

# THE ECONOMIC COST OF GUN VIOLENCE IN CALIFORNIA

In recent years, California has experienced an average of 1327 gun-related homicides, 1553 gun-related suicides, 4284 nonfatal interpersonal shootings, and 1860 accidental shootings per year.<sup>1</sup> California has the strongest gun safety laws in the nation and one of the lowest gun death rates. **Nevertheless, gun violence in the state exacts a high physical, emotional, and financial toll on families and communities.** We often hear about the heartbreak and injury these shootings cause, but there is another aspect of the gun violence epidemic that doesn't receive as much attention: the overwhelming financial cost.

## TALLYING THE NUMBERS

The 9,980 shootings that occur each year in California are a serious drain on the state's economy. Based on the expenses we can directly measure, including **healthcare costs** (\$348 million per year), **law enforcement and criminal justice expenses** (\$625 million per year), **costs to employers** (\$39 million per year), and **lost income** (\$5.5 billion per year), the initial price tag of gun violence in California is over **\$6.5 billion per year**. Much of this tab is picked up by the public, in part because up to 85% of gunshot victims are either uninsured or on some form of publicly funded insurance. Additionally, law enforcement efforts are funded entirely by taxpayer dollars. **As a result, the annual cost of gun violence to California taxpayers is approximately \$1.4 billion.**<sup>2</sup>

## CALIFORNIA'S COSTS IN CONTEXT

Although the cost of gun violence in California is staggering, these costs would be much higher if the state had not comprehensively strengthened its gun safety laws over the past 25 years.

If California's gun death rate remained at its 1993 level, when California's gun laws were relatively weak, gun violence would currently cost the state over \$41 billion each year. Additionally, if California's gun death rate was as high as a state like Louisiana, which has some of the weakest gun laws in the nation, the cost of gun violence in California would total approximately \$45 billion annually.

Although California's strong gun safety laws have contributed to saving both lives and money, gun violence still imposes massive human, moral, and fiscal costs. More can and must be done to prevent these costly tragedies.

Building effective violence reduction infrastructure—including street outreach programs for those most at risk—requires a tiny investment compared to the overall cost of gun violence. Cities like Richmond, Oakland, and Los Angeles have made this investment in recent years and have seen impressive drops in gun violence as a result.

**\$6.5+**  
**BILLION**  
TOTAL DIRECTLY  
MEASURABLE  
COSTS

When the reduced quality of life attributable to pain and suffering (\$11.8 billion) is considered, **the overall estimate of the economic cost of gun violence rises to \$18.3 billion per year.** While this number is staggering, it actually understates the true cost of gun violence in California because it doesn't include significant yet difficult-to-measure costs, including lost business opportunities, lowered property values, and reductions in the tax base.

## REDUCING GUN VIOLENCE

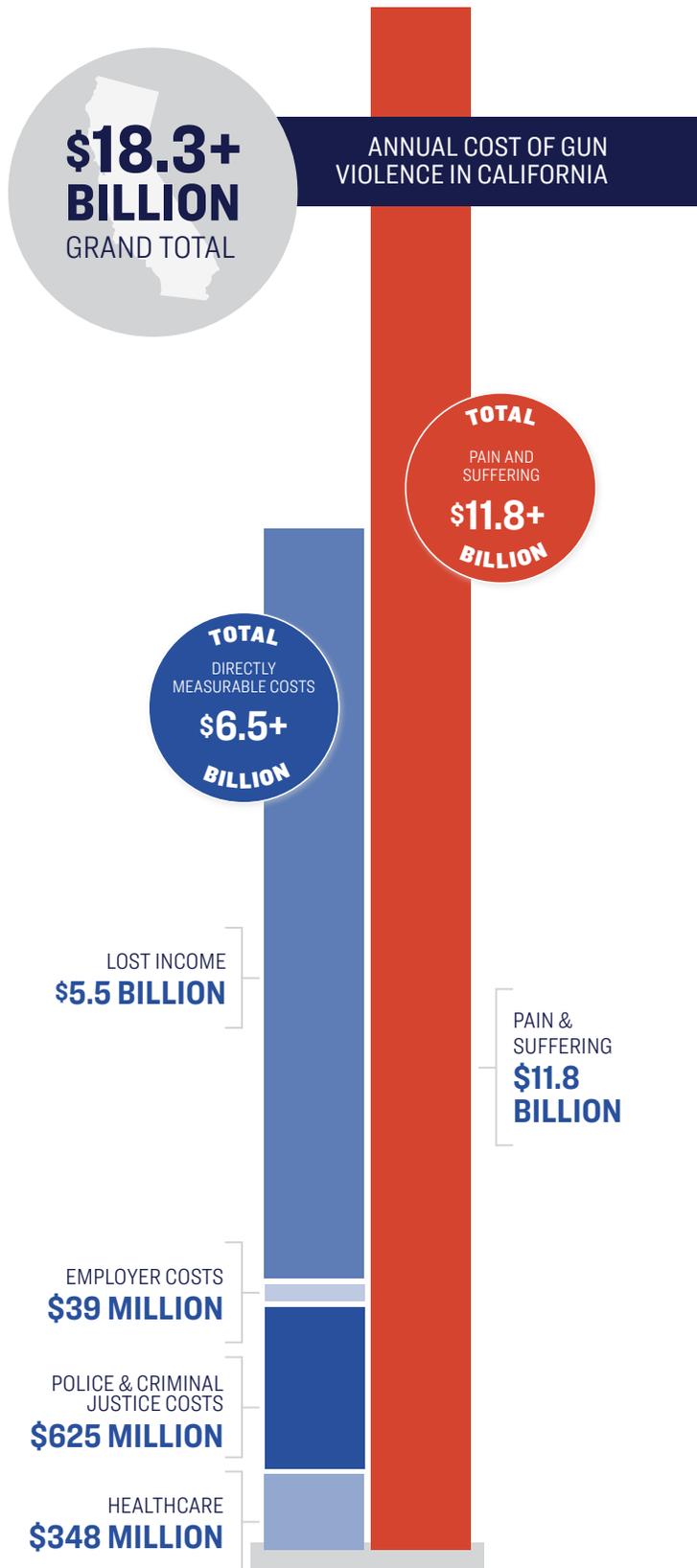
There is much work to be done. Fortunately, a number of proven solutions exist to reduce gun violence, including evidence-based violence prevention and intervention strategies focused on delivering services to those most at risk for participating in violent behavior. The investment required to scale up and expand these lifesaving solutions in California is minuscule compared to the yearly cost of gun violence in the state.

1. Fatal firearm injury data came from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's WISQARS Fatal Injury Reports (<http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html>). Nonfatal firearm injuries came from California Department of Public Health's Epicenter (<http://epicenter.cdph.ca.gov/ReportMenus/CustomTables.aspx>).
2. Estimates of the cost of gun violence in California were created using a model of the cost of gun violence published in 2012 by economists at the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE). PIRE is a nonprofit research organization that focuses on using scientific research to inform public policy. This model can be found at <http://www.pire.org/documents/gswcost2010.pdf>. All cost estimates were adjusted to 2016 dollars.

## WE'RE ON A MISSION TO SAVE LIVES

For nearly 25 years, the legal experts at Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence have been fighting for a safer America by researching, drafting, and defending the laws, policies, and programs proven to save lives from gun violence. Founded in the wake of a 1993 mass shooting in San Francisco, in 2016 the Law Center joined with former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords to form a courageous new force for gun safety that stretches coast to coast.

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