

Prospective Evaluation of California's Armed and Prohibited Persons System

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Firearm violence is a significant public safety and public health problem, ranking among the leading causes of death in the United States.¹ One overarching prevention strategy is to prohibit access to firearms by individuals believed to be at high risk for using them to harm others or themselves. Background checks and denials of purchases by prohibited persons, interventions that implement this strategy, reduce the subsequent incidence of arrest for violent and firearm-related crime by at least 25% among individuals who are directly affected.²⁻⁴ Preventing purchases by prohibited persons is a successful application of the principle of means reduction that may have deterrent effects as well, and it has gained wide acceptance.⁵⁻⁷

Almost no attention has been given, however, to intervention when individuals who pass background checks and acquire firearms legally become prohibited persons at a later time. Their transition to prohibited-person status usually follows an event associated with increased risk for future violence, such as a criminal conviction or violence-related mental health emergency.

The Armed and Prohibited Persons System (APPS), an initiative of the California Department of Justice (CalDOJ), uses that agency's data to identify firearm owners among persons who have become subject to firearm prohibitions under California or federal law and then seeks to recover those firearms. After operating as a pilot program for several years, APPS is being implemented statewide over the next three years under a statutory mandate. This expansion has been fully funded by a special appropriation (SB 140, signed by Governor Brown on May 1, 2013). APPS seeks to prevent both interpersonal and self-directed violence. It has generated widespread interest and efforts to establish similar interventions elsewhere. Its effectiveness as a violence prevention measure has not been assessed.

Our **primary goal** is to determine whether APPS *works*—specifically, whether it reduces risk of future firearm-related and violent criminal activity among those directly affected. Incident arrests will be our primary outcome measure. Our **secondary goal** is to subject APPS to a formal cost-benefit analysis.

Our **principal objectives** are:

Objective 1. To determine whether there is an association between exposure to the APPS intervention and the subsequent incidence of arrest for firearm-related and violent crimes.

Objective 2. To determine whether there is an association between exposure to the APPS intervention and the subsequent incidence of these secondary outcome measures:

2a. Arrests for crimes not involving violence or firearms and for all crimes combined;

2b. Emergency mental health hospitalizations following a determination of dangerousness to self or others or grave disability, among persons who became eligible for APPS by having had such hospitalizations;

2c. Domestic violence restraining orders (DVROs), among persons who became eligible for APPS by having received DVROs.

Objective 3. To determine whether there is an association between exposure to the APPS intervention and community-level rates of firearm-related and violent crimes, crimes not involving violence or firearms, and crimes of all types combined.

Objective 4. To conduct a quantitative assessment of APPS intervention processes, including such measures as the number of individuals identified as eligible for APPS, the proportion of eligible individuals who are contacted, the proportion of contacted individuals from whom firearms are recovered, and the number and types of firearms recovered.

Objective 5. To conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the APPS intervention.