Treat gun violence like the public health crisis it is

Last month’s mass shooting in Las Vegas, which killed 59 people and wounded 500, was committed by a single individual who legally purchased an arsenal that allowed him to fire hundreds of high-caliber bullets within minutes into a large crowd. This is just the latest in a series of high-profile mass killings that appear to be increasing in frequency.1

As terrifying as mass murders are, they account for only a small fraction of gun-related mortality. Everyday about 80 people in the United States are killed by a gun, usually by someone they know or by themselves (almost two-thirds of gun-related mortality involves suicide).2 No other developed country even comes close to our rate of gun-related violence.2

If we gather data and fund research, we can make changes to reduce deaths while maintaining the right to own a firearm.

Consider inroads made in driver safety, too. We have also made marked improvements in motor vehicle crash-related deaths and injuries.3 For decades, we have recorded hundreds of data points on every car crash resulting in a death in a comprehensive database—the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS). These data have been used by researchers to identify causes of crashes and crash-related deaths and have led to improvements in car design and road safety. Additional factors leading to improved road safety include restrictions on the age at which one can drive and on drinking alcohol and driving.

We can achieve similar improvements in gun-related mortality if we establish and maintain a comprehensive database, encourage and fund research, and are willing to adopt some commonsense product improvements and ownership restrictions that, nevertheless, preserve the right for most to responsibly own a firearm.

Don’t you think it’s time?