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

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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


