

Addressing Gun Violence as a Public Health Crisis

Presented to the 119th U.S. Congress | February 5, 2026

Gun violence is a public health crisis and a racial justice issue. Gun violence is now the leading cause of death for Black children and teens in the United States (U.S.) and a major driver of physical, emotional, and community trauma. The vast majority of gun deaths among Black Americans are gun homicides, and Black Americans make up the majority of gun homicide victims in the U.S. Black communities are disproportionately impacted by firearm-related homicides, with ripple effects across generations. Nurses witness the aftermath of gun violence in emergency rooms, schools, homes, and communities, often. The **National Black Nurses Association, Inc. (NBNA)**, representing over **308,000 Black American nurses**, urges Congress to treat gun violence as a public health emergency and are calling for urgent, evidence-based policy action to prevent loss of life and promote community healing.

Policy Priorities for Congressional Action

1. **Declare gun violence a national public health emergency** by directing federal agencies like the CDC and HHS to lead a coordinated public health response, including prevention, research, and trauma-informed care.
2. **Strengthen universal background checks** by passing legislation to close loopholes and ensure that firearms are not sold without proper screening.
3. **Ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines** by reinstating federal assault weapons bans to reduce the frequency and mortality of mass shootings and high-casualty incidents in public spaces.
4. **Invest in community violence intervention (CVI) programs.** Fund evidence-based CVI programs including those led by health professionals that reduce gun violence without relying on punitive policing.
5. **Support trauma-informed mental health services** by expanding funding for community-based mental health services for survivors, families, and frontline providers impacted by gun violence in Black communities.
6. **Expand gun violence research funding** by increasing funding to the CDC and NIH for gun violence prevention research, focusing on root causes, disparities, and effective interventions in Black communities.

Why This Matters

- Black Americans experience gun homicide **13 times** the rate of White Americans.¹
- Gun violence costs the U.S. an estimated **\$557 billion annually** in medical, lost productivity, and criminal justice expenses.²
- Exposure to gun violence **increases risk** of PTSD, depression, chronic disease, and long-term community trauma.³
- While overall gun violence saw a decline in 2025, it remains high with at least **40,000** people shot across the U.S.⁴
- Nurses are frontline responders and trusted health educators who play a key role in gun violence prevention, intervention, and healing.⁵

References

1. CDC (2023). *Firearm homicide rates by race and ethnicity United States, 2019-2022*.
2. Everytown for Gun Safety (2023). *The economic cost of gun violence*.
3. American Public Health Association (2022). *Gun violence as a public health crisis*.
4. Violence Policy Center (2025). *Nearly nine out of 10 Black homicide victims killed with guns, new VPC study finds*.
5. Hallowell, S.G., Cogan, R. (2023). Nursing's role in firearm violence prevention. *OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*, 28 (3).