

# Four studies report on key issues in preventing gun violence

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Three research studies by the UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program (VPRP) provide new data and report on current strategies and future efforts that can further reduce firearm-related injury and death. A

fourth study, accepted for publication and expected to post online the week of Oct. 7 in the journal *Injury Prevention*, identifies five distinct types of firearm owners.

"Our group's research is focused on making a difference," said Garen Wintemute, emergency physician and director of VPRP and the UC Firearm Violence Research Center (UCFC). "These studies rely on an array of methods, from scientific survey research to large-scale observational designs to narrative policy analysis. All of them improve our understanding of the role that firearms play in life in the United States. They will help shape violence prevention efforts taken by policymakers, [health professionals](#), and all the rest of us."

Summaries of the three UC Davis studies to publish in *Health Affairs*' special issue on "Violence and Health" are listed below.

*Health Affairs* - "[Background checks for firearm purchases: Current problems and recommendations for increasing effectiveness](#)"

Background checks, as well as laws and statutes that deny high-risk persons from purchasing a firearm, reduce the risk of violence among those who are prevented from having firearms. But significant flaws in the design and implementation of background check policies may explain why they do not seem to have an effect at the population level. In a comprehensive review of current background check policies in the U.S., Wintemute identifies nine problem areas. These include: Incomplete data, underreporting of prohibiting events in criminal history databases, poor definitions of events that prevent a firearm purchase, release of firearms before checks are completed, suboptimal enforcement, noncompliance by sellers and buyers, overly-narrow criteria prohibiting purchases, failure to include private-party transfers and failure to include a permitting process. He suggests specific ways to strengthen policies to address each of these shortcomings and is

optimistic that a properly designed universal background check system can further reduce firearm violence caused by individuals who should be denied these purchases.

*Health Affairs* - "[Alcohol-related crimes and risk of arrest for intimate partner violence among California handgun purchasers](#)"

Gun purchasers with DUI convictions are more likely to be arrested for intimate partner violence, a study by Hannah Laqueur and coauthors of the University of California Davis has found. Among legal handgun owners in California, a DUI (driving under the influence) conviction, with no other arrests or convictions, was associated with an almost threefold increase in the purchaser's risk of subsequent arrest for intimate partner violence, when compared to handgun purchasers with no criminal history. The purchasers at highest risk for an intimate partner violence offense were those with a prior DUI conviction and additional arrests or convictions for other offenses. Given prior research indicating that policies restricting firearm access among people with markers of elevated risk can reduce [violence](#), the study authors suggest that policies intended to regulate firearm ownership among people with a history of risky alcohol use may help reduce firearm-related [intimate partner violence](#) and the escalation of firearm-related harms.

*Health Affairs* - "[California public opinion on health professionals talking with patients about firearms](#)"

Most Californians find gun safety conversations between health professionals and their patients appropriate when a patient has a gun and has a risk factor for firearm-related harm, such as thoughts of suicide or trouble with drugs or alcohol, according to a study by Rocco Pallin and UC Davis coauthors. Although fewer gun owners find these conversations appropriate in general compared to non-owners, large majorities of both owners and non-owners reported such conversations

appropriate when risk is elevated. The study also found that most Californians, including gun owners, find health professional interventions, such as counseling the patient to have someone else keep the gun, appropriate when a patient with a gun is at acute risk for firearm injury. The results support the recommendation for health care providers to use a focused, risk-based approach to [firearm](#) safety counseling and to know and consider the lawful interventions available in emergency situations. The study used state-representative data from the 2018 California Safety and Wellbeing Survey.

Provided by UC Davis

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