

June 1, 2022

Re: Gun Violence across the United States

Grief. Anger. Numbness. These are all emotions many of us have individually and thus collectively felt in the wake of a series of mass shootings taking place this May 2022. Our hearts at NACHW are with the communities of Tulsa, OK, Uvalde, TX, Buffalo, NY, Laguna Woods, CA, and all communities affected by gun violence. The shootings at Tulsa Hospital, Oklahoma, and Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas are sadly just the most recent incidents in the epidemic of gun violence in America. While COVID-19 is global, and thus classified as a pandemic, mass shootings and gun violence are a uniquely American issue, an epidemic.

Memorial Day weekend is supposed to honor those who have served the country as military personnel, as well as mark the unofficial start of summer, the end of the academic school year, and a time of joy. Instead, we grieve. We are collectively left shaken once again by the senseless taking of 21 lives at an elementary school. In the 23 years since Columbine, the 10 years since Sandy Hook, and the two years since the murder of George Floyd, there have been innumerable acts of gun violence followed by “thoughts and prayers” by legislators. Black and Brown communities continue to be victims of racism, white supremacy, and hate. We know this through the impartial laws and habituated practice harming our communities daily and the recent mass media exposure of the mass killing of elderly Black folk murdered while grocery shopping in their neighborhood of Buffalo, NY as only a recent example. Marginalized and ethnic communities already face disproportionate cumulative environmental stressors, barriers to COVID-19 testing and treatment, suffer heavily under the weight of gun violence, cumulative weight of negative health outcomes, and we are angry. We are angry that in “the greatest country on earth,” our leadership does not act to ensure the safety of its citizens through common sense gun laws. We are angry that a woman’s reproductive rights can be stripped away to “protect babies,” while the babies we send to school are not guaranteed to come home. We are angry that no place feels safe. The acute awareness that educational institutions, hospitals, houses of God, music venues, groceries, or nail salons aren’t protected cannot be ignored. Absent of the polarization of policy and action is the actual prevention of these violent outcomes. The effects of commitment to the abolition of powerlessness that is at the heart of all violence are latent and uncertain, so the issue at hand is lack of accountability and the effects of indifference. Yet, progress can continue to persevere.

The continued acts of violence, one after another, can leave us feeling numb. We may feel frozen and helpless, feeling unable to cope with all the traumas. The strength of

community health workers is our ability to come together in support of our communities. Where there is a need, there is a community health worker ready to fill it. As we collectively process these terrible events, we must support each other and support ourselves. We support each other by offering an ear, someone to talk to about our grief, and a shoulder to cry on, for times when all you can do is cry about it. We support ourselves by giving ourselves space to grieve, by standing still in our bodies and accepting that we are not okay. For some of us, giving back is how we feel useful. Some ways to give back are to donate blood. Blood supplies are low in the wake of COVID-19, and that same blood is crucial in cases of trauma from gun violence. Visit the [American Red Cross](#) to locate blood drives near you. To donate monetarily, visit GoFundMe for verified fundraisers to help families of victims of mass shootings (verified [Uvalde](#) and [Buffalo](#) fundraisers).

Sincerely,

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National Association of Community Health Workers