

# RESEARCH BRIEF

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## PREVENTING FIREARM INJURIES AND DEATHS AMONG CLIENTS: AN ACTION PLAN MODEL FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Kelsey M. Conrick, Olivia McCollum, Sarah F. Porter, Christopher St. Vil,  
Kalei Kanuha, Ali Rowhani-Rahbar, Megan Moore

*Brief prepared by: Kelsey Conrick and Erika Marts*

### BACKGROUND

Limiting access to firearms during a crisis is an important strategy to reduce firearm injuries and deaths. When someone is going through a tough time, like feeling suicidal, not being able to quickly access a firearm can give them time to get help. This can be done by making sure firearms at home are stored locked and unloaded, asking a friend or family member to hold onto them for a while, or through laws like Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs).

Social workers, who help people in clinics and community settings, are in a good place to notice if someone might hurt themselves or others with a firearm. However, a lot of social workers do not feel prepared to talk to clients about firearms, and many do not know what options are available to support clients in limiting access to firearms in a crisis.

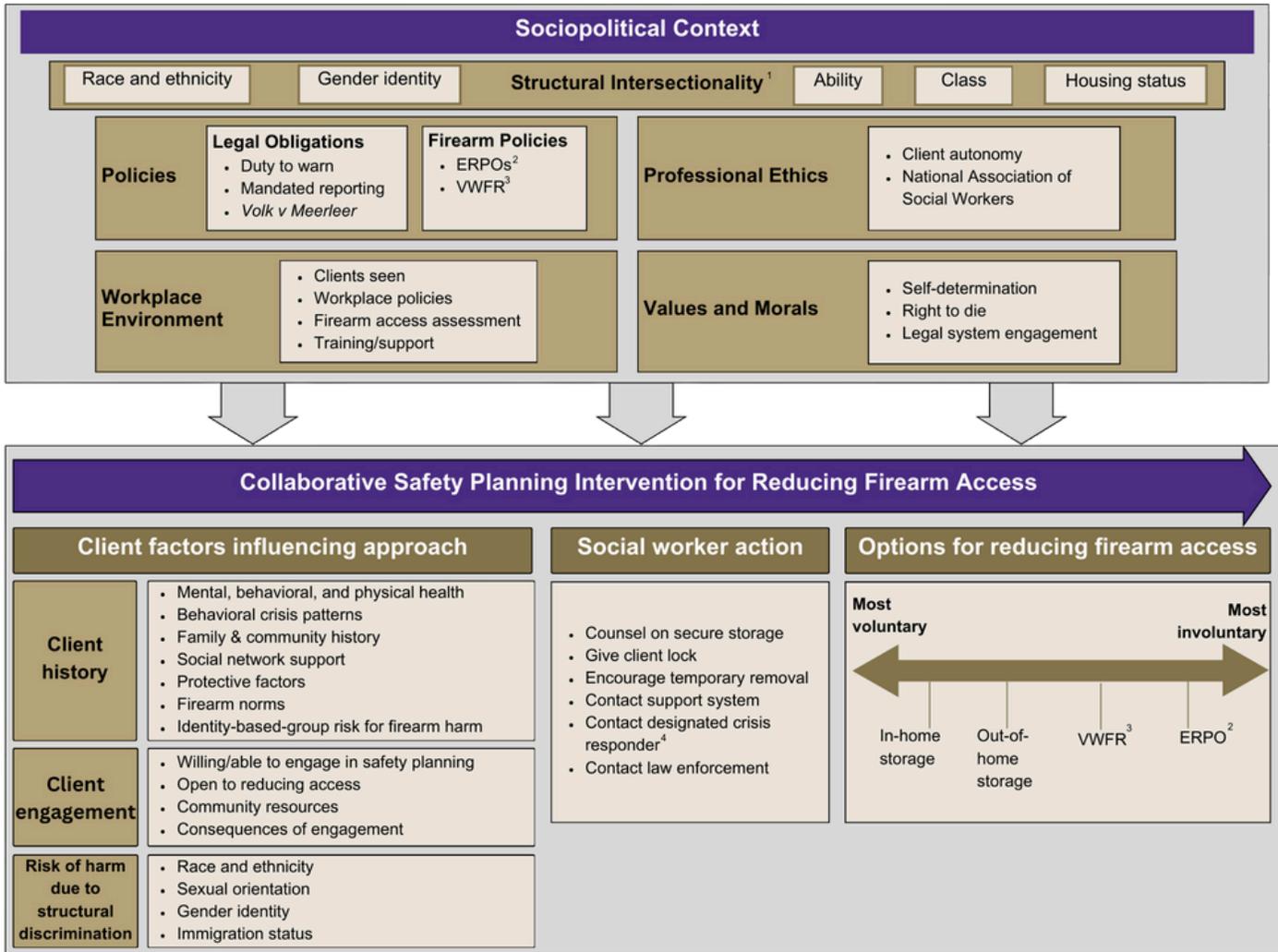
### STUDY GOAL

Researchers wanted to understand the **decision-making process** social workers use to choose **what interventions are best** to reduce firearm access for clients in crisis.

### APPROACH

Researchers talked to 29 Washington State social workers in 10 focus groups. They were asked about their experiences with clients at risk of harming themselves or someone else with a firearm. They were also asked to respond to two examples of clients and talk about what they would do to support these clients. From their responses, researchers developed an action plan model describing how social workers choose which options to pursue.

# ACTION PLAN MODEL



1. Structural intersectionality refers to the way hierarchical and oppressive (macro-level) institutional systems intersect to shape micro-level individual experiences, thereby revealing the perpetuation of inequalities (Durfee, 2021).
2. Extreme Risk Protection Order
3. Voluntary Waiver of Firearm Rights
4. Under Washington State’s Involuntary Treatment Act, designated crisis responders assess individuals to determine if they meet criteria for involuntary treatment.

## IMPLICATIONS

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| <p><b>01</b> Sociopolitical context, including policies, professional ethics, workplace environment, and values and morals influence safety planning</p> | <p><b>02</b> In addition to thinking about a client’s history and willingness to engage in safety planning, social workers should think about clients’ risk for discrimination</p> |
| <p><b>03</b> Social workers need more training on what options are available to reduce access to firearms for clients in crisis</p>                      | <p><b>04</b> Policymakers should talk to social workers to understand their unique perspectives when writing policies like Extreme Risk Protection Orders</p>                      |

### FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, REFER TO:

Conrick KM, McCollum O, Porter SF, St.Vil C, Kanuha K, Rowhani-Rahbar A, Moore M. Preventing Firearm Injuries and Deaths among Clients: An Action Plan Model for Social Workers. *Social Work*, 2024 Nov 19; swae050, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swae050>

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