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[Gun Screening and Duty to Protect from Violence Addressed in Letter to the President](#)

Ron Manderscheid/BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE/January 29, 2013

In an unprecedented letter to the President, representatives of the mental health and substance use care and prevention fields congratulated the President and Vice President on actions already taken to improve prevention, early intervention, and care for children and adolescents. The letter also proposes an approach to gun screening that focuses on expressed and intended violence, and an approach to duty to protect modeled on successful strategies already employed with disability populations. Read more....

Screening for Sale or Transfer of Ownership for a Rifle, Shotgun, or a Pistol

The mental health and substance abuse treatment and prevention community supports mandatory screening in advance of all gun sales and transfers. Previous use of a gun in the commission of an adjudicated crime by a prospective purchaser should be automatic grounds for denial of a sale or a transfer. Beyond this, screening must focus on expressed and intended violence toward others or toward oneself. Inappropriate use of substances, including alcohol, and mental illness may be factors leading to expressed and intended violence, but they are not always present. Appropriate screening tools and standards must be developed. The mental health and substance abuse treatment and prevention community will assist in efforts to develop these tools and standards.

Duty to Protect from Expressed and Intended Violence

The mental health and substance abuse treatment and prevention community recommends that “duty to protect” from expressed and intended violence mirror the successful, well-established surveillance and reporting mandates for child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, and elder abuse. State laws mandate that members of a broad net of designated professions (generally teachers and other school personnel, physicians and other health-care workers, mental health and substance use professionals, law enforcement officers, and often other professionals) report suspicion of child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, and abuse, neglect or exploitation of incapacitated or dependent adults. Typically, a report must be made when the reporter, in his or her official capacity, suspects or has reasons to believe that maltreatment has occurred or is at imminent risk of occurring. We recommend that similar processes be developed for reporting expressed and imminent violence and for separately assigning to entities other than reporting professionals the responsibility for conducting a subsequent screening for purchase or transfer of ownership of a weapon.