state program participating in a national Community Violence Intervention Collaborative launched earlier this year.

¹ U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance, "Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program," <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/jag/overview>

² The White House, "FACT SHEET: More Details on the Biden-Harris Administration's Investments in Community Violence Interventions," (April 7, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/07/fact-sheet-more-details-on-the-biden-harris-administrations-investments-in-community-violence-interventions/>

³ Ashley Archibald, "Local Leaders Call for American Rescue Plan Act to Invest More in Black Community," South Seattle Emerald, (May 18, 2021), <https://southseattleemerald.com/2021/05/18/local-leaders-call-for-american-rescue-plan-act-to-invest-more-in-black-community/>

This participation has positioned Washington to assert its state leadership by directly linking to federal programs and policymaking.

Recommendation:

Engage with the congressional delegation and the Biden administration to ensure continued federal support for firearm violence data collection and research, as well as funding for community violence intervention efforts, while leveraging newly-created flexibility to use federal programs and resources for firearm violence response.

Progress on identifying and understanding firearm violence data

Overview

Data is crucial for communities, researchers and policymakers to understand and mitigate firearm violence. Robust data can provide a foundation for improving evidence-based policymaking. It can help build capacity for data-informed decision-making. Good data can help identify which individuals, families and communities are most at risk for firearm violence. Data can help identify which strategies should be implemented and invested in – and which aren't working – by evaluating the effectiveness of existing interventions. Finally, data can help us understand the outcomes of firearm violence, including those experienced by shooters, victims and families. Prioritizing better collection and use of data provides an opportunity to modernize and update systems and analytical capabilities to match the public's expectations.

Steps taken

To make preliminary recommendations to the Legislature, OFSVP partnered with researchers from the Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center - University of Washington to compile an inventory and descriptions of existing sources of Washington firearms-related data. The inventory identified 31 data sources in three main categories:

1. Health and healthcare data
2. Criminal justice data
3. Firearm-related licensing and sales data

"We cannot solve a problem we cannot quantify, and without timely data, we lack the information we need to make the best possible decisions ... Data collection and reporting must be improved."

Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence and Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. (2021). A Public Health Crisis Decades in the Making: A Review of 2019 CDC Gun Mortality Data, p. 4. <http://efsgv.org/2019CDCdata>.

The inventory includes data sources that directly connect to or mention firearms, although other sources might help answer questions about risk factors for experiencing firearm violence. Information was compiled on each of the 31 data sources, including a general description of the data in that system, what firearm-specific data exists, and the types of identifiers are included in that data. The compiled list of data systems identified and the individuals consulted as part of this effort will be posted on the OFSVP webpage. Using the inventory, researchers can analyze previously unexplored or isolated public health and public safety datasets to understand better the unique dynamics of fatal and non-fatal shootings and firearm-related crimes.

The owners and users of these data systems were then engaged to identify steps to improve access and usefulness of data collected. The resulting recommendations must recognize the data's existing sensitivities, including health, law enforcement or other confidentiality. At the same time, we must be able to flag avoidable or outdated restrictions on data collection and sharing and adopt measures to de-identify the data to make it more accessible in aggregate, including bridging barriers created by the traditional functional boundaries of local and state agencies. Researchers and practitioners can better focus on using available datasets to understand characteristics and trends in firearm-related incidents and offer actionable information for state and local public health, public safety and public policy leaders.

Findings

Through this early work, we have learned that — while many public health and public safety agencies track data related to firearms, firearm-related injuries and fatalities, and violent crime — the data is often collected and only accessible in silos. Data silos limit the ability of researchers and policymakers to understand the problem and improve responses to gun violence. In addition, the voluntary framework of many criminal justice and public health surveillance data collection systems means that some of this information is recorded inconsistently among jurisdictions and is limited or incomplete when it is collected. Moreover, we know much more about firearm deaths than firearms-related injuries.

Renewed focus on firearm data and research at the federal level is an encouraging development. However, at the state level, some steps can be taken concurrently to improve the availability and quality of data through information collection and data sharing methods to address the concerns discussed above.

Recommendation:

Continue to support, explore and identify steps to improve the availability and quality of firearm data in Washington through information collection and data sharing.

Firearm violence data findings

The launch of OFSVP comes as the country contends with an increase in firearm violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴ Although firearm violence levels remain below historic peaks in the mid-1990s, recent increases are thought to be attributable to an undermining of services and stability due to the pandemic and social unrest related to policing. Firearm violence is a persistent health and safety threat for communities and families in Washington, where a person is killed with a gun every 12 hours.⁵

These deaths and injuries are preventable. There is emerging public and national interest in supporting data collection, research and intervention tools as an alternative to more traditional law enforcement and criminal justice responses to firearm violence. OSFVP is well positioned to engage in these efforts with Washington communities and stakeholders.

Types of firearm violence

Over the years, Washington state policymakers, academic researchers, public health officials and advocacy groups have taken steps to understand and address gun violence in our state. Existing efforts have led to the adoption of local and statewide prevention and safety measures related to extreme risk protection orders, enhanced background checks, safe storage, and restrictions on bump stocks and "ghost guns" (unlicensed homemade or improvised firearms). However, as rates of firearm deaths and injuries persist, it is clear that more needs to be done. This section provides data on the three main types of firearm violence – suicide, domestic violence and community gun violence – and recommendations for policy options to address them.

Suicide

Suicide continues to be the most common form of death from firearms, accounting for 76% of gun fatalities in Washington.⁶ Three out of every four gun deaths in Washington are from suicide, and nearly 48% of all suicide deaths in Washington involve firearms. From 2013 to 2017, 2,725 people in Washington died by gun-related suicide.⁷ There are few intentionally self-inflicted firearm-related injuries seen in hospital emergency departments because most people who use a firearm in a suicide attempt die from their injury.⁸ Firearm availability in the home significantly increases the risk of suicide.⁹ Removing access to a firearm decreases the likelihood of firearm-related suicide.¹⁰ One study found that in most of King County's youth suicide deaths from firearms, youth obtained the weapon from a family member, and in roughly a third of cases, the weapon was

⁴ Josiah Bates, "2020 Ends as One of America's Most Violent Years in Decades," Time, (Dec. 30, 2020), <https://time.com/5922082/2020-gun-violence-homicides-record-year/>

⁵ Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "The State of Gun Violence in Washington," (2020), <https://giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Giffords-Law-Center-State-of-Gun-Violence-in-Washington-2020.pdf>

⁶ Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "Washington Fact Sheet," (Jan. 2020), <https://giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Giffords-Law-Center-State-of-Gun-Violence-in-Washington-2020.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ CDC, Fast Facts, "Firearm Violence Prevention," <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/firearms/fastfact.html>.

⁹ Mann and Michel, "Prevention of firearm suicide in the United States: What works and what is possible," (2016), American Journal of Psychiatry. American Psychiatric Association, <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2016.16010069>

¹⁰ Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "Safe Storage," <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/child-consumer-safety/safe-storage/>

stored unlocked or loaded.¹¹ This data speaks to the need for continued efforts to require or encourage secure storage of firearms.

In 2019 alone, the Department of Veterans Affairs reported that 6,261 veterans died by suicide nationally.¹² In addition, the Department of Defense reported 580 suicide deaths among Active Components, Reserve and National Guard service members in 2020, and 202 suicide deaths among military family members in 2019.¹³ These numbers are of concern in Washington, given our relatively large active military and veteran population.

Recommendation:

Continue to support outreach and education and improve incentives for safe storage of firearms.

Domestic violence

Firearms make domestic violence incidents far more likely to end in death. From 2007 to 2016 in Washington, 94 women were killed by their intimate partner with a gun, accounting for 46% of intimate partner homicides.¹⁴ Federal and state laws can limit firearm possession and ownership for individuals subject to various court orders or who have been convicted of certain domestic violence crimes.¹⁵ In addition, in Washington, Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO) can temporarily prevent individuals at high risk of harming themselves or others from accessing firearms.¹⁶ Using this tool, family and household members or police can obtain a court order upon a showing of evidence that the person poses a significant danger, including danger resulting from threatening or violent behavior. As of September 2020, 521 ERPOs had been filed statewide since the law went into effect in 2017. However, no ERPOs have yet been filed in 12 of Washington's 39 counties,¹⁷ suggesting a need for improved education and outreach such as the "Three Interventions Toolkit" developed by the Harborview Injury and Prevention and Research Center.¹⁸

Recommendation:

Improve outreach and education regarding risk-based tools available to protect intimate partners and families at risk of firearm violence.

¹¹ Public Health – Seattle and King County, "The impact of firearms on King County children and youth," <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/data/youth-firearms.aspx>

¹² Department of Veterans Affairs (2021). 2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report. Available online: [2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/vsp/2021-national-veteran-suicide-prevention-annual-report/)

¹³ Annual Suicide Report for Calendar Year 2020 and Department of Defense (2020). 2020 Annual Suicide Report. Both available at www.dspo.mil/asr

¹⁴ Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "Washington Fact Sheet," (Jan. 2020)

¹⁵ See 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(9); 27 C.F.R. § 478.32(a)(9); RCW 9.41.040(2)(a)(ii).

¹⁶ Codified under Chapter 7.94 RCW <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=7.94>

¹⁷ Green and O'Sullivan, "Washington voters led much of the nation in saying guns must sometimes be seized to prevent violence. How's the law working?," The Seattle Times, (June 1, 2021), <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/washington-was-at-the-forefront-of-a-gun-violence-prevention-law-heres-how-its-played-out/>

¹⁸ [Three Interventions Toolkit - Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center \(hiprc.org\)](https://www.hiprc.org/three-interventions-toolkit/)

Community gun violence

Another type of firearm violence is community gun violence, sometimes called urban gun violence. This type of firearm violence is defined as potentially lethal interpersonal violence on the street. Reducing community gun violence requires different policies and strategies than other forms of gun violence. Non-fatal shooting victims and witnesses to multiple shootings are at a greater risk of being shot, killed with a firearm or arrested for a firearm-related offense in future incidents.

Nationally, homicide, aggravated assault and gun assault rates were significantly higher during 2020 and the first quarter of 2021 compared to previous years.¹⁹ In Washington in 2020, the number of overall shooting victims (337) in King County was up nearly 36% from the three-year average (248), with a 27% increase in the number of fatal shooting victims and a 38% increase in the number of non-fatal shooting victims.²⁰

Community gun violence disproportionately affects low-income communities and communities of color, with young men of color being particularly vulnerable. For example, black men ages 18-24 are 20 times more likely than white men of the same age to be murdered with a gun.²¹ Of the 337 shooting victims in King County in 2020, 88% were male, 43% were under 25, and 76% were people of color.²²

By interrupting cycles of violence and retaliation to reduce the incidence of homicides, shootings, and aggravated assaults, community violence intervention (CVI) programs have been shown to reduce violence by as much as 60%.²³ These programs leverage trusted messengers who work directly with individuals most likely to commit gun violence, intervene in conflicts, and connect individuals and families to social, health and wellness, and economic services to reduce the likelihood of violence as an answer to conflict. The programs can include violence interrupters, service providers, law enforcement officers, emergency room providers, educators, faith leaders, and others to offer alternatives on the street, in hospitals, schools, or in homes.

In Washington, there are firearm violence intervention efforts in some at-risk

The cost of firearm violence

The loss of a loved one is, in many ways, impossible to quantify. The emotional and financial toll on a family can feel indescribable. In addition to the pain, suffering and lost income a family might experience, state and local governments must also absorb law enforcement, criminal justice, and healthcare costs.

"Much of this tab is picked up by the public. Up to 85% of gunshot victims, for example, are either uninsured or on some form of publicly funded insurance. Additionally, law enforcement efforts are funded entirely by taxpayer dollars. As a result, the direct annual cost of gun violence to Washington taxpayers is over \$219 million."

Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "The Economic Cost of Gun Violence in Washington," <https://giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/18.08-FACT-Cost-of-Gun-Violence-in-Washington.pdf>

¹⁹ Rosenfeld, Richard and Ernesto Lopez, "Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities: March 2021 Update," Council on Criminal Justice, (May 2021), <https://covid19.counciloncj.org/2021/05/21/impact-report-covid-19-and-crime-4/>

²⁰ King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office - Crime Strategies Unit, "Shots Fired 2020 Year-end Report," (January 2021), https://kingcounty.gov/~media/depts/prosecutor/documents/2021/Shots_Fired_Final_2020_Year_End_Report.ashx?la=en

²¹ Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "Washington Fact Sheet," (Jan. 2020)

²² King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office - Crime Strategies Unit, "Shots Fired 2020 Year-end Report," (January 2021)

²³ Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "Healing Communities in Crisis," (2019), <https://giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Healing-Communities-in-Crisis.pdf>. See also Anthony A. Braga, David M. Kennedy, Elin J. Waring, and Anne Morrison Piehl, "Problem-oriented Policing, Deterrence, and Youth Violence: An Evaluation of Boston's Operation Ceasefire," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 38, no. 3 (2001): 195–225.

communities. Those efforts are supported by cities and counties, private foundations, federal funds and, in a few cases, state funds directly appropriated by the Legislature through state agencies. The 2020 Legislature created a grant program for OFSVP to support violence intervention efforts in communities, but the program has not been funded. In the future, funds should be allocated directly to the OFSVP grant program to strategically deploy the resources to support the state's promising or successful efforts and programs.

Recommendation:

Provide ongoing funding to the OFSVP grant program to support violence intervention efforts in communities.

Next steps

Positioned to lead statewide efforts, OFSVP has an important role in leveraging and enhancing local organizations' expertise, relationships and capabilities. OFSVP is committed to including community organizations, leaders and impacted families in planning processes, providing funding to support their activities, and engaging them as partners in addressing local needs. Since the office launched in early 2021, much has been accomplished. In the near future, Commerce plans to:

- Commission a landscape analysis to identify how Commerce can best direct resources to communities most impacted by firearm violence across the state. This landscape analysis will likely:
 - Assess the existing public safety ecosystem
 - Identify gaps in violence prevention and intervention services
 - Make recommendations to strengthen and align ongoing efforts and build the capacity to expand programming where it is needed most
- Continue efforts to identify, then recommend and implement steps to improve the availability and quality of firearm violence-related data through information collection and data sharing.
- Collaborate with other states, the congressional delegation and the Biden administration to ensure continued federal support for firearm violence data collection and research and funding for community violence intervention efforts, while leveraging newly-created flexibility to use federal programs and resources for firearm violence response.
- Work with leaders, organizations and agencies across the state to provide the tools needed to implement evidence-based community firearm violence intervention and prevention efforts.