

Input from Oregon Gun Owners on Firearm Safety and Suicide Prevention

Prepared for the Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide
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Submitted by Lines for Life

www.LinesforLife.org

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Background

The State of Oregon is in the process of updating the statewide Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan. Firearm safety is a key component of a statewide agenda given [national](#) and [state data](#) that firearms account for the majority of suicides (due in part to their lethality relative to other suicide methods) and the fact the firearm suicide rate is increasing. The Alliance identified the need to get input from gun owners about suicide prevention and firearm safety to inform their recommendations. To this end, in collaboration with OHA and with the leadership of Susan Keys (who had previously conducted [research](#) and developed [training](#) related to firearm safety), Lines for Life was contracted to recruit, conduct and report these virtual focus groups and interviews which were held between late April and early June 2020.

The objective of this project is to better understand how firearm owners communicate about and practice firearm safety. This understanding is intended to inform how best to advance cultural norms around safe storage and reduce stigma around mental health safety planning. This focus on culturally resonant message framing builds on [prior findings](#) by Dr. Keys and colleagues at OSU-Cascades that tested standard public health messaging and found it less impactful. The overall goal is therefore to identify strategies and [out-of-the-box solutions](#) likely to be adopted and promoted by gun owners themselves – that is, to address firearm safety with firearm owners in ways that respect and protect the rights of the gun owners while keeping persons who are suicidal safe.

Methodology

Twenty-eight Oregon firearm owners over 18 participated in five focus group interviews of 3-8 participants (2 groups of 3, 2 groups of 7 and one group of 8 participants). An additional 3 individual interviews brought the total number of participants to 31. Interviews were held virtually as Zoom meetings between April 25 and June 2, 2020. Dr. Keys designed the question guide and led the groups which were co-hosted by Jonathan Hankins who managed pre- and post- group participant communications. Jonathan Hankins, in accordance with trauma informed research best practices, also served as the point person for one-to-one conversations if someone wished to leave the group or needed personal attention (no participant accessed this support). Dr. Elissa Adair, Program Evaluator at Lines for Life, served as note-taker, data analyst and author of this report. All team members reviewed the report and edited and contributed. While all virtual meetings were video recorded and recordings are available for secondary analysis, this report is based on detailed notes.

Recruitment was primarily through the personal networks of Dr. Keys and Jonathan Hankins, staff of the Oregon Health Authority (Jill Baker, Emily Watson), Lines for Life volunteers and staff who both participated and recruited, and the Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide. Recruits were encouraged to bring a friend with them to the group, however, most participants attended as individuals not in pairs. Initially, \$25 was offered as an incentive for participation and \$125 was offered to those facilitating recruitment. The incentive was increased to \$100 to encourage participation after the first 3 meetings. An effort was made to supplement recruitment using e-mail outreach to a purchased list of Oregon voters known to own firearms. This did not yield any participants and those receiving the email were more likely to flag it as spam rather than click through to complete the form requesting information. Given this primary reliance on personal networks to recruit, it is likely that firearm owners active in

suicide prevention in their communities or professionally were over-represented. Approximately 6 participants volunteered that they or a family member had completed or attempted suicide with a firearm. Since these are qualitative findings reported from notes not transcripts, numbers are reported approximately not exactly. Terms that were used commonly to describe key concepts appear in italics.

Recruitment Response: Suicide Prevention and Firearm Safety are Sensitive Topics

Jonathan Hankins contacted 48 individuals with e-mailed information about the groups and spoke to 5 by phone or in an introductory meeting to explain the project for a total of 53 potential participants receiving outreach. Of these potential respondents, 36 planned to attend and of those 31 actually attended a focus group. 6 participants expressed interest in continuing to explore and advance solutions as community representatives and/or advocates for suicide prevention among gun owners. Some of those contacted expressed reluctance to attend, there were no-shows, and group participants did state that gun ownership was something to be kept private. Any future efforts to recruit a more representative sample (i.e. those for whom the topic of suicide prevention is less salient) might be most successful if conducted in partnership with a “gun advocacy” organization such as local chapters of the NRA or gun retailers, shooting ranges or gun clubs. Again, this convenience sample likely includes those most motivated to address the topic. That proved advantageous in one respect as participants had direct experience about communication strategies that did not work in the past. The participants were most likely to engage directly with each other when brainstorming communication strategies and safety solutions.

Participant Self-Identification as a Gun Owner

Many (not all) participants in the group expressed their support for second amendment rights, identified gun ownership with their political affiliation and/or stated that they felt they were representative of gun owners generally. About 4, stated that they did not use a gun for personal protection and/or did not feel that it was effective to do so (one participant said he felt more protected by the baseball bat kept under the bed). The majority, however, explicitly stated they owned guns for personal protection, had concealed carry permits or mentioned that a handgun was kept in an accessible location. Participants included a few new or relatively new gun owners and about 10 who were very experienced: having served as instructors on shooting and safety or in current or former professions that required a gun. Most, however, were somewhere in between. In sum, the research team felt the participants represented a range of opinions and were well qualified to suggest messages, strategies and solutions useful for promoting firearm safety and suicide prevention.

Demographic Description of Sample and Participants

Basic demographic information was collected from a total of 31 participants. Descriptive information about this convenience sample is provided below in order to consider which groups might not have been represented. Of the 31 who reported their gender, 23 were male, 8 were female and 0 were non-binary. 8 participants were known to be a veteran or on active military service.. Other occupations included: education, farming related, health services, social services, (including 5 who had a professional or advocacy role in suicide prevention). Three participants self-identified as a person of color. 13 participants were parents of children 24 and younger living in their home.

| Recruitment Source | Number Participated/Number Recruited | Recruiting Individuals |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| Lines for Life Volunteer or Staff Person | 1 | Caryn |
| Contact of Lines for Life Volunteer or Staff Person | 5 | Jonathan Hankins, Ryan Seymour, David Westbrook |
| Alliance member or contact | 13 | Danette Killenger, Amber Ziring, |
| OHA staff or contact | 6 | Jill Baker |
| Personal contact of host or co-host | 6 | Susan Keys, Jonathan Hankins |

Total: 31 participants

Geographic Location

| County (Zip Codes Represented) | PDX, Eugene, Salem Metro or Rural | Number from this County |
|--------------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| 97756, 97702, 97707 | Deschutes: Bend, Redmond, Sunriver, Lapine | 6 |
| 97080, 97203, 97266, 97228 | Multnomah County: Gresham, Portland | 7 |
| 97601, 97603 | Klamath County | 2 |
| 97355, 97321, 97370, | Linn-Benton County: Philomath | 3 |
| 97401 | Lane County: Eugene | 1 |
| 97086 | Clackamas County: Happy Valley | 1 |
| 97071 | Marion County: Woodburn | 1 |
| 97361 | Polk County: Monmoth | 1 |
| 97322, 97355 | Linn County: Albany | 7 |
| 97641 | Lake County: Christmas Valley | 1 |
| 97415 | Curry County | 1 |

Total: 31 participants

Age

| | |
|---------|----|
| 18-25 | 0 |
| 26-35 | 6 |
| 36-45 | 11 |
| 46-55 | 1 |
| 56-65 | 6 |
| Over 65 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 31 |

Findings

Shared Values

To varying degrees, participants recognized that gun owners were not a monolithic group and that different ethnicities, occupations, age groups, types of shooters and geographic regions would need to be approached differently when it came to addressing suicide prevention. That said, a number stated

that gun owners as a group supported second amendment rights which in turn stood for broader values such as individualism and self-autonomy. [Prior research](#) found that it was important to integrate these types of cultural values including patriotism, family, care and trust for each other, and individualist risk perception in prevention messaging to be impactful. The values expressed in these focus groups were consistent with those previously reported. Understanding of history also came up. One person of color had researched gun ownership in relation to oppression and valued the right to have a gun because it had been denied in the past. One additional value that arose (perhaps because of the number of questions focused on communication messages, messengers and strategy) was the importance of direct communication about safety – many gun owners described themselves as willing to step up and say something to each other if a gun-related situation made them uncomfortable. This value was often how they saw themselves as a person and was not limited to safety-related situations: “I am very open. If I am not comfortable, I am going to say this is what I am not comfortable about.” There were many examples in the focus groups of what participants considered and valued as “open conversation.”

Learning About Safety

Safety practices were formally learned and taught by instructors, informally learned from or taught by more experienced gun owners at the range or while shooting in a group, learned as part of occupational training in the military or police, acquired through word of mouth, adopted as common sense or learned from, taught or modelled by parents and adult relatives who used guns themselves. This final category generated follow-on discussion about how important it is that children are raised to *respect* guns – that is to be comfortable with firearms, be safe around firearms, see them as tools used for a defined purpose (“like a hammer for a construction worker”) and understand how they are dangerous (that is children saw animals die and potatoes explode as targets). One example of a child raised with such *respect* was given by a grandparent who lost a relative to suicide. They described their grandchild as confused by the use of a gun to suicide because that is not a purpose that they understood as the right way to handle a gun. Those who self-described as raising children or growing up in families with guns often felt that this process of becoming comfortable around guns downplayed the *mystique* and exhilaration that is part of why people, including themselves, own and enjoy guns. This exhilaration includes the sense of power and self that comes with thinking that: “Guns can kill people but I can handle them really well.”

A familial way of learning about guns and gun safety was also contrasted to video game culture which many felt desensitized young people and undermined this respect for guns because games are not real and because characters in games were shot and not harmed (that is children playing video fantasy games do not see guns as causing real damage the way children raised to hunt or target shoot do). Most participants believed familial instruction to be protective against injury and suicide with a few notable exceptions including one parent with a who’s now grown child who had attempted suicide: “I always thought that if I taught my kids how to be safe with a gun that would be enough and it wasn't.” This same participant continued to explain that following safety instructions provided in a course or pamphlet may give a sense of permission to be less vigilant because it objectively shows that you have been responsible (and can handle guns well) and gives a false arrogance that you are more protected than you actually are.

Safe Storage and Safe Handling

There was general agreement that firearm safety includes safe handling (when you are using the gun) and safe storage (“having it secure when you don’t have access to it”). Many described a defined “thought process,” checklist or protocol that guided their now established routines for each type of safety. Safety strategies identified by one or more participants (often as part of a larger protocol) are listed below:

| Safe Storage | Safe Handling |
|---|--|
| Keep ammunition separate from gun Keep magazine separate from gun Keep gun unloaded Keep the firing mechanism separate from the gun Hide the location of the gun/gun safe Keep high and out of reach of young children Gun last thing taken out and first thing put away Quick access handgun safe Magazine locks/Trigger locks/Cable locks Gun safe Pistol lock box (combination, key or fingerprint) Locked pelican case Car safe between seats Locked in glove compartment Use multiple locks (up to 3); keys different places | No one flails or spins a gun Treat all guns as loaded Checking it is not loaded before cleaning/storing Have handgun on person in holster Pointing gun only in defined directions at targets Muzzle control Safety is on until gun is brought up to shoot Put gun lock on to prevent someone else using gun Line to shoot from defined Targets checked as a group and with guns on ground Range requires safety instruction every time you go Not letting others touch, use or borrow your gun Anyone entering the house gets a lesson |

Situations which for some reason were not routine, including having guests in or visitors to the home, and more commonly any family situation in which young children or grandchildren around were all seen as reasons why a gun owner might be more attentive to safety. Being tired or distracted, having a new gun or being a new gun owner and living alone were all reasons why gun safety might not be 100% consistent and gun owners did acknowledge that lapses happened. Most gun owners felt that safe storage in the home was up to the individual and that what they might consider important for safety might reasonably be considered unimportant to someone else. They would not find it appropriate for someone they did not know well or have a prior relationship or understanding with to inquire about gun safety in the home. Gun owners also felt that different types of guns and the reason(s) for owning each gun would inform safety decisions and protocols – that is how a gun owner kept one gun safe might not be how that same owner kept a different gun safe. As an example of the diversity represented, safe handling for those with concealed carry permits included holsters, locking holsters, locked cases, car safes, locked glove compartment and handguns with some type of fingerprint safety. The only locking device that some did not consider as effective was a trigger or cable lock and that is because the gun itself could be taken. One relatively new owner was acclimating to carrying the gun with the safety off as friends told him that he needed to become more comfortable. Although there were gun owners who kept all their guns in safes and owned more than one safe placed in different locations in their house, this practice was not presented as what is required for all guns in all situations nor was there a universal understanding of what safe storage entails.

This acceptance of very different approaches to safe storage and ease of access in one's home did not apply to safe handling when shooting in a group. "We are indoctrinating you in the culture of firearms and safety is the number one backbone toward it." Since one person's unsafe handling put others at risk, focus group participants explained how rules and standards were established, reviewed or implicit given longstanding understanding – this last was most common when the group was a defined and a closed family or friend group that routinely met to shoot together. "There is a line. Don't shoot in front of or behind that line and you all respect those rules. I trust everyone I go shooting with. There are those I don't go shooting with because I don't trust them," one participant explained. Even established groups often re-stated the rules at the start of every shoot to confirm them and some participants re-iterated that safety isn't one and done it has to be repeated and reinforced. Rules were typically set out by the most experienced shooters, clarified through immediate communication and feedback ("you are creeping up"), by removing weapons from younger people who showed dis-respect or by leaving or not shooting with individuals or groups who did practice safe handling. "It only takes one time for somebody to make one stupid mistake. I'm not risking that. I'm not going out with that person again." There was some sense that safe handling equated with experience and professionalism and for this reason conversations around safety were sensitive in that they could come across as a test of knowledge or criticism of competence or responsibility rather than positive shared commitment to make sure everyone made it home uninjured: "We all have a desire to go home and be safe with each other."

Barriers to Adoption and Promotion of Firearm Safety and Suicide Prevention

Mental Health Stigma

There were understood to be varying levels of stigma in communities and demographic groups to having, discussing or addressing mental health concerns. Older age and military culture were identified particularly with this type of barrier: for example, not wanting to talk about mental health concerns and risk being seen as "weak."

Sense that Suicide is Not Preventable

"I really don't think there is a way to stop that person." In the second and third interviews conducted, participants expressed that for those who chose a gun as their method, suicide was not preventable. This included the belief that if the gun was removed the person at risk would find some other way. As this proved a conversation stopper, subsequent groups were introduced with the statement that while not all suicides were preventable, intervention was often possible if the person was driven by an impulsive action or a temporary crisis. Individuals in subsequent groups did describe situations where intervention was considered impossible but stayed more open to thinking through prevention as a real option.

Lack of information

Participants reported searching online unsuccessfully for information about suicide and not knowing who to contact. There was also a need to understand what would happen if the sheriff or an outside party needed to be contacted if they were called and at the door because a person with a gun was at risk. Could the person acting to help be held accountable somehow? Is it legal for a friend to take possession of their friend's gun? Could the person being helped retrieve their guns at a later point? Is it true that you have to be committed in an institution to lose your gun rights? Participants were

interested in legal specifics (such as the title/number of the law). One participant who had a need to separate from their guns for a period called the sheriff and could not get an answer about whether they could get their guns back and when. That was a barrier to his effort to what he and the sheriff both saw as an effort to be responsible and safe.

Coerciveness

One participant explained: “The state of Oregon has taken an approach to criminalize non safe storage of firearms if those firearms are stolen or used by someone in an illegal manner or to commit a suicide and that has been part of the gun control agenda and this coerciveness tends to turn a lot of gun abiding gun owners off so this suicide prevention aspect gets confused in the gun control aspect and people tend to resist it and find it [coercive]—instead ... give a tax credit for the purchase of a gun safe, more involved than gun locks which work but are pretty minimal, than that might be an approach that might be more welcome to encourage change.” More generally, regulations and government agency were suspect when it came to firearm safety or temporary separation from firearms. “I would not relinquish my guns to an agency, but I would gladly give them to my family.”

Cost of a safe

The cost of a safe (\$600) was a barrier. Some individualized mechanisms (hand/finger print recognition for example) were seen as expensive. Other barriers include the size of a safe and the weight of a safe, particularly for those living in smaller spaces. A final item was the cost of having the combination on a safe changed by a lock smith.

Categories of Gun Owners at Risk

While there were 3 participants who shared their own personal experiences with suicidal/homicidal ideation, many participants did not include themselves when considering who might be at greatest risk. New gun owners, “cowboys” or “yahoos” (who were lax about safety protocols or combined guns with substance use) and those who had an active mental health concern were identified as “others” who might be most at risk.

Suicide Prevention and Gun Owners

Gun owners did not want to be singled out for suicide prevention given that mental health (“people get drunk, get high, get depressed”) is a societal issue that was not specific to people who owned guns. It was not considered safe to mix alcohol or drugs with guns or for those in crisis (e.g. divorce) or thinking of suicide to have a gun. Participants were genuinely troubled by suicide and felt it was important to be there for others (as anyone would want to be there for those they know and love). It was also clear if not always stated that current practice was not fully working. As one participant explained: “We need to recognize that firearm safety protocols won’t work if someone wants to use a gun to suicide.”

Participants expressed that they and others they knew feel bad and even responsible if a suicide happened or were to happen with someone in their family or circle. That was not an experience that they wanted “on them.” One shooting instructor shared that a person he trained told him that they had come close to suiciding (gun loaded and in hand) and stopped because they knew how bad the instructor would feel if that person had completed. Another grandparent said that he had purchased a

safe to protect his wife because she was the one primarily at home with the grandkids and it would be her fault if anything happened.

It was clear that temporary separation from firearms is appropriate if the person in crisis reaches out for assistance. If there was a person of concern close to you who did not reach out, there was interest in responding, though the approach might first be to a family member. There was less consistency in how best to respond if the person was more distant. "Not every single person I feel like I have the knowledge or know them well enough to touch on it because it is sensitive." There was real interest in being able to recognize warning signs and symptoms in themselves and others. Those with personal experience with suicide were clear that was not always possible.

It was important that the person responding to a person of concern ask for permission. Phrases or strategies that gun owners thought they might use to respond:

- I'd expect you to do the same for me because we care about each other.
- I am coming from a place of love.
- Is it okay for me to hold your guns for now?
- One person noted the difference between access and possession: "How about I take the cylinder out and keep it for a while? How about you lock them up and I take the key?" Another option considered in one group was changing the combination on a safe or lock box (though if there was an override code or need for a locksmith this might prove expensive or ineffective).

Safety Education

As participants discussed their ideas for what communities might do to promote firearm safety, the following education venues were suggested: concealed carry classes, hunter education classes, support groups for a person having a mental health concern, rural (not metro) schools and gun retailers. Generally, participants wanted to see both integration of firearm safety in suicide prevention training and integration of suicide prevention in firearm education. Concealed carry classes (which are required to obtain a permit) were raised repeatedly. These classes have waitlists, were often considered to be of low quality, and reach a large number of handgun owners and new handgun owners.

Data Needs

Individuals were data focused and interested in relative risk. For example, one gun owner explained people judge us for owning a gun and yet they text while driving (for a risk comparison, [firearm deaths are more common than driving deaths due to texting](#)). There was interest in knowing how many who suicide with a gun purchased the gun to suicide or how many were new gun owners (the assumption was that long-standing gun owners were less likely to suicide). Data that quantified how specific safety strategies reduced risk would facilitate open conversation and articulation of personal values about individual choice, risk to self, risk to others. Similarly, data on how many individuals lost and/or re-gained possession of their firearms due to a mental health concern might address how reactive participants were to separating from a weapon without their permission.

Messaging Strategies and Channels

Participants had specific ideas for getting the word out more widely. While many recognized that the message cannot be one size fits all ("there has to be understanding where the message is going for it to be received"), some themes emerged about what messaging requires.

Coalitions and Communications Hosted by Gun Advocacy Organizations for Gun Owners

Given the need to engage with the diversity of individuals who own guns, local action coalitions (framed as from gun owner to gun owner) that were able to provide education, outreach, and support were recommended. Similarly, communications were considered trusted and credible if they came from gun advocacy organizations. It did not seem likely to gun owners that they would go to a suicide prevention website for information even if they had an active concern.

Conversation from Gun Owner to Gun Owner

There was recognition that individual outreach would be needed to encourage change in safety practices. "I think that it's got to be a personal message that they connect with, I thought the same way too, but this is what I found (when my child attempted suicide)." He went on to think through how a gun owner might respond to outreach – "I'm not going to talk to you if you are not a pro-gun guy." Whereas a gun owner could engage from a point of solidarity: "I agree with you but there are some better ways to do things." Some thought that gun store clerks and staff at shooting ranges could initiate these conversations as well.

Appropriate Emotion

Those with the most direct experience with suicide were most likely to identify the importance of personal stories. There was an interest in hearing from those who had attempted suicide and could talk about the thinking and the consequences of that attempt. "If we talked about it and are open about and let people know the hurt (it might do something)." Another participant talked about how knowledge would be insufficient at the point of acting to suicide: "Knowledge is very important to a certain point. When dealing with heavy emotions that trumps all the knowledge you have." However, appeals to emotion that were heavy-handed, as in, you or your gun could kill somebody were discouraged.

Facts

There was also a request for facts because the topic was already seen to be emotionally charged. Defensiveness and intense reactions were anticipated (both from gun control advocates and gun advocates). Facts were therefore seen as less reactive. It was important to "give the facts about what can go wrong." Facts include knowledge about guns and safety mechanisms/devices as well as demonstrations of how they worked. Understanding of the facts of guns were considered important to downplay the "mystique" of gun ownership. Education provided by the NRA was an example of a factual training. The data needs that arose and are listed above as well as participant descriptions of attitudinal barriers suggest some topics to address with factual knowledge (suicides are preventable, relative risk of death by suicide with a gun vs. other causes of mortality, who dies by suicide with a gun, how many gun owners have to be separated from their guns involuntarily because of mental health concerns, etc.).

Print Collateral combined with online outreach

Participants felt that manuals come with guns and people study them. For this reason, print booklets and cling stickers (with crisis line numbers) that gun retailers can distribute were suggested as appropriate for all age groups. Other places gun owners look for information include existing print materials such as those produced by the state related to hunting, fishing, falconry, etc. While important, no one felt that print campaigns were sufficient. Web influencers such as those who review guns and

pop-up ads were also important, particularly for younger generations who were seen to spend the most time online.

Parallel messaging that might be a model for mental safety planning

In thinking out loud about what safety planning might entail and how to think about temporarily separating owners in mental health crisis from firearms, gun owners identified some parallel situations: designating a sober driver, taking someone's keys away to prevent drunk driving and designating a guardian for your children. These actions exemplified important ways to be responsible for your family, yourself and others.

Terms: Mental Safety Plan, Safekeeping, Safeguarding

Firearm safety is assumed to be about physical safety and preventing injury. One person helpfully clarified that it was mental safety and a mental safety plan that we were discussing. When asked about safety planning, participants felt there was value to having a plan in place before it might be needed. Finally, the more active words "safekeeping" or "safeguarding" were very occasionally used when talking about taking *protective* measures. It was both for the guns (which were to be protected from theft, damage or causing danger) and for the person experiencing a mental health concern.

As mentioned previously, the groups also distinguished the term "access" from the term "possession." Safety can be accomplished without taking possession by instead preventing access.

Conclusion

Focus groups proved a useful approach to understanding current attitudes and practices around firearm safety and suicide prevention. Participants described what did and did not work to prevent suicide among firearm owners and identified very specific barriers to firearm safety. The focus groups generated an initial set of ideas to launch subsequent work group conversations around formal prevention and communication campaigns as well as concrete action steps that individual firearm owners can implement right now.

Preliminary Recommendations

Initial recommendations draw from how the solutions and barriers identified by gun owners might be addressed in practice. Some, but not all of these recommendations, were discussed directly by gun owners during the groups and received confirmation that they were aligned with what was being expressed. **Further diligence exploring the practicality and acceptance of each recommendation is warranted in partnership with gun owners.**

- Integrate firearm safety information in all suicide prevention trainings and work from the assumption that firearm owners are increasingly represented among trainees. Include firearm safety post-test questions (not pre-test as questions are sensitive and require introduction) in order to track whether trainings are reaching and including gun owners.
- Lines for Life and the Alliance can start work immediately with known "champions" – gun owners committed to firearm safety and suicide prevention. Champions may be those identified through these focus groups and others who want to stay in open conversation around strategies to promote mental wellness and safeguard those in mental health crisis. Consider a safe space style virtual room to promote drop-in conversations to further explore this topic.

- Similarly, a work group of champions may read this report and determine what they can do right now as individuals and family members to advance firearm safety and suicide prevention. Have champions identify and approach national gun leaders who can use social media to influence the uptake of suicide prevention training. Have champions review existing hunter education curricula and make recommendations to fish and wildlife about how best to integrate suicide prevention (video, speakers, safety gear demonstration).
- Use co-design and message testing to further develop and test communication strategies suggested by these findings for a firearm owner to firearm owner focused communication campaign. Consider with gun owners whether and which gun advocacy organizations to invite and include (NRA was mentioned by some but not all gun owners)
- Develop print collateral for any communication campaign such as brochures, ads and cling stickers that gun retailers can put on purchases. Include information in existing print materials such as those produced by the state related to hunting, fishing, falconry, etc.
- Emphasize direct and clear communication and preparation among gun owners to protect themselves and loved ones in the event of a mental health issue. Encourage gun owners to designate a mental health safety buddy in advance of needing one. In collaboration with firearm owners and gun advocates, create a living will style written firearm safety plan to be held by relatives as informal documentation of permission and preference for temporary separation if a mental health condition or substance use disorder is active. Introduce documentation with the understanding that such agreements are not legally binding and do not need to be written down (though writing may help assure clear communication and follow-thru) and can instead be models for one-to-one designation or group conversation before shooting (as one might designate a sober driver). Similarly, a tip sheet that can be used as a handy guide for putting a mental safety protocol in place before it is needed can encourage direct communication.
- Develop a firearm safety curriculum that demonstrates safety protocol and gear for parents and youth 12-16 that includes a suicide prevention component (conducted age appropriately in break-out groups as well as a return to large group parent-youth discussion). This course is to include instruction of safe handling (assembly/disassembly/loading) and, if training sponsor has a site that permits, shooting practice by participants. This training could be adopted within hunter safety education.
- Convene a cross-sector task force that includes representatives across state and federal agencies (health, education, police, secretary of state, fish and wildlife, veteran's affairs, bureau of alcohol, tobacco, firearms and explosives) to list existing points of contact with gun owners, retailers and gun clubs, identify and track data related to firearms, and endorse and coordinate dissemination of consistent education materials and curricula. The purpose of this group is to dissipate anti-government mindset among gun owners which is a barrier to intervention by including agencies for which some gun owners had regard (fish and wildlife, sheriff/public safety, military) and model how individual **and** collective responsibility combined with logistical coordination (as with a military operation and safety checklist) and NOT regulation will address suicide in Oregon. This group should be non-partisan (established public servants) and also plan to direct additional market research and/or surveys as needed to test the impact of potential communications and policy.
- Centralize oversight of concealed carry courses which are reported to be of unequal quality and hard to access. Create an RFP for an Oregon (not national) non-government organization to

manage and coordinate concealed carry courses (including an Oregon specific online training) to assure all courses meet state-wide standards and include demonstration of built-in safety mechanisms, locked carrying cases, locked holsters and all types of handgun safes. Have the cross-sector task force described above provide oversight perhaps under Oregon State Police and/or Oregon Public Safety Standards and Training. Have this funded organization convene a task force of gun retailers, gun clubs and shooting guides/instructors to address suicide and injury prevention. Charge this industry sub-group with determining how best to discount, track and increase sales and use of safety devices.

Methodological Limitations

Participants are not representative of all Oregon gun owners. Focus groups are not anonymous and there were likely differences between individuals about what constituted safe or unsafe that were not discussed. Virtual focus group technology does not support crosstalk and participant-to-participant dialogue as easily as in-person interviews. Participants and those recruited to participate considered this topic sensitive – for this reason, anonymous data collection strategies might gather more complete and accurate information.