

Research raises concerns about firearm access for people with dementia

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Today, new research released from faculty at the University of Colorado School of Medicine at the Anschutz Medical Campus looked at how caregivers address the issues of firearm safety when taking care of someone who has Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD) and has access to a gun.

The findings published today in *JAMA Network Open*.

"Alzheimer's and other kinds of dementia can cause changes in thinking and memory that could make someone unsafe to handle a gun—even if that person has a lifetime of experience," said lead researcher Emmy Betz, MD, MPH, associate professor of emergency medicine at the CU School of Medicine. "Figuring out what to do about firearms can be stressful for family members and other dementia caregivers. Our study shows that few caregivers, including spouses and family members, have received professional counseling about how to address gun safety."

The researchers examined a national survey of adults living in homes with firearms and focused on

the results of 124 caregivers for patients with dementia. Key study findings include:

- Seventy-one percent of caregivers thought it was most likely that a person with ADRD would accidentally harm him or herself or someone else. Suicide (harming themselves) is the most common form of firearm injury for this population.
- Among caregivers, 41 percent lived with the person with ADRD, usually, this was a spouse or partner. Nearly one-third of these caregivers said the person with ADRD has access to firearms in the home.
- Caregivers reported that many people with ADRD have not made plans about what to do with firearms if they became unfit to handle them.
- Majority of participants said they look to [healthcare professionals](#) for help in discussing firearm safety in the context of ADRD, but only five percent had ever had a healthcare professional talk with them about the topic.

The results of the study underscore the role of [healthcare providers](#) in addressing firearm safety and the disease progression of ADRD. This includes routine firearm safety counseling from healthcare providers and providing easy access to information and resources from trusted sources. At the CU School of Medicine, Betz leads the Firearm Injury Prevention Initiative, which uses collaboration and creative approaches to help prevent [firearm](#) injuries and deaths.

"As [healthcare](#) providers, [family members](#) and friends, we can help [older adults](#) think about what they would want to happen with their firearms, if they become unsafe to use them," said Betz. "This approach promotes respect for independence and preferences while also ensuring safety."

More information: Marian E. Betz et al. Views on

Firearm Safety Among Caregivers of People With Alzheimer Disease and Related Dementias. *JAMA Netw Open.* 2020;3(7):e207756. DOI: [10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.7756](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.7756)

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