WASHINGTON, D.C. (July 25, 2024) – The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) commends U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy for releasing a new advisory today: Firearm Violence: A Public Health Crisis in America. Tragically, suicides by firearm comprise more than half (55% in 2022) of all suicide deaths in the United States. AFSP encourages several community-based approaches to prevent firearm suicide, several of which are reflected by the Surgeon General’s advisory, as well as the 2024 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. These approaches must include collaborative suicide prevention education efforts within gun-owning communities.  
  
Research shows that the risk of suicide is greater when firearms or other lethal means are present in the home or readily accessible. Ensuring that a person at acute risk for suicide does not have easy access to a firearm saves lives; research has consistently shown that when a chosen method of suicide is not accessible, most individuals will not move on to another method of suicide and if they do, it is less likely to be lethal. In addition, suicidal urges can intensify quickly so easy access to lethal means can be fatal; putting time and space between a person in crisis and lethal means allows time for the acute urge to pass and for the person to engage with healthy coping strategies.  
  
AFSP strongly encourages further support at the state and federal levels of government for legislation, policies, funding and executive action to prioritize firearms-related research, provide education on the relationship between suicide and firearms, implement voluntary firearm removal initiatives, expand lethal means education and counseling practices within healthcare systems, and increase access to mental health, substance use, and trauma-informed care. These include:  
• Continued investment in mental health and crisis care services. AFSP urges lawmakers at the state and federal levels to prioritize sustained investment in mental health services and crisis care support. This includes the need for full implementation of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act which will save lives, including through the expansion of school-based mental health services and professionals.  
• Training for healthcare professionals on lethal means safety counseling, screening for suicide risk, and making referrals to mental health resources and care. Individuals with heightened risk for suicide are often seen in clinical settings, particularly emergency departments. Incentivizing health systems to implement suicide prevention protocols, including training health professionals to identify, support, and provide referrals for patients who may be at elevated risk will help save lives. When a patient’s suicide risk is detected if the patient has access to a firearm in the home, healthcare professionals should work with the patient and their family when possible on voluntary strategies to store household firearms away from the home, or otherwise ensure secure firearm storage, until the patient recovers.  
• Public investments to support research regarding firearms and suicide prevention. More data are needed on which firearm policies are most effective in preventing suicide, which educational efforts are most effective in promoting secure firearm storage, and how best to bring promising practices to scale so we can implement more widespread change nationwide. This includes AFSP’s strong support for continued federal investment in gun violence prevention research.  
• Community storage options and temporary transfer exceptions. When an individual is at risk for suicide, being able to store firearms outside the home can save lives. This includes storage options at gun shops, shooting ranges, police departments, community lockers, and other special storage facilities. To support the ability for an individual in crisis to store their firearm outside the home, AFSP supports temporary transfer exceptions in background check laws in cases of suicide risk.  
• Voluntary do-not-sell list programs. These are lists where individuals can register themselves to voluntarily restrict their own ability to purchase and/or own a firearm. Only the person in question can enter themselves onto such a voluntary do-not-sell list, and the list is used for no other purpose than for firearm purchases or firearm ownership. AFSP supports the establishment of voluntary do-not-sell lists at both the state and federal levels and commends the multiple states that have successfully established voluntary do-not-sell lists.  
• Laws that call for the creation and dissemination of educational materials and/or training on the relationship between access to lethal means and suicide prevention, and secure firearms storage. These include efforts to publish and distribute brochures on firearms safety and suicide prevention, distribute secure firearm storage devices, educate firearms instructors and clinicians in lethal means safety, and to put suicide prevention information on firearm warning labels and on the premises of licensed firearm dealers.  
• Extreme risk protection orders. AFSP urges policymakers at all levels of government to support policy initiatives to allow for extreme risk protection orders (ERPOs) to be used as a tool to help prevent suicide when voluntary efforts to separate an at-risk individual from firearms are unsuccessful or impossible and suicide risk is imminent.  
  
AFSP appreciates the Surgeon General’s leadership, and we look forward to working alongside our chapters, partners, and policymakers to promote the advisory and save lives.  
  
The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide, including those who have experienced a loss. AFSP creates a culture that’s smart about mental health through public education and community programs, develops suicide prevention through research and advocacy, and provides support for those affected by suicide. Led by CEO Robert Gebbia and headquartered in New York, with a public policy office in Washington, D.C., AFSP has local chapters in all 50 states, D.C. and Puerto Rico, with programs and events nationwide. Learn more about AFSP in its latest Annual Report and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following AFSP on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and TikTok.  
  
Media interested in comment on this news are encouraged to fill out this press request form and review AFSP’s Ethical Reporting Tips.