

Alcohol increases risk for gun-involved suicide among Americans, finds study

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A CAMH-led study just published in the journal *JAMA Network Open* has found that the probability of using a gun as a means of suicide among Americans increases the more alcohol they drink.

The study looked at all suicides in a national surveillance system in the

United States over a 17-year period for people 18 and older who had alcohol in their system at the time of death. It found that the more alcohol they drank, the greater the probability that they would use a gun as the means of suicide, highlighting the need for suicide prevention initiatives and safety planning for people who drink and have access to guns.

Gun death has been the leading cause of suicide in the United States for decades and has been increasing in recent years to what is currently a 30-year high. More than 50% of all suicides in America involve the use of a firearm. In Canada that figure is 16%. Overall, the suicide rate in the United States is approximately three times higher than it is in Canada.

"There are significant differences between Canada and the United States in regards to [gun ownership](#) and access to guns, but this study does have important implications for Canada," says lead author Dr. Shannon Lange, Independent Scientist at the Institute for Mental Health Policy Research at CAMH.

"Responsible gun ownership is important wherever you live and that goes well beyond the harm you can potentially inflict on others, especially when alcohol is involved. People need to aware of the harm they can inflict on themselves. In fact, guns are used more often as a tool of self-harm rather than in self-defense."

The study authors state that "means restriction" has long been a cornerstone of suicide prevention, but acknowledge that the political environment in the United States makes restriction of guns highly unlikely. They also elaborate on other targeted suicide prevention safety measures that could help reduce the number of gun-involved suicide deaths north and south of the border:

"There needs to be more education and awareness of the increased risk of suicide by any method when alcohol is involved, and especially for people with access to guns," adds Dr. Lange.

More information: Shannon Lange et al, Association Between Acute Alcohol Use and Firearm-Involved Suicide in the United States, *JAMA Network Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.5248](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.5248)

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