Firearms Injury & Death Prevention Advocacy

October 18, 2023
Why are we here?
Today’s Agenda

• What we are seeing in Alabama
  • Data from Alabama’s children’s hospitals
  • Anecdotal experiences of pediatricians in our state
• Opportunity for our collective voice to be heard
  • How to host legislators in the office/clinic outside of the legislative session
  • Legislative advocacy how-tos, dos and don’ts
• Call to action
What we are seeing in Alabama
Children’s of Alabama
Firearm Injuries

Jennifer McCain, MD, FAAP, Assistant Professor, UAB Department of Pediatrics, Division of Emergency Medicine
Firearms Involved in More Child Deaths Than Any Other Cause in 2020-2021

- The number of US children dying in firearm-related incidents has doubled since 2013.
- Firearm-related deaths - 20% of deaths of children <18 yo in the US in 2021.
- Total firearm-related deaths in 2 years- 4,733 (2,571 were < 13 yo).

CDC Wonder Underlying Cause of Death data 2020-2021
COA ED Firearm Injuries From 2000 to 2023

At 83 in September -
On target for 111 in 2023
20 Years of Firearm Injuries in COA ED: 2000-2019

- 54% were Intentional Injuries
- 76% were Male
- 71% were African-American

*** 541 patients in 2 decades
*** 320 patients in last 4 years
(extrapolates out to 1600 patients in next 2 decades)
Firearm Injuries in COA ED: 2018 vs 2023

2018 - 41 patients
- < 6 yo: 1 (2%)
- 6-12 yo: 13 (32%)
- > 12 yo: 27 (66%)

2023 - 73 patients (on track to be >100)
- < 6 yo: 14 (19%)
- 6-12 yo: 43 (59%)
- > 12 yo: 16 (22%)
Insurance Status (2018-July 2023), n=326

- 76% Medicaid
Intentionality of Firearm Injuries - 2023, n=73

- Intentional Self-Harm: 2 (3%)
- Unintentional: 24 (33%)
- Intentional: 47 (64%)
Coroner’s Cases 2022 - Jefferson County, AL

- 34 Cases Reviewed - Unanticipated Deaths
- 0 cases from MVCs
- 15 of the 34 deaths of children were caused by firearms
- Ages ranged from 12 yo - 17 yo
- 2 were Intentional Self-Harm
- 3 were Female
USA Health Pediatric Firearm Injury Data

Ashley Williams, MD, Assistant Professor, Department of Surgery, Division of Trauma, Acute Care Surgery & Burns, USA Health University Hospital, Mobile
Erin Swanson, MD, FAAP
Eric Tyler, MD, FAAP
630 text message from Dr. Linda Gibson-Young from Auburn University

“What can I do to help?”

“What do I look that bad?”

“The Dadeville Shooting”

That was the first I heard of the tragedy.

I was not notified or called as a part of a disaster team.

I was certain that my patients were in the crowd wounded by the events of a sweet Sixteen Birthday Party
Waiting

- I am lousy at waiting.
- Law enforcement and the Trauma Centers all across the region were doing their job.
- I had to stay in my lane
- FRUSTRATION
- Rumors/ Rumors. We still do not know the answer to the big question, “WHY”
The Group

- Only God knows the exact number there.
- 32 were shot
- 28 wounded.
- The birthday event was promoted on social media
- People from four counties and at least six high schools were present.
- There was no way to reach them in one set place.
Plans

- We made plans
- One office/ One provider to provide the follow-up care.
- A call got an appointment ASAP
- We waited about four days before anyone showed up.
Our mantra

- Ask how are you holding up?
- Assure. You are safe here. We will walk with you through this as far as it takes.
- Care. Assess the wounds/ dress the wounds.
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Encourage
- Repeat
The wounded

- Started showing up
- Leg wound distal-proximal and Proximal to distal.
- Ricocheting bullets
- Chest wounds
- Foot wounds
- Head wounds
- A bullet in the anterior chest wall
- Chest tube sites male and female
The Stories

- A group of females were protected by the DJ that sacrificed his equipment to us a table as protection for he and several girls.
- A group of females in bathroom herded out by a gunman instead of shooting them
- Three heroic males
- Phil Dowdell pushed his sister out of a door as he was fatally wounded.
- One guy is paralyzed from a spinal wound. The girl he covered was uninjured.
- The retained bullet guy shielded two girls taking a bullet that could have found another mark.
The Follow-up

- Weekly visits. If they wanted it.
- They all did.
- The school did not take role the last six weeks.
- We offered excuses/ referrals.
- Some continued to come for six weeks.
Camp Resilience

- Contact was made with Children’s Harbor Executive Medical Director
- Would a “Survivor Camp” be feasible?
- Spoke to the Sheriff and the District Attorney’s office
- Thumbs up
- The Sheriff and the DA have a “Victim Support.” Team
- The Children’s Harbor Staff spoke to a sister camp in Orlando that had hosted a camp for survivors.
- The Board of Children’s Harbor

THUMBS UP and one volunteered funding
Camp Resilience

- Friday 1 September through Sunday 3 September
- Camp Resilience
- This was a family camp
- The intent was organic relationships and sharing.
Camp Resilience

- This was a pilot program.
- I hope this situation is never repeated.
- BUT this Camp Idea can be used again.
Lessons Learned

The shooting involved six shooters ages 16 through 21 years. This was a strategic event. The weapons used were modified handguns.
Opportunity for our collective voice to be heard
How to Host a Legislator

Michael Ramsey, MD, FAAP | Dothan Pediatric Healthcare Network
Who are your legislators?

• House Member
• Senate Member
• Committee assignments
• https://www.sos.alabama.gov/alabama-votes/elected-official-map
What is your purpose?

- Relationship building
- Information/Education
- Influence/Persuasion
When should you reach out?

- Out of session
- In session
How should you prepare?

- Alabama AAP talking points
- Area Representatives
- Chapter Officers
- Lobbyist
Who else should I invite?

- Other pediatricians
- Stakeholders
- Business leaders
- Parent advocate
How do I talk to them?

- As an expert
- Controlled passion
- Be personal.
How do I make the most of the time?

• Stay focused on 1-2 issues
• Include an ask
• Include written information
• Offer expertise
• Be mindful of timing
What do I do after?

• Follow up
• Stay in touch
• Maintain relationship.
Resources

• Blueprint for Hosting Legislators (updated October 2023): https://tinyurl.com/3u8bsj48
Alabama Chapter - AAP
Legislative Advocacy
Graham Champion, Chapter Lobbyist
Things to Do

- Get to know your legislator before you need to engage
- Make your ask based on your personal story
- Relate your ask to something the legislator can identify with
- Be reasonable in your expectations
- Go for the low hanging fruit first
- ALWAYS thank your legislator for his or her support
Things Not to Do

- Never personally attack a legislator’s position on an issue
- Never mislead a legislator
- Do not exaggerate your position on an issue
Gun Safety Issues

- Safe Storage
- Red Flag Laws
- Age of Purchase
- Permitless Carry
Call to action
Action Items

• Make contact with legislators between now and legislative session

• Sign up to be part of task force (to help plan Chapter’s direction, plan future webinars, etc.) - see link in Chat and it will also be sent to you after the fact with the recording link.

• Sign up for future webinars in this series
Questions?