



# Delaware County Suicide Prevention Awareness Task Force

## Firearms and Suicide

### ***What's the problem?***

- *2% of the suicide attempts in PA involve guns, but these attempts produce 54% of the fatalities.*
- *In PA one-half of all youth suicides involve firearms.*
- *Adult and elder white males account for 80% of firearms-related suicides in PA.*
- *60% of the suicides in southeastern PA involve firearms.*
- *Firearms in the home increase the suicide risk of all occupants five times.*
- *There are substantially more suicides involving firearms than homicides in most communities*
- *States with high rates of household firearm ownership have significantly higher rates of suicide.*

### ***Does this mean that guns cause suicide?***

It means that if an individual at risk of suicide has access to a gun there is a very high likelihood that it will be used in attempting suicide and that the attempt will almost always result in death. More than 90% of suicide attempts using guns are fatal. Guns are involved in suicides because they are often readily available in the home, comparatively easy to acquire, and relatively easy to use. Handguns are easily hidden and all firearms offer little opportunity for rescue or intervention. Research shows that the week after a handgun purchase is a high risk period for suicide.

### ***Who is most at risk of completing suicide with a gun?***

Males of all ages are most likely to use a gun to attempt suicide. Males who have access to firearms in their place of residence are at high risk. More than 80% of the suicides among veterans involve firearms. Suicide attempts by individuals who abuse or misuse alcohol commonly involve firearms. Police officers and others who carry firearms are at high risk. Individuals who are familiar with the use of firearms are at high risk of employing them as a means of suicide. There is evidence that more women are using firearms as a means of suicide.

### ***How can suicides involving firearms be prevented?***

The best preventive measure is to keep firearms out of the home or immediately remove those that are present. Local police departments can provide information on disposing of unwanted firearms and ammunition. Firearms should not be present in households of individuals who have mental illness or a history of alcohol abuse or suicidal behavior. Where guns are present they should be stored disassembled and separate from ammunition in a break-in proof locked container.

### ***Won't a suicidal individual simply use another means if a gun is unavailable?***

Research indicates that restricting access to means of suicide does not result in the immediate substitution of another means. Impulsivity, especially as a result of alcohol use, plays a role in suicide and limiting access to a gun may provide an opportunity for intervention. ***Restricting access to guns and other means is only a short-term preventative. At-risk individuals need professional help to avoid the recurrence of suicidality and possible attempts in the future.***