**PROFILE OF GUN VIOLENCE IN COLORADO: 2023 U PDATE**

**Colorado Faith Communities United to End Gun Violence**

**September 2023**



**PROFILE OF GUN VIOLENCE IN COLORADO: 2023 UPDATE**

**SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

**Trends in Colorado’s Firearm Deaths and Injuries**

* A total of 1,047 firearm deaths occurred in Colorado in 2022 (1,005 Colorado residents and 42 non-residents), an average of nearly three deaths a day and the second highest number since at least 2000, with 2021 being the highest.
* In 2022, there were 1,638 non-fatal firearm injuries in Colorado that were treated in a hospital setting. Combined with 1,047 firearm deaths, a total of 2,685 people were injured by firearms, either fatally or non-fatally, an average of more than 7 people a day.
* Colorado’s firearm death rate increased by 44% between 2014 and 2022 and remained higher than the U.S. rate throughout that period.
* The number of non-fatal firearm injuries more than doubled between 2016 and 2022, and the rate nearly doubled between 2017 and 2022. (These rates were not available for 2016.)

**Firearm Deaths in Colorado by Intent**

* By far the largest number of firearm deaths in Colorado were suicides, 695 in 2022, accounting for 66% of all firearm deaths. Firearms were used in 54% of all completed suicides in the state. Colorado’s firearm suicide rate was 44% higher than the U.S. rate.
* 2022 also saw 312 homicides by firearms in Colorado, accounting for nearly 30% of all firearm deaths. Colorado’s firearm homicide rates have continued to climb, with 2022 showing the highest rate since at least 2000. Between 2014 and 2022, the rate increased by 179%. By comparison, the non-firearm homicide rate increased by 36% during that period.
* The use of firearms in homicides has increased dramatically, from 59% of all homicides in 2014 to 73% in 2022.

**The Demographics of Colorado’s Firearm Deaths and Injuries**

* In 2022, firearms were the most common cause of death among Colorado’s children aged 5-14 and older teens/young adults aged 15-24.
* Firearm homicide deaths were dramatically overrepresented among Black and Hispanic males aged 15-24. The firearm homicide rate among Black males in that age group was 33 times that of White Non-Hispanic males in the same age group. Among Hispanic males aged 15-24, the firearm homicide rate was 11 times that of White Non-Hispanic males.
* Males aged 15-24 had more than four times the rate of non-fatal firearm injuries as the total population. (Breakouts for race and Latino ethnicity were not available.)
* Firearm suicide was overrepresented among White non-Hispanic males aged 85 and over and was over six times higher than the firearm suicide rate in the total population.

**Hospitalizations for Firearm Injuries and Total Injuries**

* One-third of hospital encounters for firearm injuries in Colorado were hospital admissions and two-thirds were hospital emergency department (ED) visits followed by release. In comparison, 6% of all-cause injuries were hospital admissions and 94% were hospital ED visits. Hospital admission typically indicates more serious injury and results in far higher costs than ED treatment.

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With 48,187 firearms deaths in the U.S. in 2022, based on provisional data from the CDC, an average of 132 people died every day from gun injuries. This number is the second highest on record, with 2021 having the highest number, 48,830.1 Firearm deaths in 2022 included 4,603 children from ages 1 through age 19, the leading cause of death in that age group for the fifth straight year.1, 2 When compared to other large, wealthy, western nations, the U.S. had by far the highest firearm death rate (age-adjusted), 8 times greater than the second highest nation (Canada) in 2019.3

**Trends in Firearm Deaths: Colorado and U.S.**

Sources:

Colorado: Colorado Health Information Dataset (COHID) from the Vital Statistics Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Based on death certificates alone. Deaths were among Colorado residents whether the event occurred inside or outside Colorado. <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/colorado-death-statistics>.

U.S.: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. National Vital Statistics System, Provisional Mortality on CDC WONDER Online Database. Accessed in August-September 2023 at: <http://wonder.cdc.gov/mcd-icd10-provisional.html>.

A total of 1,047 firearm deaths occurred in Colorado in 2022 (1,005 Colorado residents and 42 non-residents), an average of nearly three deaths a day.4 It was the second highest number since at least 2000, when there were 442 firearm deaths. The highest number, 1,076, was in 2021 (Table A-1, p. 17).

Colorado’s firearm death rates have been consistently higher than U.S. rates. The 2022 firearm death rate was 17.1 per 100,000 Colorado residents, the second highest since at least 2000 and 19% higher than the U.S. rate of 14.4 per 100,000 in 2022 (Figure 1).

Colorado’s firearm death rate increased by 44% between 2014 and 2022, 10% higher than the U.S. increase of 40% (Figure 1). As in the U.S., Colorado’s firearm death rates have not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Source: See Figure 1, Colorado data source.

Public health experts have defined motor vehicle deaths as a major public health problem that can be reduced by improved safety standards on roads and in motor vehicles, public education, and improved law enforcement. Starting in 2009, firearm death rates surpassed motor vehicle death rates every year through 2022 (Figure 2).

**Firearm Deaths in Colorado by Intent**

Source: Vital Statistics Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). From Colorado Violent Death Reporting System, which is based on death certificates, law-enforcement reports, and coroner/medical examiner reports. Deaths occurred in Colorado among both Colorado residents and non-residents.

By far the largest number of firearm deaths in Colorado were suicides, 695 in 2022, accounting for 66% of all firearm deaths (Figure 3 and Table A-1). The percentage of all firearm deaths accounted for by suicide decreased from 81% in 2014.

Colorado’s firearm suicide rate, 11.1 per 100,000 population, was 44% higher than the U.S. rate of 7.7 per 100,000.

Firearms were used in more than half of all suicide deaths: 54% in Colorado and 55% in the nation.

Colorado, like all Rocky Mountain states, has among the highest suicide rates in the U.S., 6th highest in 2021.

2022 also saw 312 homicides by firearms in Colorado, accounting for nearly 30% of all firearm deaths (Table A-1). This percentage has increased steadily since 2014, when 16% of all firearm deaths were homicides. Consistent with that trend, the use of firearms in homicides increased substantially between 2014 and 2022, from 59% of all homicides to 73%.

**Trends in Colorado’s Firearm Death Rates, 2014-2022**

Source: See Figure 1, Colorado data source.

**Firearm Homicides**

Colorado’s firearm homicide rates have continued to climb, with 2022 showing the highest rate since at least 2000. Between 2014 and 2022, the rate increased by 179% (Figure 4). During that time, the state’s population increased by 9%.

Although Colorado’s firearm homicide rate was 17% lower than the U.S. rate (6.2) in 2022, Colorado’s increase in firearm homicide rates between 2014 and 2022 was far higher than in the U.S.-- 179% compared to 77%.

**Firearm Suicides**

Colorado’s firearm suicide rates increased more unevenly and more slowly than homicide rates, by 16% between 2014 and 2022 (Figure 4). The decrease between 2021 and 2022 accounted for the decrease in the total firearm death rate during that period.

The state’s increase in the firearm suicide rate between 2014 and 2022 was similar to the increase in the U.S. – 16% compared to 20%.

**Firearm and Non-Firearm Homicide Rates**

Source: See Figure 1, Colorado data source.

In 2022, the firearm homicide rate was 179% higher than the non-firearm homicide rate (Figure 5).

Moreover, the pattern of increase differed substantially between the two between 2014 and 2022. While the firearm homicide rate increased by 179%, the non-firearm homicide rate increased by 36% and did not show the dramatic increase between 2019 and 2022 seen in firearm homicide rates.

**Firearm and Non-Firearm Suicide Rates**

Source: See Figure 1, Colorado data source.

Unlike homicide rates, Colorado firearm and non-firearm suicide rates were similar between 2014 and 2020 (Figure 6). In 2021 and 2022, the former was higher than the latter. However, with only a two-year comparison, it is too early to conclude that a new pattern has emerged.

**The Demographics of Gun Deaths in Colorado**

**Males and Females**

Source: See Figure 1, Colorado data source.

Males were over five times more likely to die by firearms than were females, accounting for 84% of all firearm deaths (Figure 7).

Males were seven times more likely to die by firearm suicides than were females and three times more likely by firearm homicides.

**Age Groups**

Source: See Figure 1, Colorado data source.

The population aged 85 and over had the highest firearm death rate of any age group in 2022, because it had by far the highest rate of firearm suicide (Figure 8). Firearm suicides accounted for all firearm deaths in that age group.

The 15-24-year-old age group had the highest firearm homicide rate (11.2 per 100,000), which was lower in every age group after that (Figure 8).

The 62% increase in the total firearm death rate in the 15-24-year-old age group between 2014 and 2022 exceeded the 46% increase in Colorado’s total firearm death rate. The increase in that age group was driven primarily by the 160% increase in its firearm homicide rate.

**TABLE 1: COMMON CAUSES OF DEATH, AGES 5-14 AND 15-24 IN COLORADO, 2022**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Cause of Death** | **5-14 years old** | **15-24 years old** |
| Firearms | 20 (7 suicide, 12 homicide) | 180 (87 suicide, 88 homicide) |
| Drug overdose | 6 | 157 |
| Motor vehicle accidents | 18 | 150 |
| Accidental poisoning | 3 | 145 |
| Non-firearm suicide or homicide | 17 | 69 |
| All cancers | 8 | 24 |

Source: See Figure 1, Colorado data source.

As is the case nationwide, firearms were the most common cause of death among Colorado’s children, teens, and young adults in 2022, with 20 firearm deaths among 5–14-year-olds and 180 among 15–24-year-olds (Table 1).

**Race/Ethnic Groups5**

Source: See Figure 1, Colorado data source.

The highest firearm death rate in 2022 was in the Black population (39.4 deaths per 100,000), because this group had by far the highest firearm homicide rate (27.3), accounting for more than two-thirds of all firearm deaths in that population (Figure 9). The Hispanic population had the second highest firearm death rate (17.7), followed by White non-Hispanics (14.6).

White non-Hispanics had the highest firearm suicide death rate (11.7), accounting for 80% of all firearm deaths in that group. The second highest rate was in the Black population (10.6), accounting for more than one-quarter of all firearm deaths in that group, followed by American Indians/Alaska Natives (9.1, all firearm deaths), and Hispanics (8.1, 46% of all firearm deaths).

**Overrepresentation of Firearm Deaths in Gender, Age, and Race/Ethnic Groups**

Source: See Figure 1, Colorado data source.

Firearm homicide deaths were dramatically overrepresented among teen/young adult Black and Hispanic males (Figure 10). The firearm homicide rate among Black males aged 15-24 was 33 times that of White non-Hispanic males in the same age group. Among Hispanic males in that age group, the firearm homicide rate was 11 times that of White non-Hispanic males.

\*The firearm suicide death rate for the total population is the crude rate.

Source: See Figure 1, Colorado data source.

Firearm suicide was concentrated among White non-Hispanic males aged 85 and over and was over six times higher than the firearm suicide rate in the total population (Figure 11).

**Non-Fatal Firearm Injuries in Colorado**

**Trends, 2016-2022**

\* Starting in 2016, billing data were coded using the new U.S. ICD-10-CM coding structure. Therefore, counts and rates are not comparable to those in previous years.

\*\* The numbers represent emergency department (ED) visits and hospital admissions in which the individuals were treated and released. People initially seen in an ED and then admitted to the same hospital were counted only once, as hospitalizations.

\*\*\* 2020 was omitted due to the effects of the Covid pandemic on hospital-based care.

Source: Colorado Health Information Dataset (COHID) from the Injury Epidemiology Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). CDPHE analyzed billing data for ED visits and hospital admissions at Colorado acute care hospitals provided by the Colorado Hospital Association. All data on non-fatal firearm injuries in this report can be found at: <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/cohid>

In 2022, 1,638 firearm injuries resulted in emergency department visits or hospitalizations (Figure 12). Combined with 1,047 firearm deaths in Colorado, a total of 2,685 people were injured by firearms in 2022, either fatally or non-fatally, an average of more than 7 people a day.

\*2016 age-adjusted non-fatal injury rates were not available at the time of this writing.

\*\*2020 was omitted due to the effects of the Covid pandemic on hospital-based care.

Source: See Figure 12.

The number of non-fatal firearm injuries more than doubled between 2016 and 2022, and the rate nearly doubled between 2017 and 2022 (Figures 12 and 13).

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 70% of medically treated firearm injuries in the U.S. are for firearm assaults, and nearly 20% are for unintentional firearm injuries.6 Few intentionally self-inflicted firearm injuries are seen in hospital EDs because 85% to 90% of suicide attempts with a gun result in death.8

**The Demographics of Non-Fatal Firearm Injuries in Colorado**

**Males and Females**

Source: See Figure 12.

Similar to firearm deaths, males were nearly five times more likely to have non-fatal firearm injuries than were females, accounting for 84% of all people treated for non-fatal firearm injuries in a hospital setting (Figure 14).

**Age Groups**

Source: See Figure 12.

As is the case nationwide, the 15-24 age group dominated non-fatal firearm injuries in Colorado (Figure 15), accounting for 35% of all victims of non-fatal gunshot wounds treated in a hospital setting. Due to the higher risk of firearm suicide in older age groups and the low survival rate among people who attempt suicide with a gun, older people had lower rates of non-fatal firearm injuries and higher rates of firearm deaths.8

\*The non-fatal firearm injury rate for the total population is the crude rate.

Source: See Figure 12.

Combining the two groups with the highest rates of non-fatal firearm injury, males and the 15-24 age group, shows the substantial overrepresentation of teen/young adult males, with that group having more than four times the rate of non-fatal firearm injuries as the total population (Figure 16).

**Hospitalizations for Firearm Injuries and Total Injuries**

\* Hospital Encounters are ED visits and hospital admissions combined.

Source: See Figure 12.

Of the 1,638 hospital encounters related to firearm injuries in 2022, one-third were hospital admissions and two-thirds were hospital ED visits (Figure 17). In contrast, 6% of all-cause injuries were hospital admissions and 94% were hospital ED visits. Hospital admission typically indicates more serious injury and results in far higher costs than ED treatment.

According to a U.S. Government Accountability Office study using data from 2016 and 2017, inpatient hospital stays for firearm injuries cost an average of nearly $31,000 per patient – 2.5 times the average cost of $12,000 per patient admitted for a different reason. For patients with firearm injuries who came to the ED but weren’t admitted, the average cost was nearly $1,500 per patient – 2.7 times the average cost of $540 per patient treated and released from an ED for a different reason.9

Those cost estimates do not include ongoing medical expenses during the first year after the firearm injury. Nor do they include expenses associated with long-term medical problems and emotional trauma that can continue long after the first year, as well as the personal, family, and community impacts of lost wages and lower productivity.10 More data are needed for a comprehensive estimate of the costs of non-fatal firearm injuries in communities, states, and the nation.

**TABLE A-1: FIREARM DEATHS OCCURRING IN COLORADO BY INTENT, 2014-2022**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **YEAR** | **TOTAL FIREARM DEATHS** | **HOMICIDES BY FIREARM** | **SUICIDES****BY FIREARM** | **LEGAL INTERVENTION** | **UNINTENTIONAL DEATHS BY FIREARM** | **FIREARM DEATHS, UNDETERMINED INTENT**  |
| 2014 | 663 | 107 | 535 | 9 | \* | 10 |
| 2015 | 704 | 140 | 543 | 12 | 3 | 6 |
| 2016 | 793 | 159 | 598 | 18 | 11 | 7 |
| 2017 | 792 | 162 | 599 | 20 | 5 | 6 |
| 2018 | 891 | 190 | 661 | 26 | 7 | 7 |
| 2019 | 856 | 167 | 653 | 22 | 9 | 5 |
| 2020 | 925 | 240 | 651 | 24 | 6 | 4 |
| 2021 | 1,076 | 280 | 746 | 34 | 8 | 8 |
| 2022 | 1,047 | 312 | 695 | 24 | 10 | 6 |

\* Indicates fewer than 3 deaths.

Source: Vital Statistics Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. From Colorado Violent Death Reporting System, which is based on death certificates, law-enforcement reports, and coroner/medical examiner reports. Deaths occurred in Colorado and included both Colorado residents and non-residents.

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**Notes**

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. National Vital Statistics System, Provisional Mortality on CDC WONDER Online Database. Accessed in August-September 2023 at: <http://wonder.cdc.gov/mcd-icd10-provisional.html>

2 Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, “CDC Provisional Data: Gun Suicides Reach All-time High in 2022, Gun Homicides Down Slightly from 2021.” <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2023/cdc-provisional-data-gun-suicides-reach-all-time-high-in-2022-gun-homicides-down-slightly-from-2021>

# 3 The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, “On gun violence, the United States is an outlier,” May 31, 2022. <https://www.healthdata.org/news-events/insights-blog/acting-data/gun-violence-united-states-outlier>

4 Vital Statistics Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). From Colorado Violent Death Reporting System, which is based on death certificates, law-enforcement reports, and coroner/medical examiner reports. Deaths occurred in Colorado among both Colorado residents and non-residents. CDPHE’s mortality data dashboard shows that there were 1,033 firearm deaths in 2022 among Colorado residents. That number includes deaths of state residents that occurred in Colorado and elsewhere (1,005 occurred in Colorado, 28 occurred elsewhere) and is based on death certificates alone. <https://cohealthviz.dphe.state.co.us/t/HealthInformaticsPublic/views/COHIDFullDeathQuery_StateDemographyPopEstimates/MortalityStatistics?%3Aembed=y&%3Aiid=1&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y>

5 Because of changes in the ways that the 2020 Census represented Race and Hispanic Origin, race/ethnic data in the current report should not be compared to race/ethnic data prior to 2020. Changes in those updated categories include the separation of the “Asian” and “Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander” categories from the previous “Asian/Pacific Islander" category and the addition of a “Two or more races” category that did not appear in earlier data reports. For more information, see: <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/colorado-death-statistics>

6 <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/firearms/fastfact.html>. Profile of Gun Violence in Colorado does not include intent for non-fatal firearm injuries (e.g., assaults, unintentional injuries) nor does it include breakouts by race and Hispanic ethnicity. The hospital billing systems from which CDPHE’s Injury Epidemiology Program obtains its injury data are not set up to provide this information.

7 Brady United Against Gun Violence,“Gun Violence in the United States.” <https://s3.amazonaws.com/brady-static/5YearGunDeathsInjuriesStats-Jan-2021.pdf>

8 Everytown for Gun Safety, “A More Complete Picture: The Contours of Gun Injury in the United States,” Last updated 11.2.2021. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/nonfatals-in-the-us/>

9 United States Government Accountability Office, Report to Congressional Requesters: Firearm njuries - Health Care Service Needs and Costs, June 2021. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/720/715061.pdf>

10 Association of American Medical Colleges AAMC News, “The cost of surviving gun violence: Who .pays?” October 18, 2022. <https://www.aamc.org/news/cost-surviving-gun-violence-who-pays>