Partnering with Gun Owners to Prevent Suicide in NC:
Clinical & Community Strategies

Catherine Barber
Harvard Injury Control Research Center and CALM America
• 20 years ago, most suicide prevention groups didn’t talk about guns, and most gun owner groups didn’t talk about suicide.
• And yet gun owners in the US die by suicide at twice the rate of non-owners
• They are not more likely to have a mental illness or to be suicidal; they are more likely to die should they become suicidal.
• This is a modifiable risk factor, and yet both movements were frozen.
Engaging Gun Owners

• How do we reach gun owners at risk of suicide?
• With an anti-gun agenda? No
• That’s like sending an anti-gay group to do suicide prevention campaign in the gay and lesbian community.

• If you don’t trust the messenger, you don’t trust the message. And you’re likely to get the message wrong.
• When approached as part of the solution, most gun groups will help.
What’s the Message?

I don’t think I want to live anymore.

Distressed person

I care; how can I help? And for now, how about storing your guns away from home?

Confidante

e.g., Clinician, hotline worker, police officer on a wellness check, neighbor, shooting buddy
Friends don't let friends drive drunk.

If your friend has had too much to drink, he doesn't have to drive.
Here are three ways to keep your friend alive...

drive your friend home

have your friend sleep over

call a cab

The Designated Driver Is The Life Of The Party
Disseminating the Message

• Clinical strategy
  • Clinicians (behavioral & physical health)
  • Gatekeepers (e.g., first responders, clergy, defense attorneys)

• Community strategy
  (e.g., gun shop owners, firearm instructors, sportsman clubs, firearm journalists)

Lethal Means Counseling
Suicide awareness as a basic tenet of firearm safety
“If you really want to die, you can eventually find a way.”
"If you really want to die, you can eventually find a way."

That’s true.

What’s not true is that everyone who becomes suicidal remains suicidal.
Why Means Matter

1. The acute phase of a suicidal crisis is often brief.
2. Some methods are far more lethal than others. Anything a person substitutes for a gun is less likely to kill.
3. >90% of those who attempt and survive—even people making very serious attempts—do not go on to die by suicide.
Suicidal Crises

People seen in the hospital following a suicide attempt were asked when they had *first* started thinking about making that attempt.

What percent said within **10 minutes** of attempting?
Suicidal Crises

People seen in the hospital following a suicide attempt were asked when they had *first* started thinking about making that attempt.

Most people who become suicidal have struggled with ongoing, underlying problems. The movement from distress to suicidal idea to attempt can be rapid and unpredictable.
Clinical Strategy:
Lethal Means Counseling
Training Resources

**CALM-Online**
Free online training on lethal means counseling at https://zerosuicidetraining.edc.org/

**CALM-Online for Pediatric Providers**
Free training on American Academy of Pediatrics website

**In-Person NC CALM**
From CALM America or local trainers
Contact: admin@CALMAmerica.org
Lethal Means Counseling

- **Comfortable conversations** – not a cross-examination
- **Options** – offsite storage and locking options; legal context
- **Going upstream** – don’t wait for disclosure of suicidal ideation
- **The self-defense gun** – address separately
- **Which methods** – always address guns & meds; other methods if focus of SI
- **A specific plan** – the more specific the easier to implement
- **Follow up** – did it get done?
Comfortable Conversations

How you raise the issue can make a difference.

A. “Do you have guns at home?”
vs.
B. “What some gun owners do in your situation is store their guns away from home until things improve. I’m wondering if you’ve considered something like that.”
Options

**Safest**  Temporarily store guns (or a critical component like slide, bolt, firing pin) away from home while the person is at increased risk.

**Next Best**  Store in a gun safe or lock box at home and keep the keys/combination from the at-risk person. Or disassemble the guns and lock up a critical component.
Offsite Options

- Friend/relative*
- Gun Ranges
- Gun Shops
- Pawn Shops
- Police Dept.
- Storage Units

* Unless prohibited by law.
Going Further Upstream

Case Example:
You evaluate a pt after his 2nd drunk driving arrest. Hx alcoholism; rocky marriage; rocky employment. No suicidal ideation.

Interval between *first* thinking about most recent attempt and actually attempting.
“Sometimes a crisis hits and people who are already struggling in the ways you’ve described suddenly have strong suicidal feelings. Those feelings are often short-lived, but at the time suicide can feel like the only way out. If that happens, I want to be sure you make it through safely and call for help. One step would be to store any household guns away from home until you’re feeling better.”
Lethal Means Counseling

- **Comfortable conversations** – not a cross-examination
- **Options** – offsite storage and locking options; legal context
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Specific Plan and Follow-up

- Which is most likely to happen?
  - "I recommend you take steps to reduce your access to things at home you could use to hurt yourself."
  - “Let me summarize what you came up with: your wife is putting your Glock in the safe and changing the code before you get home. She’ll also dispose of the leftover oxycontin. Tomorrow your dad will pick up the guns and store them at his house.”

- Follow up to ensure the plan was carried out
Community Strategy:
Partnering with the Gun-Owning Community
Good Messengers

- Firearm instructors, sportsman clubs, gun magazine writers, gun shop owners, etc. are likely good messengers.

- **Strong safety culture** around firearm safety, protecting the family, neighbors looking out for one another.

- These values dovetail well with suicide prevention.

- Expanding focus from preventing unintentional firearm deaths (500/yr) to firearm suicides (24,000/yr) is a natural fit.
Pushing on an Open Door
Gun Partnerships - 2009

NH Birthplace!
New Hampshire’s ”The Gun Shop Project”

• Coalition of gun retailers, suicide prevention people, and gun rights people began meeting together in 2009 to examine role for gun shops in preventing suicide.
• Developed customer education materials for gun shops in NH with input from gun shop owners.

2012 NHFSC Members. Pictured: Ralph Demicco (Riley’s Guns), Elaine deMello (NAMI-NH), Howard and Sarah Brown (GO-NH), Mary Vriniotis (Harvard), David Welsh (legislator), Elaine Frank (CALM), Elizabeth Fenner-Lukaitis (state health dept). Regular Members Not Pictured: Cathy Barber (Harvard), Tom Brown (firearm instructor), Natalie Riblet (Dartmouth), John Yule (Wildlife Taxidermy and Sports [gun shop])
48% of NH gun shops displayed at least one of the materials (observed during unannounced visits to all shops in state).
Gun Partnerships - 2009

NH
Birthplace!
Gun Partnerships Today (examples)

- National Shooting Sports Foundation & American Foundation for Suicide Prevention – national gun shop project
- Veteran suicide: WorriedAboutaVeteran.org (for families); Overwatch (for Vets)
- NHFSC state coalition model spread: e.g., Lock & Talk Virginia, Safer Homes (Washington State, Missouri), Colorado Firearm Safety Coalition, Utah Suicide Prevention Coalition’s Firearm Committee, etc.
- Walk the Talk America; Hold My Guns
- Firearm instructor initiatives: UT, WA, LA, MA
- Tabling at gun shows
- Coverage in gun magazines, Outdoor Channel, Sportsman Channel
Utah Case Example
Utah Data Linkage Study

- Legislature directed state SAMH agency to conduct a study of firearms & suicide in Utah, linking existing state data. Gun rights group testified in support.

PUBLIC SAFETY
- Brady Background Check
- Concealed Carry Permit Status
- ATF Trace

2014-2015 Suicides

History of hospital visits

NVDRS Data
How many suicide decedents could pass a background check?
How many suicide decedents could pass a background check?

9 out of 10
87% overall, 92% gun suicides

**Policy Implication:** It falls largely to friends, family, providers to urge those at risk to store guns away from home or inaccessibly until they have recovered.

**State action:** $2 million state matching fund to promote suicide awareness and safe firearm storage as basic tenets of firearm safety.

**Largest private donors:** Intermountain Healthcare, LDS Church, Utah Shooting Sports Council
Creating a County Plan
What’s the Message?

Distressed person

I don’t think I want to live anymore.

Confidante

e.g., Clinician, hotline worker, police officer on a wellness check, neighbor, shooting buddy

I care; how can I help? And for now, how about storing your guns away from home?
Clinical Strategy
Major healthcare and mental health clinics; mobile crisis units; ambulance services
Building It Into Your Organization

- Train up staff (e.g., CALM-Online)
- Change protocols as of given date
- Provide cheat sheets to clinicians

Do community outreach (shooting clubs, gun shops, etc.) to change social norms. Makes it easier for pt to “hear” the message.

Change information systems

Distribute patient/family brochures. Include list of local, vetted storage options.
GIund Owners Leading the Way on Safety

Questions about Offsite Firearm Storage in Colorado

Why do gun owners sometimes store firearms away from home for safety?
• A teenager is in crisis and at risk for suicide
• The grandparents are visiting for a week
• A couple is divorcing and arguments are getting heated
• A family safeguards their guns while on vacation
• A sport shooter stores at the range to avoid keeping them in his car, vulnerable to theft, during work

WHERE CAN GUNS BE STORED?
Many places store guns—gun shops, shooting ranges, police departments. Turn this page for options near you. Guns may also be loaned to a relative, as long as the person isn’t prohibited by law from having a gun. “Relatives” are spouses, parents, children, siblings, grandparents or godparents, nieces/nephews, first cousins, and aunts/uncles. Loans to a friend are also okay. Colorado law says that loans to a non-relative for over 72 hours must go through a background check (usually at a gun shop).

WHAT DO BACKGROUND CHECKS INVOLVE?
These are the same instant checks of state and federal databases that gun shops run when you buy a gun. Their purpose is to keep guns out of the wrong hands. They check whether the person has felony or domestic violence convictions or restraining orders against them, and whether they were hospitalized against their will or found “mentally incompetent” by a court. In Colorado, involuntary 72-hour mental health “holds” do not keep you from passing a check. Records on voluntary mental health care are not part of a background check.

Some places—like pawn shops—require a background check to get your guns back. The list on the back notes where background checks are required.

PREVENTING SUICIDE
Mental health groups and the National Shooting Sports Foundation advise storing guns away from home when a family member is at risk for suicide.

What does “at risk” for suicide mean? It means struggling with a mental health or substance abuse issue, especially when life crises like relationship break-ups occur. If suicidal feelings occur, they can escalate very quickly to an attempt, especially among youth.

Why store guns offsite? Won’t a suicidal person just use another method? Some will, many won’t. But every other method is less likely to kill. The things we value in guns—their effectiveness and speed—are what make them so deadly. Once you pull the trigger there’s no chance for change of heart and little chance for rescue.

If a person attempts suicide and lives, will they eventually kill themselves? 90% will not—even people who have made serious attempts. Suicidal feelings often pass over time. Keeping guns from a loved one at risk is one way to keep them safer. When youth use a gun in suicides, most are household guns.

I need a gun at hand to protect my family. Protecting those we love means knowing the biggest threats to their safety. This can change over time. When a person has a mental health or drug/alcohol problem, suicide is a far bigger risk than being attacked.

When do I bring my guns back? It’s a case-by-case decision best made with advice from your loved one’s mental health provider. Feeling better for a week or two isn’t nearly long enough to know things are really better. People can cycle in and out of suicidal crises if the underlying mental health issues are still a problem. When you do bring guns back home, store securely locked with ammunition locked separately.
# Firearm Storage Options – Wheat Ridge Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Cost*</th>
<th>Background Check?**</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gun Shops/Gun Clubs</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns for Everyone</td>
<td>(720) 502-3596</td>
<td>9751 W 44th Ave #101, Wheat Ridge</td>
<td>FREE for mental health storage</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Part of “Walk the Talk” program to encourage gun shops to promote mental wellness and safe storage</td>
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<tr>
<td>G &amp; G Guns</td>
<td>(303) 274-7970</td>
<td>8525 W Colfax Ave Unit A, Lakewood</td>
<td>$10 per gun per month</td>
<td>Yes - $10.50</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hammer Down Guns</td>
<td>(303) 424-1948</td>
<td>4500 Wadsworth Blvd, Wheat Ridge</td>
<td>$15/gun/month</td>
<td>Yes - $10.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mountain Range Armory</td>
<td>(720) 988-9853</td>
<td>7512 Grandview Ave, Arvada</td>
<td>$20/gun/month</td>
<td>Yes - $15</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Law Enforcement</strong>*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Golden Police Department</td>
<td>(303) 384-8045</td>
<td>911 10th St, Golden</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Please call ahead before storing, and before attempting to pick up. Pick-up requires an approval by a judge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edgewater Police Department</td>
<td>(303)-235-0500</td>
<td>5901 W. 25th Ave, Edgewater</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Storage for up to 120 days.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pawn Shops and Self-Storage Units (examples only; there are many others)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>EZPawn</td>
<td>(303) 327-8510</td>
<td>5201 W Colfax Ave, Lakewood</td>
<td>20% / month on loan amount</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Must bring valid government ID to obtain loan.</td>
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<td>Pawn Bank Inc.</td>
<td>(303) 232-3300</td>
<td>2815 S Broadway St, Englewood</td>
<td>10% / month on loan amount</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>I-70 Self Storage</td>
<td>(303) 422-7886</td>
<td>8495 W I-70 Frontage Rd N, Arvada</td>
<td>$30 one-time refundable fee $45/month</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Firearms must be locked. Ammunition cannot be stored with firearms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Self Storage</td>
<td>(303) 421-2771</td>
<td>8845 W I-70 Frontage Rd, Arvada</td>
<td>$30 one-time refundable fee $55/month</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Cannot store ammunition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advantage Self Storage</td>
<td>(720) 255-0222</td>
<td>6160 W 52nd Ave, Arvada</td>
<td>$25 one-time admin fee $49/month</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Cannot store ammunition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extra Space Storage</td>
<td>(303) 423-2866</td>
<td>6160 W 56th Ave, Arvada</td>
<td>$24 one-time admin fee $80/month</td>
<td>No</td>
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</table>

* Prices subject to change (current as of October 2018). Transfer fees from store back to owner may apply, as well as a background check fee.

** Self-storage units don't require background checks when customer retrieves guns. Pawn shops do. Policies at gun shops and police departments vary. Background check fees are per transaction, not per firearm.

***Do not carry open firearms into a police station. Call in advance. Lock firearms in a case or leave them locked in your vehicle while making arrangements with law enforcement.
Gatekeeper Strategy
People who are seeing you at your lowest (e.g., police, defense/divorce attorneys, DV programs)

And people in whom you confide (e.g., clergy, barbershops, barkeepers)
Gun Community Strategy
Gun Shops, Shooting Ranges, Sportsman Clubs, Gun Shows, Firearm Instructors, Gun Rights Groups, etc.
In 5-10 Years

Clinicians and gatekeepers
Raising gun access is 2nd nature & comfortable for clinician and client

Gun-owning community – Every class, website, brochure, etc., that covers firearm safety mentions suicide prevention (“Be alert to signs of suicide in loved ones and help keep firearms from those at risk until they have recovered.”)

I don’t think I can take it any more.

I care. How can I help? And for now, how about storing your guns away from home?
THANK YOU

Questions?

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