

Universal Background Checks

Including Temporary Transfers to Prevent Suicide

A federal universal background check policy will be an effective gun violence prevention and public health law -- and including a specific exception for temporary transfers to prevent imminent death or self-harm will strengthen the legislation. Only twelve states have a relevant exception that affects temporary transfers for suicide prevention in their universal background check law, and these exceptions vary greatly from state to state.¹ Including a clear exception for temporary firearm transfers to prevent imminent death or self-harm is not only important for suicide prevention and safety planning, but also will mitigate any confusion around the legality of temporary transfers.

Firearm Suicide in the United States

- Suicides constitute three of every five gun deaths.²
- Suicide by firearm constitute half of all completed suicides and take an average of 21,000 lives annually.²
- Firearms are the most lethal means of intentional self-harm, resulting in death approximately 90% of the time.³
- Access to a gun in the home increases the odds of suicide more than three-fold.⁴

Reducing Access to Firearms for Suicide Prevention

- Reducing access to lethal means, including firearms, is an evidence-based suicide prevention practice.⁵
- Temporarily removing firearms from individuals during or in anticipation of a suicidal crisis makes it less likely an individual will die during a suicide attempt, as other means are less lethal.⁵
- If an individual is experiencing suicidal ideation and has access to a firearm, it is often recommended to temporarily store the firearm away from the home or to store the firearm locked and unloaded, and in a way so that the individual at high risk does not have access until they are no longer in crisis.⁵

Universal Background Checks

- Universal background check laws, without relevant exceptions for temporary transfer of firearms for suicide prevention, may affect the ability to easily transfer a firearm temporarily to reduce suicide risk.¹
- Physicians and mental health professionals may be unwilling to discuss firearm transfer and storage because of their uncertainty over the legality of temporary firearm transfers, therefore limiting their ability to effectively counsel patients and conduct lethal means safety counseling.¹

Allowing temporary firearm transfers to prevent suicide will help save lives

¹ McCourt AD, Vernick JS, Betz ME, Brandspigel SB, & Runyan CW. (2017). Temporary Transfer of Firearms From the Home to Prevent Suicide, Legal Obstacles and Recommendations. JAMA Internal Medicine.

² National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. 1999-2016 US Suicide Deaths and Rates per 100,000. Fatal Injury Reports, 1999-2016. <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html>.

³ Azrael D. & Miller M. (2016). Reducing suicide without affecting underlying mental health: Theoretical underpinnings and a review of the evidence base linking the availability of lethal means and suicide. In R. C. O'Connor & J. Pirkis (Eds.), *The International Handbook of Suicide Prevention*, Second Edition (pp. 637-662). West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons.

⁴ Anglemyer A, Horvath T, & Rutherford G (2014). The accessibility of firearms and risk for suicide and homicide victimization among household members: A systematic review and meta analysis. *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

⁵ Allchin A, Chaplin V. (2017). Breaking Through Barriers: The Emerging Role of Healthcare Provider Training Programs in Firearm Suicide Prevention. Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy.



States with Universal Background Check Laws

Table adapted from McCourt et al. (2017)¹

Universal Background Check Law	State	Relevant exceptions affecting temporary transfer for suicide prevention
Universal background check without permit	California	Temporary, infrequent loans to family; individual receiving firearm must have firearm safety certificate
	Colorado	Family; 72 hours transfers
	Delaware	Loans of ≤ 14 days to person known to owner; family members
	Nebraska	Certain family members; peace officer
	Oregon	For the purpose of preventing imminent death or serious physical injury (no time limit); family members
	Pennsylvania	Specific family members
	Rhode Island	None
	Washington	Gift transfers between family members; law enforcement acting within scope of duties
Permit system	Connecticut	None
	District of Columbia	None
	Hawaii	None for handguns; for long guns, loans to adults for 15 days (in-state use; 75 days out of state use)
	Illinois	Gift to family members; law enforcement acting within scope of duties
	Iowa	Family within second degree of consanguinity or affinity
	Maryland	All “loans”
	Massachusetts	None
	Michigan	None
	New Jersey	None
	New York	Immediate family members
	North Carolina	None