

# How Primary Care Providers Are Helping Reduce Firearm Death and Injury in Oregon



*Oregon's firearm suicide rate is simply too high.*

*Together, we can save lives and create real change in our communities.*

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ALLIANCE FOR A  
**SAFE OREGON.**  
Working to end gun tragedies

# Self-Care is Courageous

We will be discussing topics including suicide and firearm injuries in general.

These can be difficult and activating, so please take care of yourself.

Dial or text **988** to speak with a trained counselor for confidential support.

# Who We Are

## Alliance for a Safe Oregon

We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit working to end gun tragedies. Composed of survivors of gun tragedies, gun owners, Veterans, and advocates who envision a better future, we respect 2A rights and strive to build bridges.

### Our major programs include:

- 1) **Metro Area Violence Prevention-** Community Violence Intervention (CVI) and Youth Education
- 1) **Firearm Suicide Prevention-** *All Secure Oregon* focuses on rural communities across Oregon

# Key Beliefs

## Firearm Suicide can be Preventable

- Often impulsive, once suicidal ideation passes most people go on to live. Reducing quick access to firearms for someone in crisis is one key to saving lives, since firearms are so lethal.

## Those most impacted must help drive the solutions— *especially survivors & firearm owners*

- We always listen to and utilize the perspectives of those closest to the issue

# The Big Picture

**We lose too many people each year to firearm suicide.**

**Suicide loss is devastating for families and the broader community –  
research shows over 130 people are impacted when someone dies by suicide**

***80% of firearm related deaths in Oregon are Firearm Suicides – compared to 59% in US***

# Our Approach and Key Strategies



# Firearm Suicide Prevention Program

## All Secure Oregon

1. Focus Groups
2. Primary Healthcare Provider Training
3. Distribution of Lock Boxes
4. Evaluation
5. Partnerships - OSU/UO/OHSU, Gavs Challenge Team, Suicide Alliance & Postvention Team, VA Mental Health Advocacy Council, VSO's, CBIRT, COSPA

### Project Counties

**South-** Coos, Curry, Douglas, Klamath

**Central-** Deschutes, Crook, Jefferson

**North-** Clackamas and Willowa

## Oregon Veteran Alliance

- Connecting Veteran-serving Organizations together
- Monthly, Quarterly, and Annual events
- Partnerships and Advocacy Efforts

# Focus Groups

**Rural Oregonians, Veterans, Tribal Community Members, Older Men, and Youth are Disproportionately Affected Populations (DAPs)**

## **Focus Groups and Community Conversations, in partnership with OSU-Cascades**

- Learning why people own firearms, how they secure them, and how they see themselves as part of the solution to ending tragedies: What is similar and what is different?
  - *Leading to motivating, culturally-appropriate messaging development around secure storage and **proactive firearm ownership***



# High Impact Efforts

## Training Primary Care Providers (PCPs) in the “Hard Talk”

- Lethal Means Safety Counseling is an effective tool to prevent suicide that is currently underused among providers across Oregon
  - *Severe shortage of mental health and social services across rural Oregon*
  - *Lack of confidence/knowledge to effectively counsel firearm-owning patients*

## Increasing Rates of Secure Firearm Storage and Proactive Firearm Ownership

- Secure firearm storage is a key component of preventing many tragedies. Being proactive is a step above “responsible”. We distribute quality biometric lock boxes to clinics and partners.
  - *Barriers include attitudes and cost of secure storage devices*

# Primary Care Providers Play an Important Role in Reducing Oregon's High Firearm Suicide Rates

- Many who die from firearm suicide have seen a Primary Care Provider (PCP) in the previous months, rather than a mental health professional.
- PCPs are well-situated to assess and counsel patients about reducing their risk for firearm suicide.

However, many express *discomfort* and *lack of skills* around this topic, leading to missed opportunities to potentially save lives. *PCPs say they want more knowledge!*

**Our training is designed to quickly increase confidence and skills to have that hard talk...**

# Our Training Curriculum

**Tailored, in-person training (1-4 hours long depending on need/logistics)**

1. Firearm Cultural Competency
2. Oregon Laws
3. Secure Storage Concepts
4. Clinical Skills taught by an MD (based on the Bulletpoints Project) in assessing, counseling, and safety planning
5. Role Playing and Hands-on with Secure Storage Devices

# We Begin by Acknowledging the Big Picture

- Firearm suicide is an unpleasant topic, and it's okay to feel anxious about it. Many PCPs do not have personal experience with firearms and want to learn more.
- Being knowledgeable about the subject matter goes a long way in maintaining trust and effectively safety planning with a patient who may be sceptical or upset.
- Whatever your personal relation to firearms- *positive or negative*- healthcare professionals have a responsibility to normalize speaking about them.

**Examples slides from our training:**



# Situating Firearms in the U.S.

There are over **400 million** civilian-owned firearms in the US (pop. of 335 million)

Gun ownership is a major part of American history & culture and is protected by the 2nd Amendment of the US Constitution and the Oregon Constitution (Article 1, Section 27)

Universal Safety Rules apply to **everyone** and ***secure storage is a fundamental component of Proactive Firearm Ownership.***

***Proactive Firearm Ownership*** isn't a political perspective- it is what the most skilled and knowledgeable firearm professionals recommend, including NRA and NSSF.

# Major Reasons for Owning a Firearm (2023)

[for many people, there is more than one reason]

**72% - Protection**

**32% - Hunting**

**30% - Sport shooting (target, trap, skeet)**

**15% - Collection/Heritage**

**7% - Part of their job**

# Universal **Golden Rules** of Gun Safety

Following these greatly reduces risk of tragedy

- 1 Always treat every gun as if it is loaded, all the time**
- 2 Never point a gun at anything you don't want to destroy**
- 3 Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you are on target and ready to fire**
- 4 Know what your target is and what lays beyond and around it before firing at it**
- 5 Always keep your firearm secured from unauthorized access**



# 3 Types of Firearm Discharges

“There are no accidents”

1

**Intentional**-Intentionally handle, aim, and fire the gun at a target.

Fully responsible for the outcome.

2

**Negligent**- **Cardinal sin of firearm handling**. Even though you are aware of the safety rules, the firearm is mishandled, and through negligence, the firearm is discharged in an unsafe manner. Fully responsible for the outcome. **Punishable offense in the military and law enforcement.**

3

**Unintentional**- Someone not authorized to access the firearm causes it to fire. An untrained individual who, through ignorance, mishandles the gun and causes a discharge.

**This scenario is the very reason why secure storage is critical in homes with kids.**

# What is Secure Firearm Storage?

## Secure Storage Device:

A device that *effectively* secures a firearm from access by an unauthorized person

→ Prevents all kinds of preventably bad stuff: **like what?** Discuss for 5 min.

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- Prevents all kinds of preventably bad stuff: **like what?** Discuss for 5 min.
- **What?** Just a normal part of basic gun safety, yet too often *overlooked* or *ignored*
- **Why?** Promotes responsible ownership and provides accountability all around
- Did you know that in Oregon, it's the law if there are minors or unauthorized folks around!

# Secure Firearm Storage Keeps the Home Safe

It is possible to balance having quick access and keeping the gun out of the hands of curious kids, a thief, or a teen in temporary crisis (even in homes where everyone 'knows about guns')

*How someone secures their firearm is personal, but there are best practices!*

## → Safest Secure Storage Practice:

- ◆ All guns and ammunition secured- separately- in a manner so that they cannot be accessed or stolen by an unauthorized person. *\*Recommended by industry leaders, gun trainers, NRA/NSSF, military, law enforcement, etc.*

## → May be more practical:

- ◆ Gun kept in the condition of your choice, but effectively secured to prevents unauthorized access, yet allows the handler to access it in case of emergency

# Intercultural Communication Skills

Be supportive of the desire to **be prepared** and to **protect oneself and defend others** against any scenario... *including suicidal ideation!*

## Connect on Underlying Values relating to Firearm Ownership:

Safety - Preparedness - Reliability - Independence - Family/Community

## While Safety Planning, Emphasize Positive & Active Values

Frame secure firearm storage and safety planning in terms of **ongoing preparedness & capability.**

**1) How have you been planning to keep your household/family safe?** *(threats from outside and risks from within)*

**2) How are you preparing to keep yourself safe?** *(we all have bad days- how will you put distance between yourself and your guns?)*

# Using Credible Stories to Inspire Action

*Stories of individual courage & leadership can motivate behavioral change*

“My cousin, a **Marine Veteran**, has this really cool biometric pistol safe. She keeps a photo of her family and her old unit inside the safe to keep her accountable. Have you thought about trying something like that?”

“My buddy, a **Gun Shop Owner**, encouraged everyone he trains with to fill out a mental health safety plan. He says it **saved his life** during a really hard time. Want to learn more?”

**Praise healthy behavior:** “I can tell that you really care about this. We need more gun owners like you who take their secure storage seriously. So, what kind of safe do you prefer?”

## Key Takeaways

So far, we have trained over 120 healthcare professionals and plan to continue expanding our capacity.

The training has been very well received.

Upon follow-ups with our trainees, many PCPs state they have been applying these skills in the clinical setting.

We want to expand to more counties and organizations.



# Questions?

[www.alliancesafeoregon.org](http://www.alliancesafeoregon.org)

