

Position Statement on Doctors Against Handgun Violence

Approved by the Board of Trustees, October 2001

"Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees...These are...position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects..." – *APA Operations Manual*.

The Board approved the first four (4) intervention/action items (excerpted below) from a position statement by Doctors Against Handgun Violence. (www.doctorsagainsthandinjury.org).

- **Action: To promote public safety, collect comprehensive data on handgun related injuries.**

We need the kind of epidemiologic data that can only come from a state-based, federally funded, national database. This database should include information about all homicides, suicides, and unintentional deaths and injuries by specific weapon type as well as information about the individuals involved (absent personal identifiers), geographic location, circumstances, point of purchase, date and so on. In short, we need a level of detail comparable to that collected for motor vehicle fatalities and sufficient for policy analysis.

- **Action: To promote public safety, handguns should be treated as a consumer product.**

Dealing with handguns the same way we do other products would lead to the incorporation of already developed safety features that can reduce unintentional injury as well as promoting new safety designs.

- **Action: To promote public safety, consistent requirements regarding the sale and distribution of handguns should be applied to persons at risk of harming themselves or others.**

Based on the evidence now available, we advocate the three steps identified below. But we also believe that proof of their benefits should be required. If documentation of value is not forthcoming, consideration should be given to restoring the status quo ante.

Expand the Brady background checks to gun shows.

Current law makes the purchase and/or have possession of weapons by certain classes of people illegal. While gun dealers with Federal Firearms Licenses (FFLs) are required to conduct background checks prior to a sale, other sellers are not required to do so. As a result proscribed persons can still purchase weapons from them without impediment. By uniformly requiring a background check for the commercial sale of firearms, we can reduce inappropriate sales and decrease the risk of handgun injuries.

Support a limitation on the number of guns that can be purchased during a given time period.

Diversion of weapons from the legal market to a secondary market, where criminals and other unauthorized persons can purchase them, contributes to handgun misuse and injury. Limitations on volume purchases can prevent straw purchases (the lawful procurement of firearms by an authorized individual with the intent to sell them to unauthorized persons), thereby reducing the number of criminals and proscribed persons with guns and, as a result, diminish the number of handgun injuries.

Restore the waiting period between the time an individual purchases a weapon and the time s/he takes possession of it.

Data demonstrate that both homicide and suicide are often "acts of passion" and if the means to commit the act are not immediately available, the passion may ebb and death and injury may be avoided.

- **Action: To promote public safety, we support aggressive enforcement of current laws against illegal possession, purchase and sale of handguns.**

Just as strict enforcement of blood alcohol levels has reduced drunk driving, consistent prosecution of illegal possession or sale of guns can deter such behavior. Aggressive enforcement of the law can prevent those who have guns illegally from using them, and reduce the number of guns circulating in the secondary market. As a result, injuries are likely to be reduced.