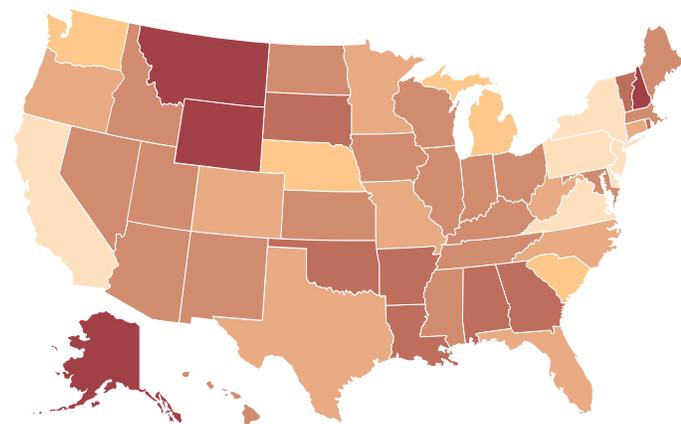


# GUN DEATHS & MENTAL ILLNESS

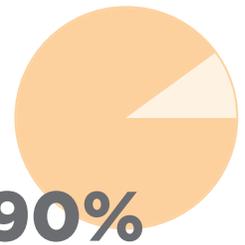
Only a small percentage of interpersonal violence in America is attributable to mental illness. In fact, people with mental illness are more likely to be the victims of violence than its perpetrators. **However, acute mental crises and severely debilitating conditions play a major role in firearm suicides and mass shootings.** Smart gun laws can help families and law enforcement proactively intervene to prevent these tragedies.



## Mental health records submitted per capita

Firearm background checks are only as thorough as the records made available by each state to the FBI. Many states fail to responsibly report these records.

MENTAL HEALTH RECORDS SUBMITTED TO NICS PER 100,000



**90%**

of people who attempt suicide have a diagnosable mental health condition at the time of their attempt.

## MORE ACCESS: HIGHER RISK

States with the highest rates of gun ownership have **four times as many suicides involving a firearm** and, as a result, nearly twice the rate of overall suicide deaths.

SUICIDES INVOLVING A FIREARM



■ States with lowest rates of gun ownership  
■ States with highest rates of ownership

**Four states have still reported fewer than 100 prohibiting mental health records ever: Alaska, Montana, New Hampshire, and Wyoming.**

People who have been involuntarily committed to psychiatric facilities in these states could likely pass firearm background checks around the nation.

## FEDERAL FIREARM RESTRICTIONS AND RECORDS

For nearly 50 years, federal law has made it unlawful to provide firearms to people who have been ordered to undergo involuntary psychiatric treatment or have been ruled by a court to be a danger to self or others or unable to handle their own affairs due to severe mental illness.

Federal law cannot require states to share records about prohibited individuals with the FBI's background check system, and many states fail to responsibly do so. For example, the Virginia Tech shooter was prohibited from purchasing firearms due to mental illness, but the records were never included in the background check system. In 2008, President Bush signed a law that provides financial incentives for states to better report mental health records to the FBI. But in 2011, 23 states had still reported fewer than 100 prohibiting mental health records—ever. In those states, a person who is prohibited due to serious mental illness would almost certainly pass a firearm background check.

In recent years, many states have passed laws that authorize or require courts and psychiatric hospitals to share prohibiting records with the FBI. Today, the number of states that had reported fewer than 100 prohibiting mental health records has fallen to four. Still, significant gaps remain.

## RISK-BASED PREVENTION

Many people have access to firearms even during periods of intense risk for the simple reason that most severely mentally ill people have not been involuntarily committed or found to be mentally incapacitated by a court. A small number of states have acted to close this gap by enacting risk-based firearm removal laws, which authorize courts to place “temporary holds” on a person’s firearm access in emergency situations until he or she is no longer dangerous or suicidal.

### States Should Enact Laws:

- **Implement Risk-Based Firearm Laws (GVPO/ERPO):** In recent years, California and Washington have passed groundbreaking gun violence protective order laws that empower family members and law enforcement to seek a court order that would temporarily suspend the most dangerous or suicidal people’s access to weapons during emergency periods.
- **Responsibly Report Records to the FBI:** Many states still fail to promptly or comprehensively report prohibited person records to the FBI.
- **Require Universal Background Checks:** In states without universal background check laws, a dangerously mentally ill person could obtain a gun from an unlicensed seller with no questions asked.
- **Include People Committed to Involuntary Outpatient Treatment:** Many states only report mental health records to the FBI when a person is involuntarily committed as a psychiatric inpatient, but courts are increasingly preferring to order outpatient treatment for severely mentally ill people who pose a risk of violence.

For more details and underlying research, visit [smartgunlaws.org/mental-health-reporting](http://smartgunlaws.org/mental-health-reporting)

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# 160+

new smart gun laws have been enacted in 43 states and DC since the tragedy at Sandy Hook.

# 114,000

Americans are shot each year—over one million in the past decade.

## ABOUT US

*Led by former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and Navy combat veteran and retired NASA astronaut Captain Mark Kelly, Americans for Responsible Solutions and the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence are committed to advancing commonsense change that makes communities safer from gun violence. Operating out of offices in Washington DC, San Francisco, and New York, our staff partners with lawmakers and advocates to craft and enact the smart gun laws that save lives. We provide expertise in firearms litigation, lead grassroots coalitions, and educate the public on the proven solutions to America’s gun violence epidemic.*

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