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National Mental Health Experts React to NRA Response on Newtown Tragedy

-Leading Researchers Denounce NRA Statement Demeaning Mental Illness-

With much of the country listening, NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre today squandered an opportunity to discuss sensible gun policy reforms. Instead, he chose to demonize millions of Americans by placing the blame for mass shootings on "our nation's refusal to create an active national database of the mentally ill."

Setting to one side its remarkable insensitivity, Mr. LaPierre's implicit characterization of people with mental illness as prone to violence was also factually incorrect. An impressive body of scientific research shows incontrovertibly that the vast majority of people with serious mental illnesses never act violently, and that only a small proportion of violence is attributable to mental illness.

Moreover, major psychiatric disorders are treatable and, with the right services and support, people recover from them. Assembling a national database on people who seek treatment would violate their confidentiality and stigmatize their conditions, thereby discouraging them from seeking treatment in the first place. We'd also highlight that the NRA, for decades, has lobbied fiercely against the creation of a national database of gun purchasers.

Mental health professionals do need to identify and limit the risk from a small proportion of people with mental illnesses that may harm themselves or others. But the solution to the problem of gun violence must be multifaceted, and reasonable restrictions on the availability of weapons designed for the sole purpose of killing large numbers of people in rapid succession is a necessary component of any effective approach.

[Statement prepared for the Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence]

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