

Let's Talk  
Marathon County



WIPPS  
WISCONSIN INSTITUTE for  
PUBLIC POLICY and SERVICE

# Let's Talk Firearms

## How should we prevent gun deaths in our communities?

Wisconsin, like much of the country, has a culture and history of hunting and recreational shooting, with many families owning firearms for sport, protection, and tradition. In the United States, it is estimated that 400 million guns are in civilian hands. At the same time, communities across the state grapple with gun violence in various forms—from domestic violence and suicide to gang-related crime and accidents.

In 2022, over 48,000 people died in the United States due to firearms, down slightly from the record high of 48,830 in 2021. Of those deaths, 27,032 were suicides and 19,651 were homicides. Wisconsin saw 830 firearm deaths in 2022, including 277 homicides, 529 suicides, and 24 classified as other causes. Fifty-five of these deaths were children aged 1-17. It's hard to find a community in the country that is not affected by gun violence, and Marathon County is no exception.

Most Americans agree that reducing gun deaths is important, but there are sharp disagreements about the best approaches. Some believe stricter regulations on firearms are necessary, while others argue for enhanced security and enforcement. Still others focus on addressing underlying social and mental health issues that contribute to violence.

How do we balance constitutional rights and the historical culture of hunting and self-defense with the need to keep community members safe? How should we prevent gun deaths in our communities?

This issue advisory presents three approaches to addressing firearms, each coming from a different



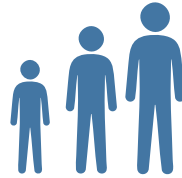
perspective and reflecting a different set of ideas about what should be done. Most people will find something to agree with in all three approaches, but each also has trade-offs, risks, or drawbacks to be taken into account and worked through. The options presented here are not ready-made solutions, but rather a starting point for weighing alternatives and reaching a sound judgment.

# GUN VIOLENCE IN WISCONSIN

Most Recent Data from CDC (2022)



**830**  
gun deaths in  
Wisconsin



**55**  
children and  
teens (1-17)



on average,  
one person is killed  
every 11 hours

**277 GUN HOMICIDES**

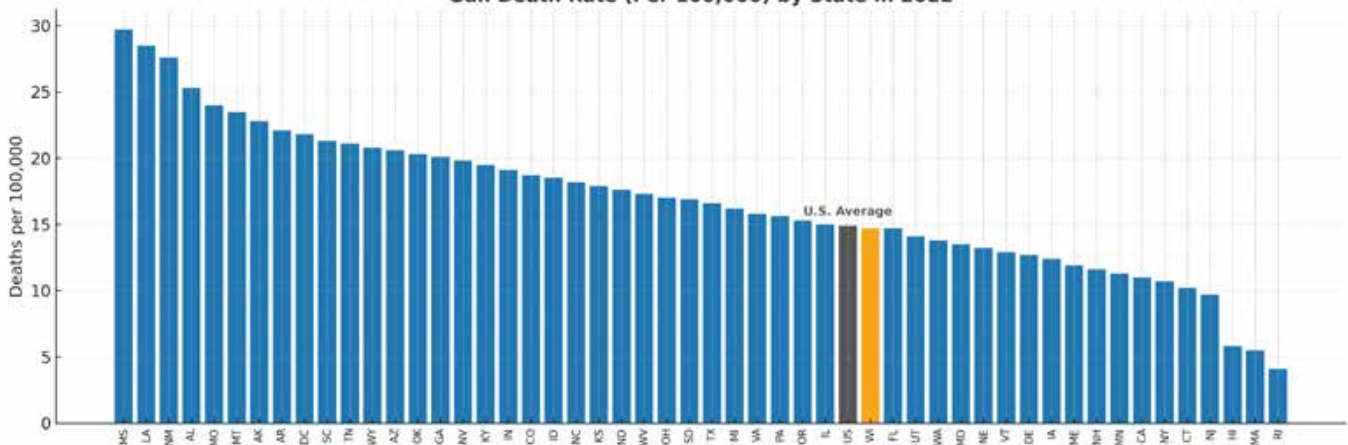
**529 GUN SUICIDES**

**24 OTHER GUN DEATHS**

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The overall gun death rate increased 69% from 2013 to 2022.
- Wisconsin had the 2nd highest gun death rate among Black people in the country in 2022.
- Black people were nearly 70 times as likely to die by gun homicide than their White counterparts.
- Firearms were the leading cause of death among children and teens ages 1–17 in 2022.
- In 2021, there were at least 42 domestic violence-related homicides in Wisconsin. 64% were by firearm.
- Firearms are used in the majority of homicides and suicides (85% of homicides, 57% of suicides).
- Males were three times as likely to die by gun homicide than females.
- Young Black males ages 15–34 make up 1% of the state’s population but accounted for 36% of all gun homicide deaths in 2022.
- Black females were 19 times as likely to die by gun homicide than White females in 2022. The Black female gun homicide rate nearly doubled between 2021 to 2022.

Gun Death Rate (Per 100,000) by State in 2022

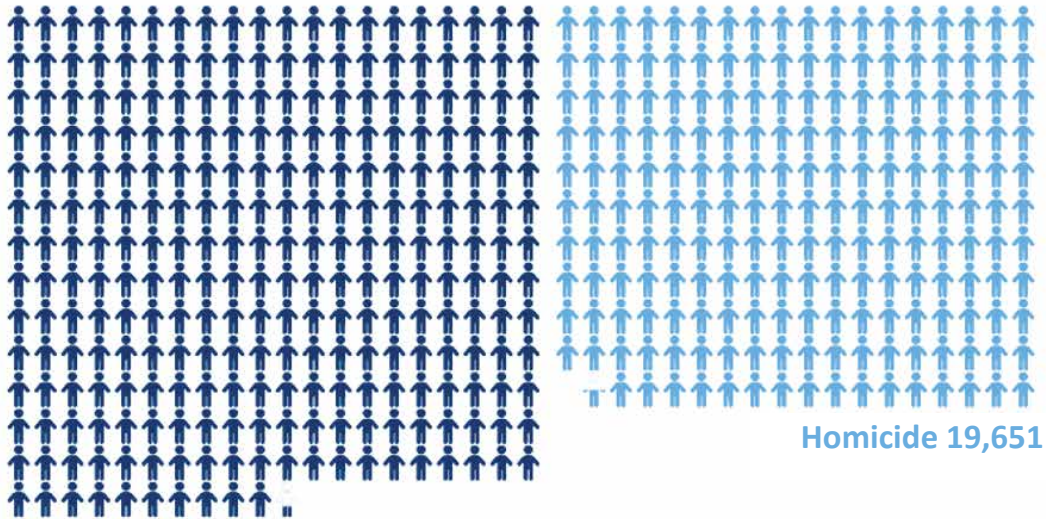


source: <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/gun-violence-data/state-gun-violence-data/wisconsin>

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# GUN VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

48,204 lives were lost to gun violence in 2022



Homicide 19,651

Suicides 27,032



Unintentional 463



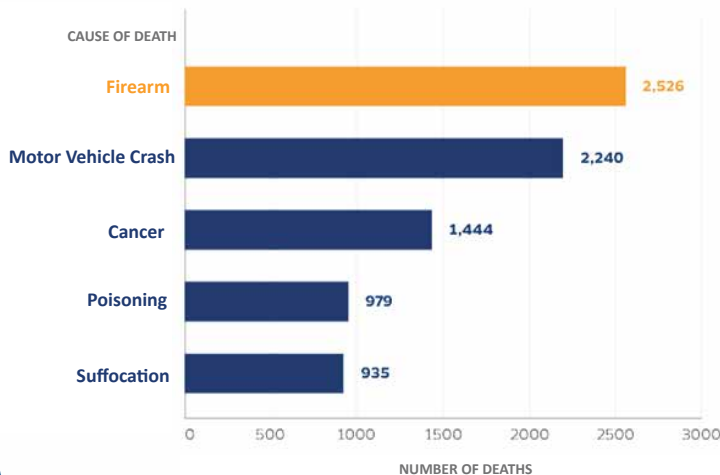
Legal Intervention 643



Undetermined 415

↑ = 100 gun deaths

Leading Causes of death for youth (ages 1-17) in 2022



## Lethality and Availability of Firearms

Due to their high lethality and availability, firearms fuel our country's high suicide and homicide rates. Four out of every five homicides and more than half of all suicides are by firearm.

**In 2022, 79% of all homicides were by firearms**

**In 2022, 55% of all suicides were by firearms**

source: <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/2024-09/2022-cgvs-gun-violence-in-the-united-states.pdf>

## Option One: Limit Access to Firearms

This approach emphasizes that the widespread availability of firearms has made our communities vulnerable to preventable deaths. With an estimated 400 million guns in circulation and varying state laws governing their purchase and possession, dangerous individuals can too easily obtain weapons during moments of crisis or criminal intent. We need comprehensive policies that keep firearms away from people who pose risks to themselves or others. Reasonable regulations—similar to those we have for vehicles, medications, and other potentially harmful items—can reduce gun deaths while respecting the rights of law-abiding citizens.

### A Primary Drawback

This approach may punish law abiding gun owners, and could give the government too much authority. Additionally, it may conflict with the Second Amendment of the Constitution.

Actions	Drawbacks
Improve red flag laws that allow temporary removal of firearms from people deemed dangerous to themselves or others.	Increase the chance that weapons will be unfairly seized.
Improve gun safety and protections for children through stricter safe storage and handling laws, increased awareness of the importance of gun safety, and increased training for parents and children.	Places burden on parents who may lack resources for proper storage; enforcement could criminalize families during tragic accidents.
Restrict access to assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.	This would not address the reality that most firearm deaths are from handguns.
Implement mandatory waiting periods and background checks for all firearm purchases, including private sales.	Extremely hard to regulate private sales without government overreach and surveillance. People can also make guns now with 3D printers.

## Options Two: Increase Protection, Deterrence, and Enforcement

This approach argues that criminals and dangerous individuals will always find ways to obtain weapons, so our focus should be on protection, deterrence, and swift enforcement of existing laws to prevent violence. Law-abiding residents need the tools and training to defend themselves, and law enforcement needs the resources and authority to stop violence before it happens. Rather than restricting the rights of responsible gun owners, we should strengthen our ability to identify threats, secure vulnerable locations, and ensure that those who commit crimes with firearms face serious consequences.

### A Primary Drawback

The proliferation of firearms and armed guards in public places could create the atmosphere of a police state and prioritize enforcement and security measures over preventive solutions such as mental health services, education, and economic development.

Actions	Drawbacks
Expand armed security as well as citizens' ability to carry firearms at vulnerable locations such as schools, workplaces, and public venues.	This could make some locations feel like a police/military state.
Increase law-abiding individuals' ability to carry firearms, including permitless concealed carry.	This could lead to greater fear, not greater security. More guns in the hands of more people doesn't necessarily make communities safer.
Enact "Stand Your Ground" laws to protect individuals who are forced to defend themselves with deadly force.	Some argue these laws may increase gun violence deaths.
Empower police and the courts to combat violence through increased patrols, resources, and tougher sentencing for crimes committed with firearms.	This could have a negative impact due to over policing and violating personal rights.

## Option Three: Address Mental Health and Social Problems

This approach assumes that gun deaths are symptoms of deeper problems in our communities, including untreated mental illness, domestic violence, poverty, lack of opportunity, and social isolation. Many of those who die by gun violence are struggling with personal crises, relationship conflicts, or social conditions that could be addressed through intervention and support. Instead of focusing primarily on the weapons themselves or increasing security measures, we should invest in mental health services, violence prevention programs, and community support that address the root causes that drive people toward violence.

### A Primary Drawback

This approach fails to address the immediate availability of lethal means and may take years or decades to show results, leaving communities vulnerable in the meantime.

Action	Drawbacks
Encourage individuals to seek mental healthcare by making mental health services more accessible, affordable, and available.	This would overload an already understaffed mental health system, patients would see increased waiting lists, and there could also be language barriers.
Enhance domestic violence intervention programs to better protect victims and prevent escalation.	It is often difficult for victims of domestic violence to reach out to authorities and ask for help.
Create increased social connection and belonging through after-school programs, mentorships, and clubs.	This is a patchwork approach that may not reach some of the most vulnerable youth.
Invest in economic development in high-crime areas to address underlying socioeconomic factors.	This could increase the cost of living and housing for those who live in low-income neighborhoods.

# Using the Issue Guide

This issue guide presents three approaches or alternatives to encourage constructive dialogue and avoid the polarizing talk which is so common today. Each approach is based on shared concerns and poses different strategies for addressing the problem. The approaches offer potential drawbacks or trade-offs inherent in each action.

You are not required to accept any one approach. You might find that you support parts of each approach while disagreeing with other parts. You are also not bound by what is in this guide. In other words, if you believe there is a relevant action that could be taken to address the problem, you are encouraged to share it with the group.

## Ground Rules

- Everyone is encouraged to participate
- Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere
- Listening is just as important as speaking
- Let others finish their thoughts before sharing yours.
- No one or two individuals should dominate
- Consider all options and ideas fairly
- Focus on the actions we can take in our communities.

## Dialogue Agenda

### Introduction

Review ground rules.  
Introduce the issue.

### Connect to Issue

Think about how the issue affects you, your family, friends, and community.

### Consider Each Option

Consider each approach one at a time.  
Allow equal time for each.

- What is attractive?
- What about the drawbacks?

### Review and Reflect

Review the conversation as a group.

- What areas of common ground were apparent?
- What tensions and trade-offs were most difficult?
- From whom else do we need to hear?

This issue guide was prepared for the Let's Talk, Marathon County project by the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS) and the Wisconsin Institute for Citizenship and Civil Dialogue (WICCD) with generous funding from New Pluralists. More information about the grant funding can be found at [newpluralists.org](http://newpluralists.org). WIPPS and WICCD are units of the Universities of Wisconsin. Visit [wipps.org](http://wipps.org) or contact us at [info@wipps.org](mailto:info@wipps.org).