

Fulfilling a promise: the national action plan for child injury prevention

For many of us, the passion we feel for our work in injury prevention is driven by a fundamental belief that we should do everything in our power every day to protect families and communities from harm. This commitment to safety is even stronger when it comes to protecting children—especially if you are a parent. The loss of a child to an injury is often needless and always tragic. We know injuries are preventable. Widespread adoption of known, effective programmes and policies offers the opportunity to reduce injuries and death among those who are the most vulnerable and the least able to control their own environment.

In 2009, more than 9000 children and adolescents 0–19 years old in the USA died from an unintentional injury—with the main causes of these injuries being motor vehicle crashes, suffocation, drowning, poisoning, fire and falls.¹ For every child injury death, more than 1000 children are treated for a non-fatal injury.² While child injury death rates declined by 29% from 2000 to 2009, the annual number of deaths (9143 in 2009) remains unacceptably high.¹

A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identified a 54% increase in suffocation death rates among infants (under age 1) from 2000 (13.8 per 100 000) to 2009 (21.3 per 100 000).¹ Even more striking, the same study showcased the near doubling of the poisoning death rate for 15–19 year olds from 1.7 per 100 000 to 3.3 per 100 000—driven largely by an increase in prescription drug overdose-related deaths.¹ The sixfold variation in state death rates (MA and NJ <5 per 100 000 vs MS and SC >23 per 100 000) underscores the uneven implementation and uptake of science-based programmes and policies across the USA.¹ In context, the USA is lagging behind other developed countries—ranking near the bottom of all Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries—with a death rate four times that of the top performing countries like the Netherlands and Sweden.³ While sobering, this statistic sets a high benchmark for what is achievable if wider adoption of known, effective programmes and policies occurs.

The progress made in reducing the number of child injury-related deaths in the USA in the last half of the 20th century came about because of the vision and commitment of many people. Organisations like Safe Kids, the Injury Free Coalition for Kids, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Children's Safety Network, the Safe States Alliance, and the Society for the Advancement of Violence and Injury Research and its members, to name just a few, all contributed to those gains, saving children's lives and improving safety in the community. Within motor vehicle injury prevention alone, the successes of increasing the use of age-appropriate child restraint devices in the 1980s and 1990s are being matched in the 2000s by gains in reducing teen-related traffic fatalities. And yet, more can, and must, be done.

The CDC used the launch of the WHO/UNICEF World Report on Child Injury Prevention in December 2008 to refocus attention on the issue of unintentional injury prevention in the USA—including publication of a CDC Data Report on Child Injury Prevention and the launch of a communications campaign known as Protect the Ones You Love.^{4 5} At the time, our partners encouraged us to develop a National Action Plan as a follow-up to these products, to help focus the field on

a common set of goals and strategies to further prevent the leading cause of child and adolescent death: injuries. The National Action Plan for Child Injury Prevention—An Agenda to Prevent Injuries and Promote the Safety of Children and Adolescents in the USA—was drafted to guide essential actions needed to reduce the burden of childhood injuries in America.

CDC worked closely with 60+ partner organisations in child injury prevention to identify what we know, where we need to go, and how to get there. It was a deliberate and iterative process to define the way forward, and many US members of the International Society for Child and Adolescent Injury Prevention participated in its development and review. The aim was to create a concrete roadmap to strengthen the collection and interpretation of data and surveillance, promote research, enhance communications, improve education and training, advance health systems, and inform policy. It is intended for use by government agencies, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, the not-for-profit community, healthcare providers and others to guide action, facilitate planning, and advance child injury prevention activities by stakeholders and allied professions. The National Action Plan sets an ambitious agenda.

The launch of the National Action Plan for Child Injury Prevention in mid-April 2012 in the USA can serve as a catalysing agent for all of us to strengthen and coordinate efforts in child injury prevention. Although the intent was to develop a specific set of goals, actions and recommendations for implementation in the USA, adaptations can be tailored for other countries and settings, which will allow all of us to make progress. For a copy of the National Action Plan and to see how you or your organisation might use or promote its strategies and recommendations, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/safechild/>. Together, we can fulfil the promise many of us made when we entered this profession—to protect families and communities from harm and to keep our children safe and injury-free.

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