



## Written Submission to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security: Bill C-21

March 2023

## Summary

The Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) is pleased to submit the following in response to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security's review of Bill C-21, An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms).

The CPS believes that guns should not be kept in homes or environments where children and adolescents live or play and strongly supports the application of a public health approach to the regulation of firearms that is evidence-based and prioritizes the health and safety of children and youth.

## Firearms injury and death

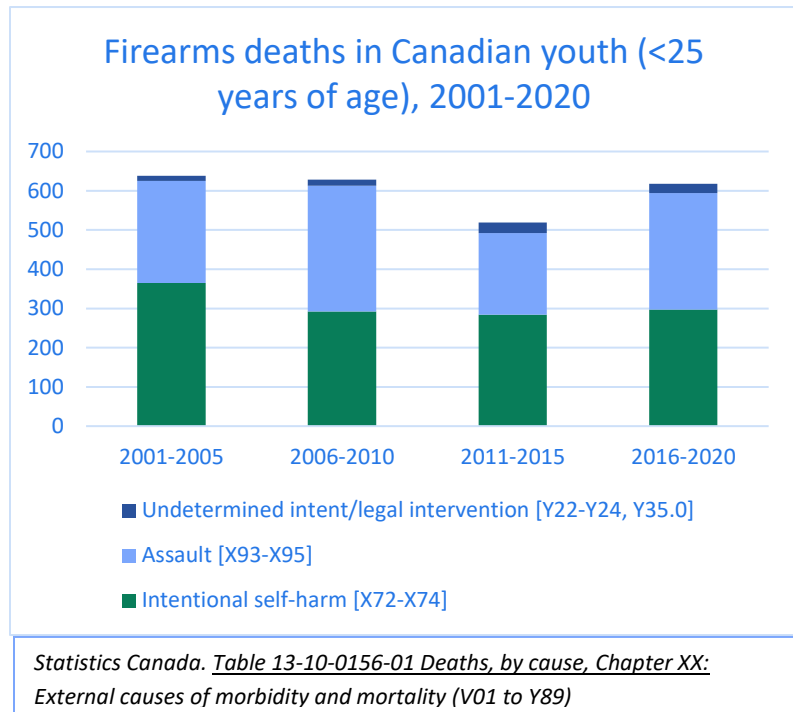
Firearms are a significant cause of preventable death and disability for Canadian youth. Adolescent and young adult males are disproportionately affected; however, firearm-related deaths occur in youth of all ages.

Civilian-owned handguns and assault-style firearms pose a serious risk to public safety. The availability of firearms to youth is an important factor in adolescent suicide, unintentional firearms deaths, gang homicide and school shootings. Guns should therefore not be kept in homes or environments where children and adolescents live or play.

The relationship between firearms injuries and death and mental health is significant and often under-reported. Intentional self-harm accounted for 75% of gun deaths for people of all ages in Canada from 2015-2020, and accounts for the majority of firearm-related death in Canadian children and youth.<sup>1</sup> Suicide by firearm is much more common in young males than young females. According to Statistics Canada, 94% of those aged 15-24 who committed suicide using a firearm between 2000-2020 were male.

## Children and adolescents

Children and adolescents have developmental characteristics that put them at increased risk for firearm injury. Children lack the experience, cognitive development, and impulse control to distinguish a toy gun from a real one, to understand the consequences of gun handling and to consistently avoid doing



<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. [Table 13-10-0156-01 Deaths, by cause, Chapter XX: External causes of morbidity and mortality \(V01 to Y89\)](#) (Accessed March 28, 2023).

something they have been told not to. Adolescents remain vulnerable to injury because they have incompletely developed self-regulation skills, including impulse control. Self-regulation skills can be particularly impaired in situations involving peers, high levels of emotion and substance use. Impulsivity is an important factor in adolescent suicide. Because firearms carry the highest case-fatality rate of all suicide methods, it is not surprising that the availability of a firearm in the home has been shown to be a strong risk factor for adolescent suicide.

## Family violence

There is a strong positive correlation between the availability of a firearm in the home and the risk of both suicide and homicide. Firearms in the home significantly increases the risk of fatalities associated with family violence and intimate partner violence – the most common form of violence against women in Canada. Family violence and IPV causes suffering, physical harms, and long-lasting behavioural consequences for youth. When there is concern regarding IPV or family violence, the presence of a firearm in the home must be determined and, if present, should be a considered a risk factor for homicide of a family member.

## Targeted school violence

While school shootings represent only a small fraction of homicides in Canada, they have a tremendous impact on the schools and communities in which they occur, as well as the nation. ‘Targeted school violence’ is a term that was developed to describe homicidal violence in which a school is specifically selected as the site of attack, while the target may be a specific individual or a group or category of individuals.

Youth who perpetrate school violence are usually male; however, they otherwise show a wide range of demographic, family and social characteristics. Based on typical characteristics of targeted school violence, the following interventions have been suggested:

- The removal of firearms from the homes of adolescents and children and the prohibition of the sale or possession of semiautomatic firearms to reduce the lethality of incidents
- Training students and teachers to identify and report threats of and planning for school violence
- Addressing bullying in schools
- Providing mental health services which can identify and respond to students experiencing depression and suicidal ideation

## Conclusion

The CPS urges all levels of government to legislate stricter controls on the acquisition, transport ownership and storage of firearms and supports the implementation of a national ban on civilian ownership of handguns and assault-style firearms. Comprehensive legislative initiatives such as the national handgun freeze are needed to protect Canadians from firearms injury and death.

It is important that legislative measures be enacted alongside targeted programs to address many of the root causes behind gun violence. Greater supports to address the crisis in youth mental healthcare including dedicated and sustained funding for youth mental health, the rollout of a Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy and the funding needed to support the successful implementation of the 988 crisis

line are needed. Measures to reduce child and family poverty such as the Canada Child Benefit and the realization of national pharmacare, dental care, and affordable child care are also needed. Scaled up efforts to tackle sexual and gender-based violence and ensure that women and children experiencing violence in the home have a safe place to turn must also be enacted.

## About the CPS

The Canadian Paediatric Society is the national association of paediatricians, committed to working together to advance the health of children and youth by nurturing excellence in health care, advocacy, education, research and support of its membership. Founded in 1922, the CPS is a voluntary professional association that represents more than 3,600 paediatricians, paediatric subspecialists, paediatric residents, and others who work with and care for children and youth. The CPS is governed by an elected Board of Directors representing all provinces and territories.