

## Licensing Firearm Owners

Part of the problem surrounded firearms which were misused by their lawful owners. Firearms licensing is intended to reduce the risk by screening firearm owners. In addition to a criminal record check, initial screening included two references, spousal notification, a 28 day waiting period, a safety examination and may include a detailed investigation. The new law requires a license renewed every five years.

Because legally owned firearms are the weapon of choice in domestic murders, particular attention is paid to screening for risk factors associated with domestic violence. Other risk factors associated with violence and suicide are job loss, substance abuse or a history of mental illness. Significant education is also needed to ensure that all those involved from police to physicians to shelter workers, understand the risks and the measures available.

## Safe Storage

Another problem surrounded guns which had been taken or stolen from their lawful owners. This suggested the need to improve compliance with enforcement of safe storage provisions. To keep children safe it is essential to keep guns away from them and all major groups concerned with the safety of children endorsed strong safe storage provisions. A recent trend in the United States is towards examining ways in which guns can be redesigned to make them more safe. Based on approaches used for other hazardous products, considerable effort is being directed towards gun design as well as advertising.<sup>25</sup> Advocates in Canada have suggested using consumer regulation in order to ensure that all guns be sold with trigger locks.<sup>26</sup> Few public safety experts have advocated widespread gun safety training for children although this is a favorite strategy for the gun lobby. In fact, public health experts in both Canada and the US have issued strong warnings that caution must be exercised in developing programs aimed at youth.<sup>27</sup> Educating children about the dangers associated with guns has been proven to be an unreliable safeguard. Youngsters commonly disregard their parents' warnings and may not understand the seriousness of the issue. Young children, being curious and impulsive, lack the developmental ability to comprehend the consequences of gun usage.<sup>28</sup> A study of children involved in accidental shootings showed that the children often did not know that the gun was loaded or believed that it was a toy gun.<sup>29</sup> A 1991 study of American gun owners demonstrated that gun owning parents frequently overestimate the effectiveness of education and supervision to protect their children from gun misuse.<sup>30</sup> In fact, education and supervision are some of the least effective measures parents can take while strategies which remain effective without constant attention or effort are more likely to prevent injury.<sup>31</sup> The inconsistency of education measures does not apply strictly to children. Research has suggested there is no link between training and safer firearms storage in the United States.<sup>32</sup> This may be because the individuals who undertake training in the United States have acquired guns for self protection and therefore are not inclined to store them safely.