

# THE ECONOMIC COST OF GUN VIOLENCE IN WASHINGTON

In recent years, Washington has experienced an average of 134 gun-related homicides, 523 gun-related suicides, and hundreds of nonfatal shootings per year.<sup>1</sup> Washington has the 10th lowest gun death rate among the states, yet **gun violence still exacts a high physical, emotional, and financial toll on families and communities in the state.** We often hear about the heartbreak and physical pain 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 hundreds of shootings that occur each year in Washington are a serious drain on the state's economy. Based on the expenses we can directly measure, including **healthcare costs** (\$56 million per year), **law enforcement and criminal justice expenses** (\$64 million per year), **costs to employers** (\$8 million per year), and **lost income** (\$1.2 billion per year), the initial price tag of gun violence in Washington is over **\$1.3 billion per year.** Much of this tab is picked up by the public. Up to 85% of gunshot victims, for example, 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 direct annual cost of gun violence to Washington taxpayers is over \$219 million.**<sup>2</sup>

## GUN VIOLENCE'S DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT

Interpersonal gun violence in Washington disproportionately impacts underserved communities in urban areas, with young men of color being particularly vulnerable. For example, in 2016, black and Hispanic men made up just 8% of the state's population, but nearly 40% of gun homicide victims. **In fact, black men are nearly seven times as likely as white men to be the victim of a gun homicide in Washington.**

Moreover, in recent years, Washington has seen a sustained increase in interpersonal gun violence, with cities suffering particularly increased gun homicide rates. **From 2014 to 2016, gun homicides increased by more than 15% across the state.**

Interpersonal gun violence, as well as the staggering number of suicides and unintentional shootings, impose massive human, moral, and fiscal costs on the state. More can and must be done to prevent these costly tragedies.

**\$1.3+**  
**BILLION**

TOTAL  
DIRECTLY  
MEASURABLE  
COSTS

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When the reduced quality of life attributable to pain and suffering (\$2.5 billion) is considered, the overall estimate of the economic cost of gun violence rises to **\$3.8 billion per year**. While this number is staggering, it actually understates the true cost of gun violence in Washington 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

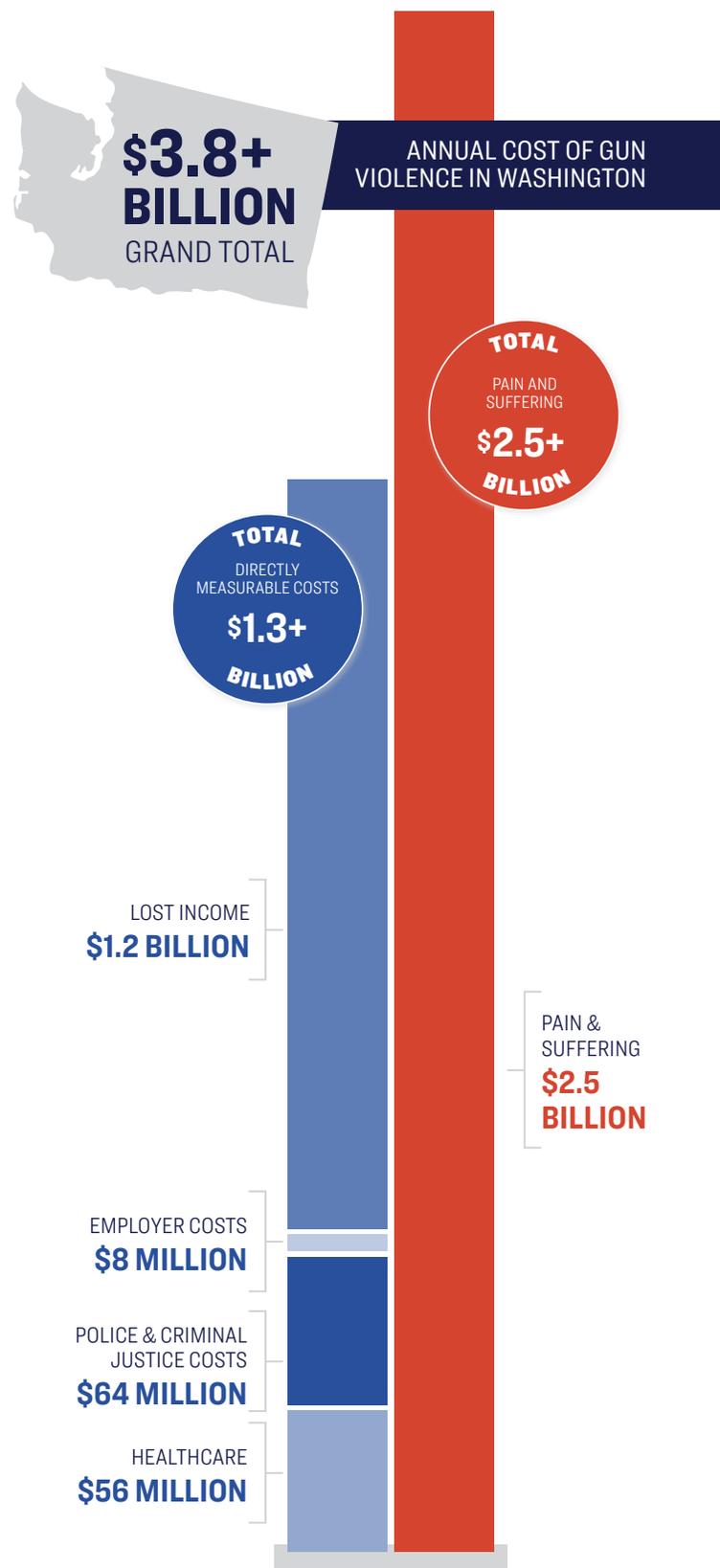
There is much work to be done. Fortunately, a number of proven solutions exist to reduce gun violence in Washington, including limiting access to military-style weapons and large-capacity magazines and funding urban violence reduction programs. The investment required to implement these lifesaving solutions is minuscule compared to the yearly cost of gun violence.

1. Fatal firearm injury data came from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's WISQARS Fatal Injury Reports ([www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html)). Nonfatal firearm injuries were provided by the Washington State Department of Health and an estimation tool which creates a ratio of the national incidence of nonfatal shootings, sourced from the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System's Firearm Injury Surveillance Study (NEISS-FISS), and the number of fatal shootings that Washington experienced in a given year, sourced from WISQARS. NEISS-FISS data is available at [www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/series/198#studies](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/series/198#studies).
2. Estimates of the cost of gun violence were created using a model 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 [www.pire.org/documents/gswcost2010.pdf](http://www.pire.org/documents/gswcost2010.pdf). All cost estimates were adjusted to 2016 dollars.

## WE'RE ON A MISSION TO SAVE LIVES

For 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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