



# Addressing Firearm Safety in Your Suicidal Patient

A RESEARCH BRIEF

## 41,000

PERSONS DIE by suicide annually in the United States

FIREARMS account for over

## 50%

OF DEATHS BY SUICIDE

Gun ownership is a normal part of life in America. In rural areas, a high percentage, if not all, of your patients will have guns in their home. Having a conversation with suicidal persons about temporarily removing firearms from the home has great promise to save lives.

### Emerging Research Suggests:

- Primary care providers are hesitant to discuss firearms with patients.
- Firearm owners find questions about guns in the home invasive and resist answering questions truthfully on intake forms.
- Data entered into electronic health records during patient contact time raises patients' suspicion that data will become part of a federal registry of gun owners.
- Trust is critical to having an effective conversation about temporarily removing access to firearms.

### DATA INDICATE:

- Rural areas have higher rates of suicide.
- Firearms are the most common method of death by suicide.
- 64% of people who die by suicide see their primary care provider within a year of dying.
- Reducing access to firearms lowers suicide rates.

### Tips for Putting Research into Practice:

- **Suggest with a tentative tone rather than asking directly about firearms, for example, say:**  
“If you have guns in the home, now might be a good time to talk about it.”
- **Ask generally:**  
“What can we do to keep you safe?”  
**Normalize gun ownership by asking:**  
“Can we talk about your guns?”
- **If the patient tells you they have firearms, tell them that you respect their 2nd amendment rights and you want to find a way to keep them safe.**
- **Make a safety plan that includes a plan for temporarily removing firearms. Bring a trusted friend or family member into the conversation, if the patient is willing.**
- **Suggest that:**  
“Now might be a good time to give your guns to a friend or family member for safekeeping.”
- **Move away from your computer while talking. Stop entering information into the EHR. Patients may feel their rights are being compromised.**

If you would like support while talking with a suicidal patient, call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at **1-800-273-TALK** (8722) for 24/7 assistance.

Take your time. Suicide is a life or death issue.