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The MMS Raises the Physician Voice for Firearm Safety and Gun Violence Prevention

BY CANDACE SAVAGE, MMS SENIOR PUBLIC HEALTH OUTREACH MANAGER

The horror and tragedy of senseless, but increasingly familiar, mass shootings shake us to our core and are widely shared across media. Yet, the day-to-day fatal and nonfatal shootings and gun suicides taking place throughout Massachusetts also deserve our attention and action. [In an average year](#), 109 people in the state die by gun homicide and 271 are wounded by gun assaults — a rate of 1.6 homicides and 3.9 assaults per 100,000 people. An additional 143 people die by suicide using a firearm each year.

The Kaiser Family Foundation's April report, [Americans' Experiences with Gun-Related Violence, Injuries, and Deaths](#), noted that one in five adults was threatened with or had family killed by a gun, including suicide. One in six witnessed someone being shot. Yet only one in seven adults surveyed said that a health care provider had inquired about guns in the home, and just a quarter said that their pediatrician had done so.

The MMS has a long and strong history of advocacy regarding firearm safety and gun violence prevention. But in the face of current civilian carnage due to firearms, we as physicians have an opportunity to proactively deter gun violence by focusing on evidence-based measures to advise educational, policy, and advocacy efforts. Physician involvement underscores that gun violence is a public health crisis and of crucial importance to physicians.

**"Change must happen. This must end.
It is our duty as physicians to drive the initiatives
needed to address this scourge."**

— Dr. Theodore A. Callanos II

The heartbreak of the elementary school mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas, in May 2022 cemented the determination of the Society to make real change to limit danger from firearm injury and death for patients in Massachusetts and across the United States. Outgoing MMS president Theodore A. Callanos II, MD, FACS, began his term that month, expecting to focus on returning to pre-pandemic priorities. The Uvalde shooting shifted his focus.

Organizing an MMS Gun Violence Prevention Initiative

"The first statement of my presidency was on the Uvalde, Texas, shooting — this event influenced the course of my presidency," says Dr. Callanos. "As a medical society, we must continue to advocate for substantial and sensible changes to stem the public health crisis of gun violence in our country. Gun violence is now the leading cause of death in the United States for children and teens. Change must happen. This must end. It is our duty as physicians to drive the initiatives needed to address this scourge."

By September, a resolute cadre of physicians with expertise in the subject agreed to serve on a newly established MMS Firearm Safety and Gun Violence Prevention Advisory Group. Physicians Christopher Barsotti, Eric Goralnick, Michael Hirsh, Thea James, Megan Ranney, and Chana Sacks have offered recommendations and direction to the MMS Officers regarding outreach, education, legislative action, and community involvement to promote gun safety in the state, on the federal policy level, and to physicians throughout the country through the American Medical Association.

Educating Physicians on Patient Screening and Risk

To educate physicians in Massachusetts and beyond, the MMS has created a new, free educational webinar, ["Firearms, Screening, Suicide Prevention, Community Engagement"](#). It offers tools and suggestions for routine screening of patients regarding guns in the home (particularly in primary