



Association of Black Women Physicians

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Some shopped for groceries in Boulder, Colorado. Others arrived for appointments at spas in Atlanta, Georgia. Several more simply were going about their usual day at an office building in Orange, California. Women, men and children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds were victims of these three recent mass shootings. Gun violence continues to rob families of their loved ones and leave them heartbroken. For physicians and many others, a life taken too soon horribly exemplifies the worst possible health consequence of untreated gun violence in our country.

Recognizing violence, specifically gun violence, as a public health crisis requires more than a new medication or surgical procedure to eradicate it. It necessitates a public health response that includes massive education campaigns about the harms of gun violence as well as reforming how people access and use guns in our country. In the United States, more than 60% of deaths that involve the use of a gun are deaths by suicide. Over 30% of deaths involving guns are associated with homicides.

Expanding background checks and prioritizing research on gun violence prevention are essential to decreasing the number of victims mourned by their families.

For the Association of Black Women Physicians (ABWP), however, we also emphasize the need to heal the loved ones left behind after these tragedies unfold. Beyond the mental and behavioral health challenges faced by grieving loved ones, we know that entire communities suffer trauma too, and it often perpetuates the continuation of more violent acts. Concurrently, many continue to endure the difficulties exacerbated by this pandemic such as job loss, economic instability, housing evictions and long-term disability brought about by post-COVID syndrome. In response to these mounting problems, ABWP supports passage of legislation that offers solutions for increasing badly needed resources to behavioral health systems currently collapsing under the pressure of exploding demands for mental health care. We specifically amplify the input of mental health experts addressing the complex grief of Black and Brown communities experiencing increased incidents of racial abuse, disproportionate illness and death from COVID-19 and agonizing numbers of deaths that involve the use guns.



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Additionally, our Association demands that conversations about gun reform include anti-biased, anti-racist, nuanced discussions about culturally attuned remedies to gun violence occurring in predominantly Black and Brown communities like Chicago, Oakland, Philadelphia and St. Louis. This means that these crucial conversations must prioritize job creation, elimination of the racial wealth gap and improved access to high quality education as well as healthcare. The public health and policy response to this complex issue cannot fail to incorporate diverse, equitable and inclusive solutions to empowering marginalized communities often ignored by the media – except to justify the politicization of issues such as gun reform. This moment cannot devolve into debates about identity politics. We can no longer accept advantaging certain communities to the neglect of others. We believe that improving the health and wellness of underserved communities requires physicians to go beyond the practice of medicine. Healing our patients, families and communities includes advocating for their safety and sense of belonging.

We, the Association of Black Women Physicians, join other professional societies in declaring gun violence a public health crisis because “this is our lane” to fight for the health of our community.

Sincerely,

ABWP

Association of Black Women Physicians

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A 501 c (3) non-profit

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