Means Restriction for Suicide Prevention

**Rationale:**
Means Restriction involves removing or reducing access to potential means for suicide. The Jed Foundation (1) and Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2) recommend that Means Restriction be included as one component of a comprehensive plan for suicide prevention at colleges and universities. Common lethal means for college student suicides include firearms, jumping from high places, poisoning, suffocation, drowning, and hanging (3).

**Impulsivity & Suicide:**
Research indicates that as many as two-thirds of those who reported suicide attempts didn’t plan their attempt ahead of time (4, 5). Also, the time between decision and action was short: a quarter of those made an attempt 5 minutes after making the decision; half of those within 20 minutes, and three-quarters within an hour (3). When means aren’t available in this brief window, a suicide attempt or fatality can be drastically reduced.

**Firearms**
Firearms are highly lethal because the effects are immediate and irreversible with little opportunity to back out or be saved once the trigger is pulled (2). In Montana, 86.8% of suicides are completed by firearm (6). It is recommended that firearms be restricted during times of a mental health or suicidal crisis until the crisis has passed (2).

**Means Restriction Reduces Suicide by (2, 3):**
- Reducing immediate access to means in times of crisis or impulsive decision making
- Delaying time between thought and action
- Reducing fatality when less lethal means are chosen
- Increasing likelihood of intervention by others

A common misconception is that people who are suicidal will find a way to kill themselves even without a gun or their chosen means. However, studies show that if a person’s preferred suicide method is unavailable, it is unlikely they will switch to a different one (7), and that even if an alternate method is used, it is likely to be less lethal (8).

**Clinical Recommendations:**

1. Conduct a campus assessment regarding suicide attempts/completions, potential access to lethal means, and create services/policies to help restrict access to means.
   - Work group of counselors, health clinicians, campus police/security, faculty, administration, and other campus partners.

2. Examine potential access to firearms and review potential policies/procedures. Areas to consider include:
   - Campus policies regarding gun possession and storage on campus
   - Consideration of a centralized storage facility staffed by trained professional staff or university security/police
   - Training in recognition of distress/signs of suicide for those storing/releasing firearms
   - Reviewing policies on storing handguns and consider prohibiting storage in on-campus vehicles
   - How to limit access to firearms for an individual during times of crisis/suicidal thinking

3. Review policies and practices regarding prescription drugs to examine:
   - Limiting the quantity/dosage of medications with potential for harm/abuse
   - Publicizing local take-back services for unused medications with potential for harm/abuse
   - How to limit access to potentially lethal medication for an individual during times of crisis/suicidal thinking

4. Examine the campus for access to lethal means and potential options for enhancing safety:
   - Limiting access to heights (rooftops, windows, balconies, ledges, bridges)
   - Restricting access to heights with locks, alarm doors
   - Providing crisis numbers or emergency phones near rooftop exits or other high places
   - Considering the installation of break-away closet rods or limiting other implements for hanging
   - Tracking, monitoring, and controlling access to toxic substances found in laboratories, pharmacies, and other departments that are accessible to students, staff, and faculty.

5. Review potential programs/policies that could enhance student safety:
   - Widely publicize crisis resources
   - Examine guidelines for medical amnesty
   - Utilize a campus care team or Behavioral Intervention Team
   - Reduce high-risk drug and alcohol use among students
   - Ensure health/counseling clinicians are trained in the assessment of risk and access to means: CALM is a free, online training module provided by the SPRC at: [http://training.sprc.org/](http://training.sprc.org/)
Footnotes


