



Enable the CDC to Research Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue

March 13, 2018

For two decades, as the result of a coordinated attack by the gun lobby, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been hamstrung from researching gun violence as a public health crisis.

In 1996, congressional allies of the gun lobby added a rider to the CDC budget that prevented the agency from spending any funds to “advocate or promote gun control.”¹ At the same time, Congress reduced the funding appropriated to the CDC by \$2.6 million—the exact amount that the CDC spent on gun violence research the previous year. In 2011, a similar rider was added to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) budget.²

The combination of the rider and a lack of dedicated funding has had a substantial chilling effect on research into gun violence.

- Since the rider was enacted, CDC annual funding for this research has fallen 96 percent.³
- From 2004 to 2015—when considered in terms of death rates—of the top 30 causes of death, gun violence was the least researched.⁴

The lack of a dedicated public investment in this research has left policymakers willfully ignorant about many aspects of gun violence in the United States and the most effective interventions to reduce gun deaths.⁵

The original author of this restriction—former Rep. Jay Dickey (R-AR)—publicly changed his mind about the rider that bears his name and urged Congress to resume public health research on gun violence.⁶ More than 100 medical organizations have called on Congress to restore funding for this research.⁷

Endnotes

- 1 *Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act, 1997*, Public Law 104-208, 104th Cong., 2d sess. (September 30, 1996).
- 2 Christine Jamieson, "Gun violence research: History of the federal funding freeze," *The American Psychological Association*, February 2013, available at <http://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2013/02/gun-violence.aspx>.
- 3 Everytown for Gun Safety, "The Congressional Ban on Gun Violence Prevention Research," available at <https://everytownresearch.org/the-congressional-ban-on-gun-violence-prevention-research/> (last accessed March 2018).
- 4 David E. Stark and Nigam H. Shah, "Funding and Publication of Research on Gun Violence and Other Leading Causes of Death" (*JAMA Network*, 2017), available at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2595514>.
- 5 Center for American Progress, "Removing Barriers and Reinvesting in Public Health Research on Gun Violence" (2016), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2016/03/09/132894/removing-barriers-and-reinvesting-in-public-health-research-on-gun-violence/>.
- 6 Steve Inskeep, "Ex-Rep. Dickey Regrets Restrictive Law On Gun Violence Research," *NPR*, October 9, 2015, available at <https://www.npr.org/2015/10/09/447098666/ex-rep-dickey-regrets-restrictive-law-on-gun-violence-research>.
- 7 Ciara McCarthy, "Over 100 medical groups urge Congress to fund CDC research on gun violence," *The Guardian*, April 6, 2016, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/06/cdc-congress-research-gun-violence-public-health>.