

# The AFFILIATES

State, regional public health associations

## Firearms a leading cause of death

### Arizona association takes on gun violence in state report

**W**HERE THERE'S A will, there's a way. Arizona Public Health Association Executive Director Will Humble recently brought both of those qualities into play when he found a way to prioritize the organization's work around firearm violence despite long-standing resistance at the state level.

In March, the APHA Affiliate released a landmark report on gun violence in Arizona. Co-authored by global health graduate student Julia Jackman and AzPHA member Allan Williams, PhD, MPH, the 114-page report examines the impacts of gun laws by using an epidemiology lens to characterize the rates, trends and demographics of gun violence in Arizona and the U.S.

Making the report a reality was no easy task. The public health impact of firearm violence was "not a priority" for state agencies during the administration of former Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey, Humble told *The Nation's Health*.

A lack of buy-in at the state level had long prevented Arizona's health department, which Humble led from 2009 to 2015,

from leading on gun violence prevention, he said. But as a nonprofit organization, AzPHA is able to advocate for causes that might challenge the direction taken by the state.

"Any good policy intervention starts with surveillance and an evidence review, and we decided to do that — to fill that gap," Humble said. "Any good Affiliate should think of themselves as a conduit for policy change and face those kinds of issues where there is resistance at the state level in terms of the governor."

With that in mind, AzPHA's board of directors commissioned the report on firearm violence in Arizona in June 2022, selecting Jackman, a global health Fulbright study and research grantee at Norwegian University of Science and Technology, and Williams, a retired Minnesota Department of Health epidemiologist and adjunct assistant professor at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health,

to examine firearm-related suicides and homicides, police shootings, unintentional firearm deaths, firearm ownership, school shootings, mass shootings and gun violence prevention laws.

"The U.S. leads the world by far in civilian gun ownership per capita, and the number of firearm deaths in the U.S. over the past 41 years exceeds the number of U.S. war deaths over the past 245 years," Williams told *The Nation's Health*.

According to the report, "Firearm Violence in Arizona: Data to Inform Prevention Policies," gun violence remains a pervasive and unrelenting problem.

It is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 1-19 in the state, and the 11th leading cause of death for adults. In 2020, more than 1,200 people died of gun violence in Arizona, which ranks 43rd among

**"Any good policy intervention starts with surveillance and an evidence review, and we decided to do that — to fill that gap"**

— Will Humble

states for gun law strength. From 1999-2020, Arizona's firearm mortality rate was 42% higher than the U.S. average. The report's evidence-based policy recommendations include laws requiring universal background checks, child access and safe storage laws as well as requirements for permits and training to carry a concealed weapon.

It also supports extreme risk protection order laws, which would allow family members and law enforcement to petition a civil court to temporarily restrict access to guns for someone who is seriously at risk of harming themselves or others. Additionally, the report recommends repealing stand-your-ground laws — sometimes referred to as "shoot first" laws — which allow people to use deadly force when they feel threatened.

For more information on the report or the Arizona Public Health Association, visit <https://azpha.org>. ■

— Teddi Nicolaus

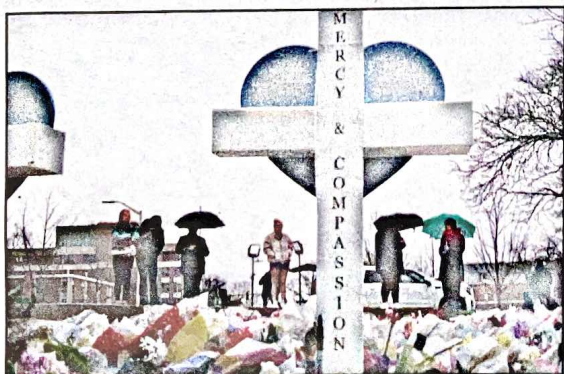


Photo by Scott Olson, courtesy Getty Images

Students killed in a shooting in February at Michigan State University in East Lansing are memorialized on campus. AzPHA is bringing attention to gun violence in another state, Arizona, in hopes of getting the attention of lawmakers.