

Federal Government announces new firearm policy in an effort to reduce gun violence and gun-related crime in Canada

MAY 6, 2020 - The Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) supports efforts to reduce firearm-related injury and death in Canada. Injury and death related to firearms are highly preventable. An average of 1300 firearm-related deaths occur in Canada annually and many more firearm-related injuries lead to hospitalizations and emergency department visits¹. In 2004-2005, Ontario had 624 emergency department visits and 199 hospital admissions as a result of firearm-related injuries². An estimated \$6.6 billion was spent in 1991 for the total medical cost associated with firearm-related injuries in Canada².

What is covered by the policy?

On May 1, 2020, the Government of Canada announced the *Regulations Amending the Regulations Prescribing Certain Firearms and Other Weapons, Components and Parts of Weapons, Accessories, Cartridge Magazines, Ammunition and Projectiles as Prohibited, Restricted or Non-Restricted*³. This amendment banned the sale and usage of grenade launchers and assault rifles including variants of the M16, AR-10, AR-15, and M4 immediately with possession of these weapons becoming illegal beginning April 30, 2022. The government simultaneously announced future intentions to implement a buy-back program allowing owners of these firearms to be compensated when they return their weapon. This policy was implemented with the intention of reducing mass shootings and lowering gun violence and gun-related crime in Canada.

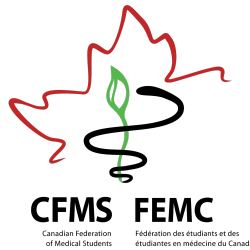
Gun Violence in Canada

Per Statistics Canada's February 2019 presentation to the Senate⁴, gun violence and firearm theft in Canada significantly increased between 2013 and 2017. Firearm-related violent crime was noted to be 42% higher in 2017 as compared to 2013 with the greatest increases seen in Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick and Manitoba during that period⁴. Most gun crimes involved the usage of handguns⁴. In 2017, 8% of victims of firearm related violent crime were intimate partners of the perpetrators⁴.

Firearm theft was also highlighted as an issue in the Statistics Canada report. They noted that more than 3,600 incidents of one or more firearms being stolen occurred in 2017 with rifles being the most commonly stolen firearm type⁴. The majority of these thefts occurred from private residences⁴.

Findings from Other Jurisdictions

Australia implemented broad firearm legislation reform following the Port Arthur massacre of 1996 which included prohibiting possession of semiautomatic and automatic firearms alongside a buyback



program⁵. Following the implementation of these policies, Australia has not experienced another mass shooting. Additionally, between 1997 and 2013, as compared to the period of 1979 to 1996, there was a 66% decline in firearm-related deaths⁵. Additionally, a comparable decline in firearm-related suicide was observed⁵. These findings are limited by the study's observational design and confounded by a decline in non-firearm suicides⁵.

Contentious findings⁶ from the United States suggest that, between 1994 and 2004, when the Federal Assault Weapons Ban of 1994 was active, mass shootings were 70% less likely to occur as compared to the 1981 to 1993 and 2005 to 2017 period. While the observational nature of this study did not allow for causality to be determined, the results suggest that a similar ban may reduce the incidence of mass shootings in Canada⁶.

Future Directions

This legislation represents one step toward preventing injury and death related to firearms. Nonetheless, handguns remain responsible for the majority of injuries and deaths in Canada. Future efforts to combat gun violence must focus on reducing the availability of these firearms.

Additional Resources

Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research:

<https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-gun-policy-and-research/>

Canadian Doctors for Protection from Guns: <http://www.doctorsforprotectionfromguns.ca>

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