Firearm Life Planning

Supporting Veterans and Their Care Partners in Planning for a Time When It May Be Necessary to Limit Access to, or No Longer Use, Firearms

February 24 and February 25, 2022

Emmy Betz, MD, MPH
Professor of Emergency Medicine
University of Colorado School of Medicine

Director, Firearm Injury Prevention Initiative, Injury & Violence Prevention Center, Colorado School of Public Health

Research Physician, Eastern Colorado Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center (GRECC), VHA

Joe Simonetti, MD, MPH
Assistant Professor of Hospital Medicine
University of Colorado School of Medicine

Investigator, Firearm Injury Prevention Initiative, Injury & Violence Prevention Center, Colorado School of Public Health

Research Physician, Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center for Suicide Prevention (MIRECC), VHA

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

Injury & Violence Prevention Center
colorado school of public health

GRECC

VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

Disclosures

- The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States Government.
- Funding for this work was provided by the NIH/NIA 3R01AG059613-02S1 (PI Betz).
- The authors have no commercial relationships to disclose.

Overview

Background
Rates, risks, and logistics

Methods & Results
Qualitative research with stakeholders

Firearm Life Plan
A new resource for the public

Q&A

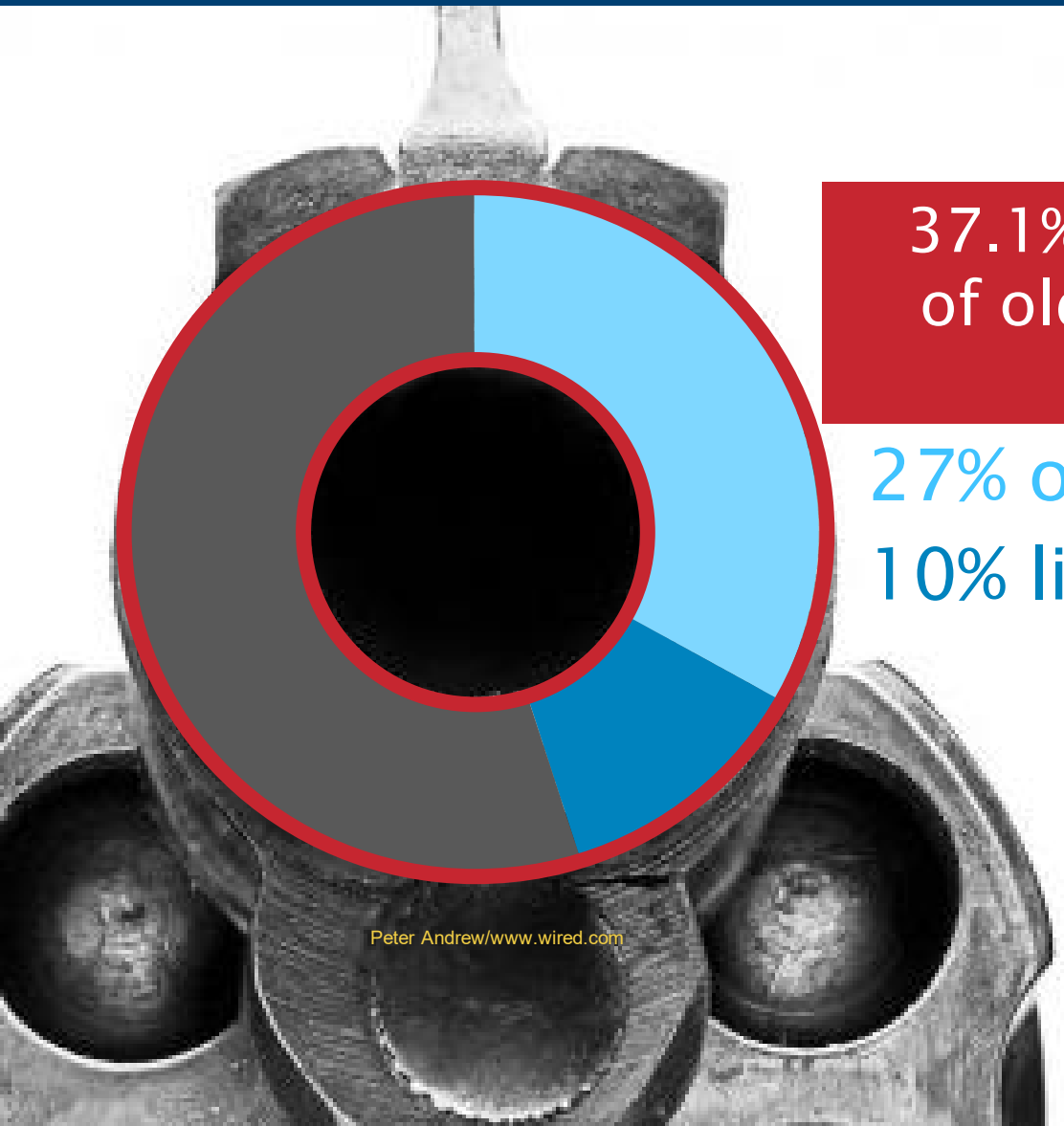
Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC
VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

Background

Prevalence of firearms in the US, risk of firearm-related injury in older adults, and logistics around firearm access in dementia

Household firearm prevalence (65+)



37.1% (95%CI 34.9–39.4%) of older adult households have firearm(s)

27% own a gun

10% live with gun owner

Carter et al. Prev Med 2022.

Characteristics of older firearm owners (50-80 years)

	Adjusted OR
Male	3.64
White, non-Hispanic	1.88
Veteran	2.49
Kids in/visit home	1.45
Income >$60k	1.74
Rural	2.84
Midwest (vs NE)	1.87
South (vs NE)	2.06
West (vs NE)	2.32
Also adjusted for age, education, marital status, self-rated health	

Carter et al. Prev Med 2022.

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

Violence in older adults

VIOLENCE

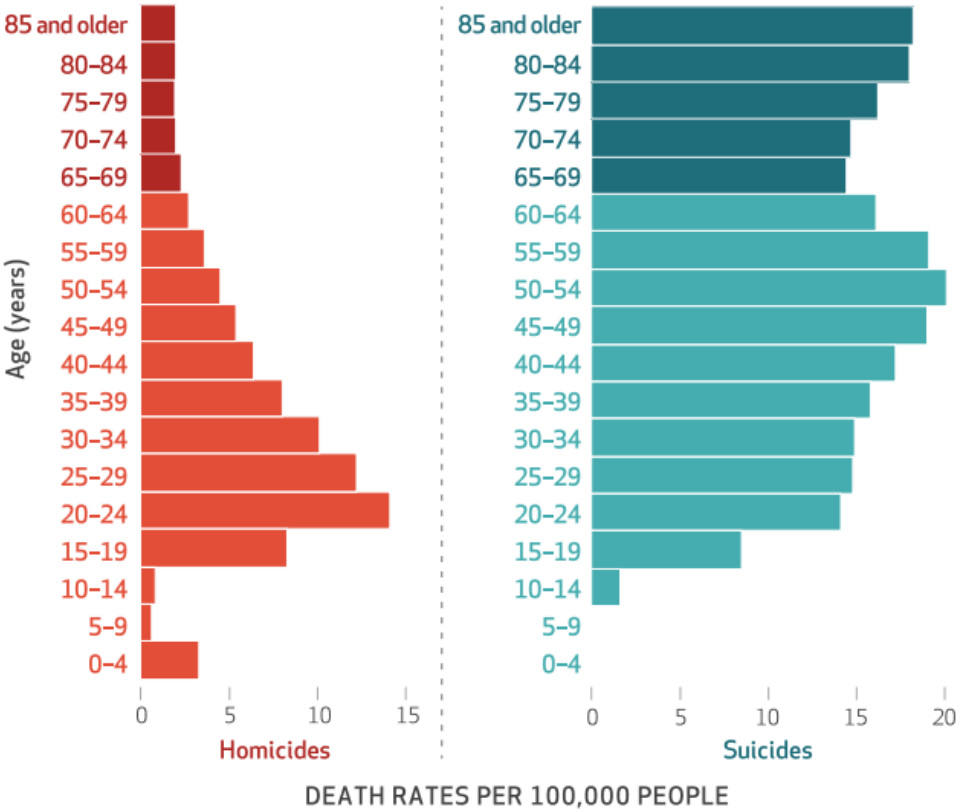
Health Affairs 2019;38(10):1630-1637.
By Tony Rosen, Lena K. Makaroun, Yeates Conwell, and Marian Betz

OVERVIEW

Violence In Older Adults: Scope, Impact, Challenges, And Strategies For Prevention

EXHIBIT 1

Age-adjusted death rates per 100,000 people in the United States, 2007–17



SOURCE Authors' analysis of data on the number of deaths from the National Vital Statistics System of the National Center for Health Statistics and of population estimates from the Census Bureau. **NOTE** Homicides include deaths related to legal intervention (for example, police-involved shootings).

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC

VA U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

Suicide

- 84% age 50+ firearm deaths due to suicide
- Firearms most common method of suicide among people with dementia
  - 73% vs 50% (all ages)
- Dementia as suicide risk factor

Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Seyfried LS et al. Predictors of suicide in patients with dementia. Alzheimers Dement. 2011;7(6):567-73.
Choi NG et al. Physical health problems as a late-life suicide precipitant: Examination of coroner/medical examiner and law enforcement reports. Gerontologist. 2017. Epub Sep 18.

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC
VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

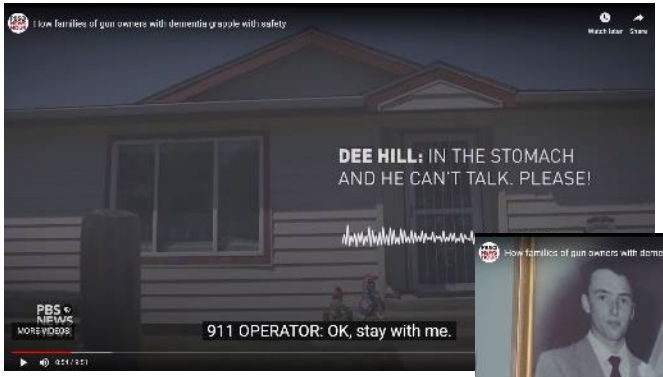
Homicide

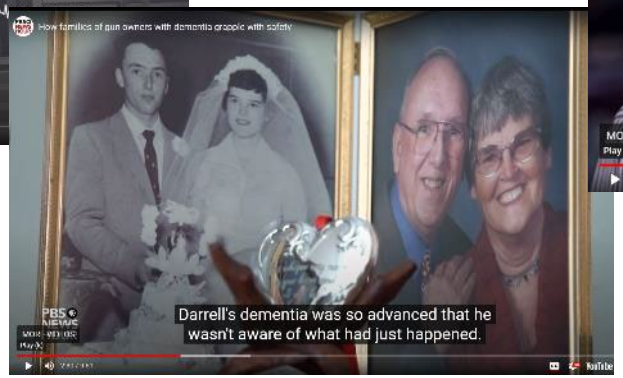
- Dementia can involve hallucinations, delusions, agitation, aggression
  → Depending on symptoms, person with dementia may pose a risk to others

Lyketsos CG et al. Mental and behavioral disturbances in dementia: Findings from the Cache County Study on Memory in Aging. Am J Psychiatry. 2000;157(5):708-14. Greene E et al. Granny, (don't) get your gun: competency issues in gun ownership by older adults. Behav. Sci. Law. 2007;25(3):405-23. Safe Return: Alzheimer's disease guide for law enforcement. 2006. Alzheimer's Association.

Unintentional

Impaired memory and judgment





https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/unlocked-and-loaded-families-confront-dementia-and-guns

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC

VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

Laws & Logistics

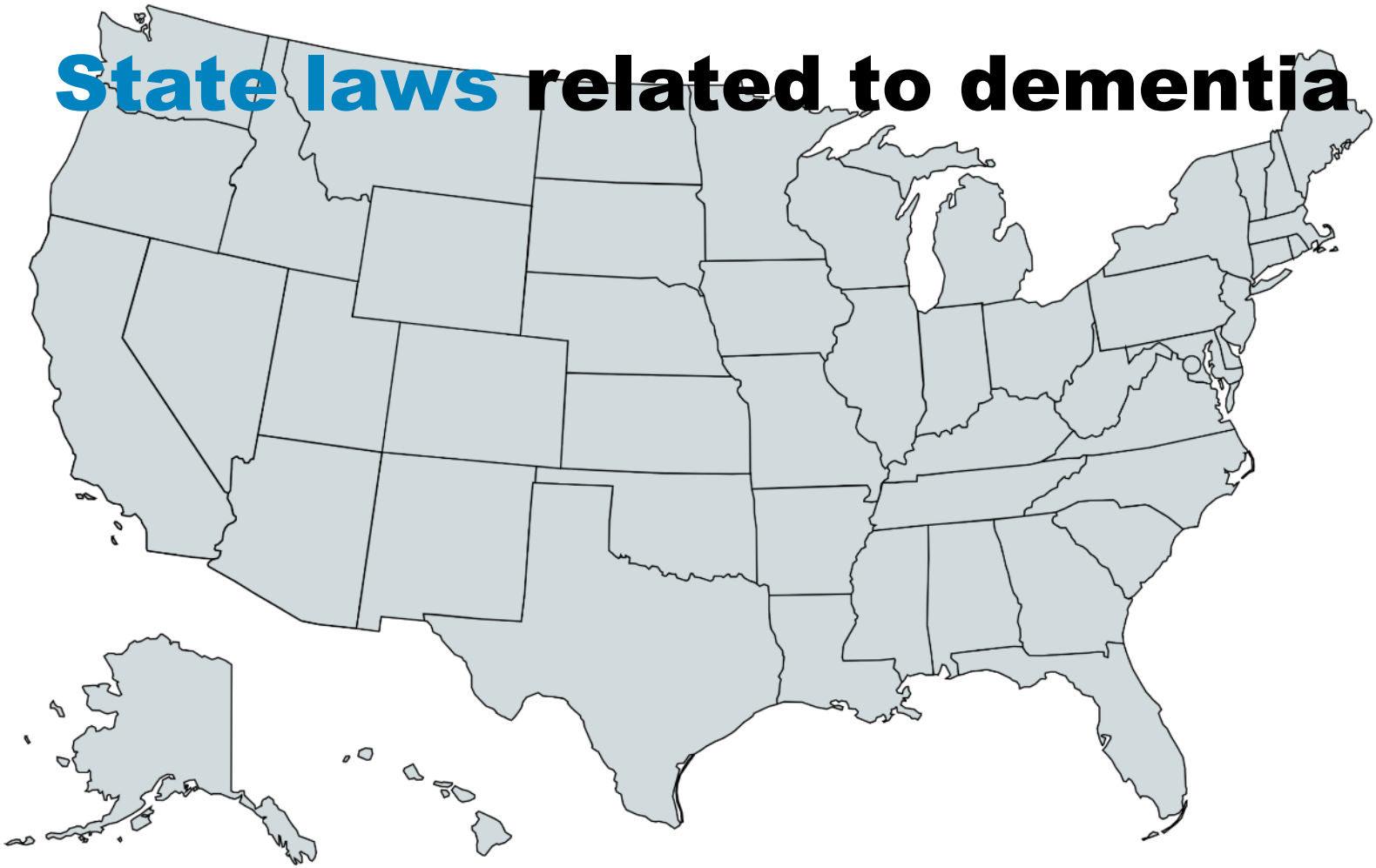
Relevant laws and practical considerations

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC
VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

No current federal or state law prohibits healthcare providers from discussing firearm safety with patients

State laws related to dementia



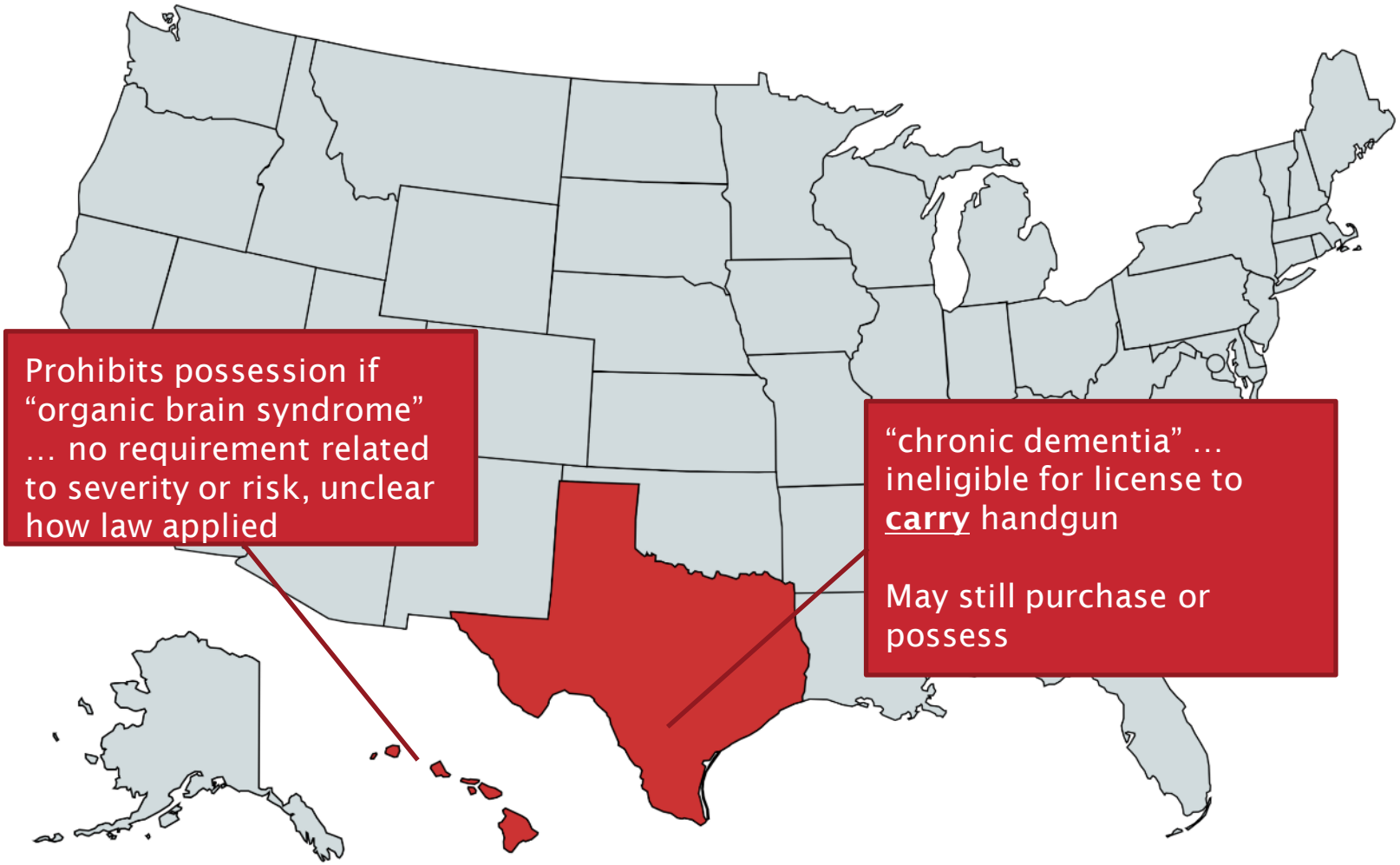
Created with mapchart.net ©

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC

VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

State laws related to dementia & firearms



H.R.S. § 134-7(c)
H.R.S. § 134-2(c)
Texas Gov't Code § 411.172(e)(5)(C)
Texas Gov't Code § 411.172

Betz ME et al. Firearms and Dementia: Clinical Considerations. *Ann Intern Med*. 2018;169(1):47-49. doi:10.7326/M18-0140

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

Decision-making about firearm access

Perhaps similar to decisions about “driving retirement”?

- Strong emotions
- Fear of confiscation
- Independence
- Autonomy
- Identity
- Time to prepare
- Logistical concerns
- Physical/cognitive ability
- Safety

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC
VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

Methods & Results

Qualitative research with stakeholders

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC

VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

Design

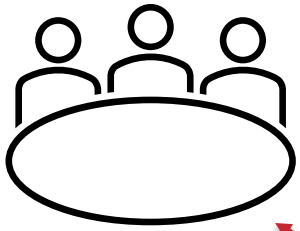
- Focus groups and 1:1 interviews
- Key stakeholder groups
  - Adults 65+ years who drive and own ≥1 firearm
  - Family members
  - Healthcare or aging service providers
  - Firearm community representatives
- Recruited nationally
- Compensated $50
- November 2020 to May 2021

Procedures

- Focus Groups (60-120m) and interviews (30-60m) via Zoom
- Groups separated by gender, and by family/older adult status
- Used semi-structured interview guides:
  - Role of firearms in older adults' lives
  - Circumstances where it might be necessary to no longer use or have access to firearms
  - The process of planning for those circumstances or changes
  - Sessions explored the concept of "firearm retirement" in comparison with "driving retirement"
- Audio-recorded/transcribed discussions
- Structured debriefs using standardized guide

Analysis

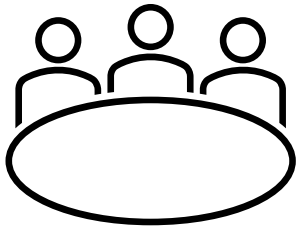
- Team met weekly to discuss coding
- Deductive/inductive content analysis to identify key themes within and across groups
- Because this study sought to explore the concept of “firearm retirement” in relation to “driving retirement,” we organized findings by similarities and differences between these domains



60 Older adults

16 Providers

104 Total Participants



21 Family members

7 Firearm stakeholders

image: Flaticon.com

Demographics (n=104)

Characteristic	%
Female	48%
Race	
White	88%
Asian	8%
African American	4%
AI/AN	0%
Hispanic	0%
Veteran	26%

Similarities

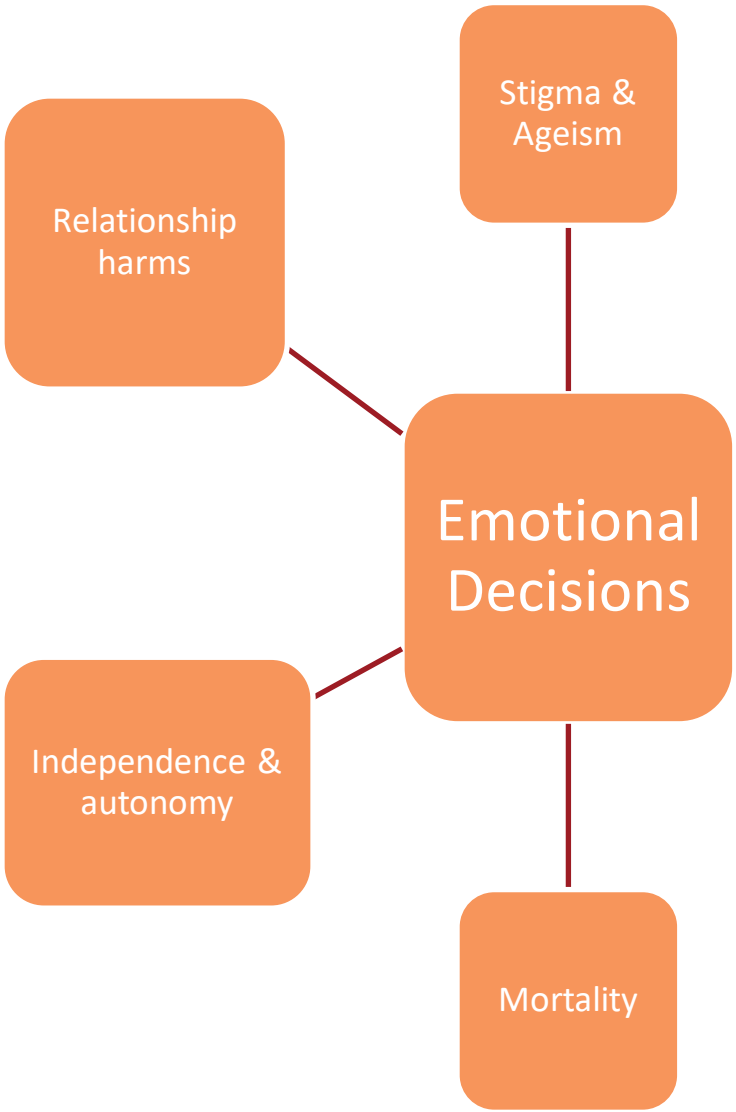
Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

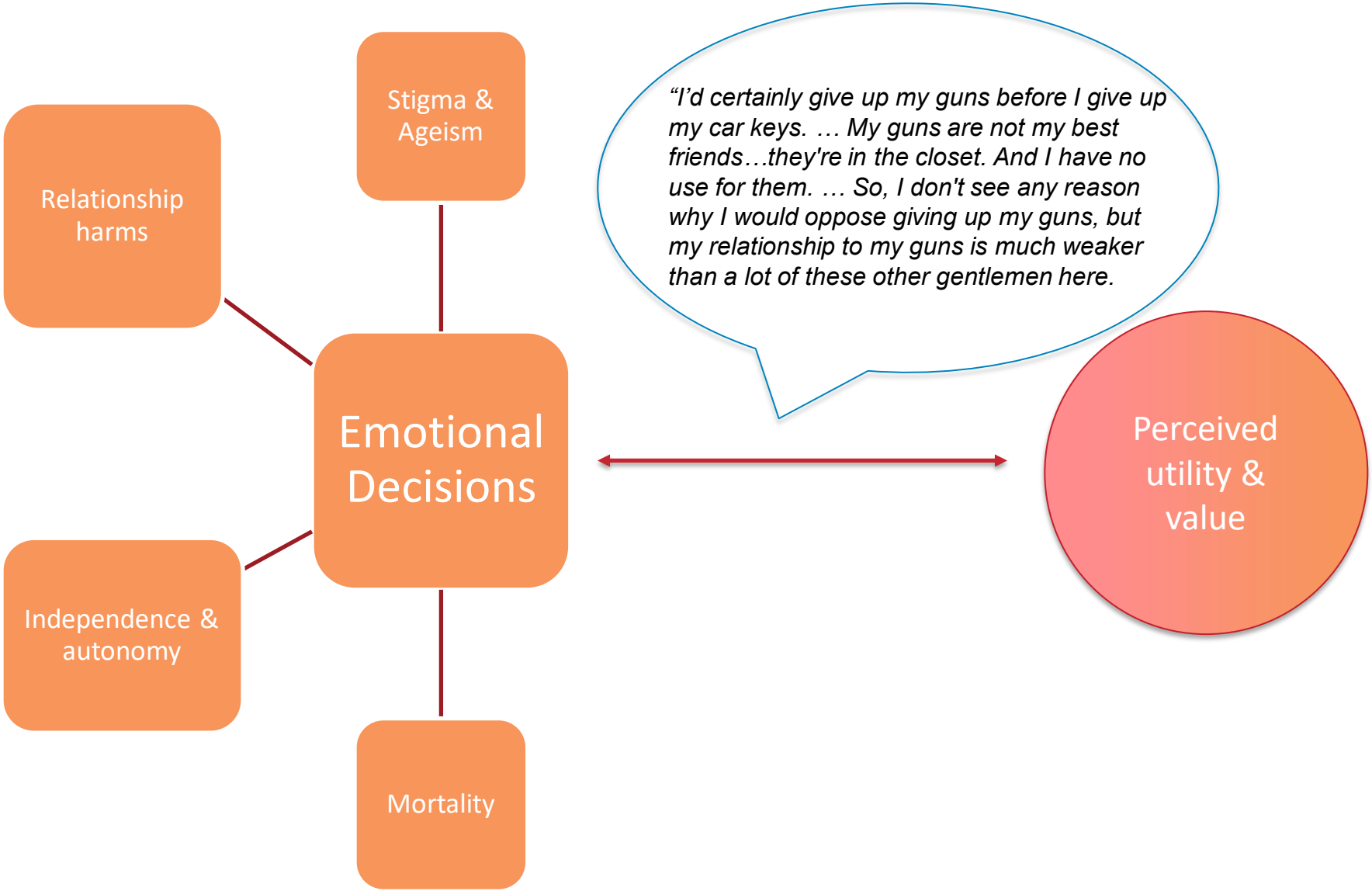
GRECC
VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

Safety

- General agreement that firearm access and driving were safety issues in the setting of certain impairments
- Many participants linked both activities, suggesting an inability to do one implies an inability to do the other…

"The ability to shoot a firearm and the ability to drive a car, I generally make that comparison all the time whenever I teach a concealed carry class…'Hey, if you're not able to drive you shouldn't be able to have a firearm with you.'" – firearm instructor


Stigma & Ageism
Relationship harms
Emotional Decisions
Independence & autonomy
Mortality



Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC
VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

Changing needs & preferences

- Both cars and firearms were noted to have practical, historical, sentimental, symbolic, and monetary value; but that value changes over time…

Changing needs & preferences

- Both cars and firearms were noted to have practical, historical, sentimental, symbolic, and monetary value; but that value changes over time…

"When you're a young kid, you want a fast convertible, red to race around, pick up chicks. As you get older and you get married, you go with a station wagon or you go with a van. And as you get older, you probably end up with a van that carries a wheelchair. It's a progression of life and it's the same thing with firearms. … I don't want to carry around a big heavy gun and walk through the woods. I'm over that. Little bit of target practice now and then with the 22LR with my grandchildren, and that's about it."

Other similarities

- Prior experiences matter
- These are challenging issues for family members…
  - Guilt, knowledge, tension and conflict
- Tension between maintaining autonomy and reliance on others
  - An older man shared: *"It's going to be difficult for me to give up driving, just as well as it's going to be difficult for me to give up firearms. But there comes a time and I think inside you know it. You may not want to admit it..."* That same man, continued, pointing out his reliance on his family to step in: "*I'm sure that like driving, when the time comes, my children will say, 'Give it up.'"*

Differences

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC
VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

Loss of driving has greater impact on independence

"Giving up the car keys creates dependence on other people to get out of the house to go anywhere. Giving up the guns, for each person, it's some kind of a loss, I suppose. Not for me. But it doesn't create a dependence."

Fewer alternatives to firearms

- Safety paramount
- Safety & firearms is a complex issue
- Aging increases perceived vulnerability
- Firearms useful in “leveling the playing field”

“[Not] driving is just more of an inconvenience, but not owning a firearm could be a matter of life or death in some situations. You never know what will happen.”

Safety and aging

- *"And then, a weapon because I'm out in the middle of nowhere, a weapon for protection, and that's about the limit of my firearms at this point."*

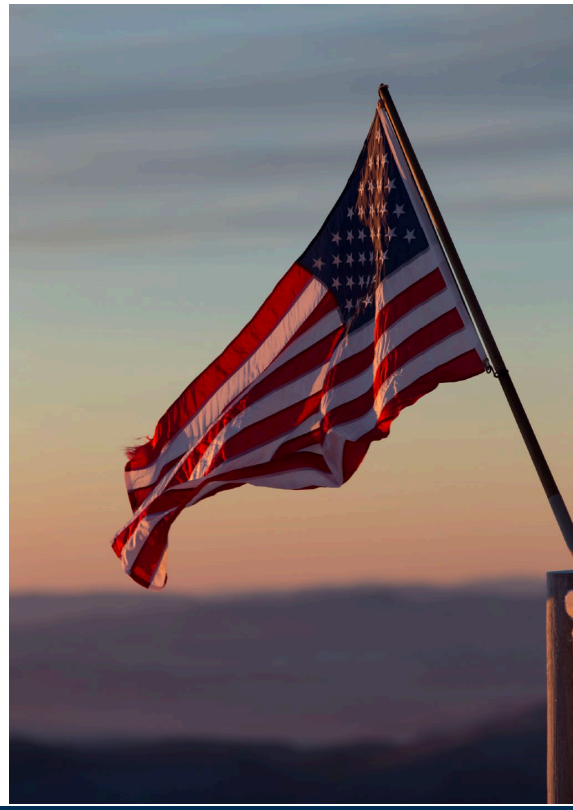
- *Another said: "… And if you're living in a secure area, and you don't need your handguns Once I move into a senior living place, I won't have a need for any firearms anymore."*

Other differences

- More legal and logistical concerns regarding firearm transfers
- More pathways, policies, and resources already dedicated to driving than to firearms
- Political significance
  - *"The biggest difference between cars and firearms is that driving a car is a privilege and owning a firearm is a Constitutional right. That's where the line gets drawn because you can still own a firearm even if you don't have the ability to pick it up and shoot it correctly any longer or handle it safely. It doesn't mean you can't own it."*

Veterans

- Largely similar findings
- Clear influence of military/combat experiences
- Messaging might need to consider service history
- More clearly related to suicide prevention
- VA providers referenced existing firearm efforts in VA as a platform for these discussions



Guidance

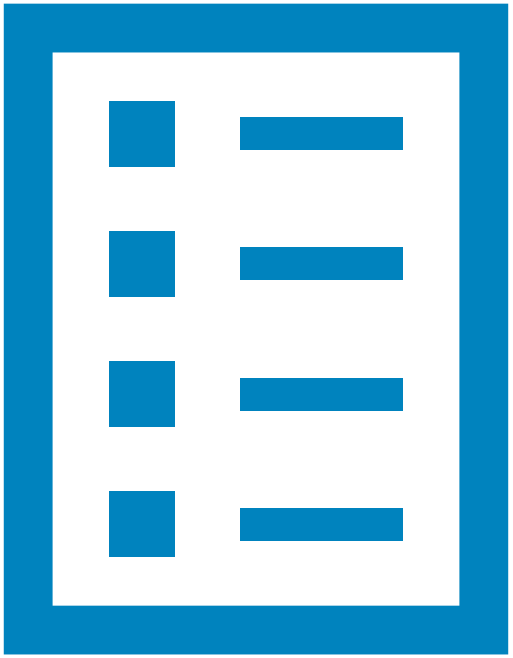
- Firearm retirement is **not** the term we should use
- Don't link this process to age
- Reframe the process from 'giving up' to 'passing on'
- Embedding conversations in other types of life planning
- Gradual release of responsibility rather than 'cold turkey'

Limitations

- Biases such as social desirability and sampling-related
- Large geographically diverse sample, but majority were White, non-Hispanic
- Procedures conducted virtually
- Study was exploratory in nature

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC
VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center



Firearm Life Plan

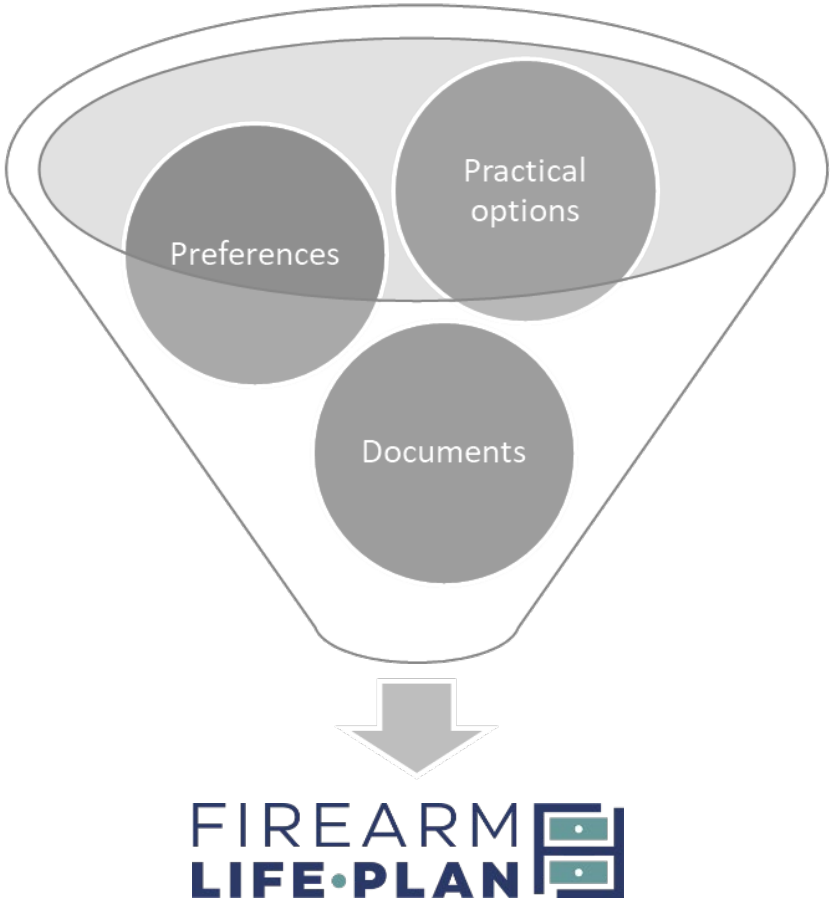
A new resource for the public

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

GRECC

VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

BACKGROUND ON THE FIREARM LIFEPLAN SITE AND PROJECT



Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

Working Draft, Information Only, Decision Making-No Funding Impact

GRECC
VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

FIREARM LIFE·PLAN

https://firearmlifeplan.org

FIREARM LIFE·PLAN

HOME ABOUT FIREARM LIFE PLAN RESOURCES

FIREARM RESPONSIBILITY AND PLANNING:

Creating a Firearm Life Plan

Download Full Toolkit

CREATE A FIREARM LIFE PLAN

Stay educated, stay responsible, stay protected. Learn about an easy-to-use toolkit to facilitate conversations about firearms, aging, and planning for the future together.

free – anonymous – simple steps

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

Working Draft, Infromation only, Decision Making-No Funding Impact

GRECC

VA U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

FIREARM LIFE·PLAN

https://firearmlifeplan.org

WORKSHEET: FIREARM INVENTORY

This document helps you and others know what you want to happen with your firearms and who you trust to enact your Firearm Life Plan. You fill out a paper version and share it only with those you want to. Update it whenever you want.

Download Now (PDF)

WORKSHEET: LEGACY MAP

This document gives you a place to document the memories and meanings attached to your firearms. Like the inventory, you share it with only those you want.

Download Now (PDF)

CONVERSATION STARTERS

These conversations can be hard. Learn how to start talking about creating a Firearm Life Plan with some conversation starters, whether you're the firearm owner or a family member.

Download Now (PDF)

WARNING SIGNS AND ASSESSMENTS

Knowing some potential warning signs can help you and those around you ensure safety. This section also covers when to consider having an experienced firearm user assess your skills.

Download Now (PDF)

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

Working Draft, Infromation only, Decision Making-No Funding Impact

GRECC
VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

FIREARM LIFE·PLAN

Firearm Inventory

WORKSHEET: FIREARM INVENTORY

This document helps you and others know what you want to happen with your firearms and who you trust to enact your Firearm Life Plan. You fill out a paper version and share it only with those you want to. Update it whenever you want.

A	B	C	D	E
Firearm Details	**Where is it?**	**Where it will go? And who gets it?**	**When?**	**Notes**
Example: Smith & Wesson 629, Good Condition, 123ABC456	Gun safe in my house Code: 21-56-96	WHERE: Gift to my son WHO: Pass down to son	Move into safety deposit box whenever my son tells me it's better off there (like if I develop dementia or physical disabilities)	This was given to me by my father, has sentimental value
Example: 2010 Ruger 10/22 rifle, good condition, 567EFG890	Gun safe in my house Code: 21-56-96	WHERE: Donate/gift to local youth firearm organization WHO: County Youth Shooting Sports	When I move into a retirement home	Good beginner's rifle, can help teach grandkids how to shoot
Example: Ear protection	Storage shed on my property Code: None	WHERE: Donate/gift to local youth firearm organization WHO: Douglas County Youth Shooting Sports	When I move into a retirement home, at end of 2021	Good pair of earmuffs, still functional
Example: Cobra Arms Freedom .38, poor condition, 567CAF890	Lockbox in bedroom closet Code: 0328	WHERE: Destroy it at local police department WHO: Douglas County Sheriff's Department	When I die or move to assisted living	Firearm was damaged. Was sold to me for cheap and should not be given or sold to anyone else.
Example: 1949 M1 Carbine, excellent condition	Gun safe in my house Key location: xxxx	WHERE: Transfer to traveling Korean War Exhibit WHO: Jeff Jackson, 719-555-5555	As soon as possible	Excellent condition and was willed to me by my uncle who served in Korea. Mr. Jackson manages a traveling Korean War exhibit and has expressed interest in the firearm in the past.

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

Working Draft, Infromation only, Decision Making-No Funding Impact

GRECC
VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

FIREARM LIFE·PLAN

Legacy Map

WORKSHEET: LEGACY MAP

This document gives you a place to document the memories and meanings attached to your firearms. Like the inventory, you share it with only those you want.

FIREARM LIFE·PLAN

LEGACY MAP

Firearms can have personal, familial, historical, financial, and sentimental value for some people, while for others they are mainly a tool for specific purposes. Part of your Firearm Life Plan means thinking about what firearms mean to you—what legacy you want to leave, and what you want your loved ones to know.

This worksheet helps you record memories, meanings, and messages about your firearms. Take your time, and then share it with those you care about. Use it as a way of expressing your legacy, lineage, or history with certain firearms. Invite others to share their thoughts, especially if you have memories with them. These questions are just examples to get you started.

- **Think about the firearms you own. Do you have memories or stories about any of them? What do you want others to know about them?**
- **Think about how you learned to shoot and handle a firearm safely. Who first taught you? Are there other firearm instructors or training that was important to you?**
- **How have firearms been important to you in your life? What did you use them for? Do you have any memorable experiences you want to share?**

- Next steps:
  - Engagement with / support from organizations
  - Dissemination
  - Examination of acceptability & effectiveness
    - Personal use? Group settings?

Department of Emergency Medicine
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS
marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

Working Draft,
Information only.

GRECC
VA
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center

marian.betz@cuanschutz.edu

joseph.simonetti@cuanschutz.edu