



National Violence Prevention Network

Testimony of the National Violence Prevention Network Concerning Fiscal Year 2013 Appropriations

*Submitted for the Record to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies – April 27, 2012*

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of increased funding for the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS), which is administered by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The National Violence Prevention Network, a broad and diverse alliance of health and welfare, suicide and violence prevention, and law enforcement advocates supports increasing the FY 2013 funding level to \$5 million to allow the CDC to expand NVDRS beyond the 18 states that currently participate in the program. FY 2012 NVDRS funding is \$3.5 million.

BACKGROUND

Each year, about 50,000 Americans die violent deaths. Since 2003, suicide and homicide have been the second and third leading causes of death for people aged 1–39 years. An average of 89 people take their own lives every day.

The NVDRS program makes better use of data that are already being collected by health, law enforcement, and social service agencies. The NVDRS program, in fact, does not require the collection of any new data. Instead it links together information that, when kept in separate compartments, is much less valuable as a tool to characterize and monitor violent deaths. With a clearer picture of why violent deaths occurs, law



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enforcement, public health officials and others can work together more effectively to identify those at risk and target effective preventive services.

Currently, NVDRS funding levels only allow the program to operate in 18 states, including **Alaska, Colorado, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin**. Six additional states, plus the District of Columbia, were previously approved for participation in the NVDRS, but were unable to join due to funding shortfalls: **Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, New York, and Texas**. Several other states have expressed an interest in joining once new funding becomes available. While NVDRS is beginning to strengthen violence and suicide prevention efforts in the 18 participating states, many other states will lack this benefit until additional funding is allocated.

NVDRS IN ACTION

Child abuse and other violence involving children and adolescents remains a problem in America, and it is only through a comprehensive understanding of its root causes that these needless deaths can be prevented. Studies suggest that between 3.3 and 10 million children witness some form of domestic violence annually. Additionally, 1,770 children died as a result of abuse or neglect in 2009.



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Children are most vulnerable and most dependent on their caregivers during infancy and early childhood. Sadly, NVDRS data has shown that young children are at the greatest risk of homicide in their own homes. Combined NVDRS data from **Alaska, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, South Carolina, and Virginia** determined that African American children aged four years old and under are more than four times more likely to be victims of homicide than Caucasian children, and that homicides of children aged four and under are most often committed by a parent or caregiver in the home. The data also shows that household items, or “weapons of opportunity,” were most commonly used, suggesting that poor stress responses may be factors in these deaths. Knowing the demographics and methods of abusers can lead to more effective, targeted prevention programs.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is another issue where NVDRS is proving its value. While IPV has declined along with other trends in crime over the past decade, thousands of Americans still fall victim to it every year. Intimate partner homicides accounted for 33 percent of the murders of women and less than four percent of the murders of men in 2005, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Despite still being in its early stages, NVDRS is providing critical information that is helping law enforcement and health and human service officials allocate resources and develop programs in ways that target those most at risk for intimate partner violence. For example, NVDRS data shows that while occurrences are rare, most murder-suicide victims are current or former



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intimate partners of the suspect, and a substantial number of victims were the suspect's children. In addition, NVDRS data indicates that women are about seven times more likely than men to be killed by a spouse, ex-spouse, lover, or former lover, and most of these incidents occurred in the women's homes.

NVDRS & VA SUICIDES

Although it is preventable, every year more than 36,000 Americans die by suicide and another 1.1 million Americans attempt it, costing more than \$36 billion in lost wages and work productivity.. In the United States today, there is no comprehensive national system to track suicides. However, because NVDRS includes information on all violent deaths – including deaths by suicide – information from the system can be used to develop effective suicide prevention plans at the community, state, and national levels.

The central collection of this data can be of tremendous value for organizations such as the Dept. of Veterans Affairs that are working to improve their surveillance of suicides. For instance, CDC determined from national NVDRS data that in 2005, veterans comprised 20% of all suicide victims. The types of data collected by NVDRS including gender, blood alcohol content, mental health issues, physical health issues, and intimate partner violence can help prevention programs better identify and treat at-risk individuals.



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FEDERAL ROLE NEEDED

At an estimated annual cost of \$25 million for full implementation, NVDRS is a relatively low-cost program that yields high-quality results. While state-specific information provides enormous value to local public health and law enforcement officials, data from all 50 states, the U.S. territories and the District of Columbia must be obtained to complete the national picture. Aggregating this additional data will allow us to analyze national trends and also more quickly and accurately determine what factors can lead to violent death so that we can devise and disseminate strategies to address those factors. Having CDC administer this program ensures that all states can benefit from their expertise in data analysis and provides a central clearinghouse to distribute information. This allows states and regions to find out what is going on in the rest of the nation much more easily so that they can identify trends early and learn what proven strategies already exist that can be used to address their local issues.

STRENGTHENING AND EXPANDING NVDRS IN FY 2013

The National Violence Prevention Network, a coalition of national organizations who advocate for national violence prevention programs, is calling on Congress to provide no less than \$5 million for NVDRS for FY 2013 – an increase of \$1.5 million. The cost of *not* implementing the program is much greater: without national participation in the program, thousands of American lives remain at risk.



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We thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record and applaud your past commitment to NVDRS. The investment in NVDRS has already begun to pay off, as the 18 participating states are adopting effective violence prevention programs. We believe that increased funding that will lead to national implementation of NVDRS is a wise public health investment and our nation will reap enormous benefits in reduced deaths from domestic violence, veteran suicide, teen suicide, gang violence and other violence that affects our citizens each year. We look forward to working with you secure an appropriation of at least \$5 million in FY 2013.