

Position Statement on Firearm Access, Acts of Violence and the Relationship to Mental Illness and Mental Health Services

North Carolina Psychiatric Association

Approved by the Executive Committee, March 5, 2014

The North Carolina Psychiatric Association acknowledges the lawful and appropriate use of firearms by the citizens of North Carolina including members of the Association. Nevertheless the North Carolina Psychiatric Association must recognize the critical public health need for action to promote safe communities and reduce mortality due to firearm-related violence. The North Carolina Psychiatric Association supports the position adopted by the American Psychiatric Association in this regard. As such, the North Carolina Psychiatric Association supports the following actions:

1. Many deaths and injuries from gun violence can be prevented through legislative and regulatory action on the national and statewide levels.

These actions should include:

- a. Limiting access to guns by persons who are identified as dangerous, whether or not they have been diagnosed with a mental disorder;
- b. Requiring more extensive background checks and waiting periods on all gun sales or transactions;
- c. Requiring safe storage of all firearms in the home, office or other places of daily assembly; and
- d. Limiting access to semi-automatic firearms, high capacity magazines and high velocity ammunition to reduce risk of critical injuries and death from firearms;

2. Research and training on the causes of violence and its effective control should be a national and statewide priority.

- a. Given the difficulty in accurately identifying those persons likely to commit acts of violence, federal and state resources should be directed toward the development and testing of methods that assist in the identification of high-risk individuals.
- b. Funding for such research should be supported broadly, drawing on a range of resources such as the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, the North Carolina Department of Justice, our eminent institutions of higher learning, and community foundations. Administrative, regulatory or legislative barriers to federal and statewide support for violence research, including research on firearms violence, should be removed.
- c. Psychiatrists, as well as other physicians and health professionals, must continue to be trained to assess and respond to those individuals who may be at heightened risk for violence or suicide. Such training should include education about speaking with patients about firearm access and safety. Appropriate federal and state resources should be allocated for training these professionals.
- d. Resources should be increased for safety education programs related to responsible use and storage of firearms.

3. Recent attention to the mental health system has highlighted the need for improved services and access to care.

- a. Early identification and treatment of mental disorders, including school-based screening, should be prioritized in a state-wide agenda to augment prevention strategies, reduce the stigma of treatment, and diminish the consequences of untreated mental disorders.

- b. Barriers to accessing appropriate evaluation and treatment services for those people with mental illness who ultimately pose an increased risk of harm to themselves or other people should be removed. Likewise the North Carolina Psychiatric Association urges the removal of barriers to accessing services for those individuals suffering from substance abuse. Access to care and associated resources to enhance community follow up should be maximized to ensure that patients obtain treatment and are not lost to care.
- c. Because privacy in mental health treatment is essential to encourage persons in need of treatment to seek care, laws mandating psychiatrists and other mental health professionals to report all individuals who appear to be dangerous to themselves or others to law enforcement officials are likely to be counterproductive and should not be adopted.
- d. The Governor of North Carolina should consolidate and coordinate current interests in improving mental health care in this state by appointing a Mental Health Advisory Commission to develop a vision for an integrated system of mental health care which corrects prior reforms that have been responsible for the degradation of the quality of mental health care provided to the citizens of North Carolina..

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