



2024

SAFER COMMUNITIES
MONTANA

LETHAL MEANS TOOLKIT

Last Updated:
November 2024



Table of CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
	iv Foreword by Ed Beall
	v A Toolkit for Montanans
	ix Why Create a Lethal Means Campaign?
	xii Introduction and Overview of SCM
01	1 <u>Establishing Need for your Community</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Let Data Be Your Guide• Where to Look for Death Data• Obstacles• Other Areas to Look
02	4 <u>Creating Your Committee</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key Stakeholders• Logistics• Training Your Committee
03	6 <u>Finding Your Champions</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who Are They?• What Do They Do?• National Shooting Sports Foundation• Where to Look• Champion Examples
04	13 <u>Public Messaging and Communication</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kinds of Media• Safe Messaging and Language• Working with the Media



Table of CONTENTS

Chapter	Page	
05	19	<u>Approaching Firearm Dealers, Pawn Shops, and Gun Ranges</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop an Elevator Speech• Identify Your Asks• Friendly Faces First• Educate Yourself• Other Outreach Tips
06	24	<u>Safe Storage</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What Constitutes Safe Storage?• Safe Storage Tips• Other Forms of Storage• What Qualifies as a Safety Device?• Establishing a Gunlock Program• How Do I Get Gunlocks for My Community?• Funding• Types of Storage Devices• Gunlocks and Materials to Include• Establishing MOU Partnerships• Evaluation• Additional Resources
07	33	<u>Community Outreach</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tabling at Events• Educate Your Volunteers• Make Your Table Inviting• More Tips for Effective Outreach• Prepare for Differing Perspectives• Work with Your Partners• Gun Shows



Table of CONTENTS

Chapter 08

Page

39 **SCM Next Steps**

- Safe Storage Mapping
- Working with VSOs
- 988/211 Mapping
- Legislation
- Case Studies

40 **Glossary**

47 **Appendices**

- [Firearm Champion Job Description](#)
- [Framework Overview for Successful Messaging](#)
- [Firearm Hold Agreements](#)
- [Gun Shop Project FAQ](#)
- [Sample Social Media Posts](#)

57 **Citations and References**



FOREWORD

Hello, this is **Ed Beall**, partner at Capital Sports in Helena. Our company has been in business for 53 years and I have been here for 38 of those. During this time we have always offered gun cabinets, safes and various gunlocks.

I became involved in SCM initially through a call from Dr. Gary Mihelish. He asked if I would consider being part of a group of people interested in suicide prevention. I had previously had contact with Keith Meyer with Shodair Childrens Hospital with a request to provide gunlocks. This, coupled with my experience in business as a firearms dealer, offering safes and storage devices and personal experiences of mental health crises with friends led me to participate.

I have had five situations where friends faced the tragedy of suicide within their families or times where a friend was in a personal crisis that led to the need to offer to hold their firearms for a time. Being in touch with friends or acquaintances in a time of need and being aware of their situation can lead to preventing suicide.

I believe that being aware of how our friends, families and acquaintances are doing is important! Then knowing how to approach them with help is key to preventing suicide. I realize that even then, suicide does happen. About 60% of all firearm-related deaths in our country are by suicide.



Safely storing firearms and ammunition is a first step in preventing a suicide, accident or at the very least a theft. Then, knowing how you can help by asking the right question, "would you like me to hold your firearms for you?" is something that we can do to help. Knowing firearms, how powerful they are and the need to store them safely is why I am a part of this effort.

I encourage you to think about securing your firearms these days to prevent theft, an accident or a tragedy. None of us want to have a firearm stolen from us and used in a crime or other tragic event. And we certainly want to keep our kids, grandkids, loved ones and others safe. Please consider safely and securely storing your firearms today.



A TOOLKIT FOR MONTANANS

There are a number of nationally available toolkits on firearm safe storage and how to prevent firearm-involved suicide. However, this toolkit is specifically designed to serve as a guide for Montana groups by incorporating the cultural trends and traditions found in our beloved Treasure State. We intend this guide for suicide prevention coalitions and working groups, public health departments, and small organizations that wish to implement a grassroots lethal means effort that employs the firearm community's expertise, buy-in, and spaces.

The goal of this document is to provide straightforward strategies, messaging, potential partners, possible locations for intervention, and customizable materials Montana teams can easily adopt and implement to create a local lethal means campaign with the help of local stakeholders and resources.

Safer Communities Montana's (SCM) efforts center on suicides by intentional overdose, as well as by firearm. However, for the sake of keeping this toolkit short and easy to use, we will focus solely on firearms for this version.

As SCM implements strategies on lethal means in Lewis and Clark County, MT, where the working group and lethal means campaign are based, more information will be added to an online version of this toolkit. Please make sure to visit www.safercommunitiesmt.org for updates and access to templates.

Benefits of the Safer Communities Montana Toolkit

1. Montana-based
2. Prioritizes collaboration with the firearm community
3. Emphasizes safe storage at the personal and community level
4. Free, shareable, and customizable materials
5. Tips and tricks
6. Direction to resources to start your own campaign



Photo source: Great Falls Tribune



A TOOLKIT FOR MONTANANS

MONTANA CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

As fellow Montanans, it will likely come as no surprise to you that firearms are a valued part of the tapestry that makes up our home state.

Montana is first in the nation for firearm ownership and third for firearm-related jobs in the nation (1).

Hunting holds strong as a way of life and Montanans are proud of their hunting heritage and traditions (2). Hunter's Safety classes are regularly promoted to families of youth and volunteers regularly teach these courses due to their love of hunting and passion for the future of the sport (3).

Firearms are common among members of the military, farmers, ranchers, and law enforcement. It is estimated that the average Montanan owns 5-7 firearms and uses them for a variety of purposes. This includes home protection and self-defense, sport shooting/recreation, pest control, and as collectors' items/family heirlooms.

Considering the many roles firearms play in the lives of Montanans, it is not unusual for enthusiasts and firearm owners to shy away from proposed restrictions that might impact our way of life.

SUICIDE AND FIREARMS

The bad news is that Montana suffers from a prolonged dilemma with suicide, and easy access to firearms by people in crisis plays a role. Montana has the second-highest gun-related suicide rate and for the last four decades, the Treasure State has ranked among the top five states for highest suicide rate in the nation (4). One contributing factor is the lethal means used in those deaths. Approximately 51% of all U.S. suicides are completed with a firearm. In Montana, 63% of suicides involved a self-inflicted gunshot wound as the primary cause of death.

The issue gets more attention in the following pages, but simply put, firearms are quick, lethal and don't provide time for reconsideration. Nearly all other methods are significantly less lethal.

LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS

Historically, many firearm-related bills in Montana have been rejected as "gun grabbing" or an infringement on Second Amendment rights. These proposed laws have garnered significant push back from legislators, and organizations like the Montana Sports Shooting Association.



A TOOLKIT FOR MONTANANS

For example, Montana legislators quickly tabled efforts to pass an Extreme Risk Protection Order law in the 2019 and 2023 Legislatures after proponents introduced these bills to the House Judiciary Committee. Also known as an ERPO or “Red Flag” laws, these allow a family member or law enforcement to seek an order for temporary confiscation of a firearm if the owner is deemed to be a risk to themselves or others. These laws are present in 19 states and Washington DC.

States with ERPO laws include California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington. Unfortunately, our state’s gun-related suicide rate is 4 – 8 times higher than those with enhanced firearm safety laws (5). Regardless, ERPO laws have yet to move out of a Montana legislative committee.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

A recent legislative success did occur in 2023 through a bipartisan effort led by State Senate President Pro Tempore Kenneth Bogner–R and Sen. Mary Ann Dunwell–D. This resulted in the passing of Montana Senate Bill 423, “An Act Generally Revising Liability Related to Firearm Hold Agreements; Limiting Liability for an individual or private entity that returns a firearm to the owner at the end of a firearm hold agreement.”

Now referred to as the Good Samaritan Firearm Liability Protection Law, it states that “No cause of action may arise against an individual or a private entity for returning a firearm to its owner at the termination of a firearm hold agreement.” Essentially, if someone is worried about a friend and temporarily holds that person’s firearms through a written or verbal agreement and then gives it back based on their best judgement, they will not be liable if the person then takes their life.

The good Samaritan is trying to help and should not be penalized for doing so.



Sen. Kenneth Bogner–R testifies on behalf of SB 432 at the Senate Judiciary Committee on Feb 24, 2023
Source: MPAN



A TOOLKIT FOR MONTANANS

“I HAD FELLOW MARINES I SERVED WITH CONTINUE TO TURN TO SUICIDE... ONCE I LEARNED THAT TWO-THIRDS OF SUICIDES INVOLVE A FIREARM, I WANTED TO WORK ON A BILL THAT WOULD HELP PREVENT FIREARM SUICIDES WHILE STILL PROTECTING 2ND AMENDMENT RIGHTS.”

– SEN. KEN BOGNER

Sen. Bogner, a United States Marine Corps Veteran, said he sponsored the bill because he wanted to prevent suicides by addressing how many struggling Montanans take their lives. Nearly half of all Veterans own a firearm. (SAMHSA handout)

Advocates who testified for the bill included members of SCM, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the American Legion, unaffiliated Veterans, the president of a members-only shooting range, the owner of a sporting goods store, the Montana Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), and Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. The bipartisan bill passed nearly unanimously and became a law on Oct. 1, 2023.

In addition to removing liability if someone temporarily looks after a buddy's firearms, it also aims at empowering community members, Veteran service organizations, and other individuals and entities to provide this life-saving service to their friends, neighbors, and those they serve.

MERGING SUICIDE PREVENTION, MONTANA TRADITIONS, AND OUR FIREARM HERITAGE

The collaborative spirit behind the passing of SB 423 speaks to how a united, nonpartisan effort can work to help keep people at-risk safe while protecting Montana's firearm heritage and traditions. It also leverages what people can do to help each other – something Montanans are known to do.

The goal of protecting those in crisis need not compete with firearm culture. Instead, it can thrive within it. This cooperative approach is woven throughout this document and SCM's work as these partnerships gives our lethal means strategies traction and better buy-in.

We hope that as you read through this toolkit you will come up with additional ideas and ways to befriend and work beside the firearm community. Through partnership, compromise and common ground, we can find solutions together.



WHY CREATE A LETHAL MEANS CAMPAIGN?

WHY CREATE A LETHAL MEANS CAMPAIGN IN YOUR MONTANA COMMUNITY?

As we have learned through experience and numerous studies, suicidal intent isn't the only component that determines whether someone dies. The tool they use, and its level of lethality, plays a key role. If someone uses a firearm to make an attempt, it is likely to be fatal, while other means are less lethal and leave time for reconsideration.

According to the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), 63% of all Montana suicides involve a firearm and 86% of Montana's firearm-related deaths are suicides. Nearly 80% of youth suicides involve a firearm belonging to a family member and 19% used their own firearm (6).

“[FIREARMS] ARE MORE LETHAL THAN OTHER SUICIDE MEANS. THEY'RE QUICK. AND THEY'RE IRREVERSIBLE. ... ONCE THE TRIGGER IS PULLED, THERE'S NO TURNING BACK.”
– KARL ROSSTON, SUICIDE PREVENTION COORDINATOR, MONTANA DPHHS

WHO WE ARE LOSING

Based on 2021 data, Montana carries the second highest suicide rate in the U.S. According to the National Vital Statistics report, the state's suicide rate is 31.7 people per 100,000. The national rate is 14.9 per 100,000.

One contributing factor to this high rate is the state's large population of Veterans, American Indians and middle-aged white males.

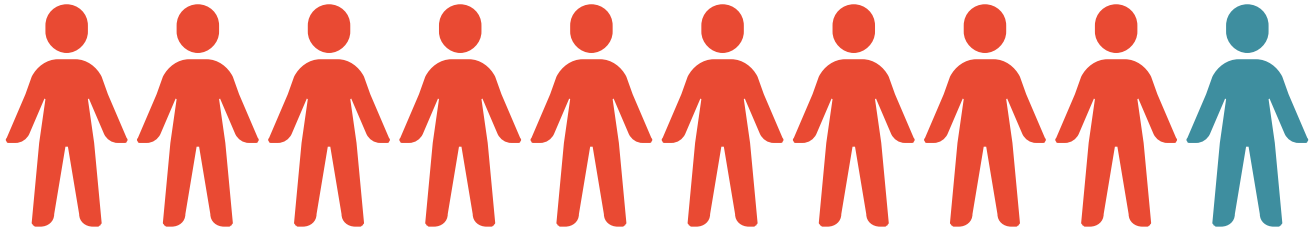
According to the Montana Violent Death Reporting System's 2019 – 2020 Summary, people aged 25–44 had a much higher rate of suicide than other age groups.⁷ American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) had a significantly higher suicide rate than white people (51.5 vs 29.6 per 100,000). Suicides occurred more frequently in rural counties (38%) followed by small metro (32%) then micropolitan (30%) (7).

Also, the suicide rate among males was three times higher than that of females (47.6 vs 14.7 per 100,000). Part of the reason behind this wide divide is the type of lethal means use.



WHY CREATE A LETHAL MEANS CAMPAIGN?

FIREARM INJURIES: 85-90% LETHAL



ALL OTHER METHODS: 5% LETHAL



Source: VA & CDC WISQARS: Deaths from death certificate data: nonfatal incidents estimated from national sample of hospital emergency departments.

LETHAL MEANS RESTRICTION WORKS

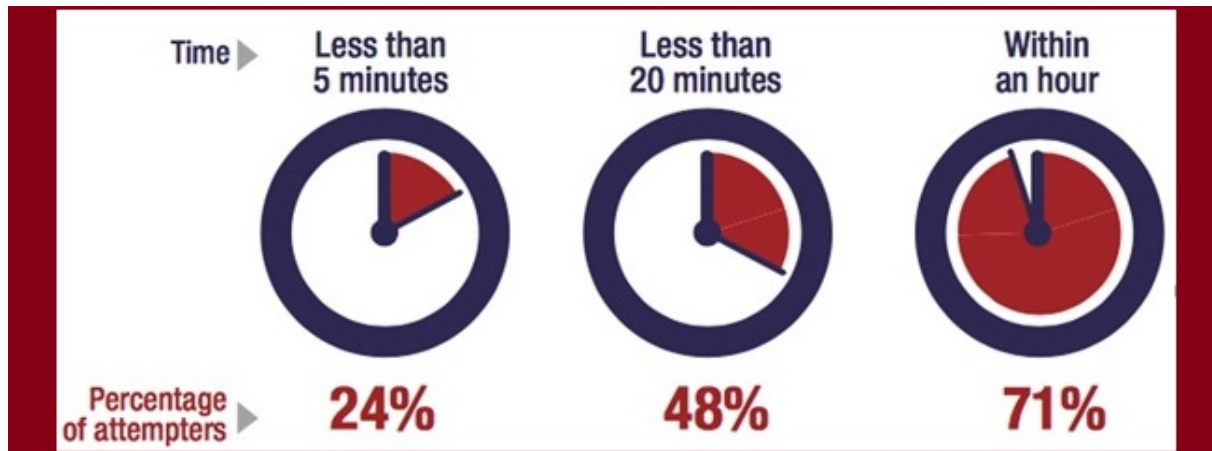
One of the few proven population-level strategies to reduce suicide is known as lethal means restriction. This refers to creating time and distance between an individual and a preferred method of self-attack. This is a primary focus of SCM's work and one of the goals of the aforementioned Good Samaritan Firearm Liability Protection Law. While lethal means restriction is hardly a cure-all for such a complex public health issue, research repeatedly shows that if someone experiencing a suicidal crisis doesn't have access to their preferred method – medication, bridges, firearms or other lethal means – or they turn to something less lethal (8), their crisis is likely to pass without a fatality (9).

Alternative methods tend to take longer to take effect. This leaves room for re-evaluation, rescue and time for the crisis to pass (10). The hopeful element here is 85 – 95% of those who survive a suicide attempt typically do not go on to die by suicide later. However, if the method they've chosen is a firearm or something similarly quick and effective, the likelihood of surviving that first attempt plummets (11).

A firearm leaves no room for a second chance (12).



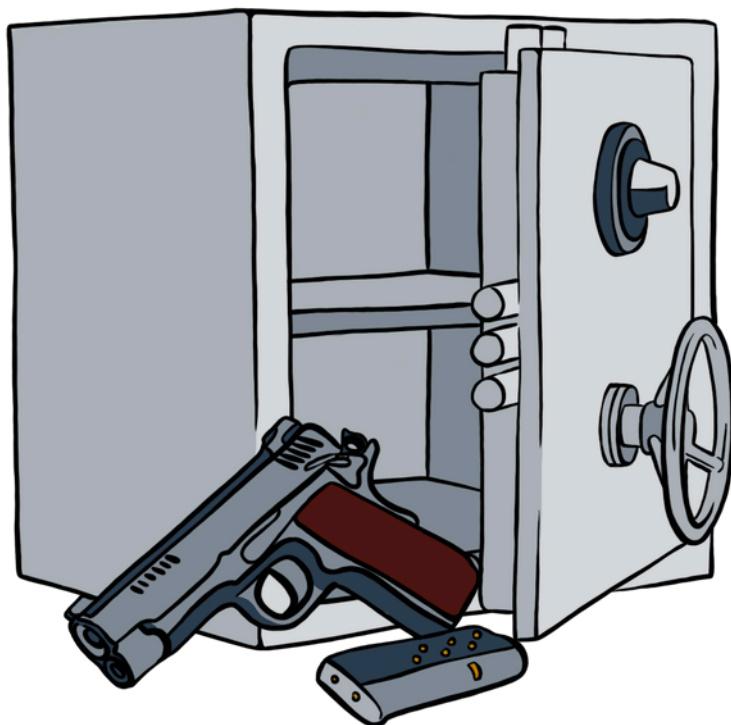
WHY CREATE A LETHAL MEANS CAMPAIGN?



Source: VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

While someone with suicidal ideation considers suicide prior to trying to take their life, most attempts occur within 5 minutes to an hour of the decision to do so, with 48% survivors reporting they attempted within the first 10 minutes. Further, people experiencing suicidality tend to pick means that are readily available and that they are comfortable with, which makes reducing access critical (13).

The goal here is not to demonize firearms, but to simply demonstrate that they impact Montana's high rate of suicide, due to their lethality, accessibility, and speed. With these facts in mind, it makes sense to find ways to create time and distance between highly lethal methods and the person-at risk to increase their likelihood of survival.



INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF SCM



A key thing to know about SCM is that it started as a “Montana-ized” hybrid of similar Gun Shop Projects that work closely with the firearm community to prevent suicide. All materials created, and every effort implemented comes from the influence of programs that came before SCM and the guidance of local firearm champions. These materials were then distributed to pawn shops, firearm dealers and gun ranges throughout the county. SCM also began running ads on radio, television, and in bathroom stalls to draw attention to the topic and how to respond.

The campaign has since grown to include other elements, but SCM adheres to its original mission of empowering firearm businesses to slow down sales and rentals when they are concerned that a client may be at risk of suicide, to provide gunlocks and drug deactivation systems to the public, and to give community members the education and information they need to save lives themselves.

That last point includes normalizing the practice of generally locking up firearms and medication when not in use, keeping ammunition locked and separate from guns, and, if someone is struggling, asking if a friend or family member outside of the home can hold on to these items until the person feels better.

We strive to create a community that is more aware, educated, and understanding of how to protect an at-risk customer, patient, or loved one from accessing means to attempt suicide.

SCM’s Firearm Program Elements Include:

- Tip sheets for firearm-related businesses and organizations on how to help customers
- Gunlock and Detera drug deactivation system distribution
- Public-facing materials and multi-media campaigns to normalize safe storage methods
- Partnerships with schools, pharmacies, and medical centers to distribute safe storage tools
- Community outreach
- This toolkit and input for bipartisan legislative strategies



INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF SCM

BACKGROUND

SCM is a subgroup of the Lewis and Clark Suicide Prevention Coalition (LCSPC), a community coalition overseen by the Lewis and Clark Public Health's (LCPH) Suicide Prevention Program. LCPH is a city-county health department in Helena, Montana. SCM started in 2019 through the coalition and Helena Mayor's challenge to prevent suicide among service members, veterans, and their families.

The LCPH Suicide Prevention Program and SCM serves the tri-county area of Lewis and Clark County, Broadwater, and Jefferson Counties. Lewis and Clark County's population is about 71,000 residents. Combined, Broadwater and Jefferson County have 19,000 residents.

Influenced by the New Hampshire Gun Shop Project, and Safer Homes, Suicide Aware in Washington state, SCM's core team focused on a grassroots approach and brought firearm dealers, gun range operators, and pharmacists together with behavioral health and public health representatives to find common sense solutions. SCM includes local law enforcement, hospital personnel, suicide prevention advocates, mental health professionals, criminal justice staff, legislators, and firearm safety experts.

Safer Communities Montana is informed by best practices and years of research on lethal means in the U.S., including the Means Matter study from T.H. Chan Harvard School of Public Health, the Montana Suicide Mortality Review Team Report, the 2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, and county data from the Lewis and Clark County Coroner's Office.

MAYOR'S CHALLENGE AND GOVERNOR'S CHALLENGE

The Governor's Challenge is a national initiative created by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to challenge states across the nation to combat suicide among Service Members, Veterans and their families (SMVF). Similarly, the Mayor's Challenge is a community-led approach also focused on reducing suicide among SMVF. Safer Communities Montana is an active participant in both initiatives.

Through the Governor's and Mayor's Challenge SCM is able to work at the state and local level to programmatically support Veterans and military-connected members by increasing opportunities for safe storage of lethal means.



LET DATA BE YOUR GUIDE

By understanding what lethal means are commonly used in local suicides and the demographics of those who have died in this manner, you will be equipped with the basic information you need to craft targeted strategies and apply for the grants necessary to support them. It can also help you to allocate your resources (staff, funding, etc.) to areas with the greatest need to make the greatest impact.

For example, if you learn that a large number of male farmers, ages 45 – 64 years old in one county are using long guns to take their lives, you can tailor your approach to this population and where you place messaging that they or their loved ones might see. That could include enlisting your local farm bureau to share information with its members and bringing farmers and ranchers to the planning table, while providing safe storage tips and education to ranch supply stores, big animal veterinarians, farriers, and agricultural extension agents. This approach wouldn't be as effective if your goal were to reduce suicide among teenage girls in Missoula County. Consider the population you wish to influence and tailor your messaging to reach them.

Community data can also be used to demonstrate the need to potential community partners to create buy-in. If you can't illustrate why an issue is important to stakeholders and how they can drive change, they are likely to focus their energy elsewhere.

Looking at information provided by the Lewis and Clark County Sheriff's Office over six years, SCM determined that the majority of completed suicides involved firearms. It also learned that males were dying much more frequently than females and most losses involved middle-aged men. As a result, it focuses its messaging on this gender and age group.

Critical Questions for your Team

- How many suicides occur in your county annually? Over the last 10 years?
- What lethal means are used in these losses? Do you notice any that are used more frequently than others? What other trends can you identify in your region?
- Are there particular populations that use certain lethal means over another or die more frequently than others?



WHERE TO LOOK FOR DEATH DATA

Basic data points to help you design your campaign include gender, race, age, Veteran and military status, job position, sexual orientation, and marital status.

- You can sometimes find this de-identified data from the coroner's division of your county sheriff's office. [A directory of Montana coroners can be found here.](#)
- County and state death data, and an annual fact sheet on firearms and suicide can be gathered from Karl Rosston, Suicide Prevention Coordinator at the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. Krosston@MT.gov
- The Montana Violent Death Reporting System can provide raw, unanalyzed, de-identified data by request. It is easiest to do this based on county of death or county of injury. Information provided includes data from death certificates, injuries, and means used. It features circumstantial data such as mental health diagnosis, disclosure of suicidal thoughts, and life stressors such as loss of job or home. It can also provide the lethal means used to cause a fatal injury, who owned the device, and if it was locked. MTVDRS began collecting suicide data in 2019. For more information, contact program coordinator, Annie Kurtz, at ann.kurtz@mt.gov.

The [2016 Montana Suicide Mortality Review Team](#) report is a great source of information about at-risk populations.

Another element of establishing need is understanding risk within your community, such as: knowing how many people visited the hospital for a suspected/confirmed suicide attempt or expressed ideation in a given time period, how many people are using 9-8-8 (Montana's Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Lifeline), how many youth have disclosed they attempted suicide through the biennial Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), and how many people have visited the closest emergency room for a suspected suicide attempt.

OBSTACLES

While an epidemiologist is helpful, you do not need one on staff to understand what is occurring in your area. If you find difficulty obtaining suicide data specific to your county, you can utilize regional or state data to paint a picture of need to administrators, potential partners, and funders. This is where information gathered and processed by MTVDRS and DPHHS can help. You can also utilize qualitative stories and testimonials from community members impacted by suicide in your community.



01

ESTABLISHING NEED FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

OTHER AREAS TO LOOK

- Community health assessments can be found at most county public health departments
- The Montana Office of Public Instruction conducts the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. You can find general information here or email for county specific data.
- Data from the adult version of the survey, Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (BRFSS) can be found here.
- Montana Community Health Insights is a tool that includes data from Montana-specific public health surveillance sources, including vital statistics, hospital discharge, emergency department discharge and BRFSS.
- The annual Montana Vital Statistics Report – Frequencies and Rates or Ratios by County
- Number of calls by county to Montana's 9-8-8 Lifeline
- You can also obtain some 9-8-8 data from John Tabb, the Suicide Prevention Program Manager at the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS). John.tabb@mt.gov 406-444-3929
- DPHHS is creating a data dashboard to make this information easier to find. Further editions of this toolkit will include more specific information.

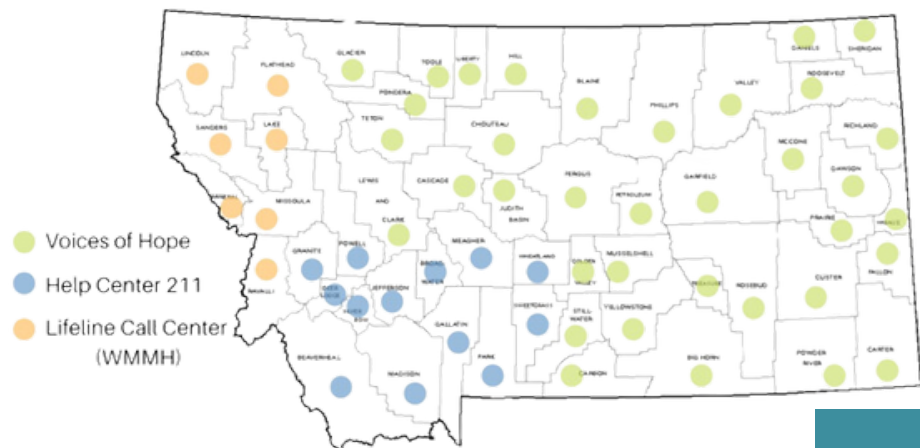
There are three call centers in Montana and one tribal call center:

- **Voices of Hope in Great Falls**
(406) 268-1330
jackievh@gmail.com
- **Help Center in Bozeman**
(406) 587-7511
info@bozemanhelpcenter.org
- **Lifeline Call Center**
Operated by Western Montana Mental Health Center in Missoula
(406) 419-4100
lifeline@wmmhc.org

- **Fort Peck Tribes Call and Treatment Center**

Not currently part of the 988 system. However, anyone on the Fort Peck Reservation can call (406) 653-2000 to talk to a local crisis counselor.

Lifeline Call Center Coverage Map



KEY STAKEHOLDERS

From its onset in early 2019, SCM leadership members understood that to accomplish their goals, they would need a community-led approach. Gathering a team of key stakeholders will serve your own efforts well. To capture a variety of perspectives and needs SCM leadership reached out to representatives of various community organizations to start those discussions.

A good place to start for your team is to brainstorm who in your community would play a role in your effort, who needs to be represented, who would be impacted, and who has the interest, expertise, and connections.

The following is a list of potential stakeholders you might consider including in your coalition:

- **Montana Chapter of AFSP**
- **Suicide prevention coalitions**
- **Veteran Service Organizations**
- **Firearm and sporting goods stores**
- **Gun ranges**
- **Montana Department of Veteran Affairs**
- **Montana National Guard**
- **Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America**
- **Local firearm enthusiasts**
- **City and/or county government**
- **Public health departments**
- **Tribal entities**
- **Law enforcement**
- **Mental health providers**
- **Hospital officials**
- **Department of Public Health and Human Services – Suicide Prevention**
- **County Criminal Justice Services Department**
- **Local Advisory Council on Behavioral Health**
- **Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks**
- **State Mental Health Ombudsman**
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness**
- **Federally Qualified Health Clinic**

It is vital that you gather key players with strong connections to the populations you wish to reach. Montanans tend to listen to and trust their own, as does the firearm community. The right stakeholders can create buy-in and help you gather support for your campaign. Please see the next section on champions.



LOGISTICS

Another important element of making your committee functional is determining frequency, time, location and duties of your committee.

- **How often will you meet?**
- **Will you meet in person, virtually or hybrid?**
- **Is your meeting space accessible for everyone?**
- **Identify a leader and assign team member duties**
- **Be clear about action items at the end of meetings**
- **Designate someone to take and share minutes**
- **Send calendar invites**
- **Don't skip introductions**
- **Craft a mission statement**

TRAINING YOUR COMMITTEE

As you are forming your committee, it is so important they understand the research about suicide and lethal means and what actions have proved successful or promising. Please see section for recommending trainings for QPR, Signs & Signals, CALM, ASSIST, and Mental Health First Aid.



WHO ARE THEY?

As you form your campaign, remember that harnessing the voices and influence of those who regularly interact with firearms is invaluable. Champions specifically refer to well-connected members of the firearm community who provide expertise and their existing social/ professional networks to assist your campaign. Considered trustworthy sources in these communities, champions can deliver information to their peers, introduce you to their professional circles, help you build relationships and buy-in, and guide your approach. They can also lend cultural competency that may be otherwise lacking in your committee by educating its members and joining you for outreach. For example, one champion with Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) provides an annual class on firearm safety for SCM to help members to speak intelligently when they staff outreach tables at gun shows.

A champion's guidance can also help to avoid accidentally alienating the firearm community by dispatching well-meaning suicide advocates with no gun experience into this space. Advice received from similar projects indicates that approaching a firearm shop is more effective if you do so with a member of the firearm community and a suicide prevention advocate.

As more firearm retailers and shooting ranges join the effort, you will likely build momentum as safety strategies are adopted. Other businesses are likely to recognize these changes and feel inspired to participate. You can certainly let business owners know of the number of shops that implemented a practice, or if another retailer they are associated with is a member to leverage participation.

WHAT DO THEY DO?

These crucial volunteers use their community knowledge and connections to schedule outreach visits to firearm retailers, gun ranges, and pawn shops, they facilitate partnerships and expand on the steps retailers can take to prevent suicide. This includes distributing printed materials, promoting suicide prevention training for staff, and highlighting the role that firearm retailers can play to save lives. Champions benefit from volunteering in this way by facilitating positive change in the community they serve, protecting firearm culture, and helping to prevent suicide.

Other possible champion activities can look like:

- **Co-branding on materials to add a greater sense of legitimacy within the firearm community**
- **Providing marketing sponsorships for lethal means messaging**
- **Offering space to run an outreach table at a champion retailers' location**
- **Amplifying campaign messaging to customers**



Champions can also write letters of support for teams interested in pursuing grant funding. Many requests for proposal (RFP's) ask for a demonstration of community involvement. Please see page 47 (Appendix 1) for a basic firearm champion volunteer description.

Critical Questions for your Team

- What firearm-related businesses, clubs, ranges, and pawn shops are located in your area?
- Could one of your members take a hunter's safety or concealed carry class?
- Are there any taxidermists or butcher shops that process wild game that might also be able to serve as champions or who might know one?
- Do you know a firearm enthusiast who has been touched by suicide who might be interested in helping? Have any enthusiasts mentioned safely storing firearms for a friend?
- Do you have existing contacts or members in your local firearm community who are interested in the topic of suicide prevention? This could include local firearm and hunting enthusiasts, sporting goods owners and retail staff, shooting sports instructors, industry representatives, outfitters, 4-H Shooting Sports programs, gun range staff, rod and gun clubs, trap clubs, Veterans and members of local Veteran Service Organizations.
- If you don't have existing relationships, are there smaller opportunities you can involve them in? Possible activities could be: Inviting them to give a presentation on background checks or firearm laws, demonstrations on how to use a gunlock at an event, or offering to put 9-8-8 Suicide Prevention Lifeline cards on a counter.



NATIONAL SHOOTING SPORTS FOUNDATION

Known as the firearm industry trade association, NSSF partners with the AFSP on helping firearms retailers, shooting range operators and customers understand risk factors and warning signs related to suicide, know where to find help and encourage secure firearms storage options. Members are likely to know the NSSF/AFSP campaign and may

be accepting of a similar Montana-based approach. You can find a list of NSSF members on their “Where to Buy” listings. You can also visit NSSF’s Where to Shoot site, but it includes non-members. NSSF range members’ listings are highlighted in bold and featured at the top of the list.

NSSF[®]
*The Firearm Industry
Trade Association*

WHERE TO LOOK

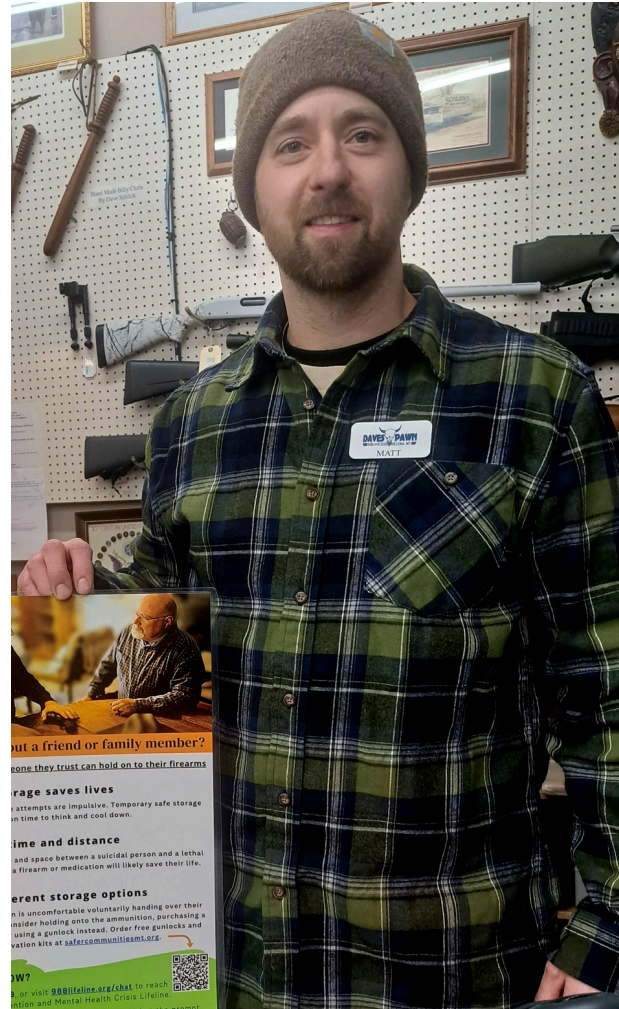
- Gun shows can be a great place to meet potential champions, especially when your group holds an informational table and/or is good at networking. Interested individuals tend to stick around for a chat at your table. A list of Montana gun shows can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
- A list of Federal Firearm Licensees in Montana can be found on the website of the [U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives \(ATF\)](#).
- A list of Montana Archery and Shooting Ranges can be found [here](#).
- Information on Montana-based taxidermists can be found at the [Montana Taxidermists Association](#).
- Many wild game processors can be found on Google or the Hunters Against Hunger Program, which is overseen by the [Montana Food Bank Network](#). You can also find a list of members of the [Montana Meat Processors Association](#).
- Montana-based outfitters can be found by region by searching the [Montana Outfitters & Guides Association’s](#) website.
- As you roll out your campaign, it is likely you will find other potential champions who might be interested in joining. This interaction can help you cultivate relationships.



CHAMPION EXAMPLES

DAVE'S PAWN

Owner Matt Schlick became involved after approaching a suicide prevention outreach table at the East Helena Rodeo. At the time, he expressed interest in offering gunlocks at his shop, which he began doing shortly after. Advocates then approached him for assistance when SCM began to form. Following a suicide that occurred at a fellow pawn shop, the owner of Dave's Pawn decided to place gunlocks on any firearms he sold and directed other pawn brokers to do the same. Gunlocks are now placed on displayed firearms in three area pawn shops and additional locks are available to their customers upon request.



SCM then approached all pawn shops, including the shop where the death occurred, to provide gunlocks, posters and resource materials, and information.



CAPITAL SPORTS

Ed Beall, the owner of Capital Sports, a popular, locally owned sports store, introduced SCM team members to other sporting goods and firearm shops in the region, and used his influence to open doors so SCM could discuss its materials and approach to safe storage and suicide. This included making calls to other shop owners and managers to set meetings with SCM, attending some of these conversations, and posting materials in his shop.



Source: Helena Independent Record

Ed provides input on strategies, materials, and storage devices, has participated in news stories about the project and testified in favor of the Good Samaritan Firearm Liability Protection Law. He continues to support SCM and participates in a legislatively focused stakeholder meeting to find ways to embed safe storage practices and awareness within the firearm community.



PRICKLY PEAR SPORTSMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Like Ed, Jason Swant, the former board chairman of Prickly Pear Sportsmen's Association (PPSA), and his organization have acted as consistent supporters of SCM. Help from PPSA has looked like materials posted at the Association's shooting range, input on materials and proposed strategies, and participation in news stories.



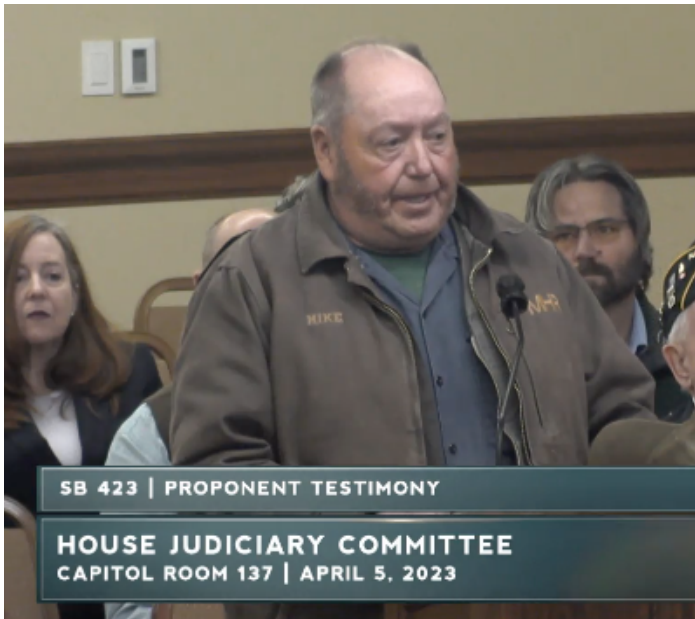
Source: MPAN

Jason testified in favor of the Good Samaritan Firearm Liability Protection Law. He initially connected with local suicide prevention work after an advocate asked if he and his fellow PPSA members would demonstrate how to use gunlocks at an outreach table for the East Helena Out of the Darkness Campus Walk. The Walk is a suicide prevention event organized by local volunteers with the guidance of the AFSP.



MIKE HOSSFELD AND VFW

Mike is a different type of a champion for SCM, as he is neither a retailer, nor operates a business. However, his connection to the Veteran and firearm community has been priceless to the campaign.



SCM members met Mike Hossfeld at the Helena Gun Show. We quickly learned that he is the Post 12177 Commander for Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). An Army Veteran, he also served in Montana Army National Guard, and joined the VFW in 2004. He's also a member of the Eagles, a civil fraternal organization. As the owner of a gun vault, Mike stored firearms for other people – especially if they are in crisis – and offered this service through his various associations.

Because he already safely stores for others, Mike served as a great example of person-to-person storage SCM promotes and why the Good Samaritan Firearm Liability Protection Law should exist. He provided testimony for the bill, hosts suicide prevention training at the VFW, participated in a National Public Radio interview about the work and helped SCM create firearm hold agreements that are found in the index of this toolkit.

Additionally, he recruits VFW volunteers to staff outreach tables at gun shows to hand out SCM information. At the shows, Mike learned that many attendees would not take free gunlocks because many already practice safe storage. However, when he began asking whether they secured the firearm they had easiest access to – the firearm in the nightstand – many said they were unlocked for home protection. Mike reminded them of how it could be accessed by grandkids and struggling friends and suggested keeping it unlocked only at night.

Volunteers started handing out locks like hotcakes.



A crucial activity to help shift community members' knowledge, attitude, and beliefs about suicide, lethal means, and safe storage involves spreading informational messages about these topics in your area. This can be conducted through a variety of avenues including paid media, earned media, and owned media.

OWNED MEDIA

Refers to any media owned and operated by your group or organization

- Your social media
- Your website
- Your newsletters
- Your blog posts

PAID MEDIA

Refers to paid placement of marketing

- Radio and television advertisements
- Newspaper and magazine print ads
- Paid social media ads and boosts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn)
- Billboards and bus ads
- YouTube placements
- Google advertising

OVER-THE-TOP MEDIA

Ads placed on streaming services via internet-connected devices

- Ads placed in bathroom stalls (sometimes referred to as potty press)
- Earned media – refers to free publicity typically spread by others about your effort, including:
 - Newspaper and magazine articles
 - Radio and TV Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
 - Letters to the Editor
 - Op-ed pieces
 - TV news segments
 - Word of mouth
- Shared and reposted social media content

Digital templates of SCM's materials are available for your community to adapt. Some of these have been developed with images of well-known community members from SCM's coverage area to add an element of credibility and familiarity to the campaign. Montanans hold neighbors in high regard, and we considered this when developing SCM's materials. We encourage you to consider using photos relevant to your own community where applicable. Note: Best practice is to depict images of hope and support that encourage connection, rather than those of people struggling or making an attempt.

You are also welcome to utilize any commercial produced by SCM and change out the logos. Please see the SCM Website at <https://lcsuicideprevention.org/safer-communities-montana-lethal-means/> to gain access to the videos and material templates. All materials have been reviewed by SCM's firearm champions for appropriateness.



Videos Focused on Lethal Means and Suicide

The Conversation (30 and 60 second versions available) – Focused on middle-aged/senior white males.

Lock It Up – a youth-focused ad produced by the Nevada Department of Human Services and updated for SCM. Please contact Nevada Suicide Prevention Coordinator Misty Vaughn Allen at mvallen@health.nv.gov for permission.

DPHHS Suicide Prevention Firearms – Focused on middle-age white males. Produced by DPHHS and the Montana Broadcasters Association, also broadcasted by SCM. Contact Montana Suicide Prevention Coordinator Karl Rosston at krosston@mt.gov.

Space Between Thought and Trigger – Focused on Veterans and produced by the Veterans Health Administration. For permission, contact Public Affairs at Fort Harrison, 406-442-6410

Many suicide prevention organizations are willing to share content like the above videos if you do not have capacity or funding to produce your own. Do not hesitate, if you see another commercial you would like to use for your campaign, to reach out. Also, feel free to let SCM know if you've created something or found a video we might utilize. We're stronger together.

SAFE MESSAGING AND LANGUAGE

First, you and your team should know it is always OK to speak in good faith with an individual about suicide or ask if they're considering it. You will do no harm.

But how we communicate with the public about suicide can make a dramatic difference in prevention efforts. Depending on our approach through avenues like advertisements, posters, social media, and other forms of one-way communication, we can encourage hope and connect people to resources OR we can unintentionally create additional challenges with stigma and suicide contagion (14). Therefore, it's important that you know HOW to craft a message that is safe, positive, and encourages the behavior you are hoping to cultivate in your community.



04

PUBLIC MESSAGING AND COMMUNICATION

At a bare minimum, we recommend always including the 9-8-8 Suicide Prevention Lifeline number on any materials and messages you produce or share. That way, anyone viewing them immediately knows where to seek help. This extends to all news stories as well. Please urge reporters to include 988 in every news piece about suicide.

There are several excellent resources SCM recommends as you develop local messages for your lethal means campaign.

The National Action Alliance Framework for Successful Messaging website provides relevant guidelines and best practices. Please see the index of this toolkit for a handout on the Framework for Successful Messaging. Another resource comes from the U.S. Veteran's Affairs Office. It provides concrete examples of how to write or talk about suicide. The VA provides this six-page guide free and in electronic and print versions.

Language, context, and who you're speaking to matters if you wish to communicate effectively. For example, if you aren't a member of the firearm community, you may not know whether to say "gun, firearm, or weapon," or the difference when someone mentions an "ought twenty or AK." You may also be unaware of the difference between a cable lock or trigger lock. Simultaneously, someone within the firearm community may be unfamiliar with the fact that suicide deaths by firearm are % higher than homicides in ... or that if someone survives an attempt, they are unlikely to die by suicide later on. Communicating and collaborating can help bridge the gap in language and knowledge between groups. Remember to rely on your champions. Also consider taking a firearm safety course to familiarize yourself with perspectives and lingo of the firearm community so you can understand your audience.



04

PUBLIC MESSAGING AND COMMUNICATION

Say or Write	Not	Why
John Doe died by suicide/ killed himself/ took his life	John Doe committed suicide/ shot himself/ blew his brains out/ took the easy way out	Using words like “commit” conveys a sense of sin and crime (e.g., John Doe committed arson). Avoiding judgmental words when speaking about suicide and those that tie the act to crime increases the likelihood that people at risk will ask for help. Also using graphic terms about how the person died can be triggering to those who’ve lost someone by similar means and normalizes the option for those experiencing a crisis.
I lost my wife to suicide while she was in crisis and experiencing a lot of different emotions. I now know some of the warning signs and that help is available. There are resources available to survivors like me.	My wife successfully killed herself after our divorce.	Research shows there is no single cause for someone dying by suicide. It is always complex and typically tied to a mental health condition like depression. Saying someone took their lives because of a divorce or other single event places blame and is misleading. Words like “success, failed attempt, unsuccessful” can sensationalize suicide. Additionally, we should avoid convincing someone who didn’t die from an attempt that their survival is a failure.
“According to VA’s 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, Veteran suicide count and rate have decreased”	“Twenty-two Veterans a day commit suicide.”	When using statistics, it’s important to reflect trends and not reduce suicide into a single number or as only affecting a specific population. Suicide impacts all classes and types of people, not just Veterans. Also, while a rallying cry for some suicide prevention work, “22 a day” is not an accurate or current depiction of Veteran suicide in the U.S.



Speaking of language, the words and phrases you and your committee use can aid with developing buy-in or quickly raise hackles. Here are a few:

- **Removal, confiscation, surrender, seizure** – These are terms SCM never uses in relation to firearms and safe storage. We suggest you avoid them, too. Securing a firearm for someone in crisis is meant to be a temporary, voluntary process, while safe storage is a general safety habit we hope to see adopted in the community. Remove, confiscate, and seize can be off-putting to an audience of firearm owners, especially in relation to their Second Amendment rights. An individual could become defensive if you are pushing them to surrender or remove their firearms. Instead, ask “How can we keep you safe for now?” “Is there someone you trust who can hold onto your firearms until you feel better?”
- **Temporary, voluntary** – SCM supports using language that emphasizes people at risk participating in their own intervention and then returning to their regular activities. Prevention is most effective when it happens with the individual’s participation, rather than it happening to them.
- **Gun, firearm, weapon** – Typically, SCM uses “firearm” in its messaging as it is the most respectful reference to these tools. In most communities, guns and firearms are used interchangeably. Weapon is often a broader term that can include a variety of instruments such as knives and explosives.
- **Safe, secure, locked storage** – How firearms are stored is essential to the work of SCM, but it can be a point of contention, depending on your audience. Many owners view their firearms as a safety device for personal and home protection and want to have easy access. If this comes up in conversation, it is a great opportunity to discuss different types of locking devices that allow access but prevent misuse.
- **Red Flag** – Often used in reference to ERPO laws, this phrase may also have unintended consequences and is often confused with taking away constitutional rights. SCM does not enter this space as it has no interest in the involuntary removal of firearms.



SCM embraces the guidelines set by the National Action Alliance. The materials displayed in this toolkit are examples of information that utilizes safe, neutral language, while promoting hope and what people can do to prevent suicide in connection with lethal means. In our community, we also examined demographics unique to our area. For example, while Montana reflects a high proportion of suicides within the American Indian population, Lewis and Clark County sees more suicides among middle-aged and older adult white males. Please see page 2 for information on where to find local data. When examining who to represent on printed marketing materials, committee members selected images of two older white men based on the type of losses occurring here. However, SCM does plan to produce materials appropriate for other high-risk populations.

Additionally, there is an intentional strategy behind SCM postcards, which aim to educate the public on safe storage options through a positive narrative. It does this by drawing a parallel between other safety measures many community members use in their daily lives and safe storage of medication and firearms. It features the 988 number, as well as how Veterans can access the Veterans Crisis Line (Dial 9-8-8 then press 1). The postcard also connects them to a list of drug disposal sites.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

News outlets often use a book known as the Associated Press (AP) Stylebook, which is a writing and editing reference for newsrooms (15). Recent versions include guidance on how reporters should communicate about suicide, but it helps to regularly remind them prior to an article or to correct an error when it occurs to prevent the likelihood of it happening again. More than 100 worldwide studies have found that responsible reporting can reduce the risk of additional suicides. Covering suicide carefully can change perceptions, dispel myths, and inform the public on the complexities of the issue.

- **Generally, AP does not cover suicides or suicide attempts, unless the person involved is a well-known figure or the circumstances are particularly unusual or publicly disruptive. Suicide stories, when written, should not go into detail on methods used.**
- **If news outlets do elect to specify the means of suicide for various valid news reasons, they should keep those details to a minimum.**

As previously mentioned, if you are receiving news coverage, always end the interview by sharing 988 and any local resources.



Lastly, if you plan to share your own personal story to illustrate why safe storage and suicide prevention matters, please visit [the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention website](#) for helpful guidelines.

If you have your other campaign elements in place, it's about time to visit your firearm businesses through an effort generally referred to as a Gun Shop Project.

The goals of this form of outreach are to:

1. **Increase retailers, pawnbrokers, and range owners' ability to recognize warning signs in a patrons**
2. **Empower these gatekeepers to slow down sales or rentals if they have concerns**
3. **Post materials in these venues to educate the public, such as posters and take-away materials.**

Through these settings, you can use messaging to normalize ways customers can respond if someone they know is struggling. This includes spreading awareness of the Good Samaritan Firearm Liability Protection Law and how and when to temporarily store firearms for another person. You can also offer information on 9-8-8, Montana's Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Lifeline. Audiences may not need the information immediately, but you can plant seeds of knowledge and hope they can use these resources to help themselves and others, now and in the future.

Goals 1 and 2 can be achieved through discussions with these gatekeepers and their staff, providing tip sheets to place behind counters, and providing training. Another way to build confidence is through role play scenarios and helping stores to establish store policies and procedures.

Through a Gun Shop Project, retailers and other firearm-related businesses work with suicide prevention advocates to prevent suicide (16). It is not the only way to address lethal means reduction, as we've pointed out elsewhere in the toolkit, but it does narrow another path someone might prepare to take their lives if they don't already have firearm access. According to the New Hampshire Medical Examiner's Office, one in ten suicides involve a recently purchased firearm (17). That data is not tracked by the Montana Violent Death Reporting System, although there are occasional accounts of this taking place locally. Regardless, firearm retailers, ranges, and pawn shops can play a crucial role by reducing the odds that a gun bought at their store today will be used in a suicide tomorrow.

**THE GOAL IS AWARENESS AND
EMPOWERMENT – NOT ASSESSMENT.**



Please keep in mind that as you approach these businesses, you will want to avoid making the impression that you are asking sporting goods staff to evaluate the mental health of a customer. This can feel like an unreasonable ask and may deter retailers and ranges from participating.

That being said, retailers deny sales if they have concerns about a customer. It can be helpful to tie recognition of warning signs and slowing sales to processes they already use when a patron is ineligible to make a purchase.

Staff at firearm businesses typically refuse sales and rentals if a customer:

- **Is visibly intoxicated.**
- **Makes threats of violence.**
- **Seems to be buying a firearm for someone restricted from ownership, also known as a straw purchase, which is illegal and punishable by up to 15 years in prison (18).**
- **Fails a background check or is a minor (19).**

Federal Firearm Licensees (FFL), those licensed to sell firearms, are informed and regularly reminded by the ATF that they can and should refuse to complete a transaction if they believe something is not right.

According to Ed Beall, the owner of Helena-based Capital Sports sporting goods store, his staff keep alcohol, marijuana use and suicide at the top of their minds when working with patrons. “The risk of liability to selling to an impaired person is great,” he explained.

At his shop, if staff smell marijuana on a customer, or alcohol on their breath, they are generally instructed to deny a sale or tell a manager to assist them. Because marijuana is considered a prohibitive substance by ATF, those who smell like weed are asked to leave the firearm counter and the store itself.

If it's alcohol, they will tell the customer “I can smell alcohol on you – we're not going to be able to sell a firearm to you today,” and then offer for the patron to return another day when they are sober. He noted that some behaviors one might identify with a straw purchase – such as awkwardly handling a firearm due to unfamiliarity – can also be seen in someone who is potentially suicidal. You can help firearm businesses use the same process with potentially suicidal customers by educating them on suicide warning signs their staff can recognize.



Signs that a patron may be suicidal

- No knowledge about guns AND no interest in learning; asks no questions, just picks out a gun
- Awkward handling of firearm
- Seems disinterested in which gun they are purchasing or is unresponsive to your questions about the purchase
- Gives unconvincing response when asked how they intend to use the firearm
- No interest in learning firearm maintenance or safety
- Mentions a recent crisis, such as a divorce, job loss, or other setbacks; seems out-of-sorts

DEVELOP AN ELEVATOR SPEECH

Retailers, ranges and pawn shops can be busy locations, so it is key to share what you would like them to know quickly and clearly. Not only does this increase the likelihood they will hear your message, but it also shows respect for the establishment and those who work there.

If they are interested in discussing the topic more, they will make time or will work with you to identify when they can speak at length. You can also ask when they might have more time to review the topic and ask to set another meeting.

It helps to be aware of your goals for these encounters prior to walking through the door. Are you hoping to get to know the players in your town and spread awareness about 9-8-8 and the Good Samaritan Firearm Liability Protection Law? Are there certain activities you would like them to engage in? Do you want them to join you at the planning table? All of the above? Setting your goals ahead of time can help drive the conversation with these gatekeepers.



What to include in your elevator speech:

- **Why they should care about this cause** – e.g. other shops are participating, suicide is preventable, crises are short, Montana's rate is high, local losses have big impact; Do they have a connection to the cause?
- **Facts about suicide and how lethal means plays a role** – How we can work together to increase the likelihood of survival
- **How can they help**

An informative list of commonly asked questions by retailers and appropriate responses can be found at <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/gun-shop-faq/> and is located in appendix I of this toolkit.

IDENTIFY YOUR ASKS

It's not enough to say you want firearm-related businesses to be involved. Having specific asks and examples of how that might occur within their walls can help take away the fear of participation. You may want to limit the number of requests you make during each visit so as not to overwhelm your contact(s) and to increase the likelihood of engagement. If you forge a relationship with the various shop keeps in your community, you can often get them more involved with time.

Would the retailer, range, or pawnbroker be willing to:

- **Hang posters customers can view and/or place takeaway materials at the counter**
- **Review and post tip sheets behind the counter to help staff recognize warning signs**
- **Encourage safe storage options (gun safes, gunlocks, etc.) with every firearm purchase**
- **Place gunlocks on displayed firearms (strategy used by pawnshops in SCM's region)**
- **Serve as a champion**
- **Include suicide prevention information in any firearm instruction provided**
- **Hold an annual discussion (at least) with staff about suicide prevention and lethal means**
- **Take a suicide prevention course annually and orient new staff**
- **Host an outreach table at their location**



FRIENDLY FACES FIRST

The notion of dropping by a firearm-related business to engage in lethal means reduction strategies can feel intimidating, especially those with little firearm experience. Please consider utilizing your champions to introduce you to those in their professional circle first. Champions can also help you identify the best individual to approach. Starting these conversations with businesses your firearm partners are familiar with can help build confidence and momentum for when you are ready to reach beyond their sphere of influence.

Pairing up with your champions can also be a compelling way to represent the perspective of suicide prevention advocates as well as a firearm enthusiast who can describe why they participate in the project and how others should, too. Lean on their credibility to open doors.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

In addition to leveraging your champions, you and your volunteers can learn to “speak the language” by participating in a Hunter’s Safety Course. The three-hour Interactive Official Montana Hunter Safety Course is \$49.95 as of this publication and can be completed at www.ilearntohunt.com/montana/. Approved by FWP, the program includes information on firearm safety, parts of a firearm, ammunition, safe handling, field practices, and marksmanship, as well as how rifles, handguns and shotguns work. However, it does not include any information on suicide prevention at this point.

Other online firearm-related courses can be found via the National Rifle Association, such as its online training courses here: <https://onlinetraining.nra.org/online-courses/>

OTHER OUTREACH TIPS

Based on suggestions gathered from the founder of the New Hampshire Gun Shop project and similar programs across the country, you may consider some of the following tips.

- **Face-to-face contact helps to build relationships**
- **Consider making a small purchase before starting a conversation**
- **Keep visits short, to the point, and have a specific ask**
- **Don’t overwhelm businesses with statistics**
- **Research the shop prior to a visit**
- **Use short stories as illustrative examples**
- **If you receive push back, don’t argue**
- **Be nice. Word-of-mouth is powerful**



As previously mentioned, because many suicidal crises are brief, safe storage of lethal means can save a life by increasing the time and distance between a person in crisis and the tool they plan to use.

Remember, suicidal people are unlikely to substitute means if their attempt is thwarted. If they do, the secondary method is almost always less lethal.

WHAT CONSTITUTES SECURE STORAGE?

The phrase safe storage (also known as secure storage) generally refers to limiting access to firearms by unauthorized users through the practice of storing firearms locked, unloaded, and separate from ammunition. There are a variety of devices individuals can use to prevent misuse, preferably through layering, e.g., a locked firearm, stored in a gun safe away from ammunition.

IF SOMEONE IS SUICIDAL, STORAGE AWAY FROM THEIR HOME IS BEST PRACTICE.

While often promoted by suicide prevention advocates, safe storage is a practice first embraced by the firearm community, including FWP's Hunter's education course delivered to thousands of Montana youth annually (20). Secure storage is second among NSSF's "Ten Rules of Firearm Safety" and is listed on the National Rifle Association's (NRA) "Gun Safety Rules" (21). However, studies indicate that more than 50% of firearm owners do not safely store ALL of their firearms (22). The firearm in the nightstand – the one meant to protect against home invasion – often remains unsecured.

A "hidden" firearm is NOT securely stored. Children are very curious. Studies have shown that 70% of youth in gun owning homes know where the guns are kept, even when hidden. More than 35% of those youth report having handled those guns. This stands true even for youth who have received substantial firearm safety training. It is advised to take no chances of child access to unsecured guns.

You can address both concerns by promoting safe storage habits and giving community members tools to lock every firearm in their keep. Further discussion on how to respond to the "firearm in the nightstand," and other common questions can be found in Appendix 5 of this toolkit.

Note: Safe storage is best as a general practice like using a seat belt and is not restricted to people who are at risk (23).



Safe Storage Tips

- When not in use, keep all of your firearms locked and unloaded. If available, store them in a gun safe, or use a gunlock to keep them secure.
- Unload ammunition and safely store it away from any available firearms.
- If someone in your household is struggling, consider temporarily giving available firearms to a trusted friend or family member outside of the home. If that doesn't work, get a gunlock and ask someone you trust to hold the keys and combination.
- A “hidden gun” is not a securely stored gun. Children and others in the home are often aware of where firearms are stored.
- Whenever possible, avoid storing firearms in vehicles. If it is required, be sure to use a quality storage device.

OTHER FORMS OF STORAGE

If storage outside the home of an at-risk individual is determined to be the best course of action, anyone who is able to own a firearm can store it. The storer is protected by the Good Samaritan Firearm Liability Protection Law, so they can use their best judgment as to when to return the firearm(s) (24). This helps provide peace of mind for those who agree to take on the role of storage provider to help a friend or family member in crisis.

Storage can also be provided through a trusted friend, family member, a fellow Veteran or Veteran's Group or family member. Law enforcement agencies are often willing to store firearms.



If outside storage of firearms is not possible, suggested alternatives include:

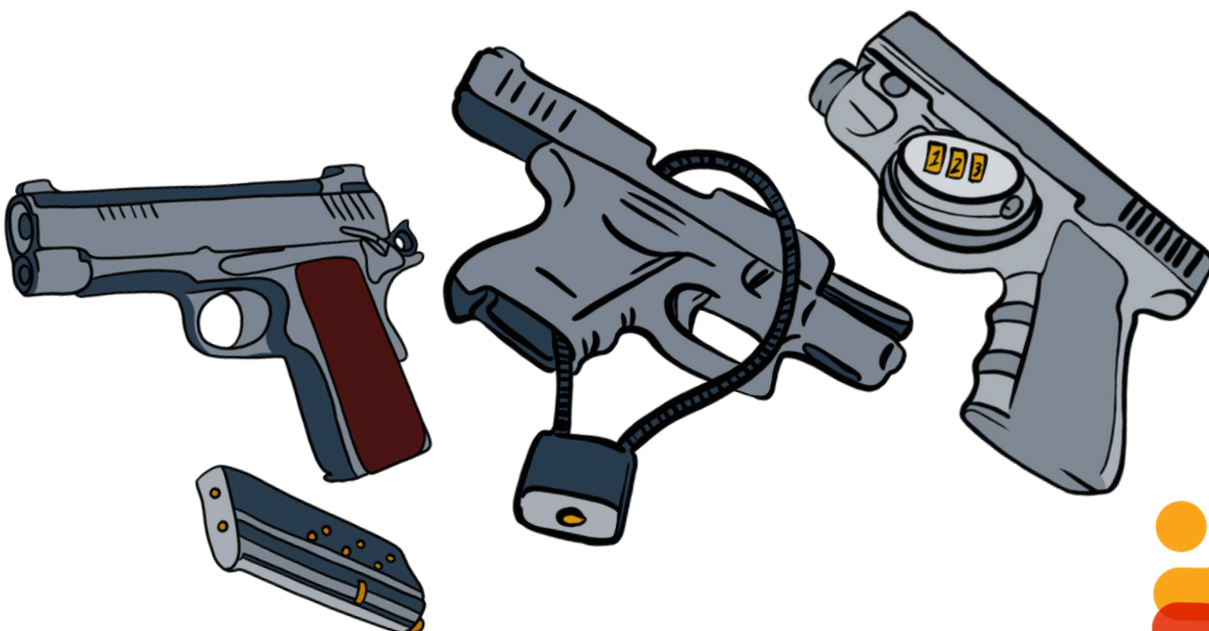
- Relocating all ammunition outside of the home
 - Create a Live4Box – Store and lock rounds in an ammunition box and have the firearm owner place photos on or in it with their “reasons to live” such as family members, friends, pets, favorite places, etc.
- Removing a key component from a firearm and storing it elsewhere. (E.g. firing pin, slide, etc.)
- If using a combination gunlock or safe, have a friend change the combination

Using a gunlock and freezing the keys in ice, as directed in the Freeze the Keys campaign

WHAT QUALIFIES AS A SECURE GUN STORAGE OR SAFETY DEVICE?

According to the ATF, a safety device is one that:

1. When installed on a firearm, is designed to prevent the firearm from being operated without first deactivating the device;
2. A device incorporated into the design of the firearm that is designed to prevent the operation of the firearm by anyone not having access to the device; or
3. A safe, gun safe, gun case, lock box, or other device designed to be or can be used to store a firearm and that is designed to be unlocked only by means of a key, a combination, or other similar means. *Zip ties, rope, and string do not meet this definition.



ESTABLISHING A GUNLOCK PROGRAM

A gunlock program involves obtaining bulk quantities of gunlocks or similar devices and then distributing them to individuals and entities in your area. Paired with accurate information about suicide and lethal means, you can assist your community in adopting safe storage habits.

Creating your own gunlock program can help you:

- **Educate the community about different storage options that meet their individual needs.**
- **Provide accurate information regarding suicide and lethal means.**
- **Offer gunlocks directly to community members at outreach events and gun shows.**
- **Create a process for community members to receive gunlocks by request.**
- **Partner with health care facilities to deliver lethal means counseling to at-risk patients and gunlocks if they have firearm access.**
- **Partner with schools to offer gunlocks to families who want them, and parents of students who are known to be at risk.**
- **Provide gunlocks to law enforcement and mobile crisis response teams.**
- **Establishing partnerships with schools, medical and mental health facilities through Memorandums of Understanding is discussed in the latter part of this section.**

HOW DO I GET GUNLOCKS FOR MY COMMUNITY?

SCM has found two reliable sources for bulk gunlocks:

Online retailers

Project ChildSafe

Project ChildSafe offers free cable gunlocks with keys through partnerships with law enforcement agencies across the country. A list of established Montana locations can be found at the link below. <https://projectchildsafe.org/get-a-safety-kit/>.

If your community is not included on the Project ChildSafe Distribution Partner list, you can approach your local law enforcement agency, inform them about this free opportunity and recommend participation. According to the Project ChildSafe website, law enforcement agencies are encouraged to partner with individuals, community groups and businesses for distribution. Gunlock delivery can take an extended period of time. We recommend you work with law enforcement to order early and often so you don't run out.



The Montana VA also gives out key-opening cable gunlocks at public and Veteran-related events but are not able to supply a community-based gunlock program.

SCM distributes combination trigger guard gunlocks and some cable locks from its VA partners to offer additional free locking options in the community. Washington State's Safer Homes, Suicide Aware Program distributes firearm safety life jacket cases, which wrap around the action of individual firearms and open with a key. It's important to remind recipients to keep the keys stored separately. Some reports indicate they may not for fear of losing them.

SCM does not promote one gunlock over another. Instead, we view any device that slows down a possible suicide attempt to be valuable, especially when layered with other precautions like a gun safe. There isn't much regulation on the quality of these devices and many firearm owners have their own preferences based on the type of firearm and mixed feeling about gunlocks in general. We address this further in the outreach section. For example, some dislike cable locks because they can scratch the finish on a firearms. Others prefer cable locks because they may work better on certain long guns, such as if one features a lever action.

It's important to give people the knowledge to make the best decision for their lifestyle so that they're more likely to practice safe storage.

FUNDING

SCM sources combination gunlocks from Amazon and purchases them with the help of two grants from a foundation and the state. Your organization can pursue similar funding through federal, state, and local government entities and community and hospital foundations. You can also seek donations from firearm retailers, and sponsorships with local businesses or community partners. There may be more opportunities through Montana DPHHS; you can follow updates on their website or the state grant system.



Types of Storage Devices

- **Cable lock** – a device used to block the chamber of a firearm by inserting through or into the magazine well or chamber or inserted through the gun barrel and chamber
- **Trigger guard lock** – 2 piece lock that fits over the trigger guard so the trigger cannot be pulled
- **Lock box** – small safe designed to store a handgun, can be firmly mounted
- **Personalized lock** – safety device permanently installed on a gun by the maker or owner
- **Car gun safe** – safe specifically designed to securely store handguns in vehicles, can be attached under the driver's seat
- **Console unit** – safes that are specific to the make of your vehicle and fit within the console
- **Gun case** – a cover/case used to secure, conceal, or transport a gun can also be locked with an external device
- **Gun safe or vault** – large unit designed to store multiple objects including long guns
- **RFID safe** – RFID stands for radio frequency identification. A safe features this technology allows a user to rapidly unlock it with a key card, or key fob
- **Biometric devices** – locking systems that can only be deactivated with biological data such as retinal scans, fingerprints, or facial recognition
- **Life Jacket gunlocks** – Lock and key devices that wrap around the action of a firearm. These are designed to be mounted on a wall



GUNLOCKS AND MATERIALS TO INCLUDE

As part of your gunlock distribution program, we recommend providing educational materials with each storage device you hand out. For example, at outreach events, SCM offers gunlocks with an SCM postcard listing safe storage tips and a pamphlet detailing storage options created by the American Academy of Pediatrics and Montana DPPHS. This information helps individuals assess their best storage options, based on the number and type of firearms they own. As you get started, consider partnering with AFSP, DPHHS and the VA to acquire free lethal means literature to hand out to the community. Please see the resources page for handout recommendations.

SCM, and its member organizations, offer locks at community festivals, Farmers' Markets and at local grocery stores, among other venues. Please see Section 7 for more on outreach.

ESTABLISHING MOU PARTNERSHIPS

Another way to get gunlocks in the hands of those who need them is by creating Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with local school districts, medical and mental health facilities and other entities. An MOU of this type is typically a written agreement that involves no exchange of funds and establishes the terms and conditions under which the partner organization will distribute gunlocks accompanied with printed materials.

For example, at PureView Health Center, an SCM MOU partner, a case worker conducts lethal means counseling to any patient with a high score on the PHQ-9 Depression screener. If they have access to a firearm or have a suicide plan with a firearm, they receive one or more gunlocks. If they are considering medication as possible lethal means, the caseworker provides information on medication disposal, limiting access to large quantities of pills and a disposal device.

Patients are informed of the availability of these devices by co-branded materials created by PureView staff, including posters and table tents for examination rooms. Next to all PureView pharmacies, postcard holders with SCM materials are displayed with the co-branded posters.

As per MOU guidelines with SCM, each staff member who gives out gunlocks is required to take Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM). The training equips them to hold a collaborative conversation about safe storage with patients/student families so they can plan for safety together.



SCM has a similar partnership with the St. Peter's Healthcare System (the local hospital) and Helena Public Schools. Both entities screen for depression. To see an example MOU and templates of materials you can co-brand with partners, see <https://lcsuicideprevention.org/downloadable-materials/>

EVALUATION

To track distribution that SCM then uses to report to funders, it asks all MOU partners and members to utilize a distribution form to count the number of gunlocks provided to the community. No personal information is captured. The forms include a QR Code that links to a digital survey that asks for the number distributed, when and where they were given out.

Additionally, to better understand whether locks are being utilized, SCM and its volunteers adhere QR Code stickers to individual gunlock boxes that connect to a utilization survey. The survey is meant to be completed by community members, who are incentivized to participate with a quarterly raffle of items such as RFID safes, lock boxes, memberships to Prickly Pear Sportsmen's Association and gift cards to local sporting goods stores. Some of these items are displayed at outreach tables to spark conversation. Please see a survey example at <https://lcsuicideprevention.org/downloadable-materials/>

Critical questions for your team

Gunlock Program

- Do you have a relationship with AFSP, DPHHS, and the VA to get free lethal means literature?
- Does your local law enforcement office give out gunlocks to the community and/or provide you with locks for distribution? If they don't have a relationship with Project ChildSafe, they can apply online at www.projectchildsafe.org

MOUs

- What medical providers are located in your community? Do any screen patients' mental health?
- Do your schools screen the mental health of students?
- Do your schools have a counselor, nurse, administrator, or a school resource officers (SROs) you can partner with to distribute locks and information?
- Is there a Mobile Crisis Response Unit in your area? Would they give gunlocks to patients?
- Would any of your partners and member organizations be willing to assist with distributing gunlocks at outreach events that you cannot attend?
- Are there local Hunter Safety classes being held in your community? They might be a good place to distribute literature, gunlocks and general educational outreach.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The links below feature information, graphics, videos, and printed materials you can offer with your gunlock program and MOU partnerships:

www.lock2live.org – this free, anonymous support tool helps individual make decisions about safe storage with someone in crisis. Also provides a downloadable decision aid at <https://lock2live.org/#help>

<https://www3.nsf.org/share/PDF/safety/FirearmsSafetyVehicles.pdf> – printable pamphlet regarding the risks of leaving firearms in vehicles.

Kids and families

<https://healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Handguns-in-the-Home.aspx> – National Academy of Pediatrics site featuring information on guns in the home and how to keep kids safe www.besmartforkids.org – Everytown For Gun Safety program focused on secure storage for families.

Military and Veterans

www.KeepItSecure.net – Lethal means restriction focused on Veteran suicide, produced by the VA. www.Overwatchproject.org – A Veteran-focused lethal means program with a candid approach to empower peers to assist each other. Includes social media posts, videos, and materials you can print.



07

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Outreach is a crucial part of a lethal means campaign to educate and engage the community, normalize safe storage, distribute safety devices, and find volunteers and champions.

Community outreach often includes the following activities:

- **Running an outreach table at local events**
- **Scheduling and operating a table at local businesses**
- **Creating your own public activities to spread awareness**
- **Holding presentations and webinars for interested parties and stakeholders**
- **Partnering with organizations to hand out materials on your team's behalf**



TABLING AT EVENTS

The term 'tabling' refers to setting up an outreach table at a local event, high trafficked area, or inside a business, and staffing it with members and volunteers who will directly engage community members. This way, you can increase the visibility of your campaign and share simple action steps the public can take to increase safety. Typically, this includes handing out materials and gunlocks while trying to spark up conversation.

If you plan to attend an event, we suggest contacting organizers early, informing them of your campaign and why you want to attend, and requesting a space. Many organizers will provide a spot, free of charge, when they recognize you are providing a community service. You can follow the same process if you would like to ask a local grocery store or other business to host a table for your campaign.

Nearly any community event can be appropriate for an outreach table, as long as you have trained people to staff it and the event is well attended enough to provide good return on your investment of time. We do not recommend leaving gunlocks at an unstaffed table, or giving gunlocks to youth unless an adult is present to provide consent.

Providing outreach at Gun Shows specifically is discussed later in this section.



Consider the following events for outreach:

- Sports – skiing, hockey, rodeos, marathons, fishing tournaments, youth sports
- County fairs and carnivals
- 4-H gatherings, agriculture conventions, livestock sales, Montana State University extension workshops
- Veteran-focused events
- Pow Wows
- Job and Health fairs
- School activities – parent-teacher conferences, open houses, student athletic events
- Holiday bazaars, harvest jubilees, and rummage sales
- Fish Wildlife and Parks field Days
- Farmer's Markets

Outreach at businesses and high traffic areas

- Provide gunlocks and information to areas frequented by hunters, such as a wild game processor, sporting goods store, or a popular trail head
- Demonstrate how to use a gunlock during a sale at a sporting goods store
- Hand out information and locks at a grocery store or coffee shop that is popular with older men

EDUCATE YOUR VOLUNTEERS

In preparation for tabling at events, especially gun shows, SCM strongly recommends instructing your volunteer team and members on how to talk about firearms, suicide, and safe storage devices.

Formal education programs are available through FWP, local suicide prevention organizations and online. Your local public health staff, mental health providers, hunter safety and firearms instructors, can help to structure your training program. For example, each year, SCM members request a basic firearm safety training from FWP (25), which includes information on the parts of a firearm, different types of ammunition, terminology, the Four Universal Rules of Gun Safety (26), and how to install gunlocks on a variety of firearms. This information helps volunteers to speak intelligently about firearms if they lack familiarity. This, in turn, helps navigate conversations during outreach with firearm owners, it also shows respect to the firearm community.



SCM suggests the following training programs:

- **An in-person firearm safety course taught by FWP or FWP's online Hunter's Education program** – <https://fwp.mt.gov/hunt/education>
- **Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM)** – Although intended for therapists, this self-paced, online course provides volunteers with helpful information on how and why lethal means reduction prevents suicide, and how to broach the topic. <https://sprc.org/online-library/calm-counseling-on-access-to-lethal-means/>
- **Question, Persuade and Refer (QPR)** – This basic suicide prevention course teaches warning signs of a suicidal crisis and how to help. Find trainers by contacting state suicide prevention coordinator Karl Rosston, krosston@mt.gov
- **Talk Saves Lives: Firearms Safety™** – Provided by AFSP, this presentation is developed for the firearms community to reduce suicide by firearm. Contact the Montana Chapter of AFSP at trassley@afsp.org or 406-312-0252 to request a presentation.

For more in-depth information on suicide prevention, mental health conditions, and how to intervene, your team can also take:

- **Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)** – a two-day interactive workshop on suicide intervention. Find a training at <https://livingworks.net/training/livingworks-asist/>
- **Mental Health First Aid and Youth Mental Health First Aid** – a skills-based training course that teaches participants about mental health and substance-use issues.
- **safeTalk** – a half-day training that equips people to be more alert to someone thinking of suicide and better able to connect them with further help. Find a training at <https://livingworks.net/training/livingworks-safetalk/>

Once you have more experienced outreach staff to table events, you can have them model these techniques to new volunteers.

MAKE YOUR TABLE INVITING

Before you begin outreach, consider how to present a welcoming table to the audience you wish to reach. For example, if you plan to attend to a community event focused on youth, consider bringing an activity to attract kids and keep them occupied while you talk to parents.

This could be as simple as offering candy or items that kids enjoy, such as coloring pages with crayons or a guessing game.



If you are hoping to speak to hunters, you can add items like duck decoys, a demo gun safe, or use an ammunition box as a pedestal for materials. SCM finds these items helpful at gun shows to start a conversation and show we are not in opposition to the firearm community. You can also offer giveaways from your firearm partners, such as a free pass to a shooting range or a gift card to a local sport store.

Additionally, be thoughtful about how many items you place on your table. With all of the partner materials you can display, it's incredibly easy to overwhelm your audience.

MORE TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE OUTREACH

When preparing to interact with the public keep the following suggestions in mind:

- **Choose outgoing volunteers who are enthusiastic and willing to greet everyone**
- **Avoid too much sitting and phone use. This can convey a message of disinterest.**
- **When possible, pair volunteers so they can help each other if the event gets busy Practice talking points and ensure all volunteers are familiar with appropriate communication and messaging.**
- **Offer items people can take with them – materials, gunlocks, freebies**
- **Listen to your community – you will learn valuable insights at your table**
- **Be careful about language so you don't alienate your audience (see Section 4 on messaging)**
- **Make sure written information is easy to understand**
- **If an event is slow or nearing its end, consider networking with present organizations and sharing materials**
- **Keep a sign-up sheet on hand for any potential volunteers and individuals who would like to learn more. Follow up with any commitments you make with the attendees you meet.**

PREPARE FOR DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES

If you've ever attended an expo, trade fair, or craft market, it's likely you've watched as some event goers skirt, avoid eye-contact, ignore, or grump at someone running a table. It happens and it's inevitable that you'll experience the same when you conduct your own community outreach. Just remember that while rejection is no fun, you are just as likely to reach people who care about this topic, which makes attendance worthwhile.



SCM suggests greeting every person who comes near your table in a friendly manner, sharing small tidbits of information as they draw closer so they come away with a tool they can use – “Do you know the new Suicide Prevention Lifeline number? It’s 9–8–8!” or “Do you know you’re protected from liability if you hold onto a firearm of a friend in crisis?” These nuggets can often help start a conversation. However, if someone says they’re not interested, it’s generally best to accept this and move on.

Volunteers will also benefit from direction on how to gracefully handle rejection and conflict when it arises. Outreach should be neutral and friendly, even if you don’t agree with an eventgoers’ perspectives. You do not want a disagreement to result in not being asked to return to an event. You can’t convince everyone.

For example, SCM volunteers have been approached by event attendees who wish to share their political leanings or information unrelated to the topic at hand. This falls outside of the campaign’s scope. Remember that your lethal means campaign is meant to be a bipartisan effort. It helps to listen, acknowledge their point of view with words like “I hear you. I can see why you’re frustrated” and then redirect to your campaign. That is why you are there.

Or, if an event attendee comments that they aren’t suicidal, you can tell them that’s a good thing, but do you know what to do if your friend is feeling that way? If they don’t use gunlocks “I don’t believe in them” because of concerns about personal safety, you can suggest a biometric or RFID safe. Please see the Gun Shop Project FAQ in Appendix 5 for more responses to common questions and comments.

WORK WITH YOUR PARTNERS

You can extend the reach of your campaign by asking your partners to hand out materials at events you might not normally attend. For example, Be SMART Program volunteers regularly attend the Helena Farmer’s Market and distributes SCM information and gunlocks along with their own materials at their table. They count every gunlock distributed and share the information with SCM staff. A local chapter of the VFW follows the same process when it attends gun shows. This allows the Veteran Service Organization to recruit new members while having candid conversations about safe storage of firearms.



GUN SHOWS

For gun shows outreach, we suggest all of the steps above, with a few considerations. Organizers may be initially hesitant about your campaign until they get to know you, so consider asking champions to vouch for your team. It can help to give gun show organizers extra time to learn about your work, review materials, and understand how you plan to interact with attendees. This can lead to more buy-in later down the road.

The Helena Gun Show, held quarterly in Lewis and Clark County, regularly provides a free spot for SCM. When volunteers have been unavailable, event organizers have offered SCM trigger locks to attendees. Planners for another gun show in a neighboring county were difficult to pin down, so an SCM champion reached out to them and SCM staff visited the show on their own to build relationships first.

Regarding gunlocks, it is not uncommon, especially at gun shows, for firearm owners to say they already have more than they can use. In this case, if you have time with the show attendee, find out why (perhaps they have a gun safe, or maybe the locks don't meet their storage needs). You can also focus on other elements of safe storage and suicide prevention – how to help a friend in crisis, 988, and locking firearms if the grandkids come over.

As previously mentioned on page 12, the commander of a local VFW often runs a VFW outreach table for with SCM information. When told by participants that they already had a box of locks, he began asking about the firearm in the nightstand and quickly saw an increase in the number distributed.



- Safe storage mapping
- Working with VSOs
- 988
- Legislation
- Case studies

An important piece to further work is tied to the Mayor's and Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and this Families (SMVF). The hope for that project is to establish Veteran Service Organizations as some of the safe storage locations, and to find other ways to increase access to storage options by the SMVF population. Furthermore, SCM hopes the map will be combined with one being developed by the state with other SMVF resources and then utilized by Montana 211 and the Montana Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Lifeline 988 for any callers in crisis.

SCM is now part of an interim task force with stakeholders from across the state, including both supporting senators, firearm champions, Veteran organizations, and the Everytown lobbyist, to find other ways to champion secure storage practices while furthering the message of safe storage. One important element of this work is creation of templates for firearm hold agreements to be used by both individuals and private entities. Sample hold agreements are being developed with firearm stakeholders who already use informal ones and will be made available through the SCM Toolkit, the SCM website, www.safercommunitiesMT.org, and Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) Injury Prevention website in months to come.



GLOSSARY

211 – Also referred to as Montana 211, this phone line and resource website, montana211.org, provides information and connects people to resources, services and assistance in their communities. This includes resources for service members and Veterans, programs for children and families, as well as services focused on food, mental health, addictions, housing and transportation. When someone calls 2-1-1, a trained resource specialist helps them to navigate services available in their region. The phone line is answered by two of three 988 call centers (please see 988 entry below), allowing for people experiencing suicidal ideation to be connected to appropriate resources.

988 – Refers to Montana 9-8-8, the Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Lifeline. This hotline, which is also part of the national Suicide Prevention Lifeline network, provides 24/7, free and confidential crisis assistance for people experiencing mental health and suicide-related distress. Calls are answered by crisis counselors in Montana, unless the call volume is so high that it must be transferred to another state. Trained counselors work within accredited centers committed to de-escalating suicidal crises. More than 70% of calls are deescalated on the line. The call centers also conduct follow-up calls and can contact law enforcement for active rescues if imminent risk is identified. Learn more at <https://dphhs.mt.gov/suicideprevention/988>

Montana's three 988 call centers, the Fort Peck call center, and their coverage areas are:

- **Voices of Hope** – Big Horn, Blaine, Carbon, Carter, Cascade, Chouteau, Custer, Daniels, Dawson, Fallon, Fergus, Garfield, Glacier, Golden Valley, Hill, Judith Basin, Lewis and Clark, Liberty, McCone, Musselshell, Petroleum, Phillips, Pondera, Powder River, Prairie, Richland, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Sheridan, Stillwater, Teton, Treasure, Toole, Valley, Wibaux, Yellowstone
- **Help Center 211** – Beaverhead, Broadwater, Deer Lodge, Gallatin, Granite, Jefferson, Madison, Meagher, Park, Powell, Silver Bow, Sweetgrass, Wheatland,
- **Lifeline Call Center** (overseen by Western Montana Mental Health) – Flathead, Lake, Lincoln, Mineral, Missoula, Ravalli, and Sanders.
- **Fort Peck Tribes Call and Treatment Center** – Not currently part of the 988 system. However, anyone on the Fort Peck Reservation can call (406) 653-2000 to talk to a crisis counselor who is also a community member.

ATF – Refers to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, a law enforcement agency in the U.S. Department of Justice. In addition to other duties, ATF enforces Federal firearms laws, issues firearms licenses and conducts firearms licensee qualification and compliance inspections. It aids the enforcement of Federal requirements for gun purchases, compliance inspections of existing licensees. <https://www.atf.gov/>



GLOSSARY

At-risk – Refers to individuals who display high risk factors for suicide.

Biometric safe – Refers to a personal firearm safe, which features a biometric locking system that can only be unlocked with biological data such as retinal scans, fingerprints, or facial recognition. These allow safe storage for an individual's firearms and can be paired with other safety devices like gunlocks. Because biometric safes can be unlocked quickly with biological data, they can be a preferred safe storage method if an owner uses a firearm for home protection.

Cable Lock – This mechanism appears similar to a bicycle lock but should not be confused with one. There are different ways to thread your cable lock through a firearm depending on the type of firearm and the style action it uses (bolt, lever, pump, semi-automatic). These are effective means of locking the firearms and you can keep your keys on your person for quick and easy access. You can also “freeze the keys” to create greater time and distance (please see Freeze the Keys entry). One criticism associated with these locks is that many recipients keep the key near the lock. Separating the two is more effective. Project ChildSafe (projectchildsafe.org), a program of NSSF, provides free cable-style locks to community's through partnerships with local law enforcement agencies. You can encourage law enforcement in your area to do the same and then help with distribution. Montana Veteran Affairs regularly distributes cable locks at community events.

CALM – Refers to Counseling on Access to Lethal Means, an online training program available through Zero Suicide and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center websites. This free, self-paced module educates providers on how to reduce access to lethal means, particularly firearms and medication, through a collaborative conversation with a patient. The goal is to work toward safety together. The course can also be helpful to train volunteers on how to talk about firearms with the community members. Find a free, online version of the course at <https://sprc.org/online-library/calm-counseling-on-access-to-lethal-means/>. Also, see entry on lethal means counseling.

Cause of death – an injury or disease that ultimately leads to death of the individual, generally determined by medical examiners or coroners.



GLOSSARY

Federal Firearm Licensee (FFL) – Also commonly referred to as an FFL, refers to businesses involving the dealing, manufacturing, or importing of firearms, or manufacturing or importing ammunition that have received a federal firearms license (FFL) from the ATF. Pawnbrokers also fall under this category. <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/types-federal-firearms-licenses-ffls>
<https://www.atf.gov/firearms/federal-firearms-licenses>

Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) – Federally funded nonprofit health centers that provide primary care services regardless of a patient’s ability to pay. Services provided on a sliding scale (27).

Firearm – According to ATF, a firearm is any weapon (including a starter gun), designed to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive, the frame or receiver of any such weapon, any firearm muffler or firearm silencer, or any destructive device.

Firearm safe storage – A practice involving safely storing firearms to prevent them from being operated. Devices to assist with safe storage include gun safes, gun cases, lock boxes, or another device that is designed to be unlocked by means of a key, combination, or other similar means like biometrics. Other safe storage options involve storing firearms outside of the home with friends, asking law enforcement to hold them temporarily and removing the firing pin from firearms and storing them separately.

Freeze the Keys – Refers to a strategy in which firearm owners use a key-locking device (safe, gunlock) to secure their firearm. They then place the keys into a container of water and freezes it.

Gatekeepers – Can be defined in relation to suicide prevention as an individual that can easily recognize red flags and warning signs and has the knowledge to intervene in some way.

Good Samaritan law – Protection for a person who, in good faith, aids another individual during a crisis. This can be in cases of drug overdoses, providing CPR, or safely storing another person’s firearms or medication. A protection similar to Good Samaritan passed into law on Oct. 1, 2023. Montana Senate Bill 423, now referred to as the Good Samaritan Firearm Liability Protection Law, states that “No cause of action may arise against an individual or a private entity for returning a firearm to the firearm owner at the termination of a firearm hold agreement.”

Gun Safe – Devices designed to store one or more firearms with some sort of locking mechanism such as a key, a combination, or biometric means.

Gun Shop Project – Describes community-driven suicide prevention partnerships between firearm retailers and public health officials. 28



GLOSSARY

Gunlock – a device designed to prevent a firearm from being used unless you obtain the appropriate unlocking method.

Hunter's Education courses – Also known as Hunter's Safety or Hunter's Ed, these courses cover basic information and skills related to the safe handling of firearms as well as basic instruction in wildlife management, game identification, landowner/hunter relations, hunter ethics, and Montana hunting laws and regulations. To purchase or apply for a Montana hunting license, anyone born after January 1, 1985, must complete a hunter education course issued by Montana, any other state, or any Canadian province. The classes, which are offered by FWP, do not typically offer information on suicide prevention but can be an opportunity to provide lethal means materials if/when they are held in your community. The course can also be helpful to train volunteers on how to talk about firearms with the community members. Class listings can be found:

- **In-person** – <https://register-ed.com/programs/montana/32-montana-hunter-education-classroom-course>
- **Online-only** – <https://www.hunter-ed.com/montana/>

Imminent risk – Refers to significant risk of someone making a suicide attempt in the immediate future or near-immediate future.

Layered storage – The idea of combining multiple safe storage mechanisms, such as pairing trigger locks with a gun safe, to limit accessibility to firearms. This is helpful when individuals are in the headspace of making impulsive decisions, if they can think about their plans for more than a few minutes they may be able to think through some of the consequences. Research shows that it can take 10 minutes or less from the time an individual begins thinking about a suicide attempt to the time it takes for them to act on their thoughts. Studies shows that these thoughts tend to subside and reduce in emotional intensity.

Lethal Means – Refers to any instrument or object that someone in crisis might use to take their life (e.g., medication, firearms, bridges).

Lethal Means Counseling – an evidence-based healthcare intervention that prevents injury and death by helping patients and families to reduce access to lethal means for those at risk. It is a process that healthcare providers undertake to determine if a person at risk of injury or death has a suicide plan and access to lethal means, and then work with the person, their family, and friends to reduce access until the risk subsides.



GLOSSARY

Manner of death – Refers to how a death came about. The manners are natural, homicide, suicide, accident, and undetermined.

Mayor's and Governor's Challenge – The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is a federal agency that is partnering with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to bring the Governor's and Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) to states, territories and communities across the nation. Challenge objectives include, convene in a state/territory (Governor's Challenge) or city/community (Mayor's Challenge) interagency military civilian team of leaders to develop an implementation plan to prevent suicide among SMVF that will advance the VA's national strategy for preventing veteran suicide and incorporate evidence-based strategies from the CDC's Suicide Prevention Resource for Action, engage with city, county, territory, and state stakeholders to enhance and align local and state-wide suicide prevention efforts, increase knowledge about the challenges and lessons learned in implementing best policies and practices, implement promising, best, and evidence-based practices to prevent and reduce suicide at a local level, and to define and measure success.

Means – Interchangeable with "lethal means," this term refers to the method someone plans to use to end their life, or choice of suicide method.

Means restriction – Refers to the process of limiting an individual at-risk for suicide to obtain the "means" to end their life. Examples include safely storing someone's firearms for a temporary period outside of the home, utilizing a gunlock and/or safe, separating and securing ammunition and firearms.

Means substitution – Research shows that individuals with a certain preference for a particular type of lethal means will not seek other means if the preferred method is restricted. For example, if an individual chooses to use a firearm but they do not have access, they are unlikely to choose medication instead. If they do, the lower level of lethality will give them time for reconsideration or rescue.

Memorandum of Understanding – A memorandum of understanding, or MOU, is a nonbinding agreement that states each party's intentions to take action or form a new partnership. An MOU does not involve an exchange of funds.



GLOSSARY

Montana Violent Death Reporting System – The Montana Violent Death Reporting System (MT-VDRS) captures unidentifiable data from death certificates, law enforcement records, medical examiner reports, and coroner reports into one central web-based registry in order to better understand the circumstances of violent deaths, including homicides, suicides, undetermined intent deaths, and unintentional firearm deaths. The data provides information on and a better understanding of the personal and environment characteristics in order to develop and implement prevention programs (29).

Peer coach – An individual who has lived experience with a mental health condition but is not fully certified as a Behavioral Health Peer Support Specialist. Peer coaches are trained to increase their support skills through Montana’s Peer Network (<https://mtpeernetwork.org/>). Peer coaches who are associated with Veteran Service Organizations. Their lived experience is tied to their connection to the military (Veterans and their family members) rather than a specific mental health or substance use disorder. Learn more about these at https://www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov/142,41684_VA.

Red Flag Laws – Please see entry on Extreme Risk Protection Orders.

RFID Gun Safe – RFID stands for radio frequency identification, which refers to a method of identifying objects using radio waves assigning them an identification number. An RFID gun safe would allow the user to unlock it with an item such as a key card, or a key fob by tapping it to the RFID reader. Because they are able to be unlocked quickly, RFID safes can be a preferred safe storage method if an owner uses a firearm for home protection.

Safe messaging – Considered best practice, safe messaging is designed to build a narrative of hope and resilience surrounding mental health and suicide that promotes help-seeking behavior and gives audiences hope. Safe messaging suggests using more positive words and phrases for commonly used terms that currently surround mental health conditions and suicide. Some of these include replacing “crazy person” with an “individual living with a mental illness” or substituting “the weather is bipolar today” with “the weather is indecisive today.” Using appropriate language can help decrease negative stigma surrounding mental health and suicide.

Second Amendment – The U.S. Constitution’s second amendment states that a well-regulated Militia is necessary to the security of a free State and the people have the right to keep and bear arms. By collaborating with the firearm community and focusing on voluntary, temporary safe storage, lethal means restriction programs can avoid disagreements associated with this amendment. This approach focuses on ways for individuals to safely bear firearms while preventing unnecessary deaths.



GLOSSARY

Second Amendment – The U.S. Constitution’s second amendment states that a well-regulated Militia is necessary to the security of a free State and the people have the right to keep and bear arms. By collaborating with the firearm community and focusing on voluntary, temporary safe storage, lethal means restriction programs can avoid disagreements associated with this amendment. This approach focuses on ways for individuals to safely bear firearms while preventing unnecessary deaths.

Stakeholders – An individual, group, or organization that is impacted by the outcome of a project. Their decisions tend to influence the outcome of projects.

Stigma – negative beliefs about an individual, group, or the ways in which they behave, which causes them to experience discrimination. It can prevent individuals from seeking care.

Suicidal crisis – Refers to a spectrum of thoughts and behaviors, which can range from thoughts and ideas about suicide without an intent of dying or with an intent of dying and is considered a key risk-factor for self-harm and future suicide attempts.

Suicide – Defined by the National Institute of Health (NIH) as “death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior.”

Suicide Attempt – Defined by the NIH as, “a non-fatal, self-directed, potentially injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior,” may or may not result in injury.

Suicide Attempt Survivor – An individual who attempted and survived a suicide attempt.

Suicide Loss Survivor – An individual who has been affected by the loss of a loved one or friend to suicide. Survivors are at a 3x increased risk of attempting suicide.

Warning Signs – Thoughts, behaviors, and conversations an individual may have that indicates they may be at-risk for suicide. These may include wanting to die, stockpiling medication or seeking firearm access, feelings of guilt or shame, burdensomeness, hopelessness, withdrawing from others, substance use, purposelessness among others.



APPENDIX 1

Firearm Champion Volunteer Description

Safer Communities Montana (SCM), a suicide prevention workgroup focused on educating the public on limiting access to lethal means, is looking for firearm dealers and their staff, range operations and others with a close connection to local firearm-related business to serve with this life-saving project. Their role will be to conduct outreach on behalf of SCM with dealers and ranges in Lewis and Clark County to encourage participation.

SCM advocates for suicide prevention in Lewis and Clark County through collaboration with the firearm and pharmaceutical communities to reduce means access by people at-risk. SCM does so by providing appropriate suicide prevention tools and training to pharmacies, firearm-related businesses, health providers, and community members.

The Volunteer Firearm Champion will assist the SCM Coordinator in targeted outreach to firearm retailers and pawn shops outlined in SCM's Scope of Work. Outreach will include distributing SCM printed materials, promoting the suicide prevention training "QPR", and highlighting the important role that firearm retailers play in suicide prevention.

Volunteers should expect to use their community knowledge and connections to schedule outreach visits, facilitate partnerships between SCM and firearm retailers in Lewis and Clark County, be prepared to expand on the steps retailers can take to prevent suicide from our tip sheets, and have a firm understanding of lethal means counseling. Training will be provided.

For this volunteer role, participants will be able to contribute 5-10 hours per month (1 – 2 hours per week) to outreach, depending on availability. All outreach will occur alongside SCM coordinator. Volunteers are also welcome to attend Safer Communities Montana Leadership Meetings on Thursdays from 2 – 3 P.M. Meeting attendance is not required.

If you are interested in this volunteer opportunity, please contact the _____. Please include your contact information, the best way to communicate with you, and a brief summary of your experience and interest in this position.



Framework for Successful Messaging

Created by the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention as part of its focus to Change the Conversation about suicide and suicide prevention

The *Framework* is a comprehensive web-based resource that outlines four critical issues to consider when messaging to the public about suicide.

» All messages should consider four key elements: **Strategy, Safety, Positive Narrative, and Guidelines**

Safety is avoiding content that is unsafe or undermines prevention.

Strategy involves planning and focusing messages, so they are as effective as possible. Includes Integrating communications with other efforts

- Defining clear goals
- Understanding the audience
- Identifying a “call to action”
- Providing resources for taking action.

Positive Narrative means “promoting the positive” in some form, for example, by

- Sharing resources

- Telling real stories of help-seeking, giving support, coping, or resilience
- Describing action steps the audience can take
- Featuring program successes, new research, or how people are making a difference.

Guidelines means using any specific guidance or best practices that apply.

Learn more at SuicidePreventionMessaging.org.

Framework for Successful Messaging

Created by the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention as part of its focus to Change the Conversation about suicide and suicide prevention

**>> Sign On and
Take Action!**



>> Make a Commitment

Sign on to the *Framework* to indicate your commitment to developing messages that are strategic, safe, convey a positive message, and follow available guidelines.

>> Support Your Commitment with Action

Use the *Framework* and the resources as a guide when developing all of your public messaging.

- Use your voice to contribute to a Positive Narrative about suicide, one that emphasizes solutions and action as opposed to describing the problem in unsolvable terms.
- Create a set of standards or policies to guide messaging across all of your efforts. For example, decide that as a matter of policy, you will not forward or repost news articles that include potentially unsafe content.
- Spread the word about the *Framework* and the media recommendations (reportingonsuicide.org) (for news and entertainment media) to colleagues and contacts who are communicating to the public about suicide.
- Submit examples of messaging that illustrate the *Framework* so they can be added to the Examples Gallery on the *Framework* website.
- Recommend additional resources to be added to the Guidelines section of the *Framework* website, which provides a listing of best resources for key messaging areas.

Learn more at SuicidePreventionMessaging.org.

Montana Firearm Hold Agreement – Owner and Private Business/Entity

This document outlines the arrangement between a firearm owner and a Private Business/Entity to provide voluntary, temporary storage of the owner's firearm(s) at the owner's request.

This Firearm Hold Agreement is between the firearm owner and _____ (Private Business/Entity).

The owner of the firearm(s) is (Name) _____ (Phone) _____.

The designee is (more than one can be named): (Name) _____ (Phone) _____.

Notes: _____

You as the owner/designee are voluntarily storing (number) _____ firearm(s) for a determined length of time. Please specify:

____ One Month ____ Two Months ____ Three Months

At the end of ____ months, the Private Business/Entity holding the firearm(s) will contact you to see if you wish for them to hold onto your firearm(s) for ____ more months. After that duration of time, the firearm(s) will be returned to the owner/designee. The firearm(s) cannot be returned before ____ months and may only be picked up by the owner/designee.

The Private Business/Entity will not sell any ammunition when picking up firearm(s). They are not required to return or refund any ammunition disposed of while storing your firearm(s). **Your name, firearm(s), and the fact that your firearm is being stored is confidential and private, except as necessary for federal licensing requirements.**

Description of Firearm(s): Pick Up Date after ____ months: (Date) _____

Make	Model	Serial Number

Identifying Marks/Accessories: _____

Make	Model	Serial Number

Identifying Marks/Accessories: _____

Make	Model	Serial Number

Identifying Marks/Accessories: _____

Make	Model	Serial Number

Identifying Marks/Accessories: _____

Owner/Designee (Signature): _____ **(Date):** _____

Private Business/Entity Providing Storage (Signature): _____ **(Date):** _____

This document is provided by Safer Communities Montana. Find more materials and tools at www.safercommunitiesmt.org



Montana Firearm Hold Agreement – Owner and Individual

This document outlines the arrangement between a firearm owner and an individual provide voluntary, temporary storage of the owner's firearm(s) at the owner's request.

This Firearm Hold Agreement is between the firearm owner and _____

The owner of the firearm(s) is (Name) _____ (Phone) _____.

The designee is (more than one can be appointed): (Name) _____ (Phone) _____.

Notes: _____

s the owner/designee, are voluntarily storing (number) _____ firearm(s) for a :

____ One Month ____ Two Months ____ Three Months

At the end of ____ months, the individual holding the firearm(s) will contact you to see if you for ____ additional months. After that time, the firearm(s) will be returned to the owner/designee. The firearm(s) cannot be returned before ____ months and may only be picked up by the owner/designee.

Individuals providing safe storage are not required to return or refund any ammunition disposed of while storing your firearm(s). **Your name, firearm(s), and the fact that your firearm is being stored is confidential and private, except as necessary for federal licensing requirements.**

Pick Up Date after ____ months. (Pick Up Date): _____

Description of Firearm(s):

Make	Model	Serial Number

Identifying Marks/Accessories: _____

Make	Model	Serial Number

Identifying Marks/Accessories: _____

Make	Model	Serial Number

Identifying Marks/Accessories: _____

Make	Model	Serial Number

Identifying Marks/Accessories: _____

Owner/Designee (Signature): _____ **(Date):** _____

Individual Providing Storage (Signature): _____ **(Date):** _____

This document is provided by Safer Communities Montana. Find more materials and tools at www.safercommunitiesmt.org



APPENDIX 5

GUN SHOP PROJECT FAQ

From a Q&A with the NH Firearm Safety Coalition

Won't a suicidal person just use something else if they can't get a gun?

Sometimes, yes. But almost every other method is less lethal than a firearm so there's a greater chance the person won't die in their attempt. Also, other methods allow time for rescue or give the ambivalent attempter some time to change their mind mid-attempt.

If a suicidal person substitutes another method and doesn't die, won't they eventually figure out a way to kill themselves later?

Suicidal feelings often pass over time. Studies that follow people over many years have found that roughly 90% of those who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide, including those who made a very serious attempt, like jumping in front of a train.

Suicide is a sensitive subject—I'm concerned about offending my customers or making them feel uncomfortable.

It's true this is a difficult subject, but it's also true that thoughtful conversations about hard topics can produce good outcomes, in this case even save lives. A customer might see our poster or brochure in your store, for example, and talk to his newly-divorced brother about letting him hold onto his guns until his deep depression lifts. Your store may have just helped save a life without your even knowing it. That said, it is very important to us to ensure our materials share information in a respectful manner. Please let us know what you hear!

Suicide is a personal choice—it's your right to end your life. Who am I to intervene if someone doesn't want to live anymore?

Suicide is certainly a personal choice. Some people attempt suicide after a lot of deliberation and are virtually certain life is no longer worth living. But many attempt during a crisis and most are ambivalent. Over half of attempters report less than an hour passed between deciding on suicide and making the attempt, according to a number of studies. Often people who have survived serious attempts say something like: "The moment I jumped I said to myself...What did I just do? I don't want to die..." Also, thousands of people in their teens and twenties kill themselves each year in the U.S.—too young an age to give up on life.



APPENDIX 5

Does relocating the guns for a while always work?

Reducing access to firearms and other lethal means is only part of a broader suicide prevention plan. Those considered actively suicidal are best protected by not being left alone until they are feeling better. Getting professional help and the support of other family and friends is strongly advised. The Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and is available 24/7.

I'm concerned I'll be sued if I refuse to make a sale or rent a firearm to someone who passes the background check.

The two largest gun shops in NH and ME have never been sued for this reason. Stores and ranges are NOT violating 2nd amendment rights by refusing a purchase or rental if we suspect something isn't right; it is well within our legal rights to deny a transaction (as long as this denial is not simply based on a person's race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, or sex). In fact, there have been instances where store owners have been sued by the family of someone who purchased a firearm and killed themselves soon after.

Customers could be acting funny for other reasons besides suicide—first time customers in particular are often a little nervous and don't know anything about guns.

It's hard to know for sure if someone is suicidal. The Tip Sheet is meant to help your staff identify customers who exhibit some "red flags." Usually new customers are eager to hear purchasing advice from staff and will gladly respond to questions we may ask as we try to help them select the best firearm for their purposes. It's those who are reluctant to converse with staff about the purchase, or who seem to be troubled, who require extra caution. You should "go with your gut" and your experience.

The Tip Sheet says one in ten firearm suicides were with recently purchased guns. That sounds like a lot—I've been in business for many years and never thought a customer was suicidal.

It sounded like a lot to us, too. But that number comes straight from the office of the NH Medical Examiner. When the ME's office investigates a death, sometimes they'll find a receipt for the gun in the victim's pocket or next to the gun, so they know it's a recent purchase. Hopefully you and your staff will never come across a suicidal customer, but being prepared should that unfortunate day come could save a life.



APPENDIX 5

I have had a customer purchase a gun for suicide, and he didn't exhibit ANY warning signs at all. You can't always spot people who are really serious about killing themselves.

There's no way all suicides can be prevented. But there have been occasions when a dealer asked a person who seemed shaky whether they should really be buying this gun and they admitted they were considering suicide. One family wrote our co-Chair (owner of Riley's Sports Shop) and said that his question saved their mother's life. The more ambivalent someone is about suicide, the greater the opportunity for intervention.

What do I say to a customer who keeps a gun at home for self-defense but is worried about someone at home who's going through a rough time?

It depends on how that gun is stored. If a customer's loved one at home (or with keys to their home) is going through a rough time, they may want to re-evaluate the accessibility of that firearm to that person. Suicide may be the bigger threat that your customer has to guard against in the short term until the situation improves.



APPENDIX 6

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Sport shooting? Sweet! Hunting? Bring us some meat! But when not in use, keep you and your family safer by locking up all firearms. Medication, too. Learn more at [xxxx](#) [#SaferCommunitiesMT](#) [#safestoragesaveslives](#) [#safestorage](#)

Safe storage saves lives. Need a free combination gunlock or drug deactivation kit? Request one at [xxx](#) [#SaferCommunitiesMT](#) [#safestoragesaveslives](#) [#safestorage](#)

After you're done hunting, don't forget to lock and unload. Safe storage saves lives. Some safety tips include:

- **Secure firearms with a gunlock or secure them in a safe**
- **Make sure firearms are unloaded prior to being stored**
- **Store ammunition in a separate area from firearms**
- **Ask someone you trust to hold your firearms during times of mental crisis**
- **If you would like free Gun Locks please reach out to us or go to [xxxx](#). [#SaferCommunitiesMT](#) [#safestoragesaveslives](#) [#safestorage](#)**



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