



Pennsylvania
Commission on Crime
and Delinquency



Pennsylvania
Department of Health



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 13, 2025

Contact: Ali Gantz, PCCD, algantz@pa.gov
Mark O'Neill, DOH, ra-dhpressoffice@pa.gov

Shapiro-Davis Administration Highlights Importance of Safely Storing Firearms to Keep Families and Communities Safe

Last year, Governor Shapiro re-established Pennsylvania's Office of Gun Violence Prevention, building on the Shapiro-Davis 2024-25 bipartisan budget which makes significant investments to make Pennsylvania communities safer.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health's state health centers began handing out free gun locks in October and have distributed more than 3,500 gun locks statewide to date.

Lancaster, PA — The **Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD)**, **Department of Health (DOH)**, and **State Police** joined Penn Medicine Lancaster General, and Mental Health America of Lancaster County today to raise awareness of the importance of safely storing firearms to reduce the risk of firearm injuries.

“Storing firearms safely within the home can make a huge difference in saving lives and preventing injuries, as nearly a third of all youth firearm deaths are due to the unintentional discharge of a weapon and suicide,” said **Health Secretary Dr. Debra Bogen**. “We are taking measures, such as providing free gunlocks to Pennsylvania families, to help prevent tragic and avoidable injuries and deaths from unsecured firearms.”

Firearm-related injuries and fatalities are a public health crisis. On average, about 1,600 Pennsylvanians die from gunshot wounds each year, with 3,000 more injured. Research shows that safer gun ownership practices, like safer firearm storage, can significantly reduce firearm injuries and fatalities associated with suicide and unintentional shootings, especially among youth.

“Gun violence is not just a public safety crisis, it is a public health emergency affecting kids, families, and entire communities,” **PCCD Executive Director Mike Pennington** stated. “PCCD’s reestablished Office of Gun Violence Prevention is taking a comprehensive approach to this urgent issue by gathering feedback from experts and stakeholders across Pennsylvania communities to develop a gun violence prevention

plan for the Commonwealth, including strategies to increase awareness of firearm safety practices.”

Pennsylvania has made significant strides in addressing gun violence as a public safety and public health issue in recent years through historic investments in community violence intervention and firearm safety programs and has seen reductions in homicides and firearm-related injuries in many communities. However, rates of firearm suicide have increased, representing 55% of gun deaths in 2022.

Safer firearm storage practices can reduce the likelihood of injury and self-harm, especially among children and youth, but research suggests that many gun owners may not use these practices consistently. Programs that offer no- or low-cost storage devices coupled with education and training on their use can help keep families and communities safe from accidents and other firearm-related incidents.

“A cable lock renders a firearm inoperable when in place, offering an additional layer of safety when used in combination with a gun safe or lock box. Cable locks are available for free at your local Pennsylvania State Police station,” said **Captain Robin Brown, Commander of PSP Troop J**. “Additionally, it’s a good idea to store ammunition away from firearms, preferably in a separate safe or lockbox.”

In addition to providing firearm storage equipment at local Pennsylvania State Police stations, PSP created a series of videos highlighting important rules and tips for handling and storing firearms. These videos can be found on the [State Police website](#).

Last year, DOH [partnered](#) with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to distribute free gun locks to residents across the Commonwealth, and more than 3,560 locks have been given out at community events and state health centers since October 2024. Each free gun lock includes information regarding suicide prevention and firearm safety, acting as an important safeguard to help prevent gun-related suicides and unintentional firearm injuries. Residents interested in obtaining a free gun lock can contact their local [state health center](#).

DOH also provides grant funding to Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health, and project partners Lancaster County Sheriff’s Office and Mental Health America of Lancaster County, to provide firearm training and education to residents of Lancaster County. The trainings are taught by certified firearm instructors and provide participants with information on firearms laws, firearms safety rules, safe storage methods, and the connection between mental health and fire-arm related injuries and deaths. The initiative also distributes cable locks through law enforcement partners, biometric gun safes through their in-person safe storage trainings and provides training for healthcare providers on how to talk to their patients about firearm safety.

“The American Academy of Pediatrics announcement that firearms were the number one killer of children in the United States was very impactful for me,” said **Dr. Pia Fenimore, Vice Chair/Chief of Pediatrics for Penn Medicine Lancaster General**

Health. “As a pediatrician and a mother, I have seen firsthand the devastation gun violence can bring to a family and a community. Programs that not only educate about safe storage but also bring awareness to the connection between safe storage and suicide prevention are critical to protecting our children and saving lives.”

“Lancaster County is coming together on this very important public health issue,” said **Lindsay Pringle, M.Ed., CPST, Manager of Community Health and Wellness and Safe Kids Lancaster County Coordinator for Lancaster General Penn Medicine Lancaster General.** “Response to this initiative has been overwhelming positive across the board. The message is simple: responsible firearm ownership includes safe storage to prevent suicide and unintentional injury.”

“As advocates to protect our most vulnerable, our hope is to reduce the number of those that die by suicide through firearms,” said **Megan Beyerle, Education Coordinator for Mental Health America of Lancaster County.** “We respect the right to bear firearms and don’t want to make this a political issue. For us it is a safety issue.”

Last September, Governor Shapiro re-established the Pennsylvania Office of Gun Violence Prevention under PCCD. Since that time, the Office has conducted four listening sessions and gathered insights from more than 800 Pennsylvanians on the impact of gun violence in their communities. Feedback will shape a strategic plan for the Office as it works to develop a Commonwealth-wide approach to prevent gun violence.

Since Governor Shapiro took office in January 2023, PCCD:

- [Provided \\$40 million](#) in grant funding for 64 organizations to strengthen gun violence prevention and intervention through the 2023-24 Violence Intervention & Prevention (VIP) grant program and Collaborative Community Violence Intervention (CCVI) Strategies grants.
- [Was allocated \\$56.5 million](#) in violence intervention and prevention funding, including \$11.5 million in first-ever state funding to enhance after-school and out-of-school opportunities for youth through the new Building Opportunity through Out of School Time (BOOST) program. Awards for 2024-25 VIP and BOOST grant solicitations will be announced later this week.
- [Secured \\$4 million](#) in federal Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative Grant funds to expand hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs) statewide.
- Provided over 800 technical assistance sessions to 135 community-based gun violence organizations receiving PCCD grant funding through [PA Peace Alliance](#).

###