RISK EDUCATION TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

A Roadmap for Policy Makers and Advocates

project unloaded

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gun violence is the leading cause of death for U.S. children and teens, with youth gun deaths increasing by 50% between 2019 and 2021. Moreover, gun violence is not simply an abstraction for young people today; only a third report feeling very safe at school and half say they worry about mass shootings at least on a weekly basis. But school shootings are the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the impact of gun violence on today's youth.

#1

Gun violence is the leading cause of death for U.S. children and teens

While these events capture attention, daily gun violence in homes and neighborhoods is much more common. More than 60% of Black and Latino youth report experiencing gun violence personally, or having a family member or friend who has. At the same time, concerns about gun violence are contributing to the mental health crisis among teens and young adults, while firearm suicides by young people are increasing dramatically.

70%

of gun owners own guns for protection

The scientific evidence overwhelmingly indicates that the presence of guns increases the risk of death by homicide, suicide, domestic violence, police shootings, and mass shootings. Communities with more guns have more gun violence, not less.

Yet despite the devastating impact of gun violence and the evidence that using, carrying, or owning guns leads to more deaths and injuries, a dangerous narrative persists: The false notion that we are safer armed. This line of thinking drives the vast majority of gun sales in America, with more than seven in ten gun owners citing personal protection as a major reason they own a gun.

To reduce gun violence in this country, we must educate and engage Americans, especially young people — who are forming personal belief systems and being exposed to gun violence for the first time — about the risks that come with owning and using firearms.

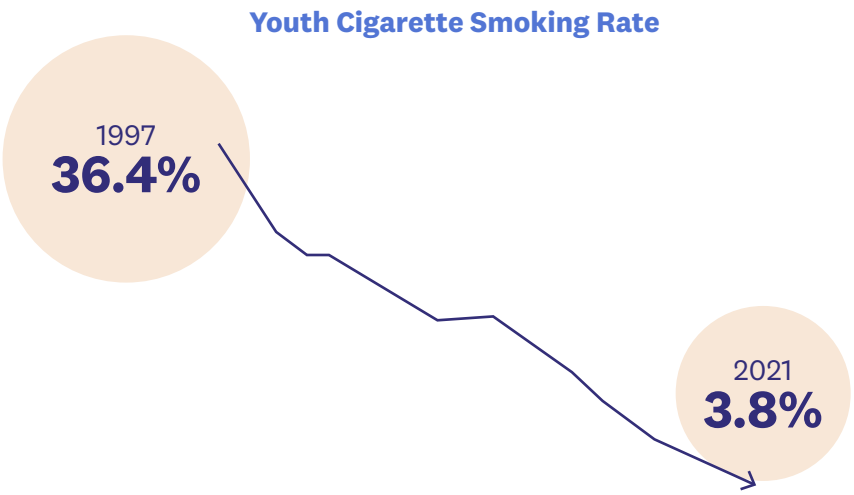
Research by Project Unloaded shows that young peoples' views about guns are still forming, and they are open to learning more, creating a unique opportunity to reach them before they decide to pick up a gun.

As the nation's only youth-focused organization dedicated to changing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors around firearm use, Project Unloaded works at the intersection of public health, youth engagement, social marketing, and culture. Through large-scale, data-backed social media campaigns, original research, teen-facing local programs, and inspiring youth leaders, we combine young people's love of social media with a gun violence prevention message centered on risk education that can reduce gun use and save lives.

Among the youth we have reached, exposure to our risk education content and programs have led to a greater awareness of the risks of firearm use and a decreased interest

in future gun ownership. Much like other successful public health efforts to increase awareness and shift high-risk behaviors, our work demonstrates the potential of firearm risk education to save lives.

Risk education is a proven and effective tool for shifting public perception and ultimately changing behavior over time, particularly among young people. From cigarette use to fentanyl use and unprotected campfires, risk education has been used to build knowledge, shift attitudes, and change behaviors on entrenched high-risk activities. Research consistently shows that risk education tools, including those driven by public policy, can help people make more informed decisions, reduce dangerous behaviors, and improve the health of communities. For example, a sustained investment in risk education measures across the public and private sectors has helped lower cigarette smoking rates among youth by more than 85% since the late 1990s.



> **Risk education is a proven and effective tool for shifting public perception and ultimately changing behavior over time, particularly among young people.**

Risk education as a gun violence prevention strategy has received scant attention from advocates and policy makers. This paper aims to address that gap with a thorough exploration of policy approaches that can be used to promote and scale effective firearm risk education initiatives. We consider three types of policies that could be deployed at the local, state, and/or federal levels to reach young people and others considering gun ownership with factual education about the risks of firearms:

1

School-Based Programming that delivers effective and engaging place-based risk education curricula to students in schools. Health education is required or encouraged in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and includes other behavioral risk topics such as sex education, substance abuse, and mental health. We explore best practices for incorporating firearm risk education as a component of health curriculum.

2

Public Education Campaigns designed to reach target audiences at scale with persuasive risk education messages through a variety of youth-focused communication channels, including social media. Government entities at all levels support similar initiatives designed to reduce public health risks, including campaigns addressing secure firearm storage and awareness of extreme risk protection laws. Youth-focused firearm risk education would be an important next step in these efforts.

3

Consumer-Based Policies that encourage or require the dispersal of firearm risk education information to prospective buyers at all ages before or during the purchase process. Implemented across a variety of products that pose a danger to public health and safety, these policies include product warnings or comprehensive educational materials at the point of sale, or education required during waiting periods before purchase.

This report details examples of successful risk education policies and programs across these categories and identifies components that can be adapted to support firearm risk education. The initiatives described in this report do not limit gun rights; rather, they are focused on empowering youth and consumers with accurate information to make informed decisions about firearm acquisition. **By learning from successful public health campaigns on issues like drunk driving and smoking cessation, effective risk education can save lives by changing public perceptions and behaviors related to firearms.**

INTRODUCTION[1]

In 2024, when the Pew Research Center polled Americans on their thoughts regarding gun ownership, a majority said that owning a gun does more to increase safety than to decrease it. Even among young people, many of whom have grown up with active shooter drills and personally witnessed the daily toll of gun violence in their communities, more than 75% believed having a gun in their home would make them safer.

This line of thinking drives the vast majority of firearm sales in America, with more than seven in ten gun owners citing personal protection as a major reason they own a gun. As with many social issues, the COVID-19 pandemic put the subject of firearm ownership into stark focus.

Americans bought almost 60 million firearms during the pandemic, roughly twice the level at which firearms were purchased just two decades prior. Many of these guns were sold to new gun buyers, with an estimated 7.5 million Americans becoming firearm owners for the first time between 2019 and 2021. These new firearm owners are younger, more politically diverse, and more likely to be women and people of color than ever before. When asked why so many Americans are choosing to become firearm owners for the first time, one reason continues to rise to the surface: protection.

But, does owning a firearm actually make you more safe? The data are clear: No. To the contrary, research shows there is a strong relationship between high rates of firearm ownership and violent crime, including firearm assault and firearm homicide. Studies also illustrate that people who live in households where firearms are present are at higher risk of homicide, suicide, and accidental death — risks that are particularly acute for women and children.

Project Unloaded works to reduce gun violence by raising awareness about the risks of firearm ownership, especially among young people. Project Unloaded focuses on teens because research shows that youth are still making up their minds about firearm ownership. The knowledge and attitudes they develop in these crucial years influence their behavior now and as they grow older. Most people form their cultural orientations in late adolescence, starting around age 18. Therefore, the window before this, when teens can grasp the concept of complicated topics like gun violence while remaining open to new views on it, presents a critical window.

When targeted with effective education measures, young people are also more likely than adults to adapt their behaviors. In the firearm space, engaging youth is particularly relevant: The average age of first-time firearm acquisition is in the late teens and early twenties. If we are able to educate youth during these formative years, we're likely to see sustained impact over the course of their lifetime.

> **“The average age of first-time firearm acquisition is in the late teens and early twenties.**

In just four years, Project Unloaded is already demonstrating the promise of firearm risk education focused on youth. In social media campaigns

and community programs, awareness of the risks of firearm use increases after exposure to our risk education message, as interest in future firearm ownership decreases. Drawing on our lessons learned and examples from other public health arenas, this report explores the potential for the public sector to advance the goal of firearm risk education and awareness. It highlights public policy approaches at the local, state, and federal levels that can make firearm risk education more widespread and sustainable.

Risk Education as a Tool for Improving Public Health

Today, when Americans leave a bar, restaurant, or social event, many instinctively ensure they have a sober ride home in the form of a rideshare, designated driver, or public transit. But this careful planning wasn't always common. In the early 1980s, drunk driving was alarmingly widespread — approximately 50% of all US traffic fatalities involved alcohol-impaired drivers. However, by 2022 this figure was cut roughly in half, from over 21,000 fatalities in the early 1980s to around 10,500 fatalities in 2018, reflecting a significant behavioral and cultural shift.

This positive change didn't occur by chance. Advocacy groups spearheaded risk education initiatives, including memorable public service campaigns like "Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk," widespread promotion of the designated driver concept through media, and targeted educational programs in schools. These initiatives also catalyzed deliberate policy actions, including raising the legal drinking age nationwide to 21, lowering the legal intoxication definition of blood-alcohol concentration limits to 0.08%, and implementing stricter driving under the influence (DUI) enforcement on roads (e.g., sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols). By increasing public knowledge about the dangers of impaired driving, these initiatives reshaped attitudes toward drunk driving, ultimately transforming individual behavior *and* public policy.

The power of risk education as a tool for improving public health has not been limited to driving under the influence. From cigarette use to fentanyl use and unprotected campfires, we've repeatedly raised awareness and shifted norms around entrenched risk behaviors through education and policy. That's because research consistently shows that risk education tools, such as public education campaigns, can help reduce dangerous behaviors, improve the health of communities, and help people make more informed decisions.

Researchers, especially in the public health space, have used the **Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior (KAB) framework** to better understand how increasing knowledge can shift attitudes, ultimately influencing behavior toward safer outcomes. This framework is centered on the concept that providing individuals with access to fact-based, unbiased knowledge is foundational in driving behavior change. An individual's increase in knowledge helps to shape their perceptions and beliefs about risks and benefits associated with particular health-related behaviors, moving them toward a positive public health behavior or action.

In public health, the KAB framework guides the design of effective interventions; as one example, it has been used to build educational campaigns on smoking cessation. As referenced in this report, Project Unloaded's theory of change is guided by these same principles of increasing **knowledge** about the risks of firearm ownership in order to change young people's **attitudes** and **behavior** regarding firearm ownership and use.

Firearm Risk Education

If risk education is a proven, powerful tool for transforming behavior, how can we apply it in the context of firearms? Our work at Project Unloaded focuses on answering that question.

We engage young people in risk education through our digital campaigns and community-based programming. One of our key digital initiatives is the *Working On It* campaign, which reaches teens on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat with simple, nonpartisan facts about the risks of firearm access to young people working on their mental health via native content, influencers, and targeted paid ads. The *Guns Change the Story* campaign reaches teens in neighborhoods at the greatest risk of violence with interactive videos and real teen stories to illustrate how the presence of a gun can turn everyday moments into risky ones. And, we partner with Gen Z content creators like popular gaming streamers to amplify our message online through the *Leave Guns in the Game* initiative. To date, more than 100 young influencers have worked with Project Unloaded to share data-backed facts on social media. These campaigns are strictly nonpartisan. The content is designed with input from teens and delivered by teens to their peers in a way that is non-judgmental, non-polarizing, and highly engaging. Since 2022, an audience of more than 10 million teens and young adults have heard our message through our social media campaigns and influencer partners.

Offline, our Community Partner Program reaches teens in their local communities through partnerships with youth-serving organizations in Chicago and other cities. In after-school and summer programs, teens learn facts about firearm risks and build their social media marketing skills so they can share those facts with their peers in their own communities. Central to these efforts is youth leadership: Our Youth Council of teens and young adults advises on campaigns, and our Creator Corps focuses on crafting and sharing creative social media content to engage their generation with facts about gun risks. Through these campaigns and programs, we are working to foster a generational shift away from gun ownership by replacing the myth of guns as protection with the reality that choosing to live "unloaded" can save lives.

10 M

teens and young adults have heard Project Unloaded's firearm risk education message on social media

Risk Education as Public Policy

We know that risk education can drive significant behavior change in the public health space, including — as demonstrated by our work at Project Unloaded — on gun

violence prevention. As noted, this report seeks to identify public policy opportunities to implement firearm risk education in communities across the country. To do that, we focus on three policy categories where federal, state, and local governments can support firearm risk education:

- **School-Based Programming:** As of 2020, all 50 states and the District of Columbia either legally require or strongly recommend some form of in-school health curriculum on issues ranging from sex education to mental health. In recent years, states have adopted new curricula to build health education on pressing topics like fentanyl awareness into school-based courses. An analysis of successful risk education programs in schools demonstrates that effective curricula are mandatory, interactive, and delivered by a trusted messenger.
- **Public Education Campaigns:** These types of campaigns reach target audiences at scale with persuasive risk education messages through a variety of communication channels. Campaigns are most likely to be effective in increasing knowledge and changing behaviors when they focus on youth as an audience (as research demonstrates they are highly influenced by risk education tactics), leverage effective messaging (e.g., peer-to-peer engagement), and identify mediums that are most likely to reach target audiences (e.g., social media for teens). Public funding from federal, state, and local governments, as well as funding from litigation settlements and excise taxes, have been deployed successfully for public education campaigns on many pressing public health issues.
- **Consumer-Based Policies:** These policies encourage or require that prospective buyers receive risk education information before or during the purchase process. This includes passive product warning requirements (e.g., in-store signage and product-specific labeling), active distribution of comprehensive educational materials (e.g., informational pamphlets shared at the point of sale), and dissemination of information during waiting periods (e.g., risk education information provided in the window between the initiation and completion of a transaction). These policies reach prospective first-time buyers of all ages, including young people.

Across each of these categories, we explore best practices and evidence-based opportunities for federal, state, and local policies that could be applied to firearm risk education for youth and other prospective first-time gun buyers. While many successful policy interventions include education to mitigate the risks of firearm ownership, such as secure storage training or gun lock giveaways, this report focuses on policy levers that are meant to educate prospective firearm buyers before or during the period when they are still considering firearm ownership.

Empowering Consumers and Saving Lives

Despite the common-sense nature of firearm risk education, we did not write this report with our heads in the sand. The Supreme Court has ruled that firearm ownership is

protected under the Constitution. It is important to note that firearm risk education is not about limiting gun rights or making it more difficult to buy a firearm — it's about empowering consumers and reducing *uninformed* firearm acquisition. Firearms are a dangerous product, and accurate information about those dangers will help Americans make the choice about firearm ownership with critical, relevant information.

This work is essential. Between 2020 and 2023, over 180,000 Americans died as a result of a shooting. And gun violence is now the leading cause of death among children and teens, surpassing car crashes and childhood cancer. As we look at ways to address this crisis, we must reckon with the reality that too few Americans understand the risks associated with owning a firearm. If risk education can be leveraged effectively to change that fact — the same way it has been for driving under the influence and smoking — it can and will save lives.

“As we look at ways to address this crisis, we must reckon with the reality that too few Americans understand the risks associated with owning a firearm.

About Project Unloaded

Project Unloaded works to prevent gun violence in all its forms by educating, engaging, and empowering teens through cultural campaigns and community partnerships that share a simple message: guns make us less safe.

We sit at the intersection of public health, youth engagement, social marketing and culture. Through large-scale, data-backed social media campaigns, original research, teen-facing local programs, and inspiring youth leaders, we combine young people's love of social media with a gun violence prevention message that can reduce gun use and save lives.

POLICY APPROACHES TO FIREARM RISK EDUCATION

1. School-Based Programming

School-based risk education programming exists across a variety of public health and safety areas to equip youth with knowledge about the dangers associated with certain behaviors. As detailed below, school-based programming can be especially effective at increasing knowledge, shifting attitudes, and shaping behavior when it is included as part of an existing curriculum, designed to be interactive, and delivered by a trusted messenger.

Overall, a wide range of non-firearm risk education programs are implemented in schools across the US. By examining these existing models, we can identify effective strategies that may be adapted to the context of firearm risk education — an area that is currently lacking in school-based settings.

A. Current Requirements for Health Education

All 50 states and the District of Columbia either require or encourage some form of health education to be included as part of the K-12 curricula. For this reason, health education provides an excellent mechanism for delivering risk education to youth at scale. The vast majority of states require health education to be taught across all three levels of schooling (elementary, middle, and high school). However, the specific content requirements vary widely by state, district, and individual school, covering subjects like sex education, substance abuse, and mental health.[2]

At the state level, health education policies include:

- **Sex education:** Sex education is a required component of health classes in 30 states and the District of Columbia. Similarly, 39 states require education on HIV prevention. Many states also include opt-in or opt-out requirements that parents must fulfill for their children to participate in these classes. Comprehensive sex education (CSE) — a type of sex education that provides medically accurate information using evidence-based educational strategies on topics including anatomy, consent, and reproductive rights — has proven effective in promoting safer sexual behaviors among young people.[3]
- **Substance use:** Education on drug and alcohol use is required by law to be addressed at least once during K-12 schooling in 45 states and the District of Columbia.[4] For tobacco risk education, 42 states have codified laws requiring it to be included in health education.[5] Recently, the fentanyl crisis has compelled some states — including Alabama, California, Illinois, Oregon, and Washington — to mandate

50 STATES

have some form of health education, providing an opportunity for firearm risk education

fentanyl-specific risk education in schools. These states now require public schools to cover the dangers of fentanyl as part of the health curriculum. Research has shown that state laws requiring students to receive education about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs lead to up to a 10% decrease in substance use by high school seniors.

- **Mental health:** Mental health education is also a legally required part of the health curriculum in 38 states.[6] Mental health literacy interventions have been proven to be effective in augmenting mental health knowledge, but have mixed results for reducing stigma or improving help-seeking behavior.

Students across the country are already required to learn about a variety of public health issues in health classes, and these lessons are effective at changing students' behaviors. Gun violence is widely recognized as a public health issue by organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Public Health Association, and could be considered a natural extension of topics already covered in these courses. There is an opportunity to identify states or localities that may consider adding firearm risk as a component of a health education curriculum, especially those that have demonstrated a willingness to add new and emerging public health topics to their curricula.

POLICY IN ACTION

Required Fentanyl Risk Education in Schools

In 2024, **Alabama** passed legislation mandating public schools provide education about the risks of fentanyl for students in grades 6-12. Under Alabama law, school districts are required to design curricula that cover:

- Preventing fentanyl addiction and abuse;
- Awareness of local, school, and community resources and the processes for accessing these resources; and
- Health education on substance use and abuse, including youth substance use.

To provide this education, the local education agency can contract with public or private institutions of higher education, libraries, community service organizations, religious organizations, local public health agencies, organizations employing mental health professionals, or an employee of the local education agency.

Similarly, a new **Illinois** law requires public schools to teach youth in grades 6-8 about the dangers of fentanyl, beginning in the 2025-2026 school year. Students in grades 9-12 will also be tested on their knowledge as part of their drug risk education classes. The instruction, study, and discussion must be taught by a licensed educator, school nurse, or school counselor.

B. Other School-Based Risk Education

School-based risk education programming is sometimes also incorporated into other classes, including language arts, physical education, and social studies. While many of these risk education programs are a required part of state- or district-mandated curricula, some programs are offered as optional rather than mandatory. These optional programs are often provided as elective courses or through school and district partnerships with nonprofits or local small businesses.

- **Digital Literacy:** The growing need to educate youth on digital literacy — fluency with basic technological concepts related to the internet — has compelled states to require school-based media literacy education. Designed in part to help students identify misinformation and online scams, digital literacy curricula are often embedded within various core classes like math and science. Media literacy focuses on skills to analyze and evaluate the reliability of online content, including social media and the growing prevalence of AI.

  As of 2023, 19 states have strengthened media literacy education, whether by requiring media literacy instruction in K-12 classrooms, mandating state education agencies to create curricular frameworks for media literacy, or otherwise. Of those 19 states, four — California, Delaware, New Jersey, and Texas — mandate K-12 schools to include instruction in classrooms at every grade level.

  While the curricular content varies across school districts, these four states require schools to incorporate media literacy education into English language arts, math, science, history, and social science lessons. Such programs have been proven to be effective at improving critical thinking and comprehension of the credibility of media content.

- **Self-defense:** Self-defense programs are typically offered to middle and high school students at no cost or for a low fee and take place outside of the required school day or as part of the physical education curriculum. Optional self-defense lessons as a component of high school physical education classes have been implemented across the country, including in Oak Park and River Forest High Schools in Illinois, Hicksville High School in New York, and Wellesley High School in Massachusetts. When incorporating principles of empowerment self-defense, these interactive risk education programs have been proven to be effective for adolescents in reducing cases of sexual violence, fostering more accurate knowledge about methods to avoid assault, and increasing confidence in a student's ability to effectively resist an attack.

C. School-Based Firearm Risk Education

Currently, there are no mandated firearm risk education programs in US schools, offering no existing evidence base. However, there are a couple of optional school-based programs that address firearm risk education, as well as other gun violence prevention topics, that offer valuable insight into potential pathways for scalable policy solutions. There are also a few existing firearm education programs that focus on secure storage, rather than

the risks of owning or accessing firearms; these may be an unexplored entry point for incorporating risk-focused content into school curricula.

Some state and local organizations have implemented school-based curricula, including in New York City and Washington state. In New York City, New Yorkers Against Gun Violence (NYAGV) has implemented the ReACTION program since 2001, reaching students in over 20 middle and high schools annually to engage youth through discussions about the root causes and local impacts of gun violence.

In Washington state, Washington Ceasefire has offered a Gun Safety Education initiative since 2017, reaching thousands of high school students in Seattle and Tacoma. Note that this program has not yet been evaluated for effectiveness or impact on youth at risk of gun violence.

In recent years, several states have enacted policies requiring or encouraging school-based education concerning firearms. However, these differ in important ways from the risk education content we recommend here. Tennessee, Arkansas, and Utah have recently passed legislation requiring age/grade appropriate instruction on firearm safety, to include safe storage and handling of firearms (which are generally undefined in the statutory language). Some permit firearms to be used in the instruction (Utah, Arkansas), including live fire (Arkansas). Other states, including Idaho, Louisiana, Montana, and Virginia, passed bills allowing or encouraging firearm safety instruction. In some cases, the legislation specifies that the instruction be based on the NRA's Eddie Eagle Gunsafe Program (e.g. Louisiana, Virginia). The Eddie Eagle curriculum is a firearm accident prevention program that purports to teach young children about how to safely respond when coming into contact with a firearm. However, research has clearly shown that this programming is not effective at changing behavior among children who may be involved in accidental shootings; it should not be considered a model for further investment.

The gun violence prevention organization Sandy Hook Promise has proposed legislation known as the SAVE Students Act requiring more generalized violence prevention training for students. These bills, which have passed in Georgia, Louisiana and Ohio, do not reference firearms or include firearm risk education.

D. Lessons for School-Based Programming Design

By examining the wide range of school-based risk education programs focused on non-firearm issues, we can draw valuable lessons to guide the development of effective firearm risk education as a potential policy solution. Research shows that mandated, interactive courses delivered by trusted messengers are the most effective way to maximize reach and impact. Additional research, including research on risk education curriculum best practices, would also be useful in developing evidence-based instruction on firearm risk education.

- **Program Delivery:** One of the most salient lessons from school-based risk education programs is the increased impact of interactive learning formats over traditional lecture-based models. Programs that incorporate peer discussions, real-life scenarios,

and skill-building exercises have been shown to be effective in promoting behavior change. For example, KiR ("Keeping it Real"), an interactive drug and alcohol use prevention program, has been found to be effective at reducing drug use compared with lecture-based classes. Interactive lessons, especially those incorporating multimedia tools like video, animation, and gamified content, have also been shown to significantly increase learning retention and student participation. Similarly, schools in Minnesota may use materials provided by the state's Department of Health to design their interactive curriculum, including a statewide video contest to educate their peers on the dangers of vaping, a video game intervention addressing youth decisionmaking around smoking and vaping, and activity kits for hands-on scientific experiments for kids to investigate the effects of vaping.

- **Trusted Messengers:** In addition to the lecture-based vs. interactive learning formats, the effectiveness of curricular programs varies based on the trustworthiness of the messenger. Laws in states like New York and Minnesota have recognized the importance of trusted messengers, explicitly encouraging or requiring risk education instruction by either peer educators or certified health teachers, depending on grade level.
- **Participation Guidelines:** The degree to which participation in risk education programming in schools is required or optional, and whether programming has an opt-in or opt-out policy, plays a major role in the program's overall impact and reach. State-level departments of education, school districts, or individual schools can set policies requiring participation in these programs or make them optional.

  Additionally, the distinction between opt-in and opt-out policies for school-based risk education creates wide disparities in students' ability to access these curricula. In schools that have *opt-out* programs, students are automatically enrolled in the curriculum, and parents and guardians have the option to withdraw their children from these classes without penalty. *Opt-in* programs require parents and guardians to send written permission for a student to access the available curriculum. While both programs offer the option for students to participate in or withdraw from the curriculum without penalty, in the case of sex education, data show that students in districts with opt-in policies are much less likely to receive the education available to them. As of 2022, eight states have opt-in policies, requiring written consent from a parent or guardian for a student to receive sex education.[7]

These lessons, emphasizing **interactive formats**, **messenger credibility**, and **requiring participation with opt-out measures**, should inform the design of firearm risk education in schools. By adopting these proven strategies, schools, districts, and states can help create a curriculum that is not only comprehensive and engaging but also reaches the most students.

2. Public Education Campaigns

Public education campaigns have long been an effective tool to shift perceptions, influence behaviors, and reduce public health risks. But not all campaigns are created equal; this section will discuss features of campaigns that are essential for delivering results.

While some public education campaigns are privately funded, government entities at all levels also support these initiatives across a wide variety of issues. This support primarily comes in two forms. The first is providing funding to organizations to run campaigns on selected topics. On issues like conservation, substance use, and gambling disorders, federal, state, and local government agencies administer grant programs that fund for- and non-profit organizations to develop and deploy public education campaigns. These grants are usually awarded after an open request for proposal (RFP) process and are often supported through a variety of funding mechanisms. Excise taxes, for example, are one potential funding source for such programs, as discussed in the *Available Funding Mechanisms* section below.

In addition to providing grants, government agencies also develop and deploy public education campaigns themselves. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) "Tips From Former Smokers" campaign is one such example. The federal initiative used real-life stories from people living with smoking-related illnesses to raise awareness and encourage tobacco users to quit.

Sometimes, the two policy levers — government funding and direct government production — are combined through an agency partnership with a for- or non-profit organization. To address the national opioid epidemic, the Ad Council and the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) jointly developed a campaign on fentanyl awareness to educate young people about the deadly risks of fentanyl-laced drugs through honest, peer-driven messaging and digital outreach.

As of early 2025, there are no federal, state, or local government-funded or government-produced public education campaigns focused on firearm risk education. While there have been government-supported public education campaigns on topics such as Extreme Risk Protection Order laws and secure firearm storage, these campaigns focus on mitigating the risks of firearm ownership, as opposed to providing youth and other prospective firearm owners with information before they make a decision to acquire a firearm.

But that can change. Governments at all levels can support firearm risk education public education campaigns through new and existing funding mechanisms. To inform the development of these campaigns, this section explores the **evidence behind effective public education campaigns, lessons learned from successful campaign design**, and the specific **funding mechanisms** governments may use to support them.

A. The Case for Public Education Campaigns

Evidence from successful public health initiatives demonstrates that targeted public education campaigns can effectively shape behaviors, especially among youth and

young adults — but doing so requires leveraging best practices in audience, message, and delivery. The examples below highlight campaigns that have done just that, helping to drive behavior change on public health issues like smoking and drug and alcohol use.

NON-FIREARMS

Campaigns developed by the Truth Initiative and Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids have helped to drive a reduction in youth smoking by more than 85% since the 1990s, widely recognized as a public health success story. However, while rates of cigarette smoking have consistently declined in the past 30 years, the use of other nicotine-containing products, especially e-cigarettes, has risen among youth. In response, the Truth Initiative's "Depression Stick" campaign sought to increase knowledge of the mental health dangers of vaping among young people. The campaign is credited with being the first national public education campaign to help reduce youth use of e-cigarettes. Its success came from its ability to draw the connection between vaping and increased levels of anxiety and depression, which a majority of youth said were a "major issue among their peers."

POLICY IN ACTION

The FDA's "The Real Cost" Campaign

The FDA's "The Real Cost" youth cigarette and e-cigarette prevention campaign has increased knowledge among at-risk teens about the harmful effects of vaping and smoking. The campaign uses targeted advertising across digital platforms, television, and social media to directly engage teenagers. The FDA contracted with advertising and marketing agencies to implement the campaign.

- "The Real Cost" contributed to measurable declines in youth tobacco and e-cigarette consumption nationwide.
- More than 90% of the target audience was aware of the first wave of ads less than a year after launch.
- The campaign helped to drive a 30% decrease in youth smoking initiation from 2014 to 2016 — preventing approximately 587,000 adolescents from initiating smoking.

The "Living the Example" (LTE) program, spearheaded by Mentor Foundation USA, offers an example of a campaign that drove a reduction among teens in 30-day intentions to use alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and even harder drugs. LTE engages high school seniors to serve as ambassadors in sharing anti-drug messages with classmates, both in person and via social media. There has been a "significant positive effect" of the campaign's exposure, with students who saw LTE content reporting a lower desire to smoke, drink, or use drugs.

FIREARMS

As noted above, most gun violence prevention public education campaigns focus on risk mitigation - with topics like secure firearm storage — and several have been impactful. For example, the Ad Council's End Family Fire campaign, in partnership with Brady, has driven nearly half (48%) of firearm owners who have seen its content to change how or where they store firearms. In this section, we focus specifically on successful public education campaigns that are educating young people about the risks of firearm ownership, of which Project Unloaded's work is a rare example.

Our research shows there is a significant need to expand this work: Despite the fact that firearms are the leading cause of death for US children and teens, and the evidence that firearm access increases the risk of fatal and non-fatal injury, most young people incorrectly believe that having a gun will make them safer. Among Black and Hispanic teens (ages 13 to 17) in urban US communities with the highest rates of gun violence, the vast majority had little to no knowledge of the risks associated with gun possession. Nearly 90% had never researched the pros and cons of gun ownership. However, approximately half of the these teens said they were still making up their minds about gun ownership and believed they would benefit from knowing more.

It's the teens who are undecided about gun ownership and interested in learning more who inspired the creation of Project Unloaded's *SNUG ("Safer Not Using Guns")* campaign in 2022. SNUG reaches teens with simple facts about gun violence and gun ownership, leveraging various social media platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, where they spend their time.

- The campaign has reached millions of young users, with almost **150 million** total views across its videos.
- Pre-market testing of *SNUG* showed a 15% decline in the belief that guns increase safety and a 16% shift among teens — from interest in gun ownership to being unsure about owning a gun.
- During the first 18 months of the campaign, *SNUG* recorded 186,000 click-throughs to its educational website from users looking for further exposure to gun risk education.

Another Project Unloaded campaign, *Guns Change the Story*, specifically engages Black and Hispanic teens from communities heavily impacted by gun violence. Teens themselves produce powerful, narrative-driven content, including videos and interactive MadLibs-style storytelling, to illustrate how the presence of firearms increases risks in everyday scenarios, effectively debunking the common myth that firearms make us safer.

- The posts reach teens through peer influencers and achieve engagement rates **significantly higher** than industry standards.

New in 2025 are campaigns focused on reaching teens through other topics of interest. *Leave Guns in the Game* is designed for teen gamers who connect with their followers to explain that guns may offer power inside a video game, but in real life they add risk.

Finally, *Working On It* reaches teens through a conversation they're already having online — about mental health — with a firearm suicide prevention message: We're all working on something, and when we're working on our mental health, we're safer without a gun around.

B. Lessons for Campaign Design

Successful public education campaigns, like those highlighted above, provide important lessons for designing future campaigns on firearm risk education. Across issue areas, these campaigns employ key strategies to drive impact: They **target youth** directly, they leverage **effective and compelling messaging strategies**, and they deliver content through **mediums trusted by their target audience**.

Engaging Youth: Public education campaigns that target youth are particularly effective because behaviors established during adolescence often persist into adulthood, amplifying their long-term impact. For firearm risk education in particular, teen-focused interventions are particularly relevant because this age group understands information about complex issues and is open to accepting and assimilating this information into their worldview. Exposure to gun violence also has a significant mental health impact on young people, leading to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. And, since the average first-time firearm acquisition occurs by people in their teens and early twenties, instilling a strong risk knowledge base early is critical.

IN PRACTICE

Engaging Youth

In 2016, the Truth Initiative partnered with Petco on a public education campaign that emphasized the health risks for pets exposed to second-hand smoke. The campaign struck a chord because young people care immensely about the well-being of their pets; as such, it effectively impacted audience members' intention to smoke in the future.

An advertisement from the Truth Initiative. (Public Relations Society of America)

Effective Messaging: Impactful public education campaigns also leverage specific messaging strategies to reach and influence target audiences, including bystander and peer-to-peer communication tactics. This approach is specifically relevant for campaigns that include risk education or aim to address harmful behaviors. In addition, messaging that is **supportive** and provides **action-oriented** information can encourage audience members to change their attitudes and behaviors.

Importantly, *who* delivers the message can greatly shape how the information is received. For instance, the 2021 Ad Council Research Institute (ACRI) Trusted Messengers study found that young Americans are more likely to trust social media influencers and celebrities than older generations are, and that individuals living in urban areas have much more trust in doctors, scientists, academic experts, and teachers than those in rural or suburban areas do. Successful messaging not only depends on selecting the right communication tactics but also on choosing trusted and credible messengers who resonate with the intended audience.

IN PRACTICE

Effective Messaging

The Ad Council and Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) 2024 "Don't Wait. Reach Out." campaign marked a significant shift in how the VA approached mental health outreach, centering peer-to-peer communication as both the method and the message. Rather than relying on institutional credibility, the campaign elevated the lived experiences and voices of veterans themselves through a powerful testimonial video, offering both credibility and relatability.

IN PRACTICE

Effective Messaging

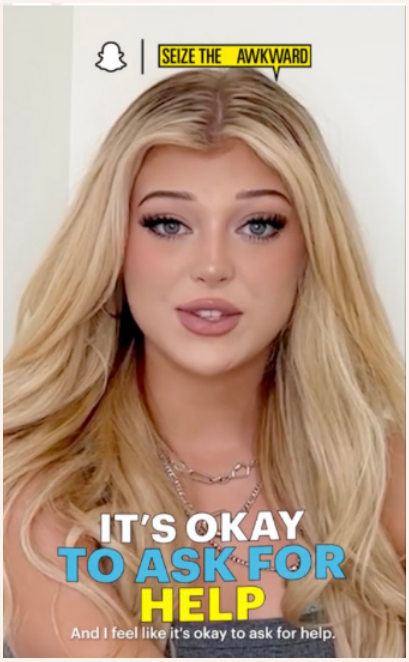
The California Department of Public Health's Children & Youth Behavioral Health Initiative's suicide prevention campaign, "Never a Bother," leveraged peer-to-peer communications to engage its target audience. Nearly 400 young Californians were involved in the campaign design, which was developed around key themes that resonate with this audience. The campaign is implemented through grants to youth-serving community-based organizations and tribal entities, helping to ensure messages and tactics are culturally appropriate and hyper-locally focused.

Trusted Mediums: Finally, the effectiveness of public education campaigns also depends on the communication mediums they use to deploy the message. This is especially true for campaigns aimed at young people: Globally, young people are much more likely to get information from social media — 45% cite it as their top source — than older generations who still rely on television and print. Successful public education campaigns **meet their audiences where they are** — and for firearm risk education targeting youth and other prospective first-time buyers, social media is a key medium for campaigns to maximize reach and effectiveness.

IN PRACTICE

Trusted Mediums

The Ad Council's suicide prevention campaign for young adults, "Seize the Awkward," uses social media to encourage young people to check in on their friends and discuss mental health. The campaign includes videos with influencers and young public figures on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, and posts information about mental health resources on platforms such as Pinterest, Reddit, and Snapchat. This tactic is backed by research that demonstrates the high levels of trust younger Americans have in social media influencers.



Social media personality and singer, Loren Gray, participates in the Seize the Awkward campaign. (TikTok)

IN PRACTICE

Trusted Mediums

Prince William County, Virginia launched "Fentanyl Exposed" to educate teens about the risks of fentanyl-laced drugs and how to respond to overdoses using naloxone. The campaign featured a teen-centered website and shared Spanish bilingual content across YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. An evaluation of the campaign found 60% of teens surveyed had never heard of naloxone before seeing its messaging, and more than half of the teens said they would be willing to carry the life-saving medication.

C. Available Funding Mechanisms

While nonprofits can implement public education campaigns solely using private funding, their reach will almost certainly be constrained. That's why many of the most successful and sustainable public education campaigns are supported by public funding. Yet, as of early 2025, there are very few firearm-related public education campaigns funded by the public sector. Of those that do exist, none focus on firearm risk education. Instead, campaigns tend to focus on promoting harm reduction through secure firearm storage practices and the utilization of Extreme Risk Protection Order laws.

Despite the current political environment, there are opportunities to leverage or reform existing funding mechanisms to help support firearm risk public education, including federal and state grant funding, excise taxes, and litigation settlement funding.

Federal and State Grant Funding

At the federal and state levels, grant funding has been used to support public education campaigns across a host of public health issues, including vaping, seatbelt use, and distracted driving. Most often, public education funding programs are specifically created by legislatures and carried out by agencies through formula grants, competitive grants, or by directly developing and implementing campaigns using agency staff. Agencies may also issue guidance making public education campaigns an allowable use of certain grant programs, even if such a use was not specifically included in the grant program's authorizing statute.

STATE GRANT FUNDING

Historically, about a quarter to a third of total state government revenue comes from the federal government. As a result, many state grant programs — especially those related to health, education, and social services — are pass-throughs or rely heavily on federal dollars. However, states do fund some of their own public education grant programs via state appropriations, including in the firearm space.

Several states support this work through dedicated violence prevention offices that have **secure state funding**. Importantly, these state-funded offices provide continuity for education efforts regardless of federal policy shifts.

- Colorado's Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP) has an annual budget of $3 million, a portion of which is used to conduct public education campaigns about existing gun violence prevention laws. For example, in 2024, Colorado's OGVP used its state budget to fund a campaign called "Let's Talk Guns, Colorado," which utilized television, radio, digital media, and community outreach to educate residents about secure storage, how to use the state's Extreme Risk Protection Order law, and how to report a lost or stolen firearm.
- Maine's Office of Violence Prevention, newly established in 2023, has been tasked with using its core state budget to conduct public education and awareness campaigns related to firearms, including secure storage and suicide prevention.

Other state-level agencies frequently administer gun violence prevention programs with public education components, funded through **state appropriations**.

- New Jersey's Office of the Secretary of Higher Education funds the Gun Violence Research Center at Rutgers University, supporting research that informs evidence-based messaging. Their initiatives include researching effective messaging for firearm secure storage for service members and understanding perceptions of the benefits and risks of firearm access.
- In California, Governor Newsom announced an 18-month, $11 million campaign in 2022 to focus on outreach and education efforts around California's Gun Violence Restraining Order (GVRO) laws in communities most at risk of gun violence. The campaign was administered by the Governor's Office of Emergency Services based on a study highlighting the need to raise public awareness around the state's GVRO law.

State-level grant programs like these offer perhaps the best avenue for policymakers to support public education campaigns on firearm risk education. They also offer a key opportunity to target youth, an audience that has been largely overlooked in existing campaigns. Currently, we are not aware of any state or local public education grant program that explicitly includes firearm risk education as an allowable use. But they easily could, either through statutory clarifications or agency guidance, depending on the grant program's underlying statutory text.

FEDERAL GRANT FUNDING

The Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (Byrne SCIP), created as part of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022, provides federal formula grants to implement state crisis intervention court proceedings and related programs. During the Biden administration, the Department of Justice Bureau of Justice

Assistance (BJA) issued guidance explicitly clarifying that investments in public education were an allowable use under Byrne SCIP. In response, multiple states, including Massachusetts, Michigan, and Washington, included public education as a priority in plans they submitted to BJA for how they would use the funding. The focus of these planned investments was on increasing awareness of Extreme Risk Protection Order laws, not educating buyers on firearm risk. Yet, firearm risk education is arguably an allowable use under the program if education campaigns are targeted towards individuals in crisis.

BJA's STOP School Violence Program is another federal grant program that can be used to support public education efforts on firearms. Created in 2018, the program gives BJA authority to provide awards directly to states, school districts, and local law enforcement agencies to invest in evidence-based school safety programs. Similar to Byrne SCIP, the Biden administration also explicitly clarified that investments in public education were an allowable use under the STOP School Violence Program. While the Biden administration's guidance particularly cited secure storage education as an example, nothing in the underlying statute would seem to prevent BJA from opening the program to firearm risk education efforts.

Of course, at the current moment, nearly all federal funding streams face considerable uncertainty, including those noted above. As a result, any progress in the near future to increase public funding for firearm risk education will likely need to come at the state or local level.

Excise Taxes

States have also developed independent revenue streams to support public education efforts. Often, this revenue is directed towards state budgets, where it is used to finance a host of government programs, including grant programs.

One particularly potent lever for revenue generation has been excise taxes on products like tobacco, alcohol, and sugary beverages. For example, California's tobacco control program established by Proposition 99 used cigarette tax revenue to finance a sustained anti-tobacco media campaign. Over two decades, this state-funded campaign is credited with helping to cut adult smoking prevalence in California by about one-third.

There is precedent for excise taxes on a wide range of goods, including firearms. One of the oldest examples is the 1937 Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, which imposes an excise tax on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment. The tax has generated billions of dollars in revenue that is distributed to state governments for conservation efforts.

- In 2024, California used Pittman-Robertson as a model and became the first state to levy an excise tax (11%) on firearms and ammunition. Revenue from California's

tax is used to fund violence prevention programs, community outreach, and school safety initiatives.

- Colorado's voters also recently approved a tax (6.5%) on firearms, firearm parts, and ammunition that was imposed in April 2025. The revenue will be largely earmarked for crime victim services, with a smaller portion reserved for behavioral and mental health interventions for veterans and youth.
- Vermont, New York, Massachusetts, Washington, and New Mexico are among the states where lawmakers are considering similar bills.[8]

At the local level, three municipalities have also successfully imposed excise taxes on firearms and ammunition: Seattle and Tacoma, WA, and Cook County, IL.

Since excise taxes are often placed on products that negatively impact public health, funding generated from these initiatives often supports education efforts about the health risks associated with consuming the product. Excise taxes are a particularly good funding source for public awareness and education initiatives because they provide a sustainable revenue stream and are less likely to be diverted to support other budget items. While relatively few states and localities have levied excise taxes on firearms, these policymakers have the opportunity to lead on firearm risk education.

POLICY IN ACTION

Consumer Fees to Fund Violence Prevention & Liability Insurance as Mechanism for Risk Education

In **San Jose, California**, the municipal government enacted a first-of-its-kind ordinance requiring firearm owners to carry liability insurance and pay an annual fee of $25 to fund violence prevention initiatives. The measure, known as the Gun Harm Reduction Ordinance, aims to address gun violence by using the revenue for firearm safety education, suicide prevention programs, and other related interventions. Though the ordinance has faced legal challenges, a federal appeals court recently upheld the measure. San Jose's innovative approach has spurred discussions nationwide about financial accountability as a tool for gun violence reduction.

This approach also opens the door to using liability insurance as a mechanism for firearm risk education — for example, the revenue could be used for public education initiatives, or risk education materials could be given to consumers when they complete the gun liability attestation form.

Litigation Settlement Funding

Funding from legal settlements, most notably from cases against the tobacco industry and opioid manufacturers, has been used to fund wide-scale public education campaigns across the country. A similar strategy could be leveraged to fund firearm risk education, especially as states are expanding the ability to hold firearm manufacturers accountable for illegal conduct.

For decades, litigation-driven funding for gun violence prevention public education has been limited due to the special immunity protections Congress provided firearm manufacturers and dealers under the so-called Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA). Since 2021, however, nine states have enacted legislation designed to limit the near-blanket civil immunity firearms dealers and makers have received.

If these new laws are used successfully by state Attorneys General and other public-sector litigants, they create a potentially potent revenue stream for public education campaigns.

- Washington state's Attorney General undertook legal action in 2023 against a firearm retailer which led to a $3 million settlement, the majority of which was dedicated to fund efforts to reduce gun violence, promote firearm safety, and support victims. The suit was brought before Washington enacted its "Firearm Industry Responsibility and Gun Violence Victims' Access to Justice Act" in 2023, meaning fewer barriers exist to filing similar cases in the future.

Examples of Litigation Settlement Funding Allocated to Support Risk Education

Tobacco litigation provides a roadmap for this work. In 1998, the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement came into force, and major tobacco companies agreed to compensate states for tobacco-related health costs and restrict tobacco advertising practices. An estimated $206 billion was paid to the states over a 25-year period which were then allocated to support health-related initiatives such as smoking prevention programs and public health campaigns. The settlement also created and funded an independent foundation (now the Truth Initiative) to run youth anti-smoking campaigns.

Similarly, litigation related to the opioid crisis has yielded billions of dollars in settlement funding for states to spend on substance use disorder (SUD) treatment and prevention. This funding — which, for participating states, is allocated based on a formula that considers a state's population, overdose deaths, and prevalence of SUD — is usually administered by a relevant state agency. The agency is tasked with developing a plan to spend the funds on opioid awareness and prevention projects and programs. The funds can be allocated through RFPs or non-competitive grants to nonprofit or educational organizations (including universities), or can be spent on activities sponsored by the agency itself.

Public education campaigns are an allowable use of funds through the national opioid settlements, and many states are directing funding to state agencies and nonprofits for this purpose. For example, the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs is using settlement funding for public education campaigns that educate youth about the risks of opioid misuse. Similarly, settlement funding supports the Illinois nonprofit Prevention First's "Guard and Discard" public education campaigns against opioid misuse.

3. Consumer-Based Policies

Consumer-based risk education policies have been implemented across a variety of products, including firearms, tobacco, and alcohol, in response to the dangers these products pose to public health and safety. The hazardous nature of these products — whether due to their addictive qualities, potential to cause chronic health conditions, or increased risk of lethal violence — has prompted regulators and policymakers to develop strategies to provide risk education to consumers with the goal of raising awareness about dangerous products. These policies often take the form of **product warnings**, **comprehensive educational materials**, or **education during required waiting periods before purchase**.

There is a large body of evidence that demonstrates the efficacy of providing prospective consumers with information about the risks associated with certain products. For example, the effectiveness of warning signs and labels at points of sale has been well-documented in tobacco control. For over half a century, **product warnings**, such as warning labels on cigarette packaging and at retailers, have served as a public health intervention, encouraging cessation and raising awareness of tobacco-related harms. Evidence suggests that warning labels on cigarettes contribute to behavioral change among young smokers. Smokers exposed to warnings are more likely to consider cessation and seek support services, while adolescents and young adults tend to develop a heightened awareness of the dangers of smoking and are therefore less likely to begin smoking in the first place. Policy application of this evidence in the context of firearms is nascent, but New York, California, and King County, Washington, have begun to pursue this avenue, implementing signage at firearms retailers and labels on product packaging.

Similarly, **comprehensive educational materials** such as pamphlets serve as an additional tool for consumer education, offering more detailed information than simple warning signs. These pamphlets typically include statistics, crisis resources, and safety recommendations. Unlike product warnings, which rely on brief exposure to educational materials, resources like pamphlets allow consumers to receive risk education on their own timeline and at their convenience. As explained below, some jurisdictions — including Anne Arundel County, Maryland, and the state of California — have mandated that firearm retailers distribute pamphlets at the point of sale, reinforcing messages about secure storage, suicide prevention, and the legal responsibilities of firearm ownership.

Waiting periods offer another avenue for risk education by lengthening the amount of time between the initiation and completion of a transaction, the point when buyers gain possession of the product. Waiting periods are well known for their application to firearm sales; they have also been applied to other consequential purchases, such as real estate in California's natural hazard zones. For firearm purchases, these types of mandatory delays are already in place in 13 states and the District of Columbia, serving both as a "cooling-off" period and as an opportunity for completion of background checks. The city of Los Angeles has explored leveraging this window to send educational materials

to firearm buyers who have initiated a transaction, an approach that has successfully influenced buyer awareness and decision-making.

Unlike school-based programming and public education campaigns, which can be targeted directly at youth audiences, consumer-based policies reach a wider audience. Given their effectiveness in driving behavior change in tobacco and other high-risk activities, the policies highlighted above demonstrate the potential for these innovative approaches to be applied to firearm risk education. These policies could help reach consumers of all ages, including young people and other prospective first-time buyers.

A. Product Warnings

Product warnings, which may take the form of warning labels, in-store signage, and advertising language requirements, have been used across many different products to ensure consumers are aware of the risks. Research on the effectiveness of product warnings in curbing the use of products with potential health risks has yielded mixed findings, with some studies providing evidence that they can influence behavior change. The reality is that not all warnings are created equal, and evidence suggests some warnings are more effective at changing consumer behavior than others. For example, in the tobacco context, product warnings and signs containing imagery have been proven to be more effective than text-only warnings.

PRODUCT WARNINGS: NON-FIREARMS

In-Store Signage

In the case of tobacco, cigarette retailers have been ordered by courts to post "corrective statements" in stores to inform consumers of health risks. This 2022 federal court order applies to over 200,000 retailers in the US and mandates that the signs be displayed through June 2025. Yet, research suggests that merely posting warning signs may not significantly alter behavior. One study on point-of-sale tobacco warnings found that while removing tobacco product display cases reduced smokers' urge to buy cigarettes and their actual purchases, the presence of warning signs alone had no measurable effect. However, the study found that even if signs alone may not drastically change behavior, they help reinforce health messages and ensure consumers have clear, accurate information before and during the transaction process.

In-store warning signs about the dangers of consuming alcohol while pregnant are required to be posted in all alcohol retailers in 23 states and the District of Columbia, and have been effective in reducing prenatal alcohol consumption (although the evidence base is limited to a small number of studies). The messaging on the signs varies by state law but generally offers a bold warning that drinking while pregnant can cause birth defects.

Overall, the body of research on the impact of in-store signs on consumer behavior is quite small, so the evidence should not be taken as conclusive. Groups like the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids continue to advocate for these warnings, pointing to

the possibility that sustained, visible messaging can influence public perception over time. Additionally, given the addictive nature of tobacco, it is possible that consumers of non-addictive products like firearms may respond differently to in-store signs.

Graphic vs. text-only warning labels on cigarette packaging. (RAND, Wikimedia Commons)

Warning Labels

Warning labels on products or product packaging have been applied to a variety of risky products, most notably alcohol and tobacco.[9] For example, in the United States, alcoholic beverage containers must include a warning label describing the risks of drinking while pregnant and drunk driving. Under the Alcoholic Beverage Labeling Act (ABLA) of 1988, this mandatory warning, which applies to all alcoholic beverages containing at least 0.5% alcohol by volume, explicitly states the risks of birth defects, impaired driving, and other potential health consequences. Similarly, other countries, including Australia, Chile, France, and Ireland, require warning labels to highlight the dangers of drinking while pregnant. An evaluation of warning labels on alcohol packaging found that they lead to a reduction in the likelihood of prenatal purchase.

Cigarette warning labels first appeared in the 1960s in the United States. In 1964, the US Surgeon General reported that cigarette smoking posed serious health risks, prompting the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to propose health warning labels on cigarette packages and advertisements.

Graphic warning labels — such as those that include imagery depicting harmful health consequences — were first introduced in Iceland in 1985 and quickly proved to be effective at reducing tobacco product sales. In 2001, Canada became the first country to require graphic photographs on cigarette packages. Graphic health warning labels, together with tax increases, dropped per capita tobacco consumption in Canada by 8.1% from 2001 to 2002. Following the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2005, the use of graphic warning labels on cigarette packages

became more widespread. In 2003, only Canada and Brazil had adopted such labels, but by 2012, 49 countries, including the US, had implemented these requirements.

Decades of research have shown the effectiveness of warning labels on cigarette packaging in increasing consumers' knowledge of the health risks associated with smoking, shifting consumers' attitudes, and ultimately impacting behavior (i.e., curbing the use of cigarettes). There is also a significant amount of research backing the idea that imagery on cigarette warning labels is more effective than text-only warnings.

Policy innovation continues in this space. For example, in Canada, warnings are now required to be printed on each individual cigarette. In the United States, 11 new health warnings were proposed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in March 2020 in accordance with the 2009 Tobacco Control Act, which granted the FDA authority to regulate tobacco products and mandate graphic warnings. However, as of early 2025, the implementation of these regulations is on hold following a federal district court ruling in Texas in favor of tobacco companies.

Warnings Accompanying Product Advertising

Warnings in advertisements have long been required for a range of high-risk products, with cigarettes being a primary example. The FDA requires that print cigarette advertisements include one of 11 graphic warnings, and that the warning "comprise at least 20 percent of the area of the advertisement in a conspicuous and prominent format and location." These requirements also apply to advertisements on social media and are more restrictive for e-cigarettes that contain synthetic nicotine, where the warning must appear in the upper portion of the advertisement.

Research has shown that graphic warning labels on cigarette ads are more impactful at increasing consumer recall of smoking risks than text-only warnings, suggesting that they are effective risk education tools. In the context of social media, research shows that advertisements adhering to FDA requirements received fewer likes and comments than those without.

While states and localities are allowed to impose certain restrictions on cigarette advertising and promotion — such as when, where, and how ads appear — they are prohibited under the Tobacco Control Act from altering requirements about the content of cigarette advertisements.

Required warning labels on cigarette ads (FDA)

PRODUCT WARNINGS: FIREARMS

In-Store Signage

Nineteen states, including California and New York, have enacted laws requiring firearms dealers to display prominently placed signs in their stores warning customers about the risks of firearm ownership. These text-only signs — which are largely the same in their content requirements — highlight the potential dangers of keeping a firearm at home, including increased risk of severe injury and death to household members, and provide contact information for suicide prevention hotlines. Warning signs in stores are used to educate potential buyers about the risks of firearm ownership. However, there is currently no available data on compliance with or enforcement of these requirements.

Warning signs required in Westchester County, NY firearm retailers (CBS)

As noted above, research on the efficacy of in-store signage in the context of cigarette warnings is limited, but suggests that visual or graphic warnings are more effective than text-only notices. In the context of firearms, research doesn't yet exist. Legislation passed by the New York City Council in October 2025 requires the city's 14 firearms dealers to display warning signs that feature images depicting the risks associated with having a firearm in the home.[10] While the legislation did not propose specific imagery, it is worth noting major differences of opinion among the gun violence survivor community about the use of graphic images, such as those from shooting scenes, in a public setting. As such, we do not recommend their use as a component of risk education in this report.

POLICY IN ACTION

Signage Requirements

In 2023, **California** passed legislation requiring firearms dealers to post signage with the following message: "WARNING: If you or a loved one is experiencing distress or depression or is contemplating suicide, please call 988 (The Suicide & Crisis Lifeline). Access to a firearm in the home significantly increases the risk of suicide, death, and injury during domestic violence disputes, and the unintentional death and traumatic injury to children, household members, and guests." This law went into effect on January 1, 2024.

In 2024, **New York** passed a similar law requiring firearms dealers to post a warning sign where weapons are sold, displayed, or delivered. The sign must include a paragraph explaining how firearms in the home "increase the risk of suicide; death during domestic disputes; and/or unintentional death to children, household members, and others." It must also include contact information for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In addition to being displayed in at least two locations at each store, the written warning notice must be given to any firearm purchaser at the time of sale. This law went into effect on January 7, 2025.

Given the recency of these policies having taken effect, it is too early to draw definitive conclusions about their implementation, enforcement, and effectiveness.

Warning Labels

Currently, no jurisdiction in the United States requires warning labels to be placed directly on the packaging of firearms or ammunition sold by retailers. In 2022, the American Medical Association expressed its support for such a policy, specifically for requiring ammunition to carry a legible, boxed warning about the risk of owning and using firearms and recommendations to store ammunition securely and separately from firearms.

Attaching a warning label to the product itself ensures that the message remains in the possession of the buyer. Unlike a warning sign at the counter or a pamphlet, which may be easily overlooked or discarded, the warning label on the product packaging may serve as a physical reminder of the dangers of firearm ownership, especially if the firearm or ammunition is stored in its original packaging long-term. At the same time, since the product label is likely only seen by those who have already purchased the firearm and/or ammunition, these labels may function more as a harm reduction tool than as a risk education measure for prospective buyers.

Warning Labels Accompanying Advertising

Currently, there are no policies at the local, state, or federal level requiring risk education information or health warnings in firearm advertisements or sponsored social media posts. While firearm advertisements are uncommon in mainstream media due to the individual policies of major television networks and social media platforms, there is no federal law that prohibits firearm manufacturers or dealers from advertising their products or requires specific warnings.

Following the mass shooting at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, large cable providers like Comcast and Time Warner banned firearm advertisements, and social media giants like Meta, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube have similar policies in place. While firearm manufacturers maintain social media accounts for product updates, they are restricted from direct advertising or linking to sales — though the extent to which these policies are enforced remains contested. Instead of using direct ads, a network of social media influencers, including military veterans and gun rights activists, promotes firearms to millions of followers. This strategy allows manufacturers to connect with younger, impressionable audiences while avoiding the scrutiny of traditional advertising regulations.

A requirement for risk education warnings or disclosures on advertisements, including those from influencers, would likely face legal challenges and scrutiny based on First Amendment protections. For example, in 2015, San Francisco passed an ordinance requiring warnings on advertisements for sugary beverages — a policy that was struck down by a federal appeals court as an infringement on protected commercial speech. Even after San Francisco implemented a modified ordinance, using less direct language in its warnings and reducing the size of the warning requirement, the policy was challenged again and ultimately repealed in 2021. However, products like cigarettes and alcohol are required to include warnings in advertisements. In 2024, the Supreme Court refused to hear the

tobacco industry's challenge to this advertising requirement, noting that the warnings were "factual and noncontroversial" and therefore did not infringe on the industry's First Amendment rights.

B. Comprehensive Educational Materials

Comprehensive educational materials, such as informational pamphlets and brochures, are required across various industries to educate consumers about potential risks and encourage safer behaviors in contexts such as body art, plastic surgery, and substance use. In the context of firearms, some state and local governments require educational materials to be distributed to potential buyers by firearm retailers at the point of sale. These materials serve as an additional tool alongside product warnings to inform consumers about the risks of firearm ownership.

Although there is limited literature on the effectiveness of comprehensive educational materials as a firearm risk education policy, research in other issue areas suggests that they can influence behavior by equipping consumers with the information necessary to make more informed decisions.

COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS: NON-FIREARMS

Educational materials are disseminated across many domains where changes in behavior can improve personal and public safety. For example, research indicates that educational materials can significantly influence individuals' decisions to get a tattoo, especially among adolescents. One Italian study found that providing students with adequate information on health risks associated with body art practices is essential to ensure they make informed choices, including potentially postponing their appointments. Students who were more aware of the health risks were less likely to obtain their tattoos from unauthorized operators with higher health risks. Based on the research, a more comprehensive booklet on body art and associated health risks was developed and disseminated. Educational materials are also disseminated in the US at points of service for tattoos. As just one example, in Amherst, Massachusetts, clients are required to read and sign a disclaimer that lists health conditions that are risk factors for those considering body art. It acts as a last-minute risk education tool that could dissuade marginal customers.

Of course, there are many examples of government-developed educational materials that are provided to the public but not required to be distributed at the point of service or sale. For example, organizations and government agencies, including the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), provide educational brochures for parents talking to their children about the dangers of alcohol and other substances, though they don't require these conversations to take place.

Studies on mailed educational materials suggest they can play a role in shaping behavior. A clinical trial on opioid use found that sending informational brochures on chronic pain, long-term opioid use risks, self-management strategies, and resources

available for tapering to long-term opioid users led to a reduction in opioid dosage, particularly among men, younger adults, and urban residents. This study suggests that informational materials can contribute to harm reduction through risk education that encourages behavioral change.

COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS: FIREARMS

In the United States, some states, including California, New York, and Pennsylvania, require educational materials to be distributed to potential buyers by firearm retailers at the point of sale. These materials — like in-store signage requirements — outline the dangers of firearm ownership, offering another avenue for firearm risk education. For example, in New York State, a bill passed in 2024 requires firearms dealers to distribute comprehensive educational materials, in addition to posting signage, about the risks of firearm ownership at the point of sale. Other states, such as Maine and Michigan, require safety brochures to be distributed but have fewer requirements about the exact language used in these documents. In Anne Arundel County, Maryland, an ordinance requires firearm stores to provide customers with literature on suicide prevention when they purchase a firearm or ammunition. The information is provided after the purchase is made, so it is more accurately described as risk mitigation rather than risk education, but retailers have largely complied with the requirements.

POLICY IN ACTION

Point-of-Sale Pamphlets

In 2023, **California** expanded its firearms safety certificate test — passage of which is required to purchase a firearm in the state — to include questions related to the increased risks of homicide and unintentional injury associated with bringing a firearm into the home. The state also instituted a requirement that firearms dealers provide buyers with an updated pamphlet developed by the California Department of Justice. This pamphlet highlights the dangers of firearm ownership, emphasizing the heightened risks of suicide, homicide, and accidental injury. The law went into effect on January 1, 2025, and no public reporting on its implementation is available yet.

The distinction between compelled exposure to educational materials and displaying warning signs in stores has key implications for firearm risk education. Consumer engagement with signage is often brief, and signage may not be noticed at all. Educational materials, however, provide a higher likelihood that the consumer has access to the message and create an opportunity for more detailed content, including

statistics, persuasive imagery, and crisis resources. This deeper engagement allows for more education on the risks of firearm ownership. Educational materials in the form of pamphlets and flyers also have the advantage of being taken home, potentially reaching other household members and reinforcing long-term awareness. We know that access to comprehensive informational materials can lead to behavior change. For example, when patients were provided with informational pamphlets about their medical condition, they were more likely to comply with recommended guidelines and had a deeper understanding of the disease. While there's little existing research on the effectiveness of policies mandating the provision of comprehensive educational materials — and none for firearms in particular — it remains a promising and popular strategy given its relatively low cost and straightforward implementation.

POLICY IN ACTION

Gun Buybacks as a Place-Based Medium for Engaging Consumers

Gun buyback programs offer public-sector entities a potential lever to deliver firearm risk education and engage key audiences. While research suggests that buybacks alone might have a limited impact on directly reducing violent crime, buyback events can serve as an opportunity for risk education. Attendees of these events are firearm owners or family members who live with firearm owners. Designing an intervention that occurs before they purchase their next firearm is an effective window for an educational campaign. Additionally, these programs are often facilitated by law enforcement officers — generally the most trusted messengers when it comes to communicating with adults on firearm issues.

C. Opportunities for Risk Education in Waiting Periods

Waiting periods are legally mandated delays between the purchase and the possession of certain items, often used to implement additional safeguards such as cooling-off periods or the completion of background checks. In the context of firearm purchases, waiting periods present a unique opportunity to incorporate firearm risk education alongside mandatory waiting times. These policy interventions might overlap with existing warning labels, signs, and pamphlets, but they could also go further by incorporating personalization, selecting an effective messenger, and requiring safety exams.

WAITING PERIOD EDUCATION: NON-FIREARMS

Waiting periods have been tested in various policy areas, including in real estate transactions, to allow individuals time to gather and process more detailed information before finalizing significant decisions. For example, California's Natural Hazard Disclosure Act (NHDA) requires certain environmental risk disclosures for property sales in high-risk zones. The law's mandated "Natural Hazard Disclosure Statements" are intended to both deter transactions involving overly-risky real estate investments and uphold fair property prices. The disclosures are required during the extensive real estate transaction process — a natural "waiting period" in homebuying before the parties complete the transaction.

Fire risk is one of the hazards included in the disclosures. Under the NHDA, sellers are legally obligated to provide prospective buyers with detailed information about the property's exposure to wildfire hazards. This includes data on historical fire incidents, the property's proximity to wildland-urban interfaces, and any relevant local mitigation measures or building code requirements designed to reduce fire risk. Similar to letters that might target would-be gun buyers, the intent behind these disclosures is to ensure that buyers have a clear understanding of the risks they stand to inherit if they proceed with the purchase.

Research has shown that properties in high-risk, disclosure-mandatory areas often experience lower sale prices compared to similar properties in safer regions. This price adjustment reflects the increased future risk and the higher insurance premiums that buyers can expect. Buyers are also more likely to seek additional information or professional advice regarding risk mitigation before finalizing a purchase.

Beyond immediate market effects, the mandatory disclosures have sparked community-wide discussions about land use and urban planning in climate-sensitive areas, prompting local governments to reconsider zoning regulations and future development strategies in high-risk zones. This case study displays the potential for immediate, short-term risk education to catalyze longer-term behavior change.

WAITING PERIOD EDUCATION: FIREARMS

Waiting periods for firearms serve two primary functions. First, they allow time for law enforcement agencies to conduct background checks, preventing prohibited individuals from acquiring weapons. Second, they allow for a "cooling-off" period where potential buyers can reconsider a purchase that might be driven by interest in immediate retaliation or suicidal ideation.

Federal law does not have a waiting period requirement, meaning firearm purchasers who pass a background check can walk out of a federally licensed dealer with a firearm the same day they initiate their purchase.[11] However, 13 states and the District of Columbia have adopted some form of waiting periods before firearm purchases can be completed. Research on the efficacy of waiting periods in the firearm space is strong. According to

the American Academy of Pediatrics, states with waiting periods experienced 51% fewer suicides by firearms and a 17% decrease in firearm homicides compared to states without.

Where they do exist, waiting periods create a window for proactive education. However, to date, no jurisdiction in the US has used waiting periods specifically to educate consumers on the dangers of firearm ownership. Research shows we might be missing an important window when would-be firearm buyers are tuned into the risks and responsibilities that come with firearm ownership.

A 2007-2008 study in Los Angeles found that firearm buyers who received a letter from law enforcement during California's 10-day waiting period were more likely to report to police if their firearms were subsequently stolen. In this study, buyers who purchased firearms on odd-numbered days received a letter from law enforcement reminding them to properly record any future transfers of a firearm. The letters were also advantaged by the fact that they were signed by prominent law enforcement officials — trusted messengers for adults on firearm-related information. While the letter didn't change legal sales or crime-related firearm recoveries to a statistically significant degree, it more than doubled the rate of stolen firearm reports — a notable behavior change in the direction of greater compliance. The study shows that simple awareness campaigns during waiting periods can shift behavior and influence firearm buyers early in the purchasing process.

CONCLUSION

Many Americans purchase a firearm because they believe owning one will make them safer. But research simply proves this wrong: Firearm ownership is associated with an increased risk of homicide, suicide, and accidental firearm deaths. Communities with more guns have more gun violence, not less. Correcting this misperception by clearly communicating the facts about the risks of gun ownership, especially to young people and other prospective first-time gun buyers, can save lives.

We've only begun to scratch the surface with firearm risk education policies and programs, including those offered by Project Unloaded. Opportunities to partner with the public sector at the federal, state, and/or local levels offer the ability to reach young people more quickly at scale.

Policy Levers to Scale Risk Education for Firearms

In this report, we offered three categories of policy levers that can be used to implement firearm risk education at scale. The first, **school-based programming**, offers a place-based setting to deliver risk education to youth as part of a curriculum, in the same way schools across the country include educational programming on the risks of alcohol and fentanyl. Although there are no mandatory school-based firearm risk education curricula in any state, locality, or school district in the U.S., pilot programs are garnering policymaker interest and demonstrate the potential for school-based programs to scale. Applying lessons from decades of research on school-based risk education, it's evident that firearm risk curricular programs should be mandatory (as opposed to optional), emphasize interactive learning, and be delivered by a trusted messenger in order to maximize effectiveness.

The second, **public education campaigns**, have proven effective in creating behavior change when they engage youth, use relatable messaging, and leverage the right communication channels. While Project Unloaded and other nonprofits can launch effective campaigns with private funding, public investment would spur a greater impact at a wider scale. Despite the success of government-backed campaigns on topics like tobacco, opioids, and suicide prevention, there are currently no publicly funded campaigns focused on firearm risk education — only those promoting safer ownership practices. This gap can be addressed by adapting proven campaign strategies and tapping into public funding mechanisms like state and federal grants, excise taxes, and litigation settlement funds to support firearm risk education efforts.

The third, **consumer-based policies** (including product warnings, comprehensive educational materials, and education during waiting periods), have a strong base of evidence in moving public attitudes and behaviors on a wide range of health and safety topics. From youth smoking to real estate transactions in natural hazard zones, consumer-based policy levers at the federal, state, and local levels have been successful

in delivering risk education that moves the needle on reducing dangerous behaviors and improving health outcomes.

While only a handful of states and localities nationwide have implemented consumer-based policies related to firearm risk education, many of the lessons learned from other issue areas are applicable and transferable — such as strengthening existing requirements about warning signs in stores (by adding imagery, for example), or requiring the delivery of risk education materials during firearm purchase waiting periods.

The Path Forward

This report comes as gun violence continues to devastate communities across America. While gun homicides have fallen following a surge during the COVID-19 pandemic, gun suicides continue to rise. The stakes our country faces are simply too high not to use every tool at our disposal to save lives, including by better educating young people about the risks associated with firearm ownership. We know that risk education works, and we know how to adapt successful models from other public health initiatives to reach young people and other prospective first-time gun buyers with compelling and proven tactics.

By combining best practices at federal, state, and local levels with innovative approaches, we can scale risk education initiatives and integrate them into our public health infrastructure — ultimately shifting the culture around firearm ownership toward an evidence-based understanding of risk and safety.

APPENDIX: FROM ROADMAP TO ACTION

Immediate Policy Opportunities

Governments at all levels have the ability to implement and scale firearm risk education right now by leveraging gun violence prevention laws and public health policies already on the books. These opportunities, which the report discusses in more detail, reach young people as well as prospective first-time gun buyers. They include:

- **Risk Education in School-Based Health Curricula:** Policymakers may direct school districts to develop interactive firearm risk education curricula, and over time, require schools to include the teachings as a mandatory component of health or safety coursework in schools.
- **Risk Education Through Public Education Campaigns:** Federal, state, and local governments may fund campaigns that deliver firearm risk education via social media and other public platforms with messages tailored to youth and prospective first-time gun buyers. Campaigns are often carried out by nonprofit organizations or by government agencies.
- **Risk Education During Waiting Periods:** Policymakers may integrate firearm risk education requirements into existing background check waiting periods by mandating retailers share information with gun purchasers outlining the risks of firearm ownership before the transaction is completed.
- **Risk Education During Buybacks:** While the evidence base on gun buyback programs is limited, they offer a unique channel to provide risk education on firearm ownership. Mayors' offices and law enforcement agencies that run these programs could provide risk education materials to participants at these events.
- **Risk Education at the Point of Sale:** Point-of-sale policies requiring in-store signage, product warning labels, or the dispersal of educational materials offer an opportunity to provide prospective firearm purchasers with fact-based information about the risks of firearm ownership. Pilot programs that include funding for implementation and evaluation could bolster our understanding of these interventions.

Immediate Funding Opportunities

Policymakers at all levels of government can also leverage public funding for firearm risk education policies, including through the budget process, grant programs, excise taxes, and settlement funds:

- **Set-Asides in Grant Programs:** Through the regular state budgeting process, legislators can appropriate funding to new grant programs for public education initiatives, and may include requirements that a portion of the funds go to firearm risk education programs.

- **Clarify Allowable Uses for Grant Funding:** Where appropriate, policymakers may amend legislation or issue guidance to clarify that firearm risk education is an allowable use of funding through an existing grant program.
- **Clarify Allowable Uses for Excise Taxes:** While current firearm excise tax laws direct revenues toward gun violence prevention programs, including school safety initiatives and victim services, public education on firearm ownership risk has not been specifically noted. Policymakers may review existing statutes to determine whether there are opportunities to clarify allowable uses for excise tax revenue and explicitly include firearm risk education.
- **Litigation Settlement Funds:** As firearm-related litigation efforts move forward in states, it will be important to educate attorneys working on these cases about the opportunity to allocate future settlement funds toward firearm risk education. This approach would follow the precedent set by national opioid settlements, which have used similar strategies to fund public health initiatives.

ENDNOTES

1 Project Unloaded acknowledges the support of Evergreen Strategy Group in the research and writing of this report.

2 States that recommend, but do not require, health curricula in K-12 schools as of 2019 are Colorado and Oklahoma. Three states — Alaska, California, and North Dakota — legally require health education to be taught in schools at some point in elementary, middle, or high schools.

3 CSE programs are required at least once during K-12 in California, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, and Illinois public schools. Of note, sex education is not mandated in Illinois and Colorado, but if the subject is taught in schools, it must be comprehensive.

4 Three states (Hawaii, Kansas, and Minnesota) require the curriculum to include drug and alcohol use through non-codified policy, and two states (South Dakota and Wyoming) have no policy at all.

5 Seven states (Hawaii, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wyoming) have non-codified policies addressing tobacco use, and one state (Alaska) does not address it.

6 Five other states (Hawaii, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, and Wyoming) provide some guidance on mental health curriculum through non-codified policy and seven (Alaska, Arizona, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota) do not address it at all in their state laws or regulations.

7 Importantly, opt-out policies may also be more broadly acceptable to communities with concerns about curricular content. This was reflected in the 2025 Supreme Court decision upholding a Maryland school district's opt-out policy for LGBTQ+ curricula, with the majority opinion emphasizing the right of parents to remove their children without restricting access for others.

8 There is also a countermovement: In Missouri, Ohio, and Florida, Republican lawmakers have filed bills or have otherwise expressed considerations to exempt firearms and ammunition from sales taxes entirely.

9 Most consumer products, like car seats, toasters, and lawn mowers, are regulated by the federal Consumer Protection Safety Commission (CPSC). Firearms, however, are one of the only products that have been exempt from oversight by the CPSC since the commission's creation in 1972.

10 New York City's bill uses the term "graphic warnings" but does not propose any specific imagery. It directs the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to "design and disseminate" these warnings.

11 Under federal law, if the background check of a prospective buyer has not been completed within three business days, a federally licensed dealer is allowed to proceed with the sale without a completed background check. This has come to be known as the "Charleston Loophole" [18 U.S.C. § 922(t)(1)] because it allowed Dylann Roof, who was legally prohibited from owning a firearm, to purchase the gun he used to kill nine parishioners at Charleston's Emanuel AME Church in 2015 after his background check was delayed and not completed within the three-day window.