

Lives Cut Too Short:

Kids Killed by Guns and Our Failure to Protect Them

Written by Tamarine Cornelius with contributions from Michelle Robinson and other staff members at Kids Forward.

In order for every child in Wisconsin to thrive, we must protect them from things that will harm them and cut their lives short. However, our state and our country lack the political will needed to make the changes necessary to keep children from being killed by guns. The consequences of this failure have been devastating, and children have paid the price. In 2016, 33 kids were killed by guns in Wisconsin—the highest number in 13 years. It's time that policymakers begin focusing on how to prevent child gun deaths.

Kids Killed by Guns

Between 1999 and 2016, 461 children in Wisconsin were killed with guns. The children die when they use guns to end their lives, or when others intentionally shoot them. Some die when guns go off accidentally.

Every time a child in Wisconsin dies from injuries inflicted with a gun, the loss is felt on multiple levels. The family suffers the most obvious loss, as it grieves the premature death of one of its young members. But our communities also lose, as the death of each child forces us to recognize that communities are not as safe as they could be.

In Wisconsin, some communities experience this kind of loss more frequently than others, with African American communities bearing an especially large burden from losing children to gun violence. Still, no community in our state has been untouched by the preventable loss of a child to gun violence. Wisconsin children recently killed with guns include:

- Justin Evans Jr, six years old, who was shot and killed in his grandmother's yard in Milwaukee.

Justin was getting ready to go on a fishing trip. He was killed in July 2017.

- Miyanna Jelks, nine years old, who was accidentally shot by her ten-year old brother in Milwaukee. Miyanna was in third grade. She was killed in March 2018.
- Jonathan Wesener, a 16-year old boy who killed himself in Edgar, Wisconsin in May 2015. He played football and enjoyed skiing and baseball.

Justin, Miyanna, and Jonathan should still be alive today. While we cannot restore their lives, we can work to ensure that we do not lose more children in our state to the preventable cause of gun violence.

Unfortunately, present efforts to protect Wisconsin's children and eliminate preventable gun deaths are hindered by the inaction of national lawmakers who block our ability to better understand the causes of preventable deaths, and thereby develop effective strategies and solutions. Until Congress invests in research on the causes of gun violence and the most effective methods of preventing it,

we will continue to be ill-equipped to prevent the unnecessary deaths of children in Wisconsin, as well as the grief of families and communities who will bury children who could otherwise be saved.

Deaths in 2016 at Highest Number in Several Years

The number of children killed with guns in Wisconsin in 2016 reached the highest number since 2003. In 2016, 33 children in Wisconsin were killed with guns, or about one child every 11 days on average. The rate of children killed with guns—which takes into account changes in the number of children in Wisconsin—was also at its highest level in 2016 since 2003.

In 2016, 17 children in Wisconsin used guns to end their lives, the highest number since before the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began tracking figures in this way in 1999. Another 15 children died in homicides committed with guns.

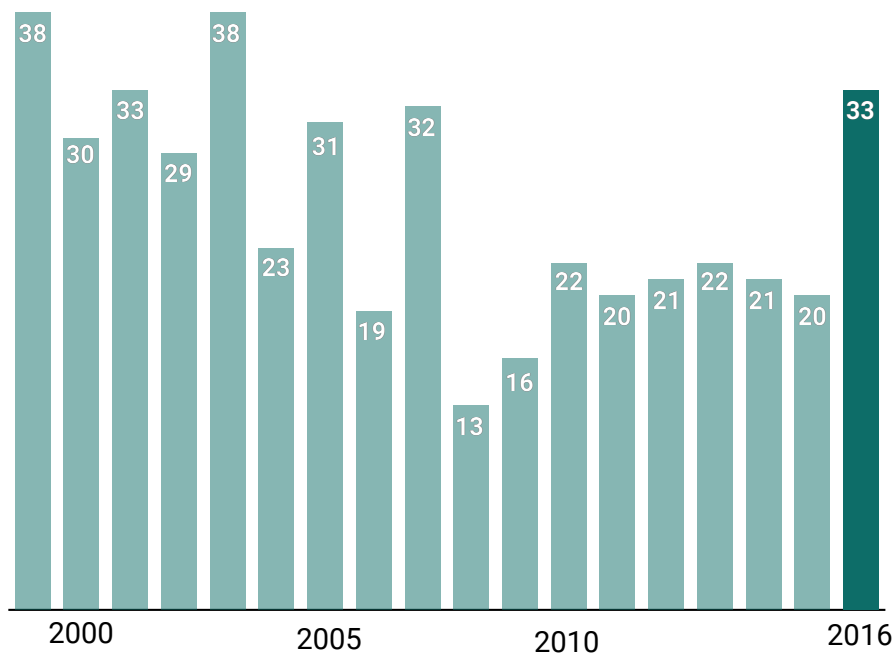
Child deaths nationally from guns also reached high levels. Both the number and rate of children in the United States killed with guns reached its highest level in 2016 since 1999.

Every time a child is killed it is a tragedy. The severity of the tragedy stands in contrast to the limited number of deaths in a given year, which make it difficult to identify trends or determine whether the difference between the number of children killed in one year compared to the next is due to something other than chance.



Number of Children Killed with Guns in Wisconsin Spiked in 2016

Deaths from firearms in Wisconsin, for children age 17 and under. Figures include homicides, suicides, and accidents.



Source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services

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Which Children Die and How

Knowing which Wisconsin children are killed by guns and how they die may help shape solutions that can reduce the number of children killed.

Location, Age, and Gender of Child Victims

Child deaths from firearms occur across the state, with most of them (60%) occurring outside of Milwaukee County. Between 1999 and 2016, 277 children outside of Milwaukee County were killed with firearms. Counties other than Milwaukee in which the highest number of children were killed with firearms over this period include Dane (18), Winnebago (13), Brown (11), and Waukesha (11). Since 1999, children have been killed with guns in 63 out of Wisconsin's 72 counties.

The remaining 40% of deaths (184 children), occurred in Milwaukee County. The appendix includes a list of all Wisconsin counties in which five or more children were killed with guns during this period.

Older children make up the largest age group among those killed, but even the youngest children have been victims. Eighteen children in Wisconsin age four years and younger were killed with firearms between 1999 and 2016, averaging one child a year. Another 17 children who were five to nine years old died over this period. The remainder of the children

who died were age 10 and older, with the majority of deaths (72%) occurring among children ages 15 to 17.

Children killed by firearms are primarily male. Boys made up 5 out of 6 children in Wisconsin killed with firearms, or 83%.

Causes of Death: Homicide, Suicide, and Accidents

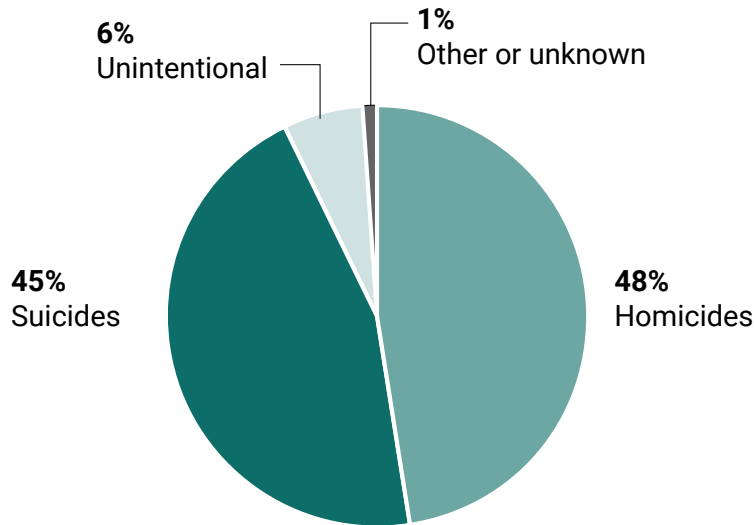
Child deaths from guns in Wisconsin are about evenly split between homicides and suicides. Homicides made up just under half the child deaths from firearms between 1999 and 2016, or 48% of the total. Another 45% of the deaths in Wisconsin were suicide. Accidental deaths from guns made up six percent of the total, or 29 child deaths. Other deaths, which include deaths caused by law enforcement and deaths for which the cause is unknown, make up the remainder.

In recent years, more deaths have come from suicides than homicides. In six out of the last seven years in Wisconsin, there were more child firearm deaths from suicide than homicide.

Firearms are the third leading cause of injury death for Wisconsin children overall, and caused more child deaths between 1999 and 2016 than drowning, fires, and falls combined.

Child Deaths from Guns in Wisconsin Roughly Evenly Split Between Homicides and Suicides

Deaths from firearms in Wisconsin, for children age 17 and under, for the years 1999 through 2016.



Source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services

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Difference By Race and Ethnicity

African American children in Wisconsin are much more likely than children of other races to be killed by guns, and more likely than African American children in most other states to be killed with guns. There is no clear answer as to why these differences exist, but it is important to note that high-poverty communities are much more likely to have high rates of crime and violence, and children in these communities are less likely to have high-quality schools and safe places for them to play. Acknowledging and examining the differences without reinforcing stereotypes can help shed further light on the best ways to keep all children and communities safe.

Wisconsin children who are African American are nearly five times as likely as their white non-

Hispanic peers to be killed by guns: 1.4 out of every 100,000 white children were killed with guns between 1999 and 2016, compared to 6.6 African American children. For African American children in Wisconsin, firearms are the leading cause of injury death. Death rates of Hispanic and Asian children in Wisconsin are similar to that of white children, and death rates for Native American children are slightly higher than for white children.

If African American children in Wisconsin had been killed by guns at the same rate as white non-Hispanic children, the number of African American children killed during this period would have dropped from 154 children to 33. That means a total of 121 children who died would have been spared.

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Not only are African American children in Wisconsin more likely to die from guns than their white counterparts, they are more likely to be killed with guns than African American children in other states. In Wisconsin, 6.6 African American children per 100,000 were killed with guns between 1999 and 2016. Nationally, 4.8 African American children per 100,000 were killed by guns during this period, considerably lower than the Wisconsin rate. Put another way, African American children in Wisconsin were 37% more likely to die from guns than African American children in other states. If African American children in Wisconsin were killed at the same rate as African American children

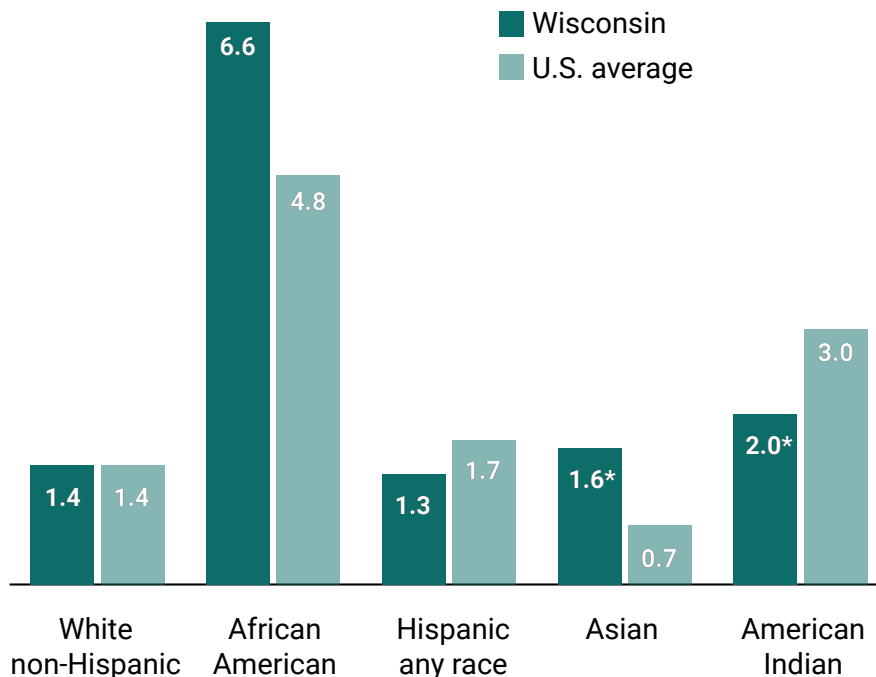
in other states, 41 African American children in Wisconsin who died during this time would still be alive.

Wisconsin ranks in the middle of the states in overall child death rates from guns—27th out of 50 states—but that overall ranking hides a great deal of variation in Wisconsin’s ranking in death rates by race. Wisconsin ranks slightly below the median—31st out of 48 states with information—in firearm death rates for white non-Hispanic children, but ranks much higher for deaths of African American children: 7th out of 38 states for which figures are available. Wisconsin ranked 18th out of 33 states with information for death rates for Hispanic children, and 2nd out of 6 states for Asian children. No information was available on how death rates for American Indian children in Wisconsin compared to those in other states.



For Black Children in Wisconsin, Firearm Death Rates are Higher than the National Average

Rate of children killed by firearms per 100,000 children, for the period 1999-2016. Figures by race are for children of non-Hispanic ethnicity; Hispanic children are of any race.



Use caution in interpreting figures such as this one that are based on counts of fewer than 20 deaths.

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Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Wisconsin Department of Health Services

Children of all races die from both homicides and suicides committed with guns. However, the main cause of death differs substantially with the race and ethnicity of the children. African American and Hispanic children in Wisconsin who died from injuries inflicted with guns are much more likely to die from homicide than from suicide or accidents. Eighty-eight percent of African American child deaths from guns were homicide, and 92% of Hispanic child deaths, compared to only 20% of white child deaths.

In contrast, white children who died from firearm injuries were much more likely to die from suicide than homicide. Seventy-two percent of white child

deaths from guns were suicide, compared to only five percent of African American child deaths.

Research Blocked that Could Protect Children

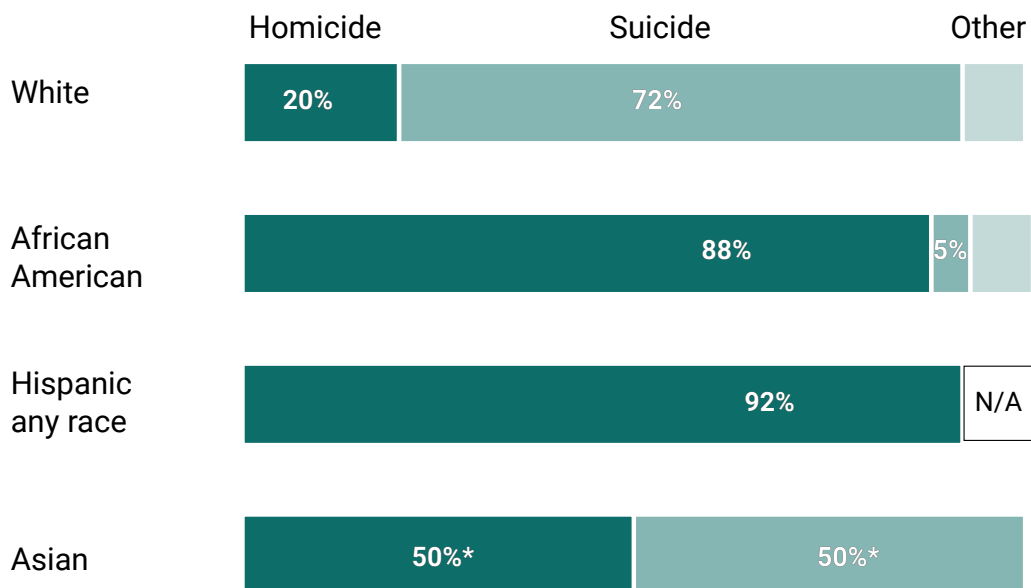
In order to do a better job at protecting children, we need more information about the causes of gun violence and the most effective methods of preventing it.

But national lawmakers have made it harder for researchers to identify ways of keeping children and others safe, by blocking funding for research



White Children are Most Likely to Die from Suicide, Black and Hispanic Children from Homicide

Manner of death for Wisconsin children killed with firearms, 1999-2016. Figures by race are for children of non-Hispanic ethnicity; Hispanic children are of any race. No information is available for American Indian children.



* Use caution in interpreting figures such as this one that are based on counts of fewer than 20 deaths. Source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services

that could yield useful information about what causes gun violence, who is most at risk, and models, strategies, and policies for preventing these deaths.

Since 1996, Congress has largely barred the federal government from conducting research that could help us better protect children from gun violence. Critical to the enactment of smart and effective solutions is our ability to examine important topics like identifying factors that increase the chance of involvement with gun violence, recognizing early red flags that children may be considering using a gun to end their lives and strategies for how to intervene, and the psychological impact of living in a community with a high rate of gun violence.

A 2018 omnibus bill passed by Congress signaled a positive step forward as it included language specifying that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has the authority to conduct research

into the causes of gun violence. However, Congress did not allocate any resources for conducting that research, which means that the authority was made clear without the tools and resources required to actually research the problem.

With the number of child deaths from guns reaching its highest level, Congress needs to take action to fund research—and Wisconsin voters need to let their federal lawmakers know that protecting children from gun violence is a high priority. It's time for lawmakers to take action and keep children and communities safe.

Appendix

Wisconsin children killed by firearms, 1999-2016, for ages 17 and under. Figures by race are for children of non-Hispanic ethnicity; Hispanic children are of any race. Counts in categories of less than five deaths are redacted for privacy reasons. Use caution in interpreting figures that are based on counts of fewer than 20 deaths.

Year	Number
1999	38
2000	30
2001	33
2002	29
2003	38
2004	23
2005	31
2006	19
2007	32
2008	13
2009	16
2010	22
2011	20
2012	21
2013	22
2014	21
2015	20
2016	33
Total	461

County	Number
Milwaukee	184
Dane	18
Winnebago	13
Brown	11
Waukesha	11
Outagamie	10
Racine	10
Rock	10
Walworth	9
Grant	8
Marathon	8
St. Croix	8
Polk	7
Sheboygan	7
Kenosha	6
Lincoln	6
Manitowoc	6
Marinette	6
Wood	6
Forest	5
Jefferson	5
Oconto	5
Portage	5
Vernon	5
Other	92
Total	461

Race and ethnicity	Milwaukee County	Rest of State	Total
White	19	244	263
Black	141	13	154
Hispanic, any race	17	9	26
Asian	6	6	12
Native American	N/A	N/A	6
Total	184	277	461
Gender	Milwaukee County	Rest of State	Total
Male	153	231	384
Female	31	46	77
Cause	Milwaukee County	Rest of State	Total
Homicide	162	58	220
Suicide	12	196	208
Accident	7	22	29
Other/Unknown	N/A	N/A	N/A
Age group	Milwaukee County	Rest of State	Total
0 to 4	7	11	18
5 to 9	6	11	17
10 to 14	21	72	93
15 to 17	150	183	333

Figures in the table and the report are from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.