

# Safer Homes, Safer Communities: Firearms, Safety, and Culture

**Jeffrey Sung, MD & Brett Bass**

Forefront Suicide Prevention  
Safer Homes, Suicide Aware  
saferhomescoalition.org

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## Participant poll: Agree or Disagree

### I live in a home with firearms.

- 43% of surgeons have at least one firearm in the home (Kuhls, et al., 2016).
- 13% of pediatricians own at least one firearm (Olson, et al., 2007).
- 14% of medical students have at least one firearm in the home (Frank, et al., 2006).
- 42% of all Americans have at least one firearm in the home (Parler, et al., 2017).

### People with mental health illness should be prevented from purchasing firearms.

- 92% of surgeons agree (Kuhls, et al., 2016).
- Psychiatrists advocate for non-discrimination against people with mental illness who wish to own firearms (Bonnie, et al., 2015).

### The sale of some types of firearms should be banned.

- 64% of pediatricians support legislation banning the sale and possession of handguns (Olson, et al., 2007).
- 90% of surgeons *without* firearms in the home and 44% of surgeons *with* firearms in the home support restricting civilian access to semi-automatic rifles (Kuhls, et al., 2016).

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## We are all on the same side

### Values



Health professionals      Gun owners

Everyone values safety, protection, responsibility, freedom and community.

### Suicide



No one wants suicide as an outcome.

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## Safer Homes, Safer Communities: Firearms, Safety, and Culture



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Northwest Prevention  
Technology Transfer Center  
November 2, 2022

- Community-based prevention: Cultural competency
- Firearm-related suicide: Scope of the problem and populations at risk
- Firearms and culture: What is safety?
- Gun-shop projects for suicide prevention
- Cultural knowledge
- Safer Homes, Suicide Aware

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## SAMHSA: The Strategic Prevention Framework



**Culture:** "...the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group." (Cross, et al., 1989)

"By involving community members in all aspects of prevention planning, implementation, and evaluation, planners demonstrate respect for the people they serve and are more likely to develop prevention services that meet genuine needs, build on strengths, and produce positive outcomes."

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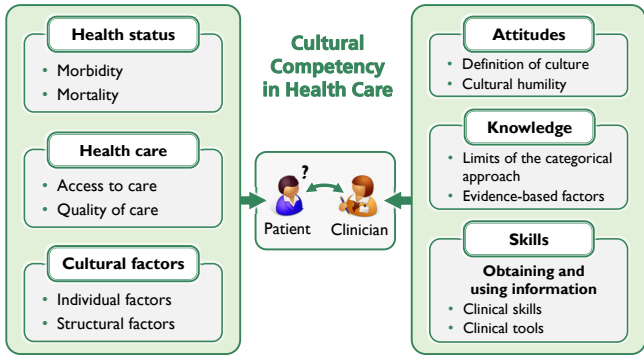
## SAMHSA: The Strategic Prevention Framework



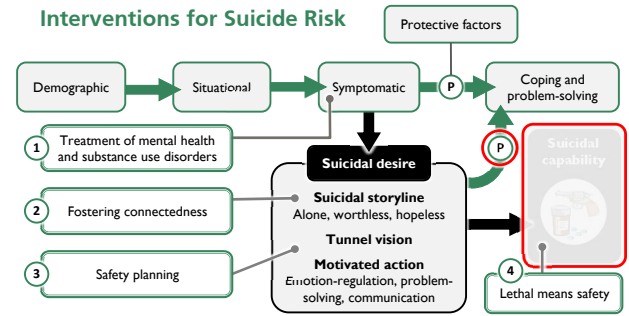
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- |            |                    |                   |
|------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Gender     | Ethnicity          | Spirituality      |
| Disability | Geography          | Language          |
| Age        | Race               | SES               |
| Education  | Sexual orientation | Firearm ownership |

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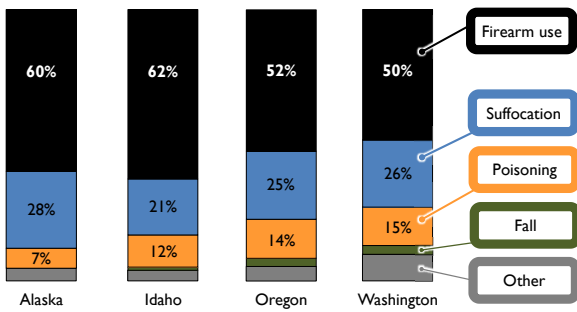


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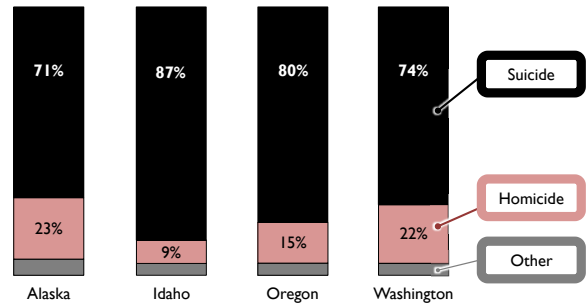
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Scope of the Problem: Suicide Methods (CDC for 2018-2020)



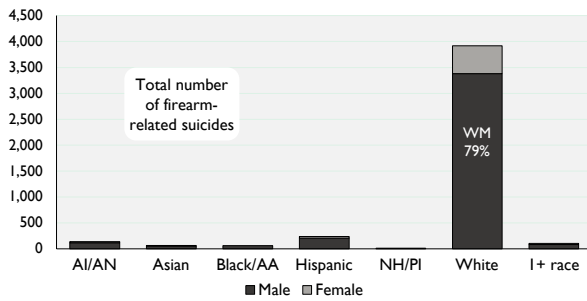
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Scope of the Problem: Fatal Firearm Injury (CDC for 2018-2020)



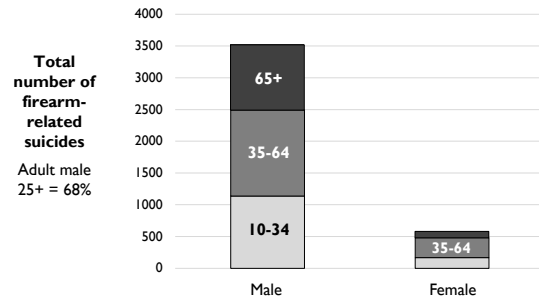
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Populations at Risk: Race, Ethnicity, Gender (CDC for 2018-2020, HHS Region 10)



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Populations at Risk: Gender, Age (CDC for 2018-2020, HHS Region 10)



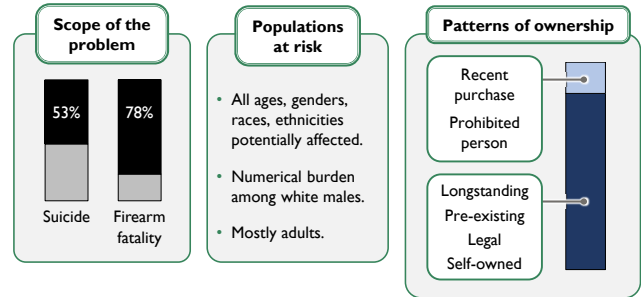
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### Populations at Risk & Patterns of Firearm Ownership

- Pre-existing, often longstanding ownership:**
  - Median of 11 years before firearm suicide (Cummings, et al., 1997).
  - Ownership > 1 month in 85% (Studdert, et al., 2020).
  - Less than 10% with recent firearm purchase (Vriniotis, et al., 2015).
- Legal ownership:** 92% of Utah firearm suicide decedents could have passed a background check (Barber, et al., 2019).
- Who owned the firearm used in suicide? (Barber, et al., 2022)**
  - Adult male 21+: 88% used their own firearm**
  - Adult female 21+: 52% self, 32% partner's
  - Youth 18-20: 42% self, 43% family member's, 8% friend's
  - Children: 19% self (typically long gun), 79% family member's

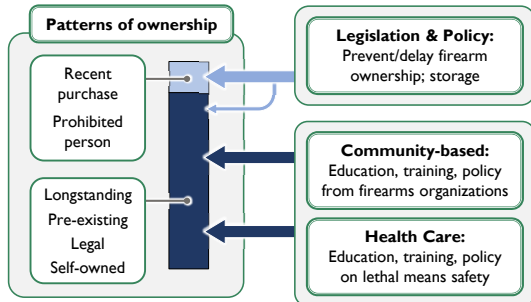
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### Firearms and Suicide: Summary



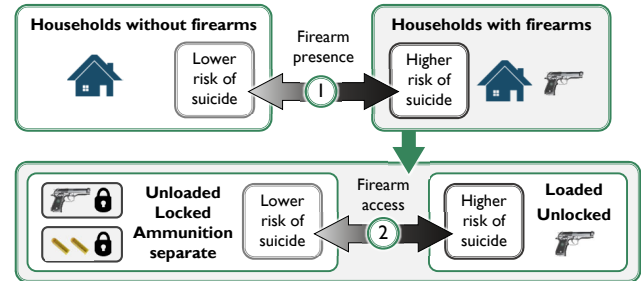
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### Firearms and Suicide: Types of Intervention



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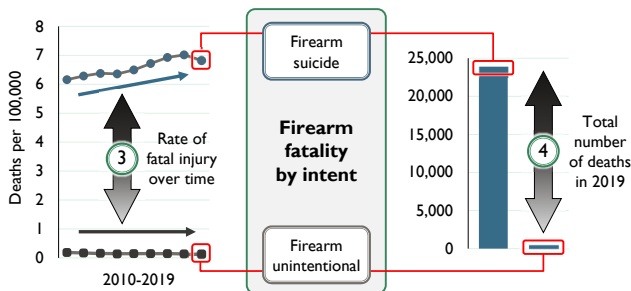
### Firearms and Suicide Risk: What is the Message?



Anglemyer, et al., 2014 in AIM; Dempsey, et al., 2019 in JAMA; Miller, et al., 2016 in ER; Pallin, et al., 2019 in AIM

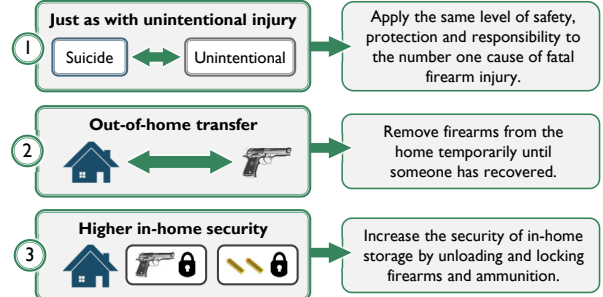
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### Firearms and Suicide Risk: What is the Message?



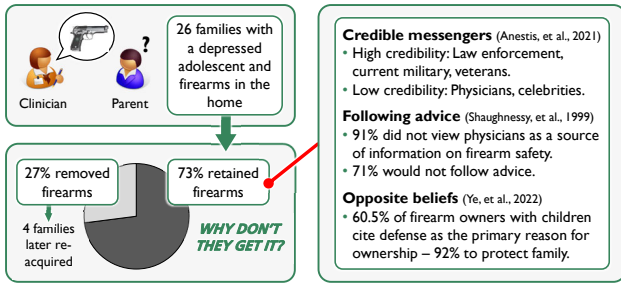
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### Firearms and Suicide Risk: What is the Message?



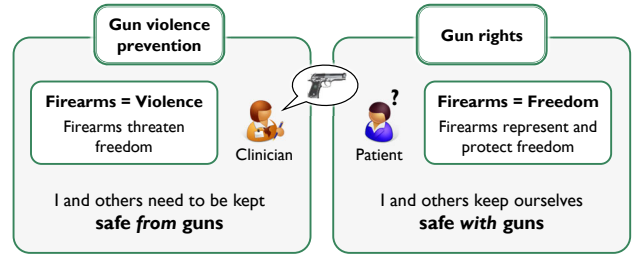
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**When Counseling Parents on Guns Doesn't Work:**  
*Why don't they get it?* (Brent, et al., 2000 & Christoffel, 2000)



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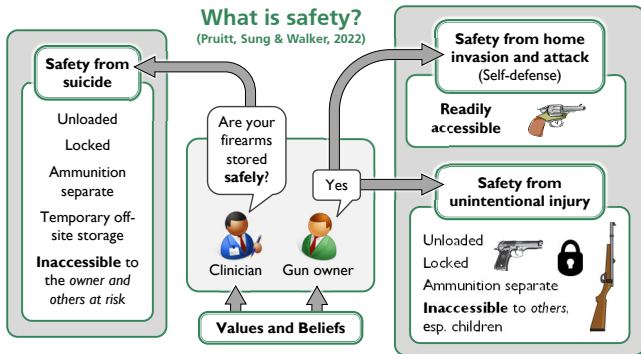
**Cultural Factors**  
Bias, Ethnocentrism, Implicit Beliefs



Stewart & Kuhls, 2016 in JTACS; Yamane, 2017; Yamane, 2018

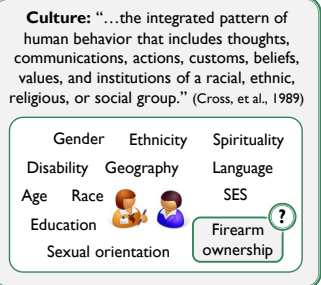
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**What is safety?**  
(Pruitt, Sung & Walker, 2022)



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**SAMHSA: The Strategic Prevention Framework**



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**Firearms and Culture**



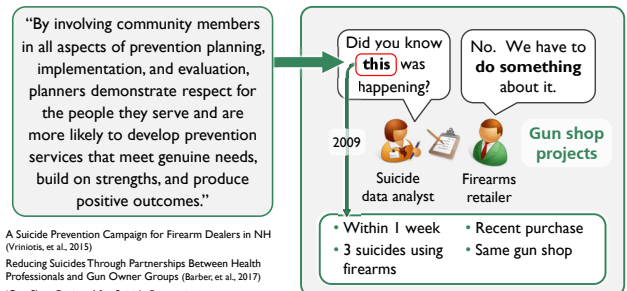
**Physician Counseling on Firearm Safety: A New Kind of Cultural Competence**  
(Betz & Wintemute, 2015)

**A culture gap in the United States: Implications for policy on limiting access to firearms for suicidal persons**  
(Marino, et al., 2016)

**What is "safety"?: Lethal means counseling as a cross-cultural communication**  
(Pruitt, et al., 2022)

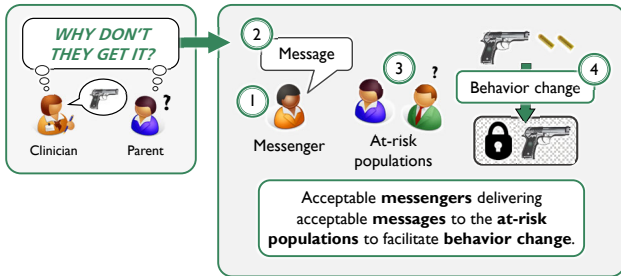
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**"Gun Shop Projects" for Suicide Prevention in the U.S.**

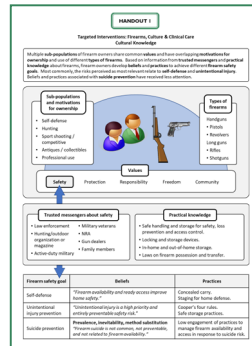


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## Individual-Level Lethal Means Safety (Barber & Miller, 2014)



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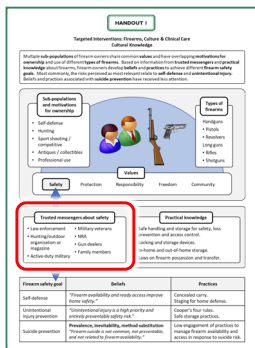


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## Cultural Knowledge

### Cultural factors related to firearm ownership and use

- Sub-populations and motivations for ownership
- Types of firearms
- Values
- Trusted messengers
- Practical knowledge
- Safety goals, beliefs, practices
  - Self-defense
  - Unintentional injury
  - Suicide

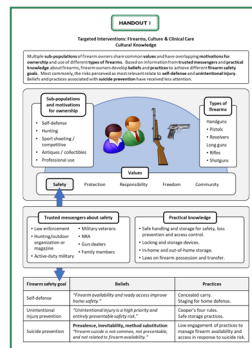


## Trusted Messengers: Language Choices

Talking About "Firearm Injury" and "Gun Violence": Words Matter (Betz, et al., 2022)

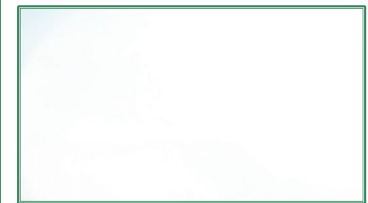
Rather than...	Consider...
Gun violence	Firearm injury
Gun	Firearm
Restriction, Surrender	Transfer, Temporary removal
Assault rifle	AR-15 style rifle

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## Cultural Knowledge



**The Suicide Prevention Collaborative of El Paso County**  
A county partner of the Colorado-National Collaborative



- Community outreach**
- SAFER in-person events
  - Tele-SAFER
  - Firearms ranges and retailers
- Community engagement**
- Washington Department of Veterans Affairs
  - Law Enforcement Mental Health Task Force
  - Legislative advocacy
- Training**
- Firearms retailers
  - Firearm safety webinar
  - Health care professionals
  - Veterans

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**SAFER**

- **S:** Signpost
- **A:** Assess
- **F:** Facts
- **E:** Emotion
- **R:** Recommend

Community-based guided conversation

Distribution of firearm locking device, medication lock box or disposal kit (Stuber, et al., 2020)

**1175 participants**

- 14 gun shows (N=772)
- 2 military/veteran events (N=289)
- 2 community safety events (N=114)

**Demographics:** 76% men, 53% age 35-64

**Firearm ownership**

- 85% with firearms in the home
- 54% with a dedicated home defense firearm

**372 with pre- and post-assessment**

**All firearms locked up**

51% → 66%

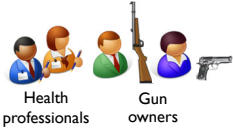
**All medication locked up**

46% → 68%

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Gun owners

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