

Gun Violence Positioning for Healthcare Organizations

As pressure mounts across society to solve the public health crisis of gun violence, leading hospitals and health systems are going beyond being places that physically care for victims and fully engaging in developing solutions to this epidemic. Not only do provider organizations have communications plans to prepare for a shooting on-site or in their community, but they are also developing clearly articulated positions backed by action that leverages their power as a trusted voice.

Doing this work is yet another challenge – and possibly an uncomfortable one – for overburdened healthcare leadership.

However, **silence is its own message** – one that sends a signal to employees and community members belonging to groups disproportionately affected by gun violence or targeted in a specific act of violence.

The following questionnaire and checklist will help marketing and communications leaders navigate these challenges and elevate the organization's commitment to addressing gun violence within the context of the myriad programs already underway related to public health and in service to the overall mission.

We encourage you to use this assessment in conversations with your wider leadership team as a guide to developing your organization's position and plan.

For more information, visit [chartis.com](https://www.chartis.com) and [jarrardinc.com](https://www.jarrardinc.com).

Questionnaire & Checklist

To determine our organization's current position (if any) and how it fits with our mission, take a few moments to assess the following:

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| <p>1. Do provider organizations have a responsibility to actively address gun violence? Yes No</p> <hr/> | <p>2. Is our organization comfortable communicating about gun violence? Yes No</p> <hr/> |
| <p>3. Is gun violence a priority issue compared to other public health initiatives within our organization? Yes No</p> <hr/> | <p>4. Do we have a written statement on community violence or gun violence? Yes No</p> <hr/> |
| <p>5. Do we have a history of addressing gun violence, either proactively or responsively, through community/media questions?</p> | <p>6. Are there people across the organization who have a vested interest in addressing community gun violence? Who are our existing advocates?</p> |
| <p>7. Who are our employee groups that may be disproportionately affected by gun violence and what are we hearing from them?</p> | <p>8. Are there other anti-violence campaigns taking place within our community and who is leading them?</p> |
| <p>9. What are the institutional hurdles, such as potential pushback from internal stakeholders, that could slow our efforts?</p> | <p>10. What is the political landscape in our county, state or region on this issue?</p> |

This checklist will help us compile existing program, data and system positioning on gun violence, along with community relationships and resources. Information to collect:

Determine our organization's commitment - in programs, dollars and employee time - to initiatives that address gun violence.

Coordinate with government relations to assess local elected officials' positions on this topic.

Gauge executive leadership and Board members' interest in taking a stronger position.

Compile existing data on gun violence treatment within our system and the impact of gun violence in our hospitals.

Compile data on financial support for and partnerships with gun violence prevention or other community organizations.

Research position statements from state and federal hospital advocacy organizations.

Detail gun safety and mental health resources, both for employees and community members.

Where applicable, include information on anticipated new public health initiatives or policy advocacy.

Next Steps

After completing the assessment you will be positioned to proactively develop custom materials for sharing your organization's approach with any audience and in any context, whether speaking on the national health crisis of gun violence or responding to a local incident. Those materials, and descriptions you can use when discussing them with your team, may include:

Position statements

While the ultimate form of our position announcement could range from a simple reactive media statement to a full-blown campaign to announce a major initiative, starting with a position statement internally allows our team to pressure-test ideas and tone. Utilizing the information and data points from the assessment, we will want to build a position statement that addresses what we believe about gun violence and our responsibility in addressing it, includes data that supports our level of urgency and communicates specific actions we're taking as an organization.

Detailed messaging

Building upon the foundation of our position statement, our detailed messaging document will serve as a library of messages that articulate our position and the rationale that supports it. This messaging will be tailored by audience while ensuring consistency in tone and approach across the organization.

FAQ for internal and external use

Regardless of where our ultimate position lands, we will face questions about how we arrived at our position, why we're choosing to engage vocally (or not) on this issue, and how we're allocating organizational resources and energy. Based on our answers to the assessment, as well as our knowledge about the current climate in and around our facilities, we will be able to anticipate the types of questions our audiences may ask. The development of this FAQ prepares our spokespeople to answer those questions confidently and in a way that is consistent with our mission and values.

Fact sheet

We recommend compiling the most compelling data points into one, comprehensive overview of our approach to this issue, including our recommended solutions. This tactic is particularly useful for interactions with members of the media and elected officials, supplying spokespeople with the details and information they need to demonstrate our commitment to our position.

Spokesperson training

Utilizing the range of materials we have created to support our position on gun violence, we can get all of our spokespeople comfortable with and conversant on how we arrived at our position, where the organization is going to intervene in this issue and how we will ultimately use our work here to improve the lives of those we serve.

Case Studies

The following are examples of public statements made by healthcare organizations across the country regarding the crisis of gun violence. Key Takeaways are ideas and quotes adapted from each organization's response. Though representative, the points are not comprehensive – see the full statements for more.

Northwell Health

[READ THE STATEMENT »](#)

Background

- Gun violence is a public health crisis that traumatizes communities, strains health systems, and kills more than 40,000 Americans each year.
- The public health effects of gun violence disproportionately impact communities of color. Gun violence is the leading cause of death for young Black men in America.
- Gun violence affects everyone. Let's stop referring to this as a political issue and address it as the public health crisis it is.

Call to Action

- Health systems have a unique ability and responsibility to tackle the epidemic of gun violence.
- We can stem the gun violence crisis if we take a public health approach to preventing and treating firearm injury and death.
- We know that there's a critical need to make firearm injury and mortality prevention strategies part of routine health care, especially within at-risk communities.

Plan

- At the Center for Gun Violence Prevention, we're investing in gun violence research, developing best practices for hospitals, and mobilizing a national coalition of health care leaders to depolarize gun safety and tackle this public health crisis.
- Our goal is to dramatically reduce gun violence so that it's no longer a driver of hospital admissions for injuries or deaths.

Massachusetts General Hospital

[READ THE STATEMENT »](#)

Background

Gun violence is a public health crisis.

Call to Action

Doctors, among others, can no longer stand on the sidelines as so many Americans are killed each year.

Plan

The Center for Gun Violence Prevention focuses on reducing injuries and deaths related to firearms and promoting safety in the home and in the community through clinical care and education, community engagement and research.

Kaiser Permanente

Background

Gun violence is a leading cause of premature death in the United States, claiming more than 45,000 lives each year and surpassing motor vehicle fatalities as the leading cause of injury death, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Call to Action

- The goal of the Center for Gun Violence Research and Education is to reduce the incidence and impact of gun violence, including intimate partner violence and suicide, in the United States.
- The center will develop, test, and scale public health and health care solutions to addressing gun violence.

[READ THE STATEMENT »](#)

Plan

Grants, to include distribution through Kaiser Permanente's fund at the East Bay Community Foundation, are laying the groundwork for the center's future collaboration with organizations that are addressing gun violence in its many forms across the United States.

Duke Health

Background

- We at Duke Health grieve for the victims of the recent shootings in Buffalo, Uvalde and now Tulsa, and are also saddened by the painful loss of hundreds of others in our local communities whose lives have been cut short in a senseless epidemic of violence.
- As members of the health care community, we are too often at the front lines of these tragedies and see first-hand the physical and emotional devastation that is caused by gun violence.

Call to Action

- We encourage everyone to look for opportunities to be part of the solutions to reduce this epidemic.
- While solutions are as complex as the problem, Duke Health is committed to partnering with groups in Durham and surrounding communities to seek ways of reducing gun violence.

[READ THE STATEMENT »](#)

Plan

- Committee formed to explore how, in coordination with community organizations, our hospitals can provide support and services for victims of gun violence.
- A violence intervention program will begin this summer that will work with families to identify root causes of violence as a way to prevent future incidents.
- A gun safety program is also active, with the goal of preventing accidental shootings.

ALSO WORTH READING:

- 1 [Statement from Christopher O'Connor, CEO and president, Yale New Haven Health on the recent and tragic gun violence](#)
- 2 [Joint Statement from Allina Health, CentraCare, Children's Minnesota, Essentia Health, Fairview Health Services, Gillette Children's, HealthPartners, Hennepin Healthcare, North Memorial Health, Sanford Health](#)
- 3 [Statement from Fenway Health](#)