

Title: Firearm Injury Prevention Legislation in Illinois

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Introduction: Gun violence is a public health crisis. A third of homes with children also have guns, and many of these are not stored safely. It is the leading cause of death in Illinois children ages 1-17. Further, this burden falls disproportionately on Black youth. The objective of the project was to pass legislation to decrease the burden of firearm injuries on children in Illinois.

Description: Through a Gun Violence Prevention workgroup including health care providers, the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, government relations teams at children's hospitals, the Illinois Department of Health, and a group of Illinois state legislators, we designed an evidence-based bill for an education campaign for safer storage for firearms. The messaging will be completed with considerations for unique geographical and cultural diversity in Illinois.

The most effective safe storage campaigns pair messaging about safe storage from a trusted source such as pediatricians with distribution of gun locks and safes. We included provisions for training materials for providers; suicide prevention and support for teenagers; counseling for victims of violence and their families; and buy-back opportunities.

Because to date there has been limited data on effectiveness in existing campaigns, we included an evaluative component for the campaign to study number of people reached and subsequent changes in behavior and patterns of injuries.

Results: We worked with the legislators to pass Illinois HB4729 by creating a white page to highlight key aspects of the bill, securing over two dozen community sponsors, including every major children's hospital throughout the state, speaking with other legislators, and filing and recruiting other health care workers to file witness slips. I also testified before the bipartisan, bicameral Children's Health Caucus, which helped secure a Senate sponsor for the bill. This bill was signed into law in June of 2022.

Conclusions: Gun violence is a public health problem, and we need to apply evidence-based public health solutions. Through strong collaborations with elected officials, health care providers can directly impact and create effective legislation to reduce mortality in children and adolescents. We will continue to work with legislators to strengthen gun safety laws by improving Firearm Restraining Order implementation, improving the Firearm Owners Identification (FOID) card process, and working to counteract gun trafficking from neighboring states.