

Gun Violence in Dane County

September 2023

Gun violence is a preventable problem that affects everyone, from the people directly involved to our society as a whole.

- Survivors of gun violence can experience long-term physical and mental health effects. Even if no one is hurt, witnesses, friends, and families can have mental health impacts for years.
- Gun violence costs our society a lot of money. The organization [Everytown for Gun Safety](#) estimates that in 2021, gun violence cost Dane County taxpayers over 10 million dollars.

We can make a difference by addressing gun violence at all levels of our society.

Efforts to address gun violence require a comprehensive approach. That looks like: increasing responsible gun ownership, creating stricter regulations, improving mental health support, supporting community-based intervention programs, focusing on addressing root causes such as poverty, inequality, and social disconnection. You can find our full list of recommendations to prevent gun violence [on our website](#).

This report contains data on sensitive topics, including suicide. If you or your loved one need support, call 988 for free and confidential help.



✓ Key Points

- The **number of guns in Wisconsin has increased** over the last decade.
- The number and rate of firearm-related deaths has also increased.
- On average, **80% of annual firearm deaths in Dane County are due to suicide**.
- **Suicide disproportionately impacts men**, particularly white men, while homicide disproportionately impacts Black men.
- **1 in 2 adults report being impacted by gun violence**, either directly or through a family member.

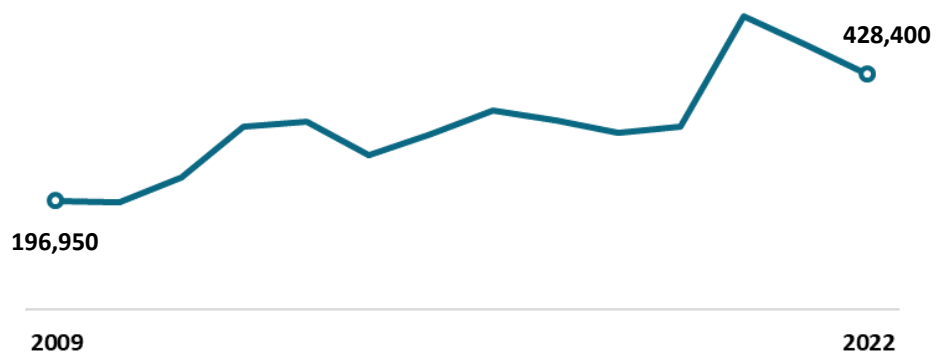
The true burden of gun violence is much greater than just deaths and injuries. It is also the trauma and long-term effects to people and communities, even when no one was physically hurt.

🏠 Gun Ownership

The **estimated number of firearms** sold to people in Wisconsin has increased since 2009.

Increased firearm access is associated with greater rates of [firearm deaths](#).

The number of firearms sold during 2020 was high, as civil unrest and the pressures of COVID-19 isolation were felt by many.



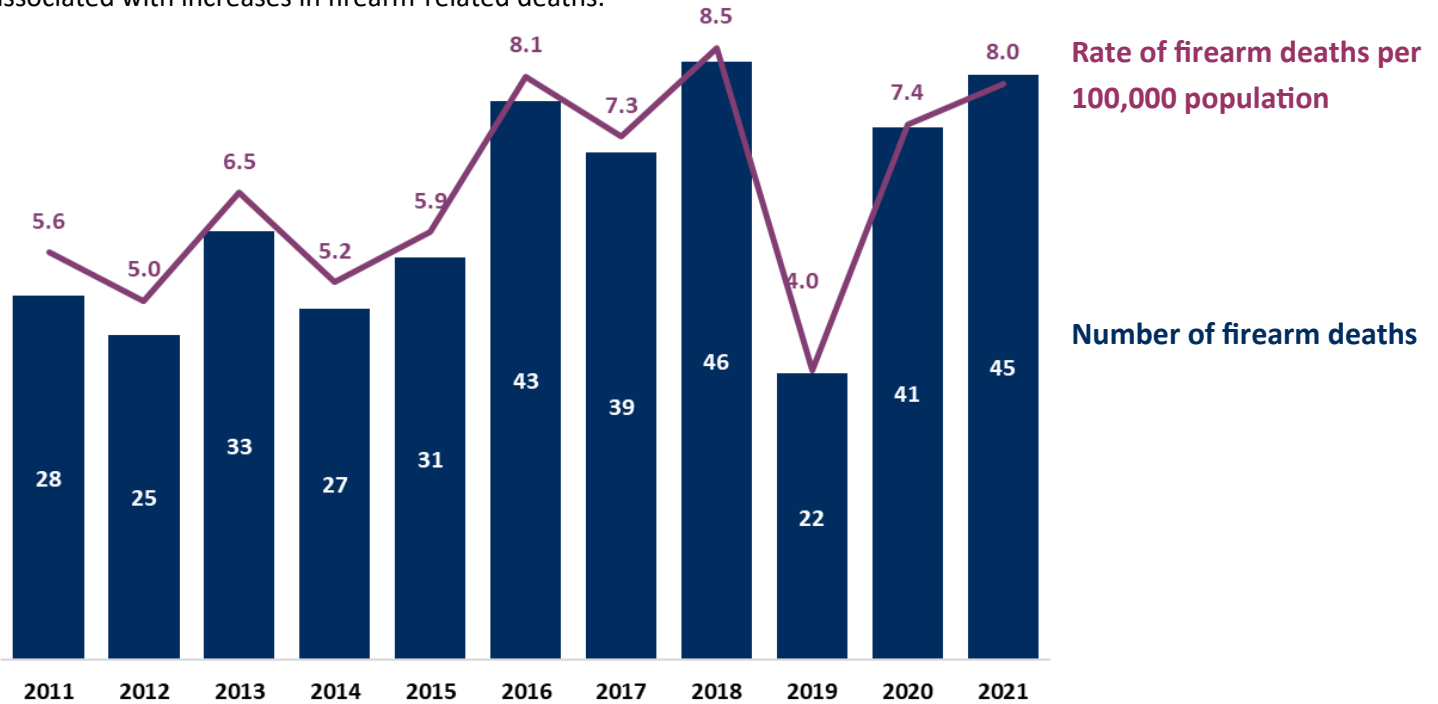
Graph data source: [FBI background checks](#) in Wisconsin as a proxy for licensed firearm sales.



Fatal and Non-Fatal Injuries

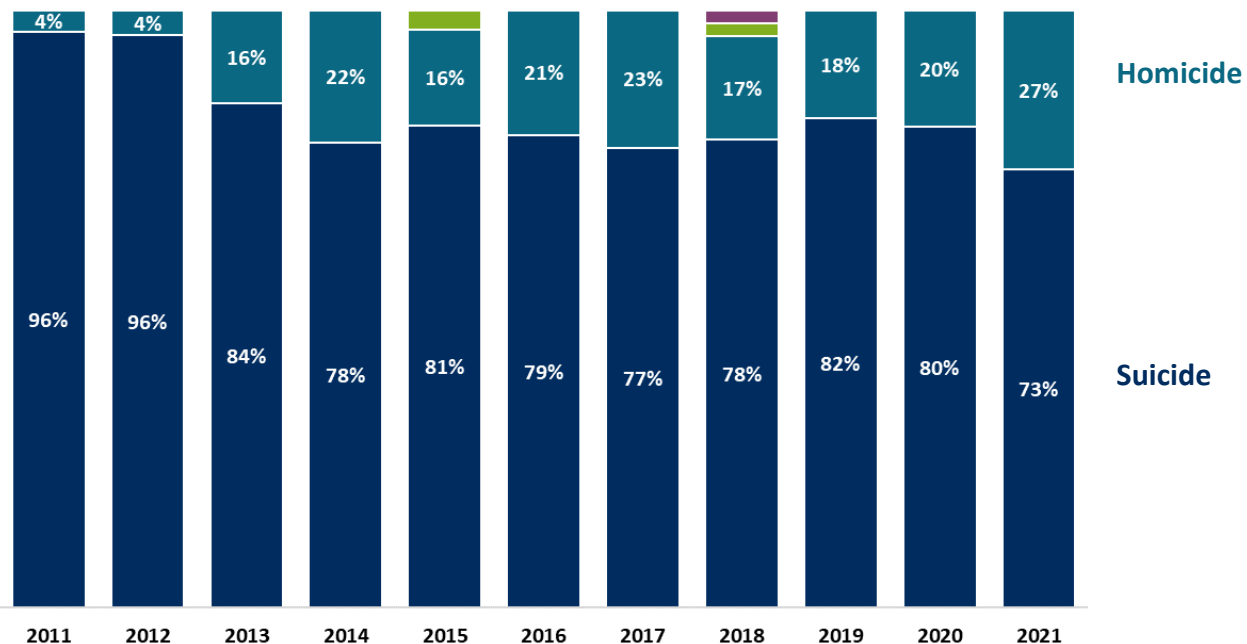
Both the **number** and **rate** of deaths due to firearms increased in Dane County over the last decade.

However, most of the increase happened from 2012 to 2016. Firearm deaths have been stable since 2016. We don't know why deaths are increasing, but [increasing access to firearms](#) may contribute to this trend. [Systemic causes like poverty](#) have also been associated with increases in firearm-related deaths.



On average, 4 out of 5 of people in Dane County who die from guns die by **suicide**.

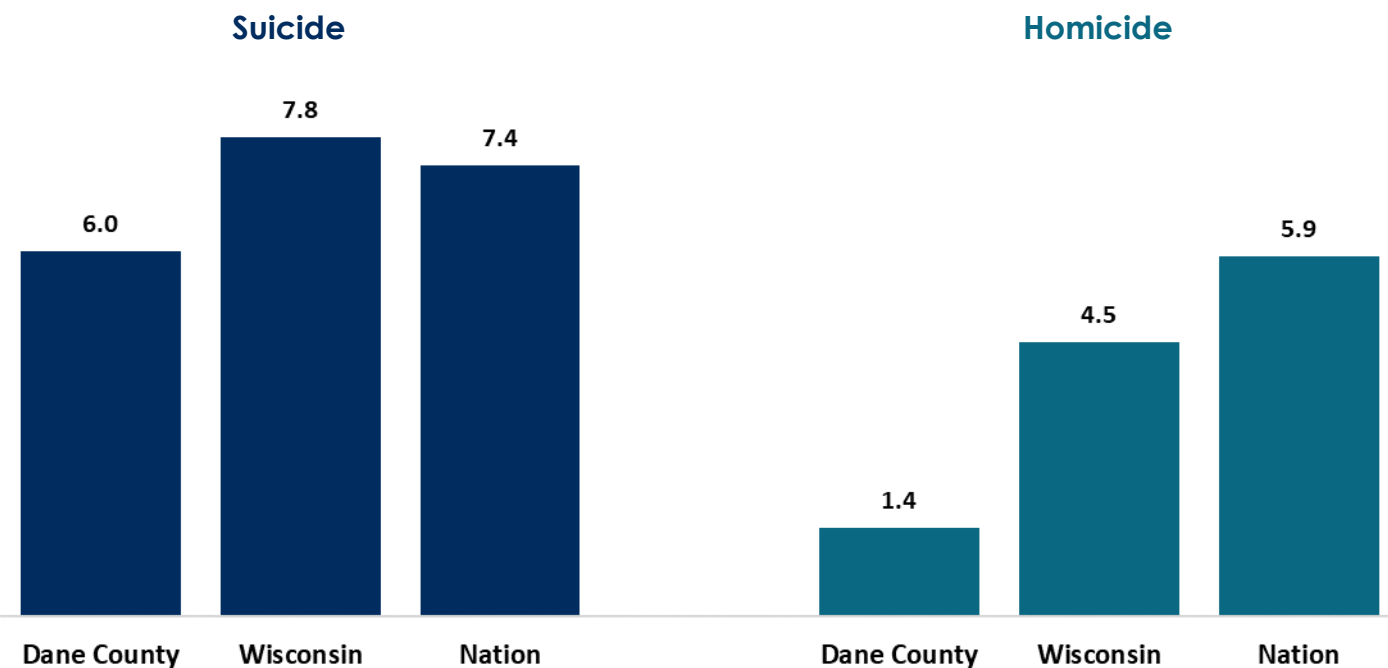
A small percentage of firearm deaths had **unknown intent** or were **unintentional**. Some factors that help [prevent suicide](#) include people feeling connected to others and their community, having access to quality physical and mental health care, and having reduced access to ways of hurting themselves.



Data source for this page: Vital records for people living in Dane County.

Dane County had a firearm **suicide rate** in 2020 that was similar to the Wisconsin and national averages. However, our firearm **homicide rate** was much lower than the Wisconsin and national rates. (Rate is per 100,000 population)

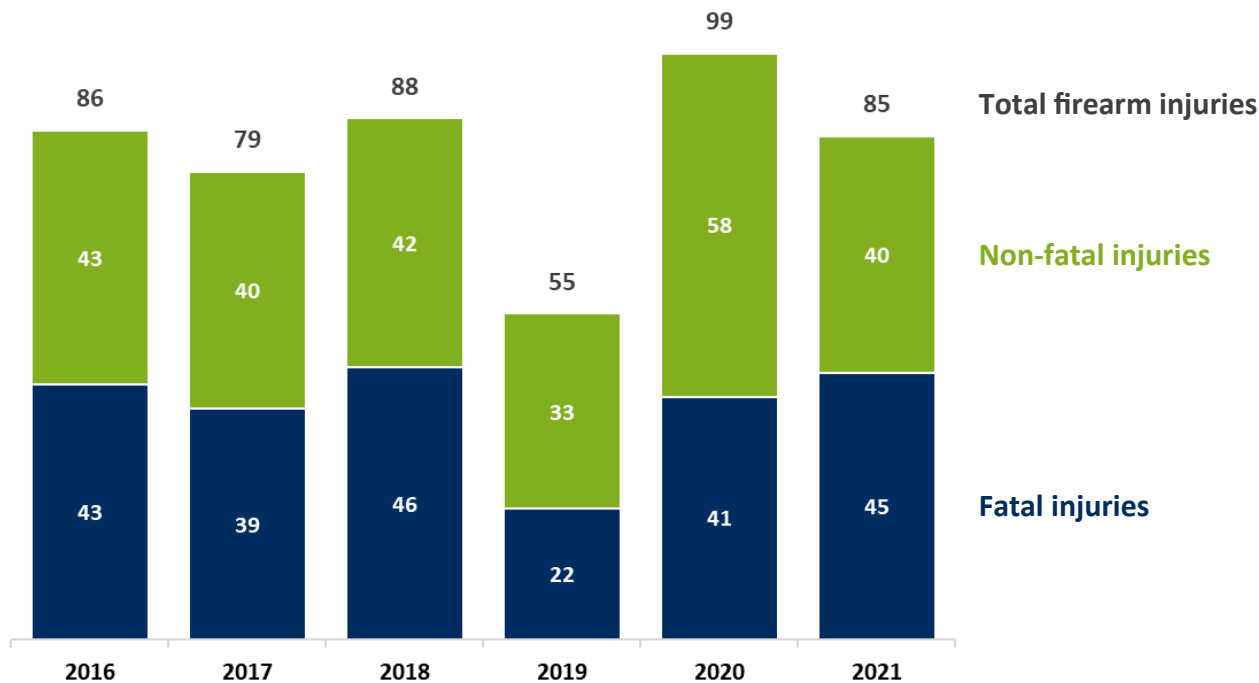
Dane County has a low number of homicides in comparison to the state and country as a whole. Yet every life lost to a firearm is a preventable tragedy and affects many people around the person who died.



Data source: Vital records for people living in Dane County, CDC WISQUARS for Wisconsin and nation

In addition to **firearm deaths**, there are an equal number of **non-fatal firearm injuries** in Dane County each year.

Depending on how severe the injury is, non-fatal injuries from firearms can cause serious and long-term health effects. One [study](#) found that roughly 20% of patients surviving intentional firearm injury go on to develop a disability.



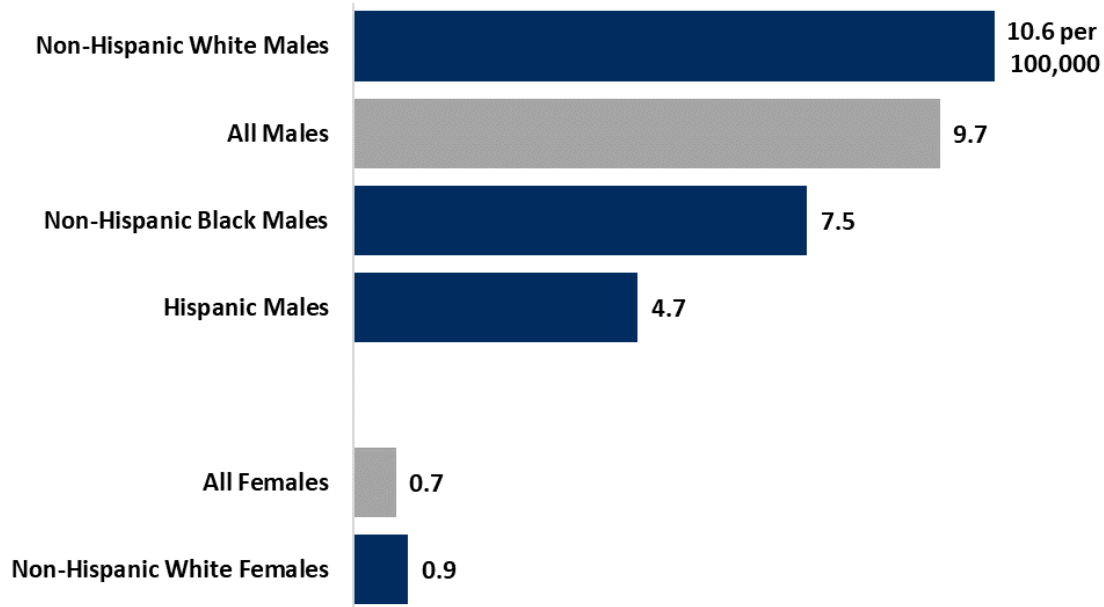
Data source: Hospital discharge data for people living in Dane County



Characteristics of People who Died

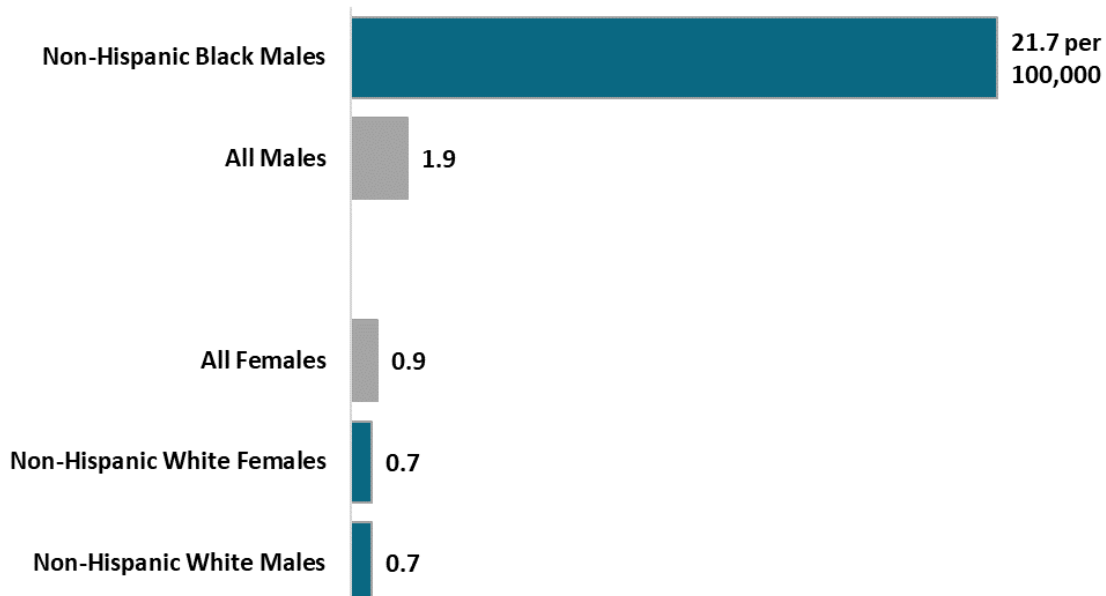
Non-Hispanic white men are more likely than men of other races and ethnicities, and 11 times more likely than all women, to die by **suicide** with a firearm.

Some [reasons](#) for white men having higher suicide rates include being less likely to seek mental health care, more likely to use a firearm, and being more socially isolated than men of other racial and ethnic groups. While the numbers were too small in Dane County, Native American people also have higher than average rates of suicide with a firearm in [Wisconsin](#) and [nationally](#).



Non-Hispanic Black men are 11 times more likely than men and 24 times more likely than women of other races and ethnicities to die by **homicide** with a firearm.

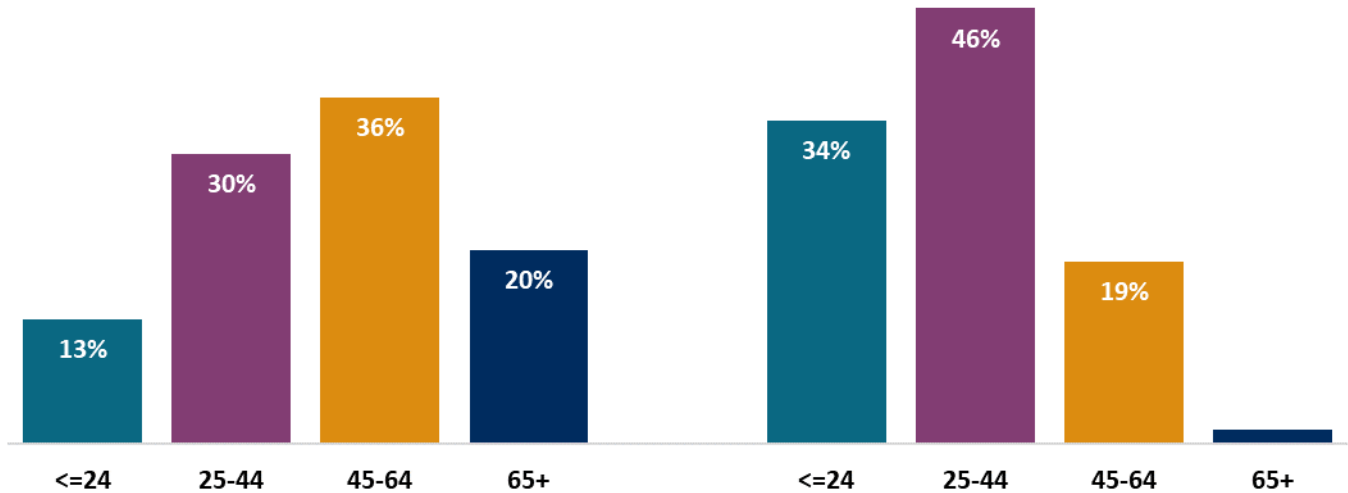
Homicide rates are a [reflection of systemic racism](#) and disinvestment in the U.S.. Concentrated poverty and disadvantage, created through policies such as redlining and discriminatory lending practices, [has contributed to increased gun violence](#) within Black communities.



Both graphs show the age-adjusted death rates per 100,000 population, 2016-2021. Age adjustment is a statistical process which allows communities with different age structures to be compared. Rates are shown for racial and ethnic groups with at least 5 deaths during the 6-year period. 5 deaths for the top graph and 7 deaths for the bottom graph are not included.

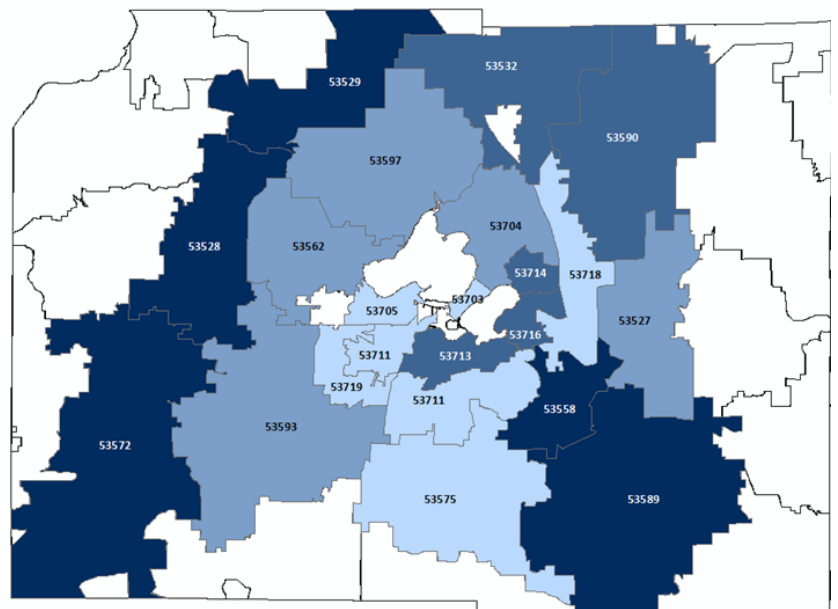
Data source: Vital records for people living in Dane County.

The age at death of people who died during 2011-2021 by firearm suicide (left) tended to be older than people who died by firearm homicide (right).

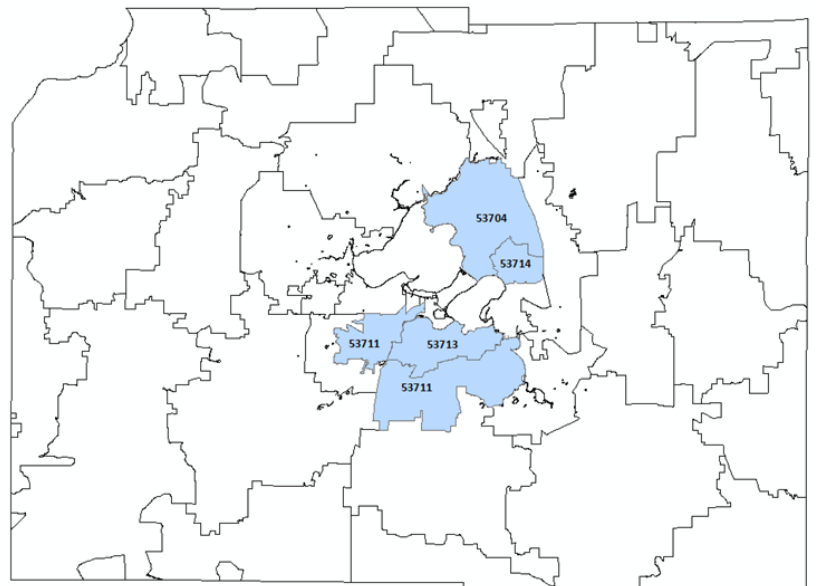
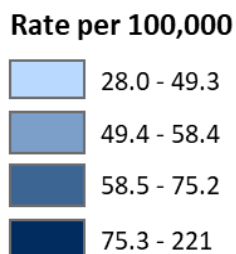


The firearm suicide rate per 100,000 (top) is higher in rural zip codes in Dane County, and the homicide rate (bottom) is higher in urban zip codes.

The distribution of suicide rates [may be due to](#) increased access to firearms, increased social isolation and decreased access to mental health care in rural areas.



The neighborhoods where homicides are more common correspond with [neighborhoods of higher disadvantage](#) in Dane County.



Rates are shown for zip codes with at least 5 deaths from 2011-2021.
Data source for the page: Vital records for people living in Dane County.

Firearms and All Violent Crime

Firearms were present during over 1,000 violent incidents in Dane County during 2018-2022, including:

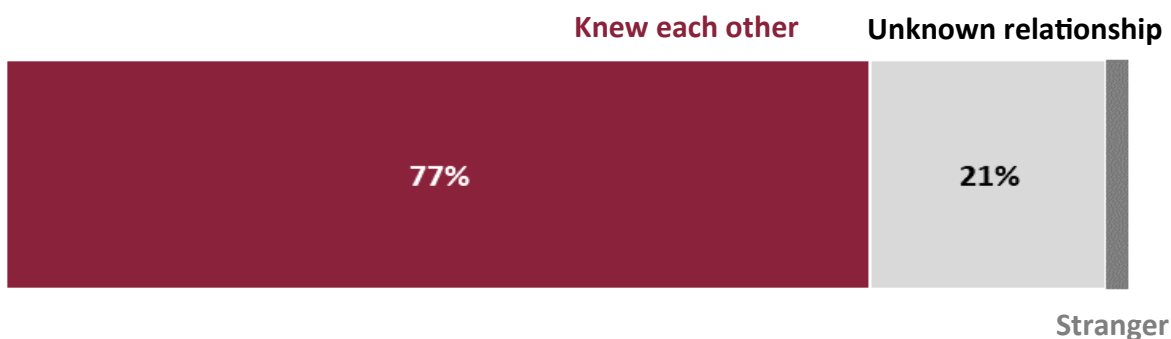
- **78% of 49 homicides**
- **43% of 1,037 robberies**
- **15% of 3,442 aggravated assaults**
- **1% of 809 incidents of reported* rape**

* Acts of sexual violence are among those most likely to go unreported.

Suicide is not classified by the criminal justice field as a violent crime, but for comparison, firearms were the cause of death in 45% of 268 suicides in Dane County from 2018-2021.

More than two-thirds of those who died by firearm homicide in Dane County during 2018-2022 **knew the person** who shot them.

In some cases (21%) the relationship between the victim and suspect was unknown. In only one documented case was the suspect known to be a stranger to the victim.



Data source for the page: Wisconsin Department of Justice. Note that these are likely undercounts as many police departments in Dane County did not start incident based reporting until 2021.

Community Trauma

Beyond fatalities and injuries, gun violence can contribute to a climate of fear and insecurity within communities.

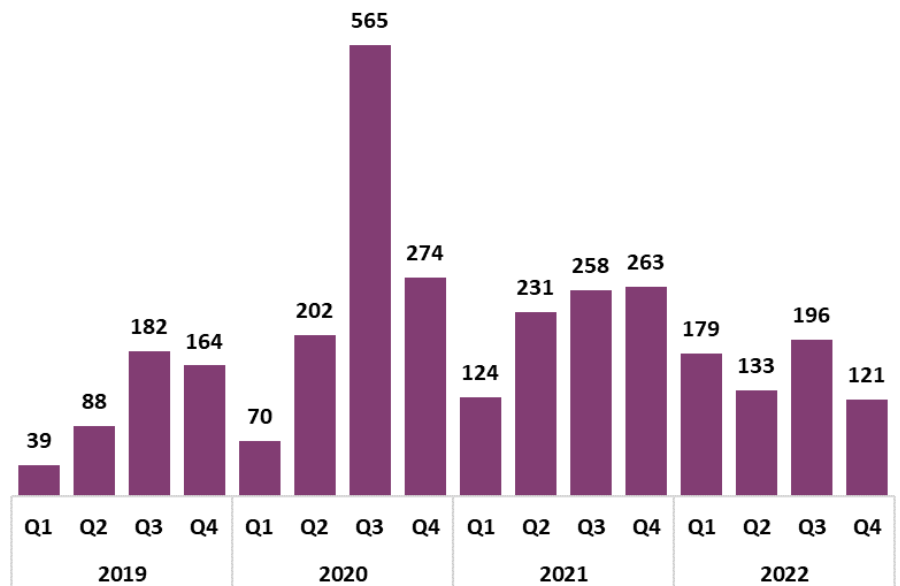
People may be scared to go outside, participate in community activities, or even visit local businesses.

The ultimate impacts of gun violence on communities can result in social isolation, decreased economic neighborhood development, and reduced quality of life.



In Madison, there were over 450 **shell casings** (evidence that a gun was fired) per year recovered by the police from 2019-2022, with more than 1,000 recovered during 2020 alone.

Although these data on shots being fired apply only to the city of Madison, they give an indication of how gun violence is prevalent in our communities, even when no one is injured.



Data source: Madison Police Department, [Chief's Reports to the Common Council](#)



National Survey Results

During March 2023, the Kaiser Family Foundation conducted a [survey](#) with a nationally representative sample of Americans about their experiences with gun-related violence, injuries and deaths. Here are some of the key findings from this survey:

- **1 in 2 adults reported being impacted by gun violence**, either directly or through a family member.
- **1 in 5 adults reported being personally threatened with a gun (21%), having a family member who was killed by a gun, including suicide (19%), or personally witnessing someone being shot (17%).**
- **Almost 1 in 3 (29%) respondents purchased a gun to protect themselves from the threat of gun violence**, and 4 in 10 (41%) reported living in a household with a gun.

The impact of gun violence was higher among people of color.

- **1 in 3 Black adults personally witnessed someone being shot (31%)** or had a family member who was killed by a gun (34%). 1 in 5 Hispanic adults (22%) personally witnessed someone being shot.
- **1 in 5 Black adults (20%) and Hispanic adults (18%) reported that gun violence is a “constant threat”** to their communities.
- 1 in 3 Black adults (32%) and Hispanic adults (33%) reported that they **worry every day or almost every day about gun violence**, compared to 1 in 10 white adults.