MENTAL ILLNESS AND GUNS

*Mental illness is not the cause of gun violence*

Nearly 1 in 5 American adults live with a mental illness

- An estimated 44.6 million American adults live with a mental illness in a given year.
- Approximately 25% of these individuals (11.2 million) live with a serious mental illness.

The majority of individuals with mental illness do not engage in violence against others. Most violence is caused by factors other than mental illness

- Violence has many interacting causes and mental illness alone is very rarely the cause. Only 4% of interpersonal violence is attributable to serious mental illness alone. Only 4% of interpersonal violence is attributable to serious mental illness alone. Only 4% of interpersonal violence is attributable to serious mental illness alone.
- Most people with serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, are never violent toward others, and are in fact more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violence.

There are evidence-based factors that do increase the risk of violence

- Past violent behavior is the best predictor of future violence, regardless of a diagnosis of mental illness.
- Significant risk factors for interpersonal violence include, among others:
  - Male
  - Young age
  - Exposure to violence
  - Alcohol or substance misuse
  - Illegal use of controlled substances
  - Impulsive anger
- There are certain times, in certain settings, when small sub-groups of individuals with serious mental illness are at increased risk of violence, such as the period surrounding involuntary psychiatric hospitalization.

Mental illness can be a risk factor for suicide, but according to recent CDC data, less than half of all suicide decedents were known to have a mental health condition

- Significant risk factors for suicide include, among others:
  - Alcohol or substance misuse
  - Relational, social, work, or financial loss
  - Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
  - Easy access to lethal methods, such as firearms
- Suicide is an important part of gun violence prevention. However, focusing only on mental illness will not be sufficient to prevent these deaths.

**Bottom Line:**

*Mental illness is a poor indicator of gun violence. The focus should be on dangerous behavior – not diagnoses.*
HOW TO TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH WITHOUT THE STIGMA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROBLEMATIC</th>
<th>PREFERRED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentally ill, mental defective</td>
<td>Person with mental illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person-first language is preferred. A diagnosis does not define an individual.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dangerously mentally ill</td>
<td>Person with serious (severe) mental illness</td>
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<tr>
<td>The word “dangerous” is stigmatizing, not based on facts, and not a clinical word. No person is dangerous purely because they have a serious mental illness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Committed suicide</td>
<td>Died by suicide</td>
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<td>“Committed” conflates suicide with being a crime or criminal behavior, a holdover from when many states classified suicide as a felony.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Successful suicide</td>
<td>Suicide death</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Successful” implies a desired or positive outcome.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failed, unsuccessful suicide attempt</td>
<td>Non-fatal suicide attempt</td>
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<td>“Failed” has a negative connotation and glamorizes suicide attempts.</td>
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7 Ibid.