

## Statement on Gun Violence and Mass Shootings to Ensure the Safety of People with Disabilities

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) is concerned about the increased incidence of mass shootings and gun violence in the past few years, and we are grateful for the bipartisan efforts to address it. We recognize this issue is a complex balancing act of personal freedom and collective safety in the United States. However, we must also acknowledge that among developed economies, the United States has the highest level of gun violence,<sup>1</sup> gun shots are the leading cause of death for children,<sup>2</sup> and many of these deaths occur at home or in other homes and not in schools or mass shootings.

AUCD is concerned with the impact of this violence on all people, and particularly people with disabilities who are members of vulnerable population groups. AUCD recognizes the unique role our network plays in educating our members and the public about the impact of gun violence on people with disabilities. As a national network, as well as individual centers and programs in states and local communities, we must address gun violence and educate others on the impact it has on people with disabilities.

Gun violence disproportionately impacts people with disabilities as victims. At the same time, stigma surrounding disability/mental health linked to gun violence continues to exist. People with disabilities are much more likely to be the victims of gun violence than the perpetrators.<sup>3</sup> Survivors of mass shootings and gun violence are often left with lifelong disabilities, including physical, cognitive, and mental health conditions. Violent experiences, such as mass shootings, have a traumatic impact on the individuals involved, and can increase the effects of previously experienced traumas, such as abuse, neglect, and isolation. Even the repeated exposure to reporting on mass shootings and gun violence can trigger trauma in individuals. Consequently, victims of gun violence, including people with disabilities, must have access to high quality, accessible, affordable, long-term healthcare and mental health services for their injuries and trauma.

People with disabilities from racial and ethnic groups other than non-Hispanic White experience a disproportionate burden of the impact of gun violence. People with disabilities from these racial and ethnic groups have increased vulnerability because of intersectionality - historical and current day discrimination and marginalization based on their multiple identities.<sup>4</sup> Because of these realities, care must be taken to protect the lives of people of color with disabilities where the risk and consequences of gun violence are greater due to discrimination, misidentification, and inadequate care, supports and services.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.healthdata.org/acting-data/gun-violence-united-states-outlier>; <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2022-us-gun-violence-world-comparison/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2201761>; <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/22/1094364930/firearms-leading-cause-of-death-in-children>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1389236/>;

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4211925/pdf/main.pdf>; See also this compilation of research from the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, <https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/briefs/gunviolence/#r+5406+1+3>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Daniel-Semenza/publication/358117219\\_Urban\\_housing\\_affordability\\_economic\\_disadvantage\\_and\\_racial\\_disparities\\_in\\_gun\\_violence\\_A\\_neighbourhood\\_analysis\\_in\\_four\\_US\\_cities/links/61f0bf9e5779d35951d48145/Urban-housing-affordability-economic-disadvantage-and-racial-disparities-in-gun-violence-A-neighbourhood-analysis-in-four-US-cities.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Daniel-Semenza/publication/358117219_Urban_housing_affordability_economic_disadvantage_and_racial_disparities_in_gun_violence_A_neighbourhood_analysis_in_four_US_cities/links/61f0bf9e5779d35951d48145/Urban-housing-affordability-economic-disadvantage-and-racial-disparities-in-gun-violence-A-neighbourhood-analysis-in-four-US-cities.pdf)

In addition, people with disabilities are often more vulnerable during mass shooting events due to physical and societal barriers that they experience.<sup>5</sup> Emergency and evacuation plans and practices for schools, businesses and communities must fully include and account for the needs of people with disabilities in a mass shooting or other events marked by gun violence. People with disabilities need to be fully included and accounted for in drills to test and implement those plans.

As the AUCD, we recommend the following steps to address these issues:

- Provide early detection and intervention services to meet the need for mental health supports and services due to exposure to adverse and/or traumatic events.
- Provide active education on gun safety for people with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, and their families/caregivers.
- Educate and prepare individuals with disabilities about how to keep themselves safe and get the care that they need should they find themselves a victim of a mass shooting or other act of gun violence.
- Meet with our trainees, which include future educators, special educators, and related service professionals, to discuss best practices on how to respond if gun violence occurs in schools or in the community and strategies to support students and adults with disabilities following gun violence.
- Provide education about the importance of trauma-informed care for survivors of gun violence with clinicians and other health professionals.
- Collaborate with emergency planning and management, EMS, and schools to develop and implement accessible mass shooting and gun violence response plans.
- Enhance education for local, state, and federal policymakers about the unique impact that gun violence has on people with disabilities and collaborate with survivors, family members, community leaders and interdisciplinary teams on how to best address this issue.

*AUCD is the national nonprofit membership association of 143 University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and other Disabilities (LEND) Programs and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Centers (IDDRC) located in every state and U.S. territory. AUCD members conduct research, create innovative programs, provide training, and disseminate information about best practices in the service delivery systems that support people with disabilities. The AUCD network serves as a bridge between the universities and communities, bringing together the resources of both to build capacity and create systems change. AUCD provides leadership in areas that affect the lives of people with disabilities and their families.*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2212420919305643?via%3Dihub>