

Massive gun 'buyback' doubled fall in Australian gun deaths

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The chances of gun death in Australia dropped twice as steeply after 700,000 guns were destroyed in a national firearm 'buyback' and amnesty, reveals a decade long study in Injury Prevention.

The study tracks the 10 years following the introduction of gun law reform in Australia between 1996 and 1998.

The legislation was prompted by a firearm massacre in Tasmania in 1996, when 35 people were killed and a further 18 seriously wounded.

The reforms banned the use of semi automatic and pump action shotguns and rifles, destroying more than 700,000 weapons taken from a population of 12 million adults.

The study shows that in the 18 years before the legislation was passed, there were 13 mass shootings in Australia, in which 112 people died and 52 were wounded.

There have been no mass shootings since the law came into force.

The fall in the number of deaths associated with the use of firearms, including suicides, rapidly accelerated after the law took effect.

The decline was at least twice as high (6%) as it had been before the reforms were introduced.

In the 18 years prior to the legislation, on average, 491 people took their lives, using a firearm. After the legislation, this fell to an average of 246.

Similarly, the number of murders using guns fell from an annual average of 93 to just over 55.

There was no evidence that the use of other methods to commit suicide or homicide increased.

Before the introduction of the law, the overall number of homicides not related to guns had increased 1% a year. After the law took effect, this number fell by almost 2.5% a year.

And the total numbers of suicides fell by 4% after having risen annually by 2% before the introduction of the gun laws.

Source: BMJ Specialty Journals

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