

**Firearm Safety Stakeholder Group**  
*Convened by the North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force & Safe Kids NC*

**Report to the Unintentional Death Prevention Committee  
of the NC Child Fatality Task Force**

**November 7, 2017**

**I. Background**

For North Carolina children and youth ages 0 to 17 during the five-year period between 2010 and 2014, there were 279 firearm-related hospitalizations and 777 firearm-related emergency department (ED) visits; in 2016 alone there were 97 firearm-related hospitalizations and 314 ED visits.<sup>1</sup> Between 2010 and 2014 there were 74 firearm-related deaths to NC children age 0 to 14, and 136 firearm-related deaths to NC youth age 15 to 17, for a total of 210 deaths.<sup>2</sup> In 2016 alone, there were 15 firearm-related deaths to NC children age 14 and under, and 36 firearm-related deaths to NC youth age 15 to 17, for a total of 51 deaths.<sup>3</sup> During the five-year period between 2012 and 2016, firearms (of all types) were the lethal means used in over 35% of suicides and 25% of homicides among children ages 0 to 14, and in almost 50% of suicides and over 90% of homicides among youth ages 15 to 17.<sup>4</sup>

According to the 2011 North Carolina Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 41.6% of North Carolina residents own firearms (2011 was the last year this data was collected). Approximately half of North Carolina residents with a firearm reported that the firearm is unsecured (secured = gun cabinet, trigger or cable lock), and 62.5% of residents who are parents left their firearms unsecured. Nationally, approximately one in three handguns is kept loaded and unlocked and most children know where guns are kept by their parents; more than 75 percent of guns used by youth in suicide attempts were kept in the home of the victim, a relative, or a friend.<sup>5</sup>

Nationally and in North Carolina, suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth between the ages of 10 and 17.<sup>6</sup> There were over 300 suicide deaths to North Carolina youth age 17 and younger during the ten-year time-period between 2006 and 2015.<sup>7</sup> For the 2015 NC Youth Risk Behavior survey, 9.3% of NC high school students surveyed reported attempting suicide, which is almost double the rates reported in 2011 and 2013.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Data according to NC Violent Death Reporting System. Note: In October 2015, there was a change in the coding system used in administrative data sets that impacted the definition used to identify firearm-related injury cases. Because of this change, data are unavailable for 2015, and data pre-2015 are not comparable to data collected after this change occurred. For more information on the coding transition visit: <http://www.injuryfreenc.ncdhhs.gov/DataSurveillance/ICD-10-Transition-1pg-Summary.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, NC Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>3</sup> North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, NC Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>4</sup> NC Violent Death Reporting System, NC Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>5</sup> *Gun Violence: Facts and Statistics*, from the Center for Injury Research and Prevention, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Research Institute.

<sup>6</sup> NC data - NC DHHS State Center for Health Statistics, based on 2015 NC Death Certificate data. US data - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, based on 2015 Underlying Cause of Death from CDC WONDER Online Database.

<sup>7</sup> State Center for Health Statistics, NC Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>8</sup> 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, North Carolina High School Survey:  
<http://www.nchealthyschools.org/docs/data/yrbs/2015/statewide/highschool/trend.pdf>.

In 2016, the North Carolina Child Fatality Prevention Team recommended to the Child Fatality Task Force (CFTF) taking action to address access to lethal means by children & youth. This included a specific recommendation to establish a firearm safety stakeholder group to address an access to means awareness and safe storage campaign.

The Task Force voted to carry out this recommendation through a 2017 administrative item on its agenda to have the Task Force and Safe Kids NC convene a group of firearm safety stakeholders to examine and make recommendations related to firearm safety, reporting back to the CFTF Unintentional Death Prevention Committee by November 2017.

## **II. Goal and charge of the FSSG**

The goal of this stakeholder group was to convene a diverse group of firearm safety stakeholders to examine and make recommendations related to firearm safety, and to report back to the Child Fatality Task Force in the fall of 2017 with the components of the group's work outlined by the Task Force as follows:

- Examination of firearm safety messaging, materials, and training currently in use in NC and nationally.
- Development of a statewide approach to firearm safety education and awareness.
- Examination and potential implementation/expansion of programs to distribute gun locks and/or lock boxes.
- Identification of effective local firearm safety groups or coalitions whose structure and efforts could serve as a model for duplication in other local communities.
- Recommendations as to whether/how NC could have an ongoing stakeholder group charged with addressing firearm safety to reduce firearm-related child deaths in NC.
- Recommendations as to associated funding that would be needed to sustain efforts.

## **III. Group members, educators, and conveners**

### **Conveners**

**Kella Hatcher**, Executive Director, NC Child Fatality Task Force  
**Jan Parker and Shannon Bullock**, Safe Kids NC

### **Consultants and Educators**

- **Ingrid Bou-Saada, Shana Geary, Nidhi Sachdeva, Hanaleah Hoberman, Scott Proescholdbell, and Alan Dellapenna** -- Injury and Violence Prevention Branch of the NC Division of Public Health
- **Gail Neely** – Durham Gun Team
- **Dr. Meghan Shanahan**, Research Scientist, Injury Prevention Research Center, UNC Chapel Hill

### **Stakeholder Group Members**

**Dr. Tamera Coyne Beasley**, Director, NC Child Health Research Network and Professor of Pediatrics and Internal Medicine, UNC Chapel Hill

**Becky Ceartas**, North Carolinians Against Gun Violence

**Natasha Donnelly**, Juvenile Justice Health Services, Department of Public Safety, and representing the State Child Fatality Prevention Team– (also a suicide prevention expert)

**Dr. Ellen Essick**, NC Healthy Schools Section Chief, Department of Public Instruction

**Phil Harris**, Chief of Police, City of Brevard

**Trishana Jones**, NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence

**Peg O’Connell**, Safe Kids NC Steering Committee Chair

**Jim Parker**, Hunter Educator

**Kelly Ransdell**, Safe Kids NC Steering Committee member

**Anthony Roulette**, National Rifle Association

**Henry Schaffer**, researcher/educator

**Bill Tarplee**, NC Wildlife Officer

**Vanessa Totten**, Assistant Attorney General, Department of Justice

#### **IV. Process undertaken**

##### **A. Logistics and elements of the process**

The FSSG had three meetings (approx. three hours each). Conveners and educators performed research and provided the structure, tools, and information needed to facilitate meetings including these specific elements in the process:

- Presentation and examination of data related to firearm-related deaths and injuries to children and youth, as well as safe storage practices.
- Contribution of input from FSSG members related to their hopes for group achievement, as well as what they anticipate as the greatest challenges and strengths for the group and for particular types of firearm safety initiatives.
- Presentation and examination of various state and national firearm safety education and awareness campaigns and the evidence of effectiveness (or lack of evidence) for various strategies.
- Small group work, worksheets, and an online survey to facilitate the prioritization of target behaviors, audience, and strategies for a firearm safety education and awareness initiative in North Carolina.

- Large group discussion and sharing of knowledge and information from all perspectives.
- In-person and online discussion to facilitate group approval of recommendations and this final report.

## **B. Greatest hope for the work of this group**

The greatest hope identified for the work of the group was to bring together diverse viewpoints and expertise to develop strategies that will reduce firearm-related deaths and injuries to children and youth in North Carolina.

## **C. Challenges identified**

Challenges identified by the group included: crafting agreed-upon effective messaging; implementing that messaging; having limited resources (people and funding) to achieve the work of targeting and reaching the right audiences to be effective; and recognizing that different communities and segments of the population require different strategies.

## **D. Strengths identified**

Strengths identified by the group included the ability to enlist the help of community partners such as Safe Kids and Law Enforcement Agencies to reach people at the local level, along with the ability to tap existing resources and expertise at the state and national level to move forward.

## **V. Guiding Principles for North Carolina Firearm Safety Education and Awareness Efforts**

### **A. Best practices for effective educational interventions**

The FSSG planning team identified ten evidence-based “best practices” in the research and evaluation literature for effective educational interventions related to firearm safety or other similar behavior change efforts. Through a survey and subsequent group discussion, the FSSG prioritized principles of effective prevention education.

#### **1. Top priority principles** -- The top three principles FSSG members identified are:

- Increase a sense of susceptibility to an adverse outcome (“this could happen to me/my family”)
- Incorporate messengers that resonate with the target audience (utilize role models for the message who are viewed as trustworthy, credible, and competent)
- Increase a sense of self-confidence of the “target behavior” (“this change is easy to do”)

#### **2. Second priority principles** -- Two other best practices were also favorably ranked. These include:

- Focus on positive feelings resulting from the behavior change/action (“by doing this, I could save a child’s life”)
- Increase sense of severity of an adverse outcome (“not doing this could result in a child’s death”)

**3. Third priority principles** -- The remaining best practices from the research and evaluation literature that the group did not rank as high as the above top five, but are still important, include:

- Address barriers for easy access (convenience/meeting the consumer where they are, e.g., home delivery of safety intervention such as gun lock)
- Make the message dramatic and memorable (but not a scare tactic)
- Increase perception of effectiveness of adopting the target behavior (“this could really work to protect a child from harm”)
- Incorporate cues to action (reminders to follow through, e.g., follow-up phone calls, safety posters where firearms are purchased)
- Focus on a message of hope and emphasize preventability (especially important for suicide prevention)

#### **B. Emphasis on competence and expertise**

The group emphasized the importance of involving those with the necessary experience and expertise to facilitate an effective initiative. For example, it is important to involve those with expertise related to mental health and suicide prevention, domestic violence, firearms, hunting, public health/injury prevention and other areas to provide input as plans for any initiative are being developed.

### **VI. Priorities Identified for Education and Awareness Efforts**

The FSSG recognized early on the challenges of effectively reaching various audiences with limited resources. While many strategies could be employed, not all could be undertaken immediately or simultaneously. With that in mind, the FSSG developed priority strategies for initial statewide efforts, with the hope that ongoing efforts beyond an initial phase could include additional strategies. These priorities include the following:

#### **A. The primary target audience should be all gun owners.**

The FSSG considered whether efforts should specifically target subcategories of gun owners such as parents and caregivers, and also considered whether a campaign should be aimed at all adults (not just gun owners), or whether a campaign should be aimed at educating children or youth. While there could be some benefits to having efforts that target these different audiences, the initial priority focus should be on all gun owners.

#### **B. The primary target behavior(s) should be use of a gun lock (for guns not locked away).**

Primary target behaviors were prioritized based on importance and changeability. Importance was defined as how critical it was to focus on this particular behavior to reduce injury and death of children and youth due to firearms. Changeability was defined as the ability to reduce injury and death of children and youth due to firearms by targeting this behavior, based on the effectiveness of available interventions, and their ability to make measurable impacts.

Use of a gun lock was identified as a top behavior that was both important and something that was possible to get people to do (changeable). Although storing firearms in other ways that are safe, such as keeping them in a lockbox or a locked drawer or cabinet are also effective, the FSSG believed it may be harder to get people to do this (less changeable than use of a gun lock).

**C. The primary target strategies should include the following:**

1. **Creating and distributing a community mobilization toolkit for local community groups that encompasses multiple prevention strategies.** A priority strategy that should be included in the toolkit is a PSA-type video for distribution through channels such as social media campaigns, with potential for broader use. Another important strategy for the toolkit includes information and materials to support community mobilization events.
2. **Acquisition and distribution of free or discounted gun locks.**
3. **Incorporation of information related to current NC laws on safe storage into prevention strategies**

**VII. Recommendations to the NC Child Fatality Task Force related to statewide efforts toward firearm safety and education to prevent firearm-related deaths and injuries to children**

**A. State-level development of a website**

A website should be developed (or likely dedicated pages on an existing agency or academic site) where NC citizens and communities can go for information about firearm safety and protecting children and youth from firearm-related deaths and injuries. This website should include, at a minimum:

- Messaging about the importance of safe storage
- Data on firearm-related deaths and injuries to children and youth
- Facts and data related to safe storage of firearms
- A toolkit (see below) for communities to use for firearm safety education and awareness at the local level
- Contact information for obtaining a free or discounted gun lock or lock box
- Information on NC's safe storage laws
- Links to various resources related to firearm safety such as those addressing domestic violence, hunter education, and suicide prevention

**B. State-level development of a firearm safety toolkit that would include, at a minimum:**

- Data related to firearm deaths and injuries to children as well as safe storage of firearms, providing context as to WHY this toolkit should be used in communities
- Video PSA that can be distributed for use on social media and beyond
- A flyer and a poster that can be downloaded, printed, and posted with suggested venues for posting
- Contact information for obtaining free or discounted gun locks (if no existing local program for obtaining)
- Suggested structure, content, participants, and media outreach for holding a local gun safety education/awareness event

- List of the types of stakeholders for communities to involve in firearm safety initiatives
- Contact information to connect with experts who may be able to visit communities to make educational presentations
- Contact information to connect with experts who can offer advice on getting an ongoing firearm safety stakeholder group started in their community

**C. State-coordinated outreach for distribution of toolkits to local communities**

**D. The formation of an ongoing Firearm Safety Stakeholder Group with diverse representation**

**E. State funding for the purchase and distribution of gun locks and to support implementation of the above recommendations**

The group recommends that organizations leading implementation of the above recommendations include an organization with technical expertise related to injury prevention (such as UNC’s Injury Prevention Research Center) as well as an organization structured to reach local communities (such as Safe Kids NC).

**VIII. Tapping Existing Resources**

The FSSG encourages those implementing the above recommendations to generously utilize, where possible, existing state and national resources, using those resources directly and in lieu of developing new resources, or using those resources as a model for developing NC’s own version.

Examples of existing organizations and efforts that could be accessed and/or duplicated to carry out FSSG recommendations include (but are not limited to) the following.

**A. Project ChildSafe:** Provides free Safety Kits to Law Enforcement partner agencies that contain a cable-style gun lock and safety instructions. Citizens can obtain these kits from participating law enforcement agencies for free. They also have a wealth of downloadable resources such as:

- Hunt S.A.F.E. checklist
- PCS Pledge
- Ten Tips for firearm safety in your home
- Safe Storage options infographic
- PSA video: safety is a habit
- Store your firearms responsibly brochures
- Press Release Example for National Safety Month
- Sample Social Media Posts for National Safety Month
- Firearms and Suicide Prevention Brochure

<http://www.projectchildsafe.org/resource-library>.

**B. Durham Gun Safety Team and “Love Our Kids, Lock Your Guns”:** A project that brings together a broad group of stakeholder organizations to meet once a month. Operated out of the Durham County Department of Public Health, this program consists of counseling on gun safety tailored to the needs of participants, providing gun safety information, and a gun lock.

[http://www.injuryfreenc.ncdhhs.gov/preventionResources/docs/Casestudy\\_Durham\(reformatted\).pdf](http://www.injuryfreenc.ncdhhs.gov/preventionResources/docs/Casestudy_Durham(reformatted).pdf).

**C. Means Matter Campaign** from the Harvard Injury Control Research Center: This campaign focuses on suicide and has educational resources including summary data, a “Means Matter” booklet, a power point presentation, sample brochures from state’s firearm safety campaigns, and more.

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/>.

**D. New Hampshire Firearm Safety Coalition and the NH Gun Shop Project**, currently being replicated in 20 states. Affiliated with Means Matter (above), it provides materials for firearm retailers and range owners on ways to help prevent suicide, including encouraging them to display and distribute suicide prevention materials.

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/gun-shop-project/>