

Firearms, Culture and Suicide Risk: What Is Safety?

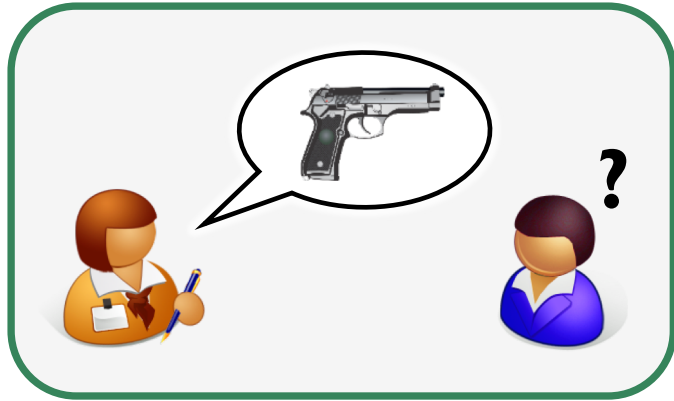
Jeffrey Sung, MD & Brett Bass

Forefront Suicide Prevention

Safer Homes, Suicide Aware

saferhomescoalition.org

Firearms, Culture and Suicide Risk: What Is Safety?



**Jeffrey Sung, MD &
Brett Bass**

World Suicide
Prevention Day
September 10, 2021

- What is safety?
- Cultural worldviews and cultural humility
- The population at risk
- What is the message?
- Cultural competency training
- Cultural knowledge

What is safety?

Safety from suicide

- Unloaded
- Locked
- Ammunition separate
- Temporary off-site storage
- Inaccessible** to the owner and others at risk


Are your firearms stored safely?

Yes




Clinician Gun owner

Values and Beliefs

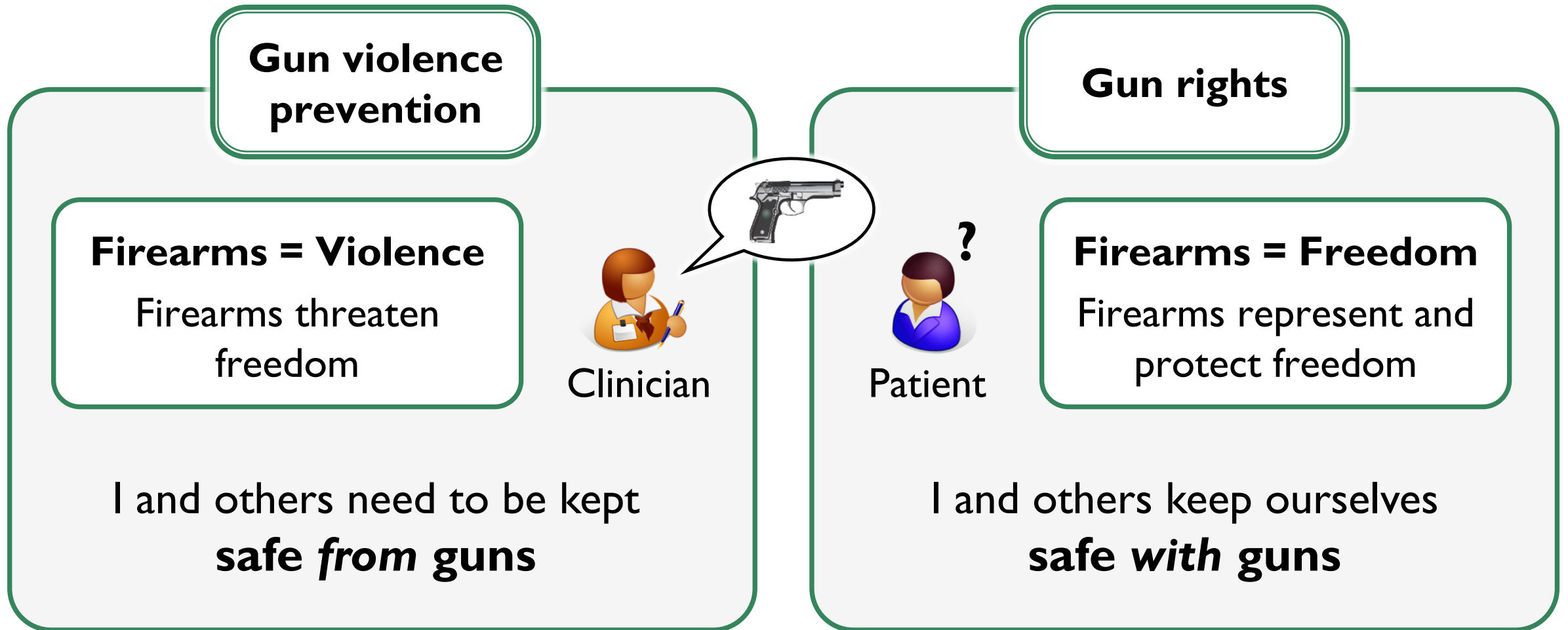
Safety from home invasion and attack (Self-defense)

Readily accessible 

Safety from unintentional injury

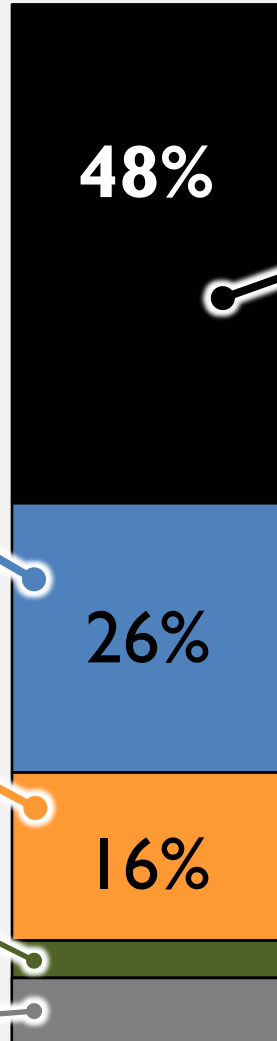
- Unloaded
- Locked  
- Ammunition separate
- Inaccessible** to others, esp. children 

Cultural Humility: Recognizing and Examining Personal Worldviews



Suicide & Fatal Firearm Injury

Suicide methods
WA state
2015-19



Suffocation

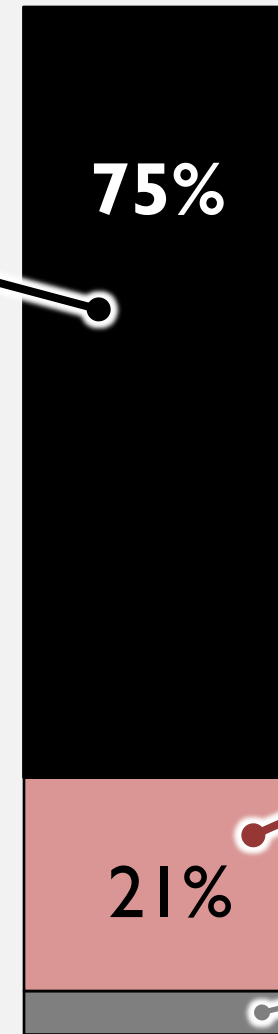
Poisoning

Fall: 2%

Other: 6%

Firearm suicide

Fatal firearm injury
WA state
2015-19



Homicide

21%

Other: 4%

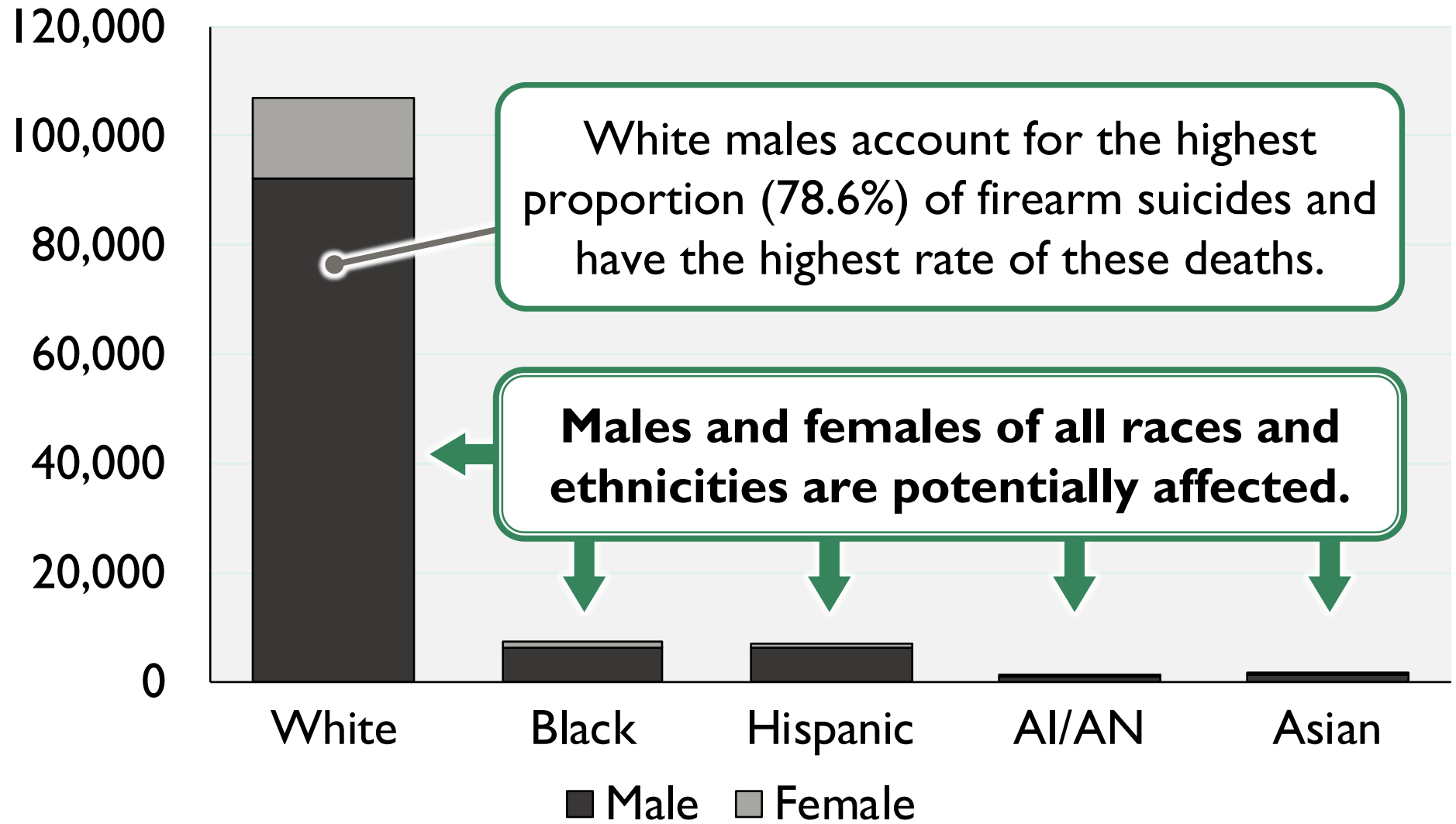
CDC
WISQARS

Firearm Suicide: Populations at Risk

**Total
number of
firearm
suicides
(2015-2019)**

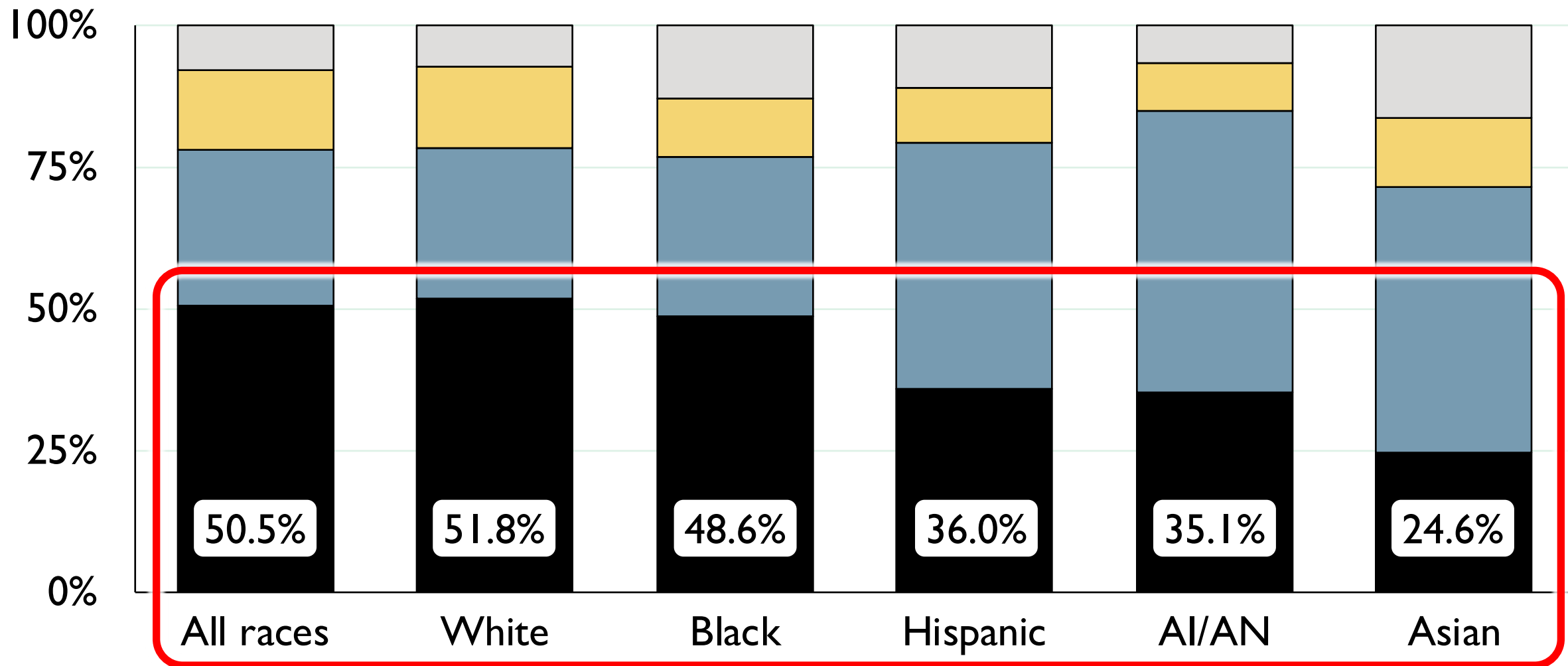
Male: 86%
Female: 14%

CDC
WISQARS



Firearm Suicide: Populations at Risk

Suicide Methods by Race/Ethnicity

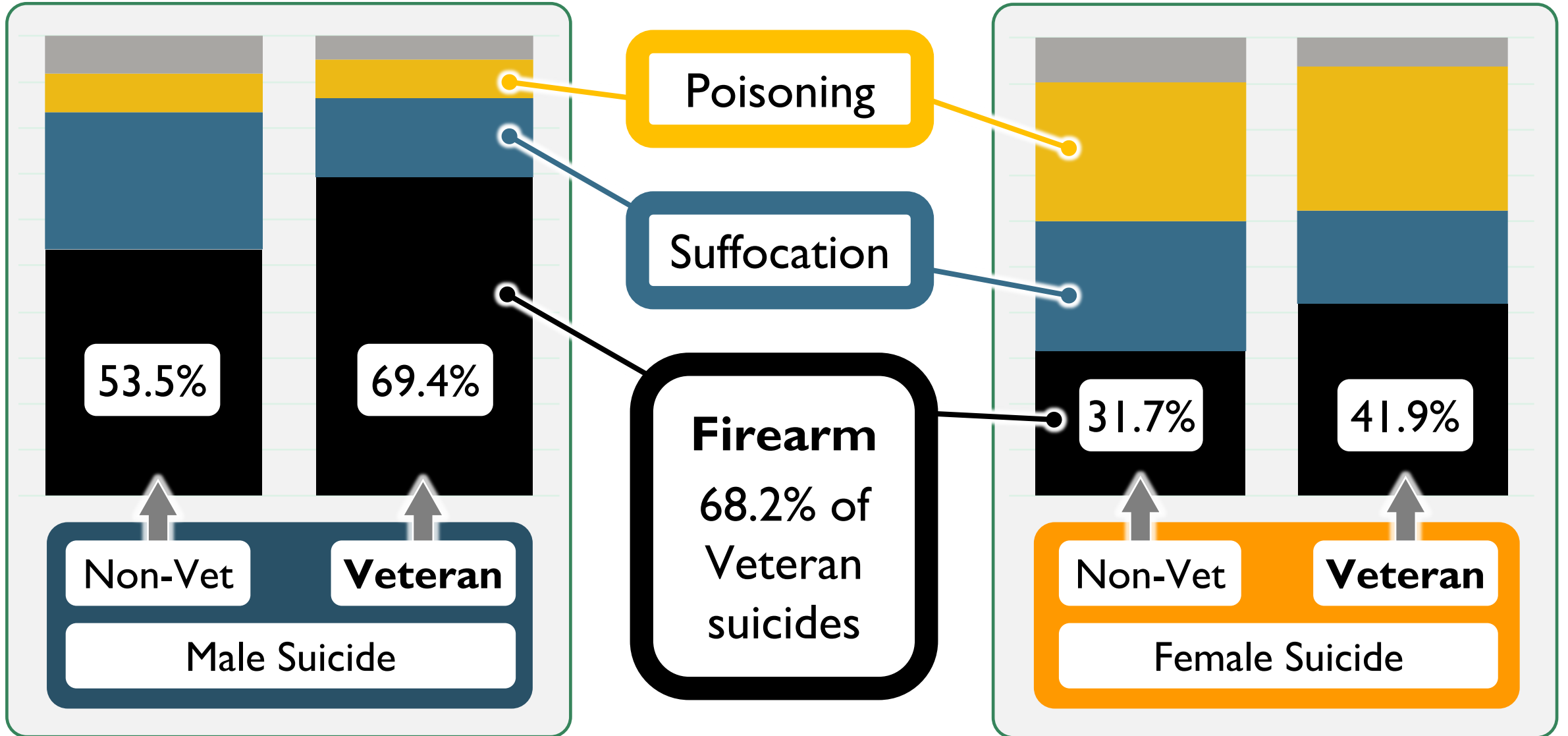


CDC WISQARS
for 2015-19

■ Firearms ■ Suffocation ■ Poisoning ■ Other

Firearm Suicide: Populations at Risk

National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report (2020) for 2018



Populations at Risk & Patterns of Firearm Ownership

Populations at risk

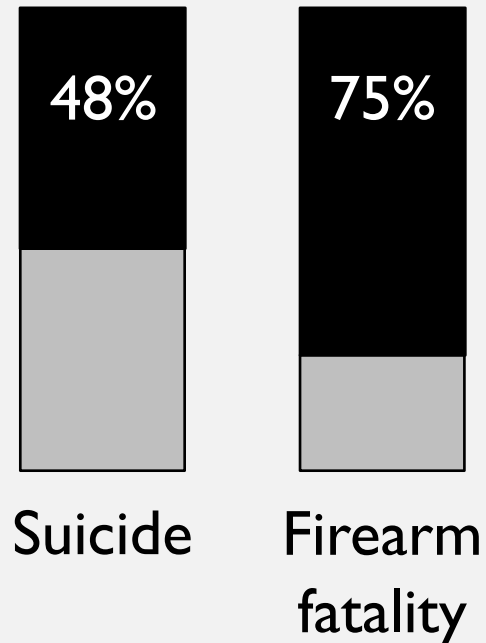
- Numerical burden among white males.
- All genders, races, ethnicities potentially affected.
- More prevalent among veterans.

Patterns of firearm ownership

- **Pre-existing, often longstanding ownership:**
 - Median of 11 years before firearm suicide.
Cummings, et al., 1997
 - Ownership >1 month in 85%.
Studdert, et al., 2020
 - Less than 10% with recent firearm purchase.
Vriniotis, et al., 2015
- **Legal ownership:** 92% would have passed a background check (Barber, et al., 2019).

Firearms and Suicide: Summary

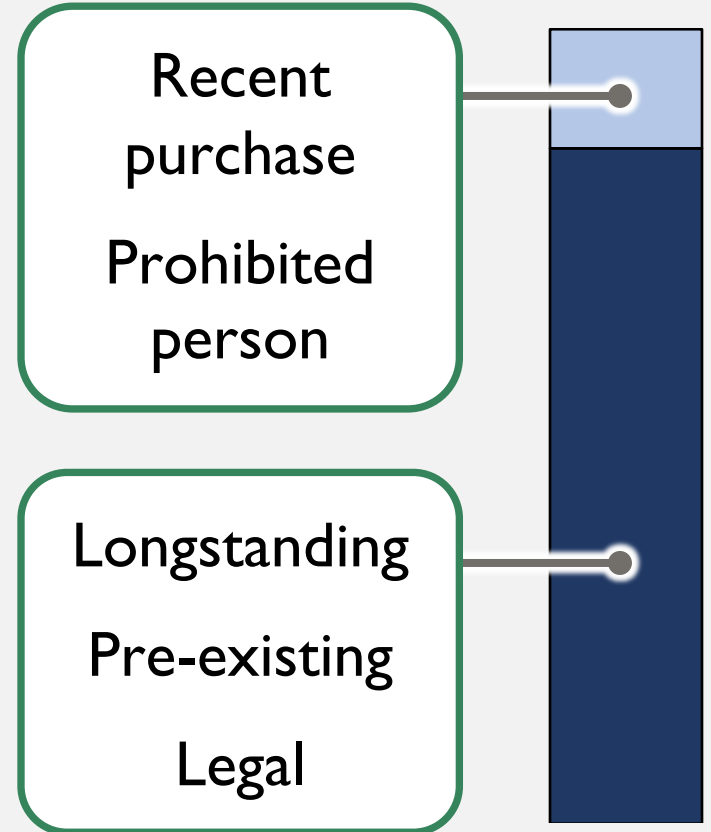
Scope of the problem



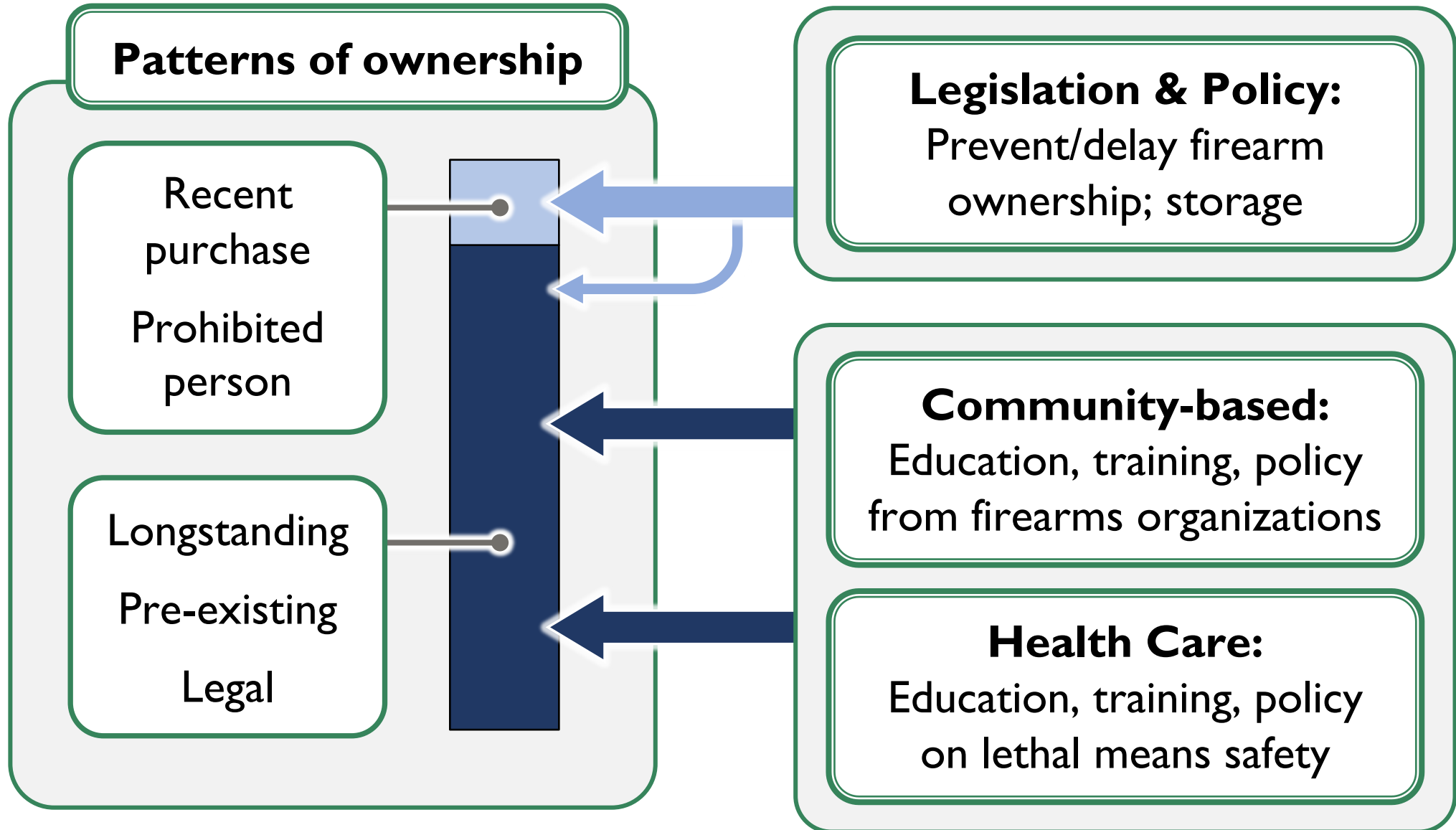
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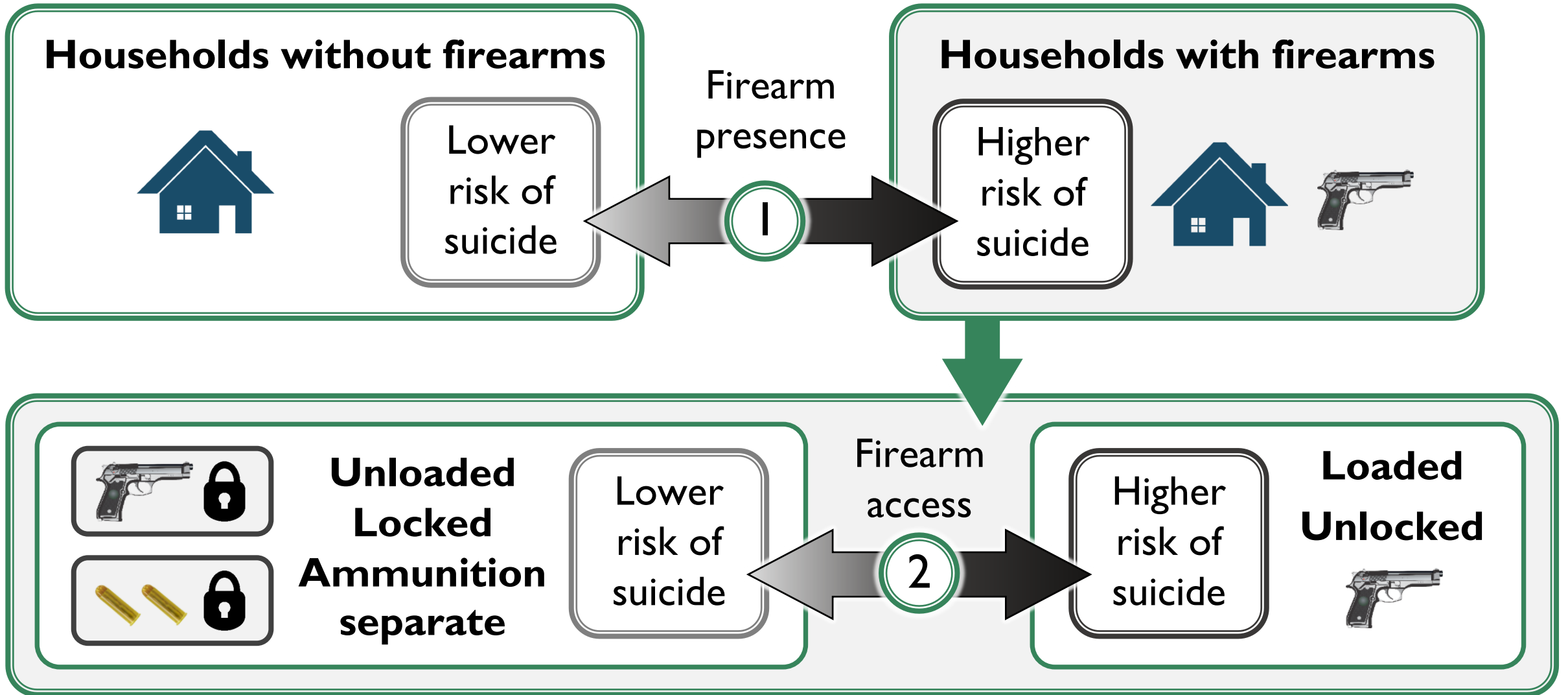
Patterns of ownership



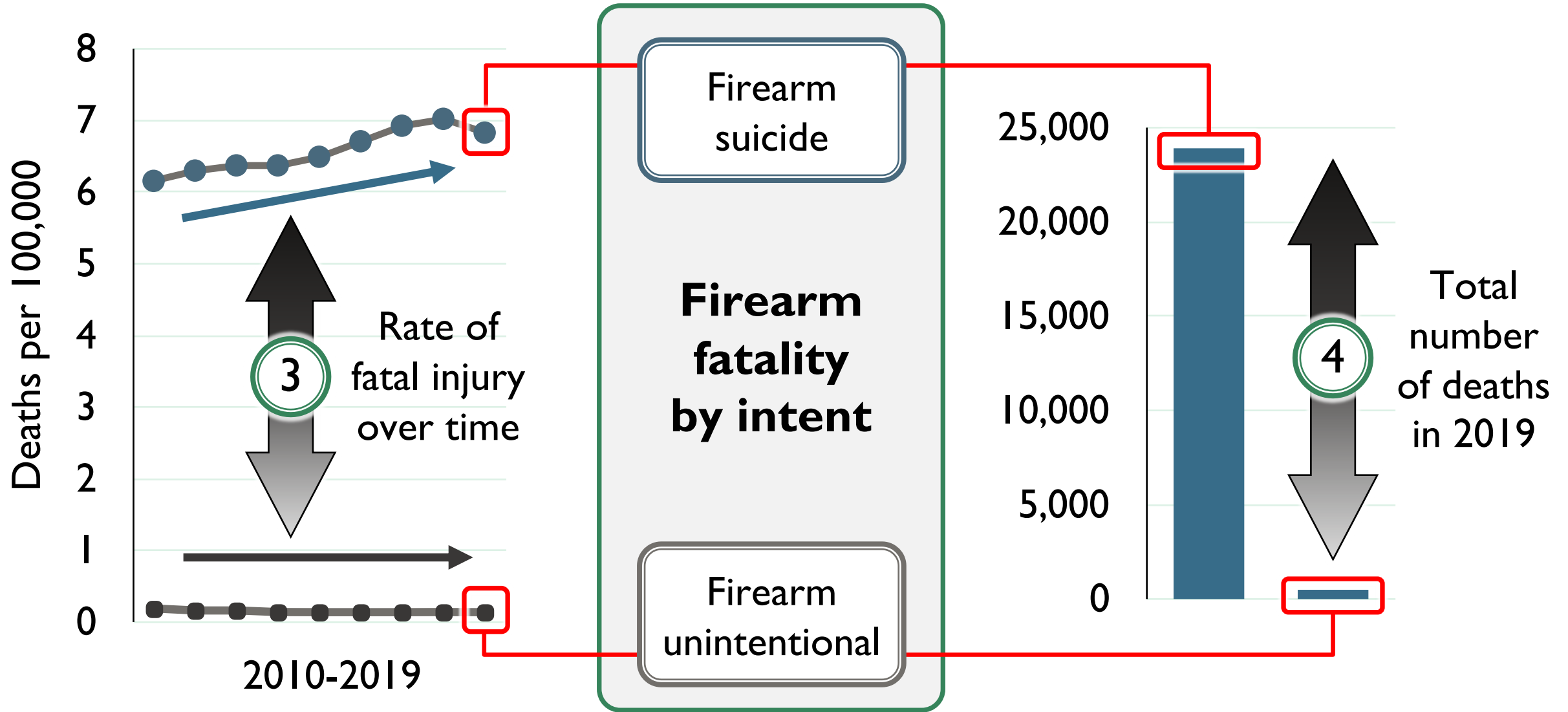
Firearms and Suicide: Types of Intervention



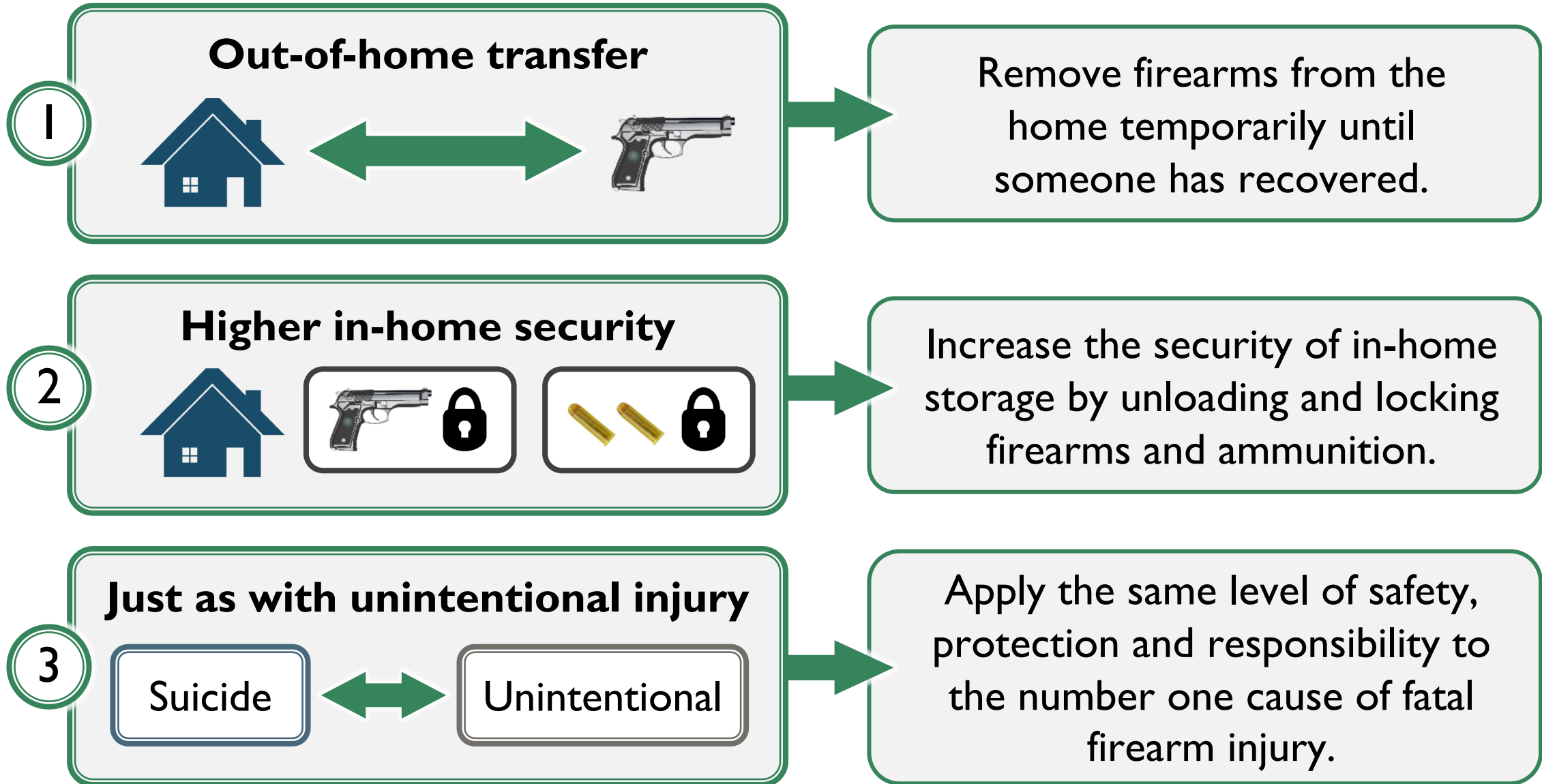
Firearms and Suicide Risk: What is the Message?

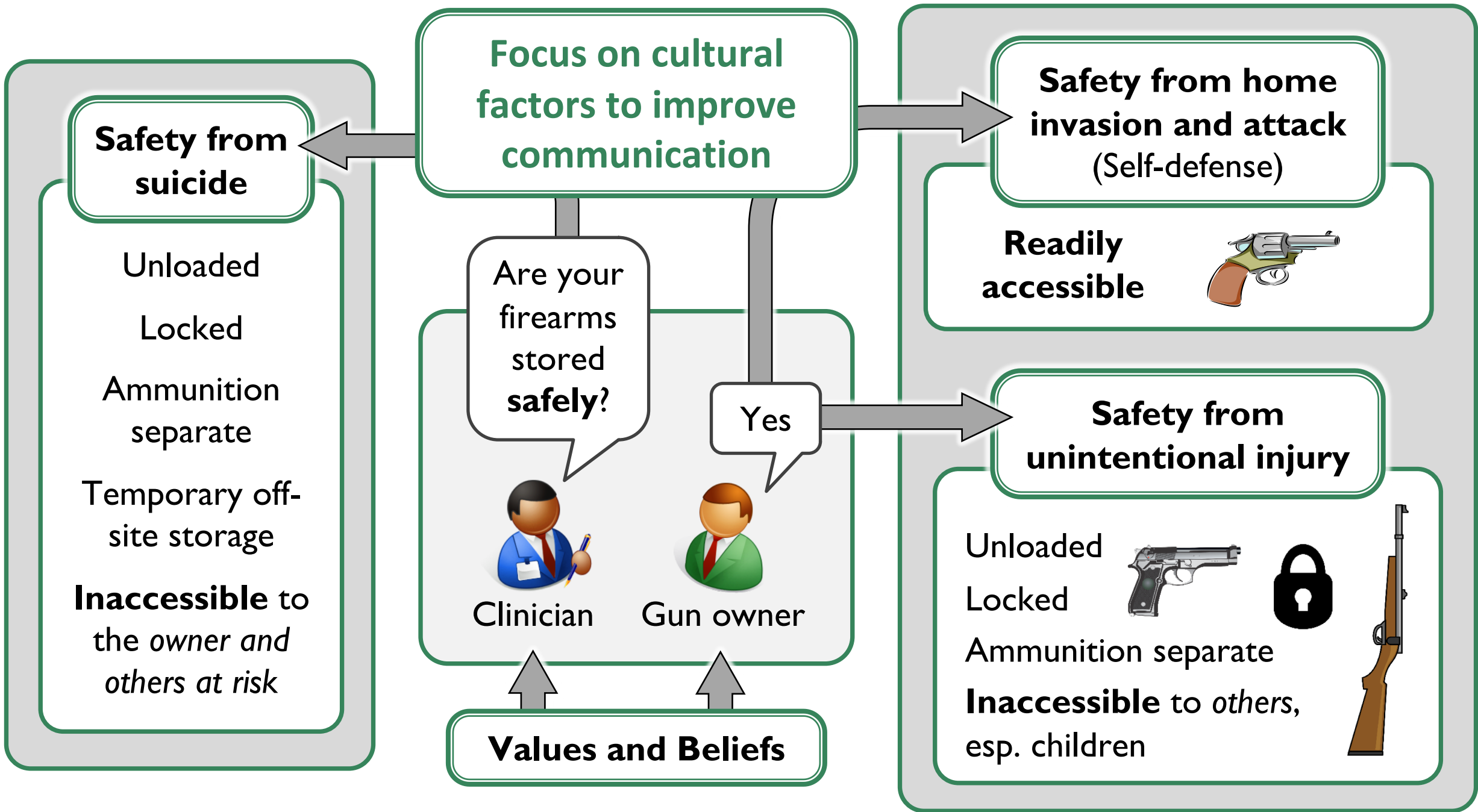


Firearms and Suicide Risk: What is the Message?



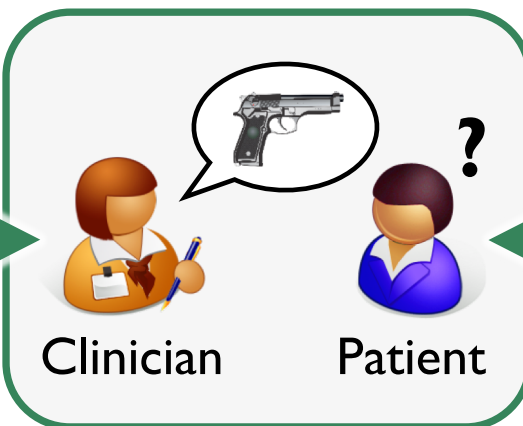
Firearms and Suicide Risk: What is the Message?





Targeted Interventions

Firearms, Culture & Clinical Care



Attitudes: Cultural humility

- Cultural meaning of firearms
- Common cultural worldviews
- Worldviews among physicians
- Bias in worldviews
- Ethical responsibilities

Knowledge: Firearms and suicide

- Cultural knowledge about firearm ownership and use
- The suicidal process and story of suicide care
- Scientific basis of lethal means safety

Skills: Lethal means counseling

- Assessing for firearm access
- Orienting to lethal means safety
- Motivational interviewing
- Addressing cultural factors

Health status

- Suicide risk related to whether firearms are kept in the home
- Suicide risk related to how firearms are kept in the home
- Suicide risk relative to unintentional injury

Health care delivery

- Low assessment of firearm access
- Low use of lethal means counseling

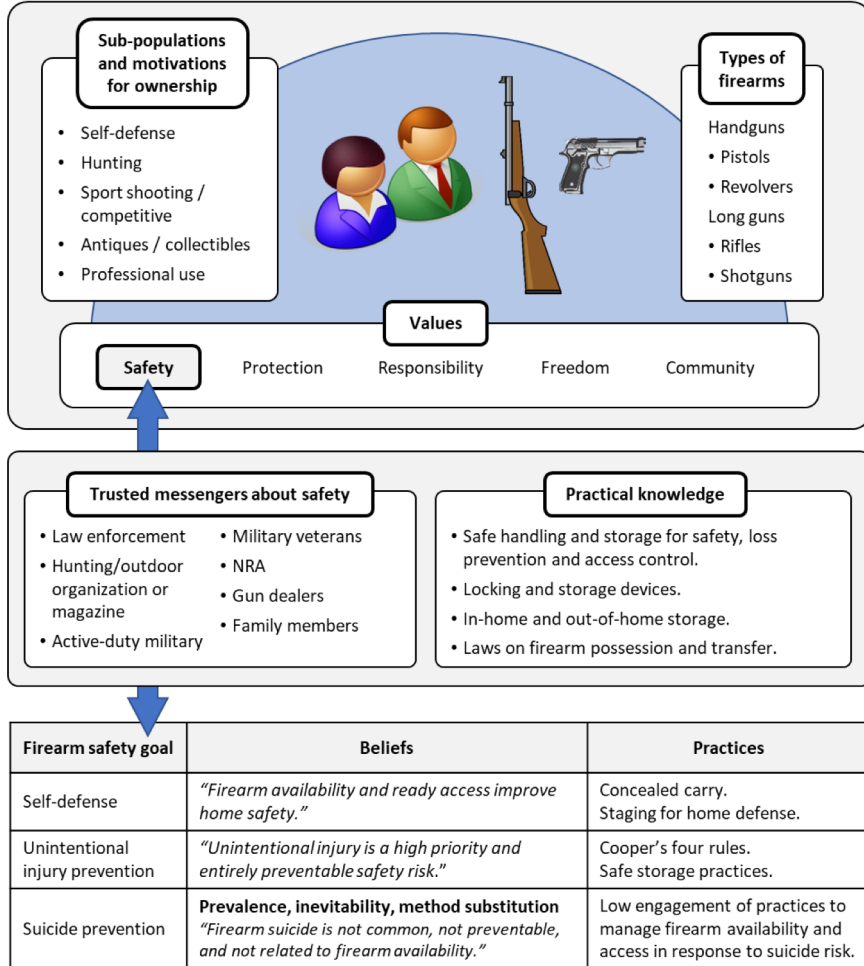
Cultural factors

- Sub-populations
- Reasons for ownership
- Types of firearms
- Values
- Trusted messengers
- Practical knowledge
- Safety goals, beliefs, practices

HANDOUT I

Targeted Interventions: Firearms, Culture & Clinical Care Cultural Knowledge

Multiple **sub-populations** of firearm owners share common **values** and have overlapping **motivations for ownership** and use of different **types of firearms**. Based on information from **trusted messengers** and **practical knowledge** about firearms, firearm owners develop **beliefs** and **practices** to achieve different **firearm safety goals**. Most commonly, the risks perceived as most relevant relate to **self-defense** and **unintentional injury**. Beliefs and practices associated with **suicide prevention** have received less attention.



Cultural Knowledge

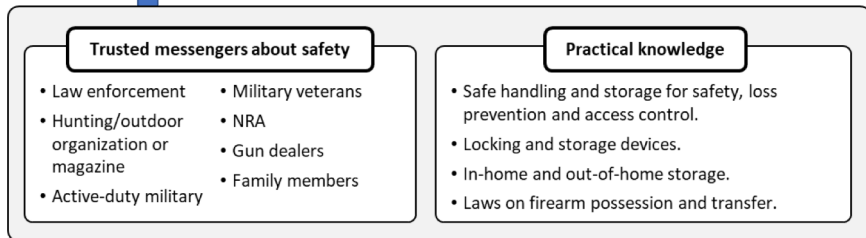
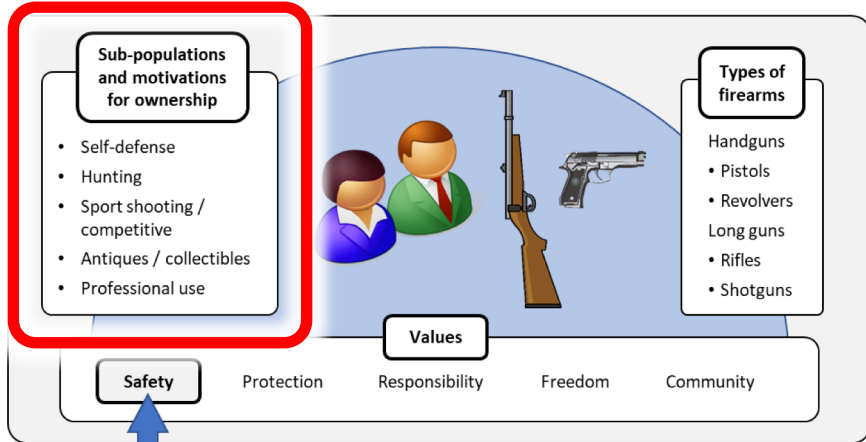
Cultural factors related to firearm ownership and use

- Sub-populations
- Reasons for ownership
- Types of firearms
- Values
- Trusted messengers
- Practical knowledge
- Safety goals, beliefs, practices

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Cultural Knowledge

Sub-populations & motivations for ownership

Protection /
Self-defense

67%

Hunting

38%

Sport
shooting

30%

Gun
collection

13%

Professional

8%

Pew Research
Center, 2017

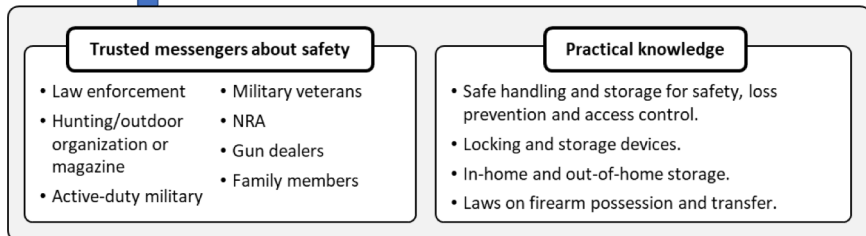
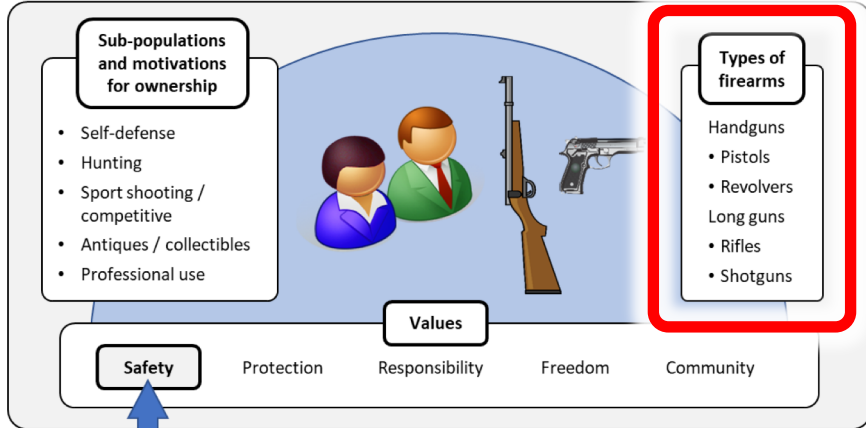
0%

50%

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Cultural Knowledge

Types of firearms: Handguns

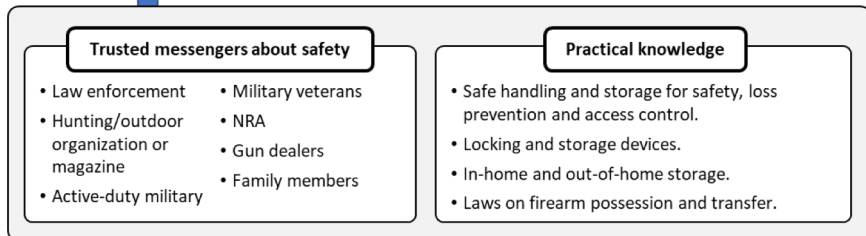
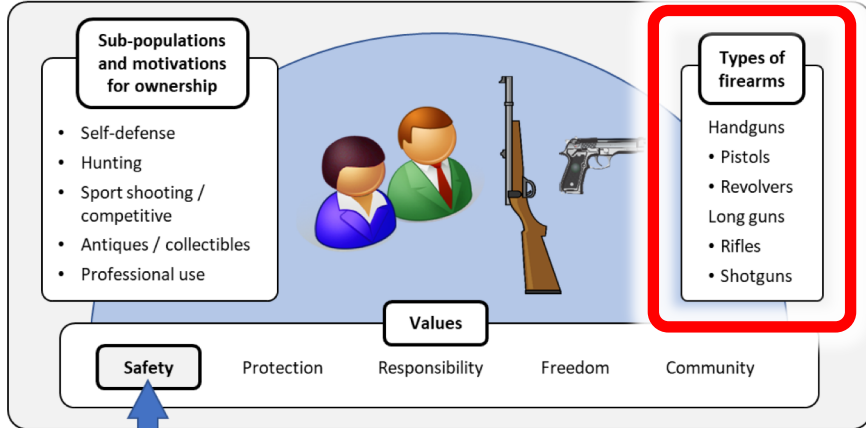


| | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Pistol | Home defense |
| Revolver | Sporting |
| Semi-automatic | Collectors |
| Concealed carry | Professional use |

HANDOUT I

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Cultural Knowledge

Types of firearms: Long guns

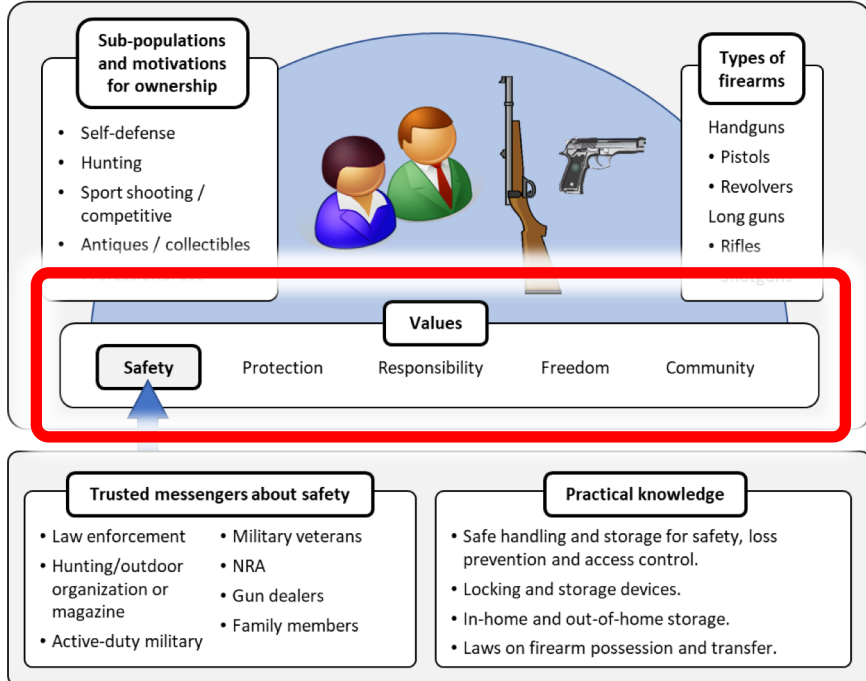


| | |
|--------------|------------------|
| Rifle | Professional use |
| Shotgun | Competitive |
| Hunting | Home defense |
| Self-defense | Collectors |

HANDOUT I

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Cultural Knowledge: Values

The Rifleman's Creed

This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine. My rifle is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life.

Without me, my rifle is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless.

My rifle is human, even as I, because it is my life... We will become part of each other.

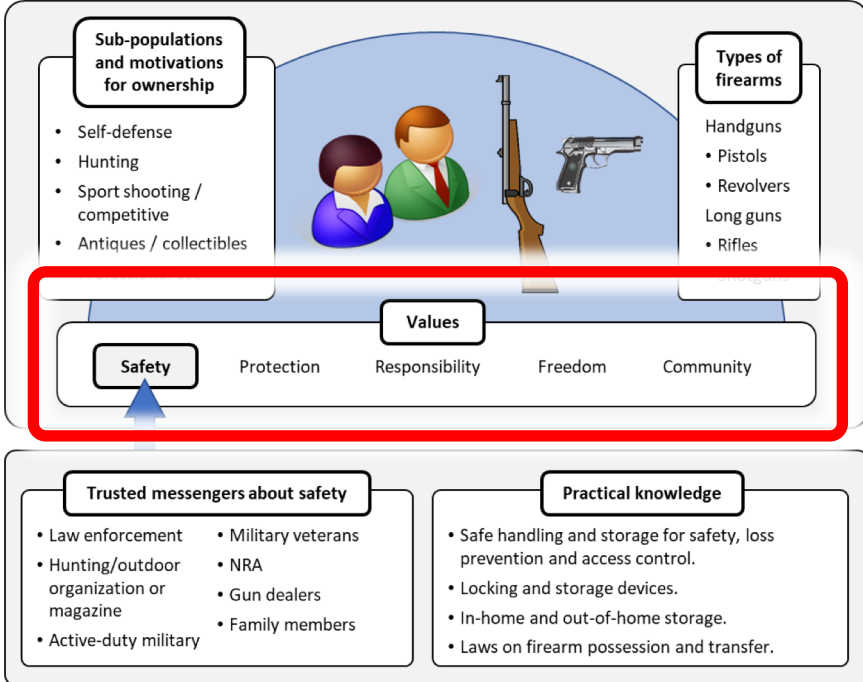
Before God, I swear this creed... My rifle and I are the defenders of my country.

So be it, until victory is America's and there is no enemy, but peace!

HANDOUT I

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Cultural Knowledge**

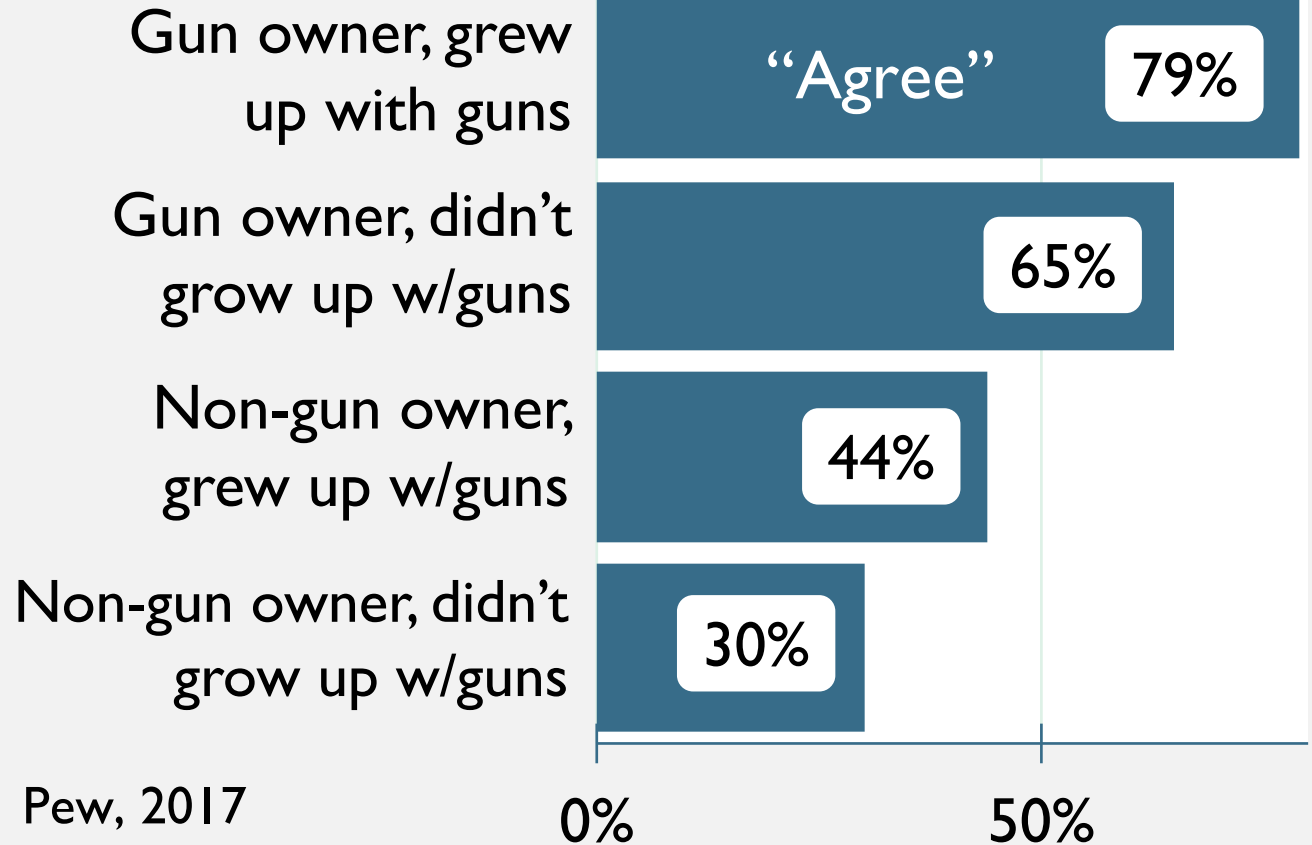
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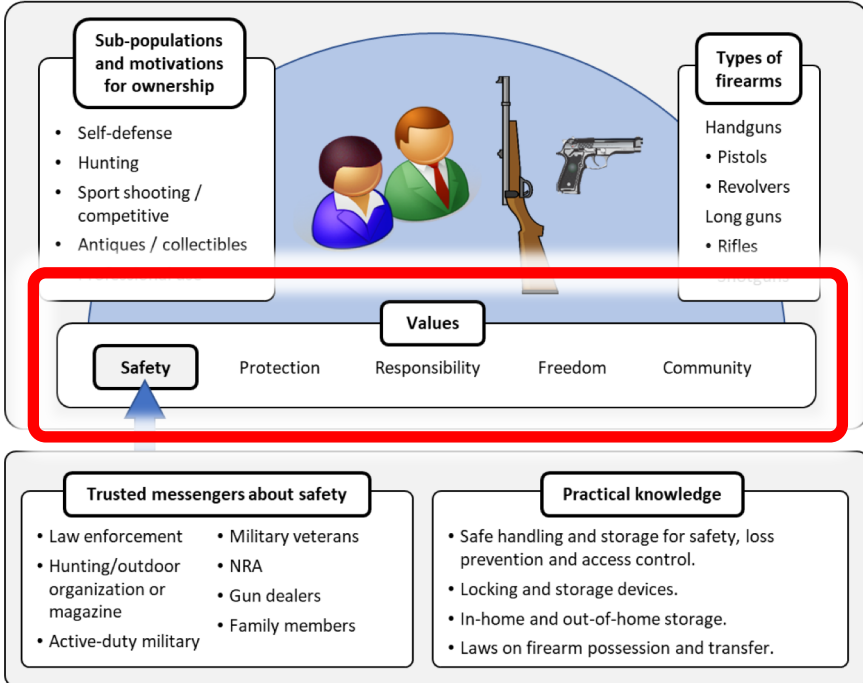
*"The right to own guns is essential to my sense of **freedom**."*



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Cultural Knowledge: Values

The Pink Pistols

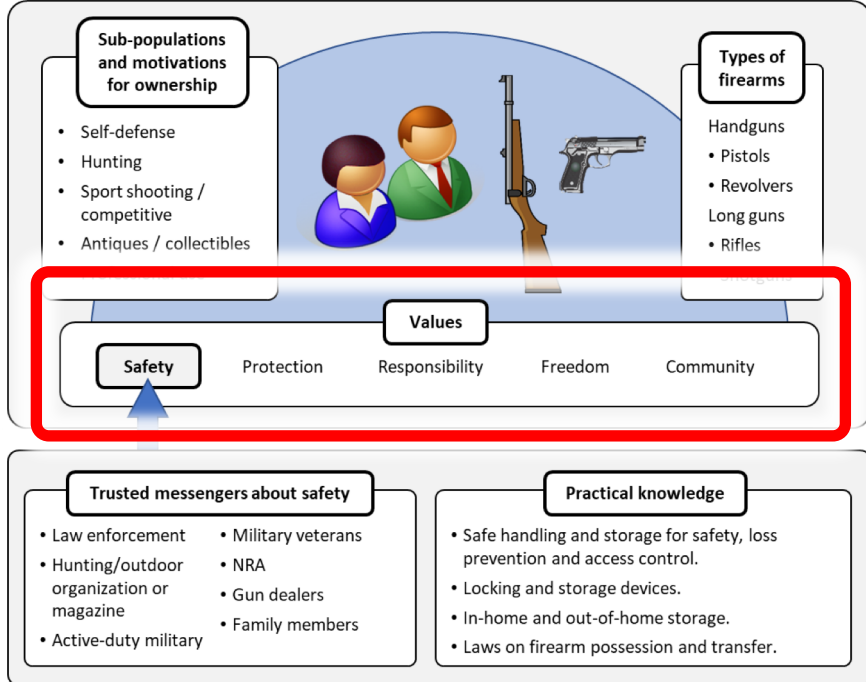
“We are dedicated to the legal, safe, and responsible use of firearms for **self-defense of the sexual-minority community**. We no longer believe it is the right of those who hate and fear gay, lesbian, bi, trans, or polyamorous persons to use us as targets for their rage. Self-defense is our **RIGHT**.”

“We will help you select a firearm, acquire a permit, and receive proper training in its safe and legal use for self-defense.”

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Cultural Knowledge: Values

NAAGA Mission Statement

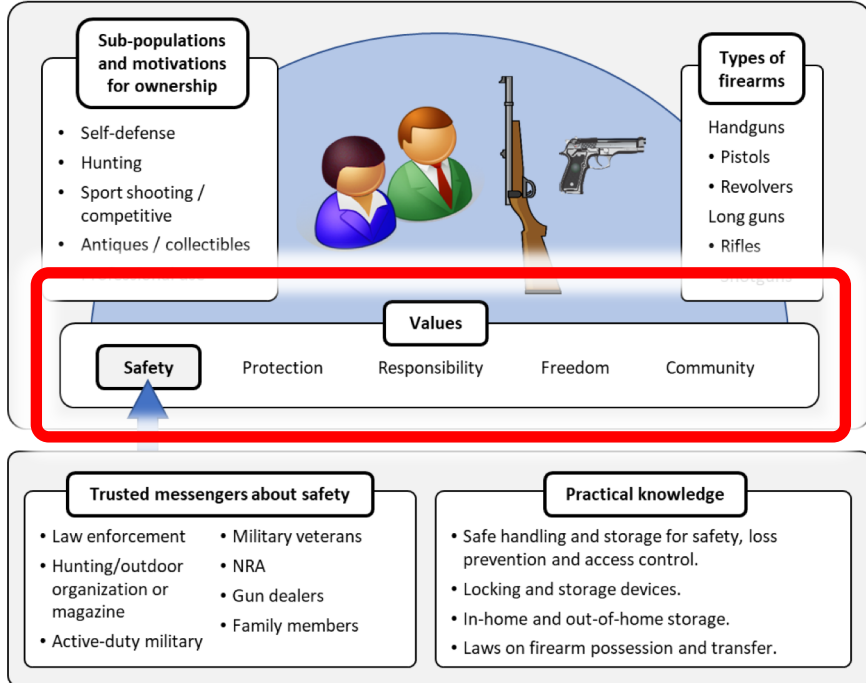
“The mission of the National African American Gun Association (NAAGA) is to establish a fellowship by educating on the **rich legacy of gun ownership by African Americans**, offering training that supports safe gun use for self defense and sportsmanship, and advocating for the inalienable right to self-defense for African Americans.

Education. Training. Safety. Self-Defense. Advocacy. For and By African Americans.”

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Cultural Knowledge: Values

DC Project: Women for Gun Rights

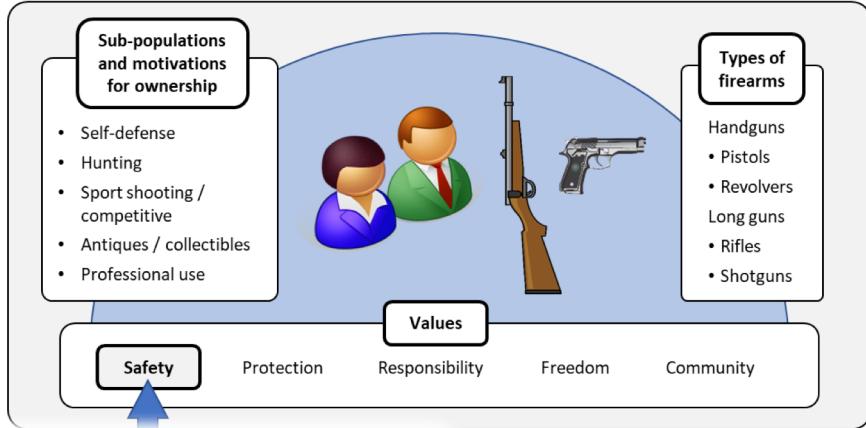
“The DC Project raises awareness that firearms safety and violence prevention are achieved through education, not legislation; encourages the preservation of America’s gun culture; and highlights the diversity and rising demographic of **female gun owners** through ongoing advocacy because **gun rights are women’s rights.**”

Individual journeys on one unified path: to preserve the Second Amendment

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Cultural Knowledge

Survey of gun owners: Best and worst messengers about safe firearm storage for suicide prevention? (Anestis, et al. 2021)

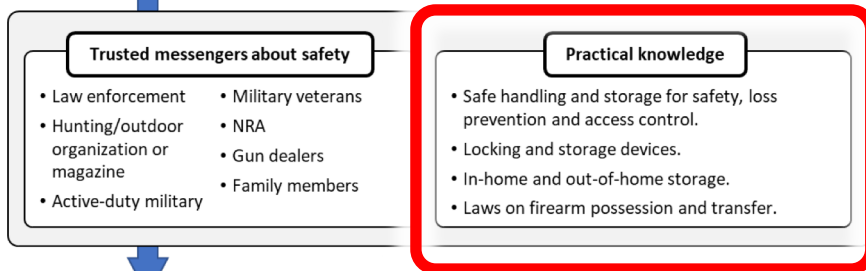
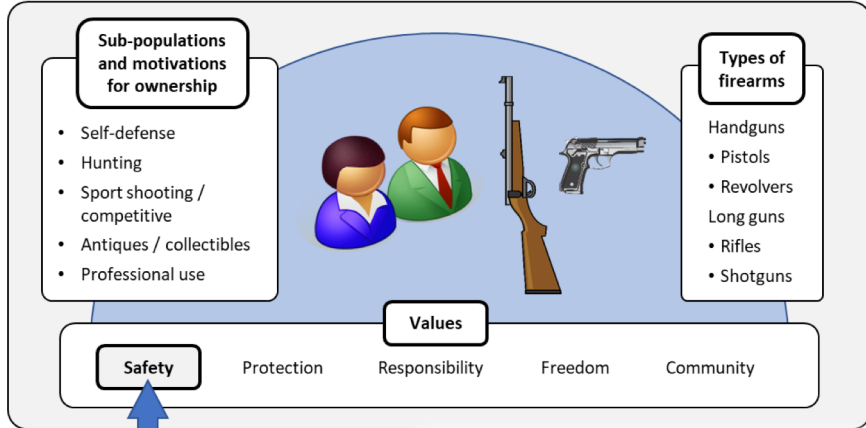
Rank ordered messengers: Best to worst

| | |
|-------|--|
| 1 | Law enforcement |
| 2 | Military veterans |
| 3 | Current military personnel |
| 4 | National Rifle Association |
| 5 | Family members |
| 6 | Hunting or outdoor organization |
| • • • | |
| 13 | Physicians or medical professionals |
| 14 | Celebrities |

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Cultural Knowledge Firearm locking devices



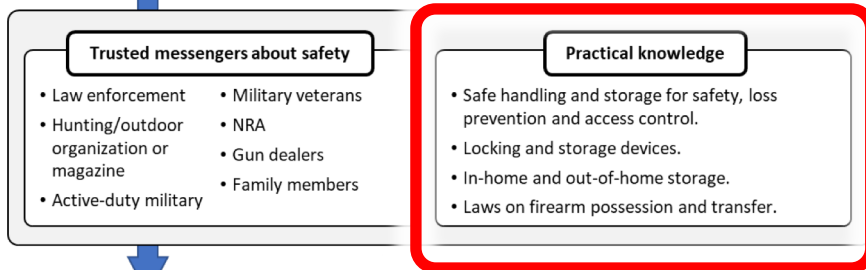
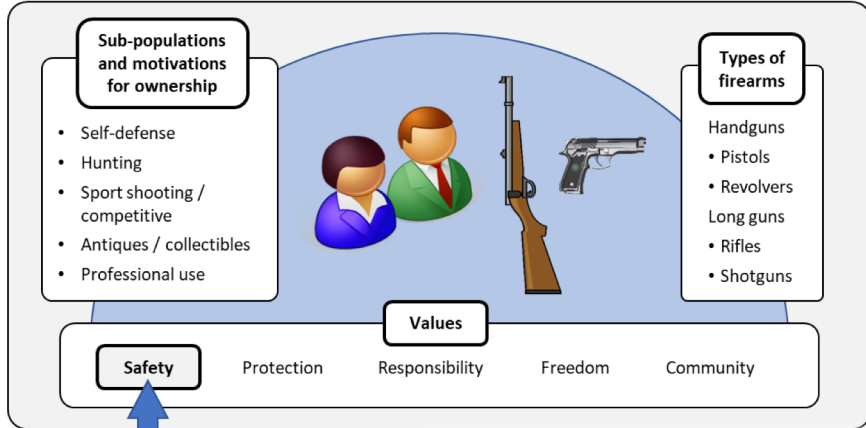
Cable lock
Trigger lock
Lock box

Gun case
Gun safe

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Cultural Knowledge

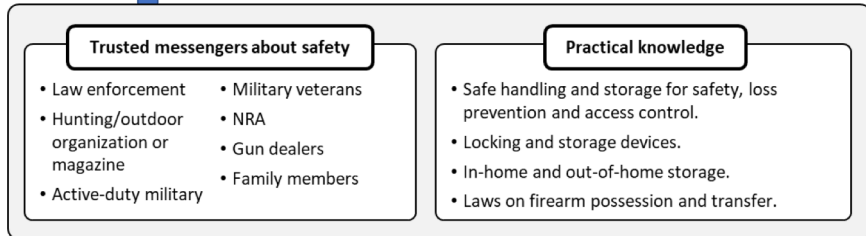
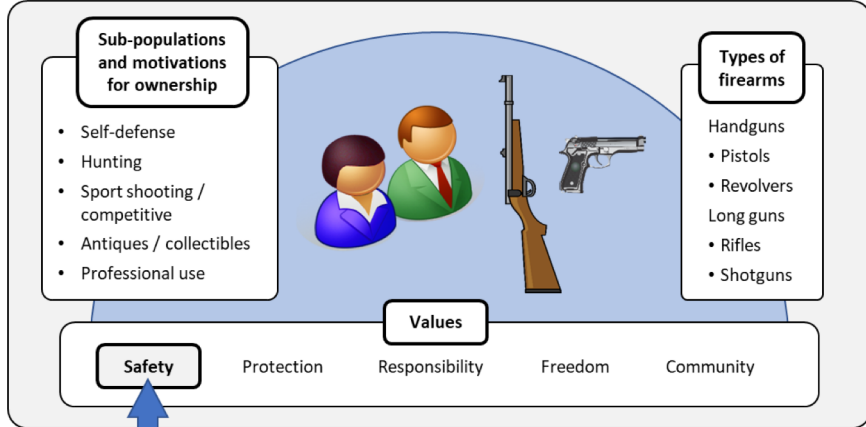
Laws related to firearms

- **Background checks:** It is legal to transfer a firearm without a background check if it is intended to prevent suicide and meets other criteria (RCW 9.41.113).
- **Voluntary waivers** are an option for people wanting to place their own name on the "do not sell" list as a prohibited person.
- HIPRC has a **Firearm Safe Storage Map** with organizations willing to hold firearms.
- **Extreme risk protection orders (ERPO)** can be used in high-risk situations.

HANDOUT I

**Targeted Interventions: Firearms, Culture & Clinical Care
Cultural Knowledge**

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| Firearm safety goal | Beliefs | Practices |
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| | "Firearm availability and ready access improve home safety." | Concealed carry, Staging for home defense. |
| Unintentional injury prevention | "Unintentional injury is a high priority and entirely preventable safety risk." | Cooper's four rules, Safe storage practices. |
| Suicide prevention | Prevalence, inevitability, method substitution "Firearm suicide is not common, not preventable, and not related to firearm availability." | Low engagement of practices to manage firearm availability and access in response to suicide risk. |

Cultural Knowledge

Training topics
among firearm owners with
formal training (61.4%)

- **Safe handling: 61.1%**
- Safe storage
- Preventing accidents

32%

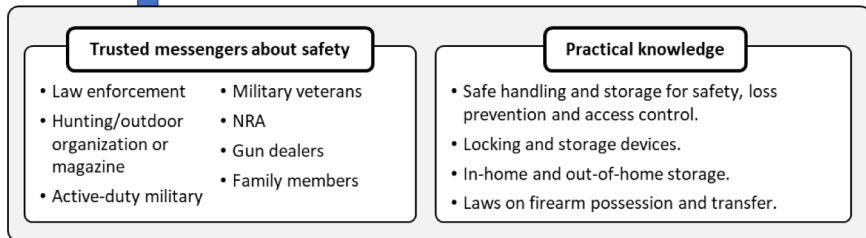
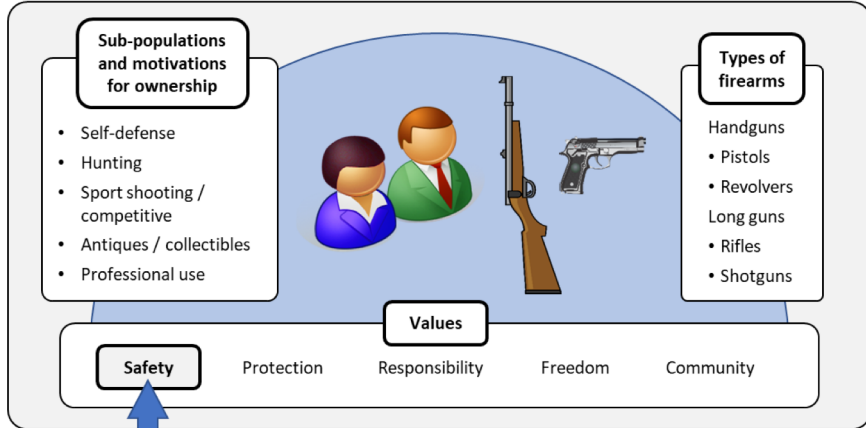
- Preventing theft
- **Suicide prevention: 14.7%**

National Firearms Survey, 2015
Rowhani-Rahbar, et al., 2017 in *BMJ IP*

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Cultural Knowledge: Safety Goals Unintentional injury prevention

Cooper's Four Universal Rules of Safe Firearms Handling

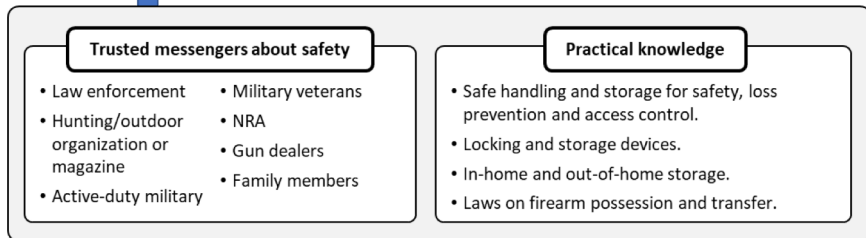
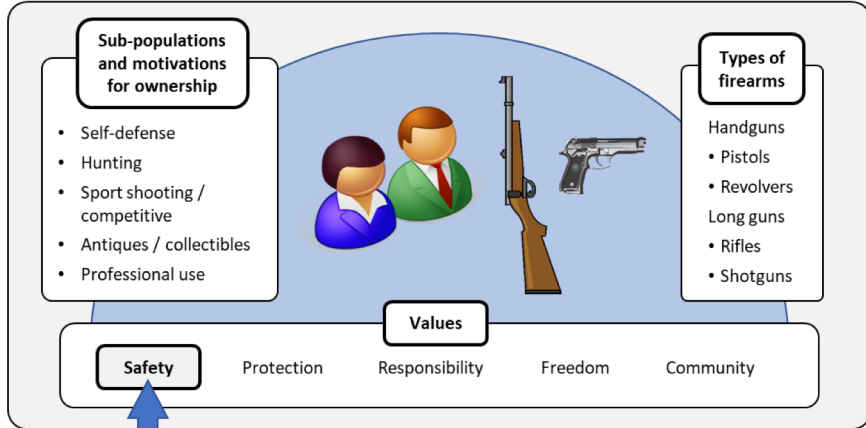
1. All guns are always loaded.
2. Never let a gun point at anything you don't intend to shoot, kill, or destroy.
3. Keep your finger off of the trigger until you are on target and intend to fire.
4. Be sure of your target plus what is around and behind it.

Morrison, G.B., 1991

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Cultural Knowledge: Safety Goals Suicide prevention

Beliefs about firearms and suicide

- **Prevalence:** "Suicide is not a common cause of gun deaths."
- **Inevitability:** "If someone is determined to die, there's nothing anyone can do about it."
- **Method substitution:** "If they don't have a gun, they'll just find another way."

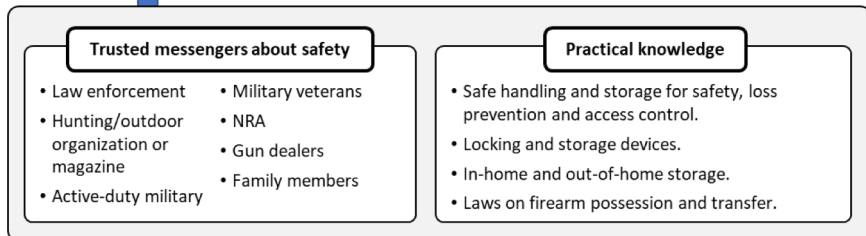
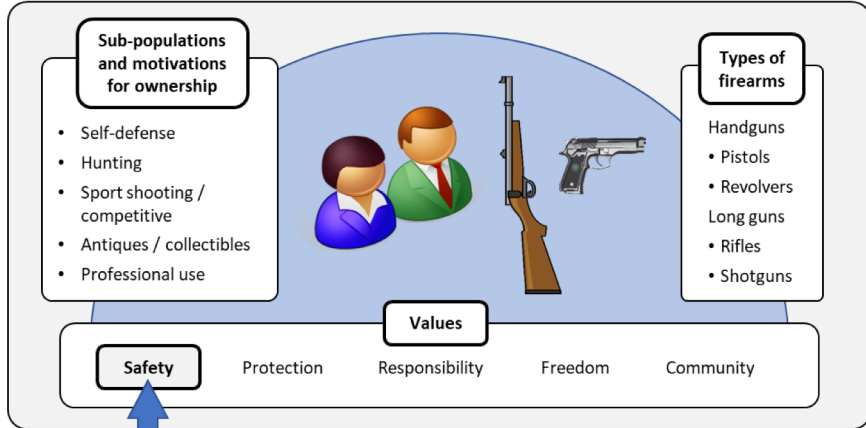
Walton & Stuber, 2020; Knopke, et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2006

Prevalence **Duration of crises**
Long-term survival **Lethality**

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Cultural Knowledge: Safety Goals Suicide prevention

"Time and distance"

Out-of-home transfer



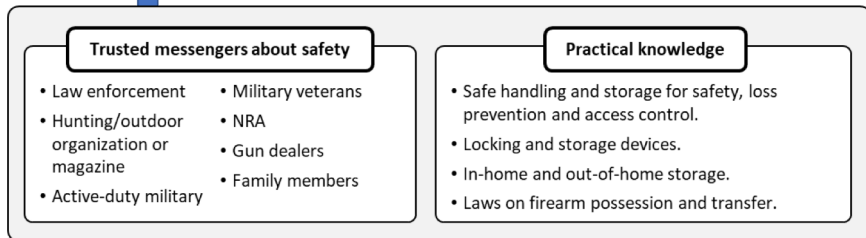
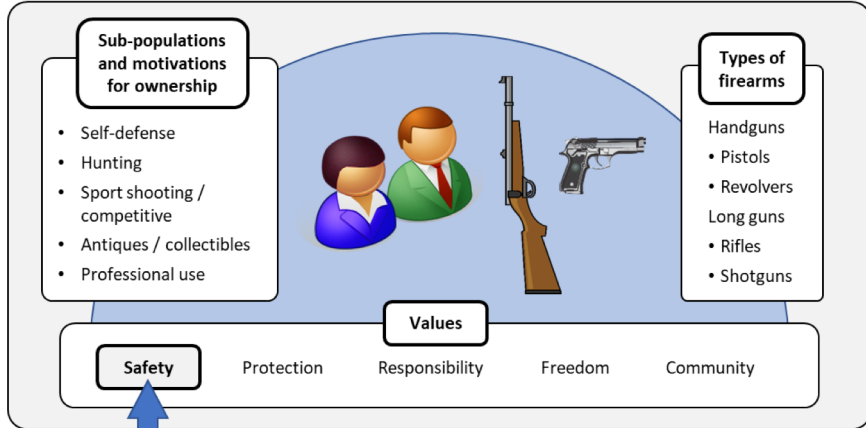
Higher in-home security



HANDOUT I

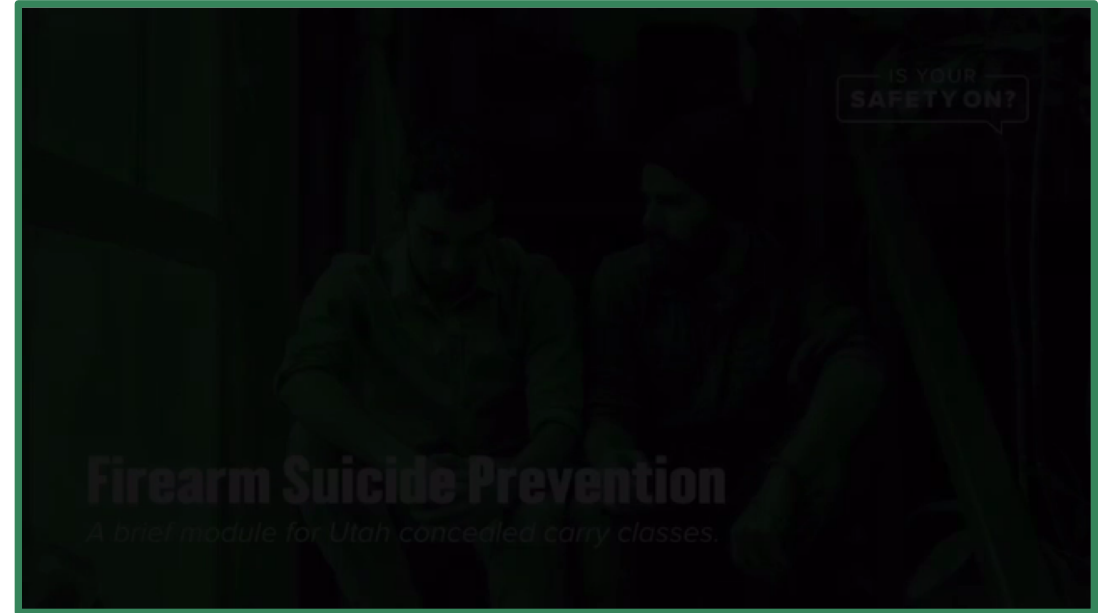
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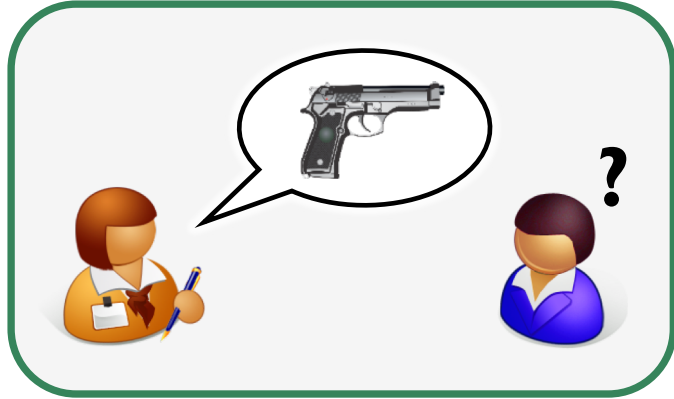
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Cultural Knowledge



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sub-populations | Types of firearms | Practical knowledge: Laws, locking devices |
| Values: Safety, protection, responsibility, freedom, community | | |
| Trusted messenger | Safety goals: Self-defense, unintentional injury prevention | |
| Safety goal: Suicide prevention | Beliefs: Prevalence, inevitability, method substitution • Prevalence • Long-term survival, duration of crises, lethality | Practices "Time and distance" • Off-site storage • Increased in-home security |

Firearms, Culture and Suicide Risk: What Is Safety?



**Jeffrey Sung, MD &
Brett Bass**

World Suicide
Prevention Day
September 10, 2021

- What is safety?
- Cultural worldviews and cultural humility
- The population at risk
- What is the message?
- Cultural competency training
- Cultural knowledge