

# THE COSTS OF GUN CONTROL VS. THE COSTS OF GUN VIOLENCE

There has been a lot of deliberate misinformation concerning the costs associated with the Firearms Program, fuelled by its opponents.

## The Costs of Gun Violence

In an article published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, it was estimated that the cost of gun death and injury in Canada in the mid-nineties was \$6.6 billion per year.<sup>1</sup> In 2006, the Geneva based Small Arms Survey singled out Canada's gun control legislation for its significant impact on reducing gun death and injury in Canada, and estimated the decrease in gun injuries and gun deaths since 1995 equals savings of up to \$1.4 billion Canadian dollars a year.<sup>2</sup>

The *Institut national de santé publique du Québec* has calculated that the *Firearms Act* is associated with a reduction of an average of 250 fewer suicides and 50 fewer homicides a year in Canada since it came into force in 1998, which equates to nearly one less death per day.<sup>3</sup> Some of the research going into that was published in a study in the *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* in 2011,<sup>4</sup> which explains how the enactment of Canada's gun control legislation is associated with a significant drop in the number of homicides committed with firearms: a decrease of 5-10%, depending on the province. The decrease was particularly noticeable in homicides committed with non-restricted shotguns and rifles, and no significant "tactical displacement" or substitution to other methods of homicide was observed.

Debates linked to the gun registry rarely acknowledge the incalculable amount of human suffering resulting from firearms misuse, whether criminal, accidental or self-inflicted. Fatalities and traumatic injuries are listed as statistics with no attempt to assess the enormous loss to society, communities, and families. Canada's gun control legislation in its current form is aimed at preventing tragedies and protecting the rights of Canadians to safety. It is the result of at least six public inquests, which have emphasized the importance of licensing and registration as a means of preventing future tragedies.

## The Costs of the Canada's Firearms Program: The Facts

First and foremost, the Auditor General of Canada confirmed that setting up Canada's entire system to license all gun owners and register all firearms cost close to one billion dollars over a 10 year period.<sup>5</sup> These costs include additional enforcement measures (NWEST), costs to the Correctional Services of Canada for increased sentences under the *Firearms Act*, and contributions to the provinces to administer the system (approximately \$180 million over 10 years), among other things.

In those initial years, most (two-thirds) of the expenses were for screening and licensing two million gun owners – NOT on registering and classifying their firearms. Shortly after the Program was transferred to the RCMP to administer, the Deputy Commissioner of the RCMP testified that the "long-gun" portion of the registry only represented about 20% of the CFP's workload as of 2006.<sup>6</sup>

The old system (Bill C-17) the Firearms Program replaced cost at least \$30 million annually (incurred by the individual provinces and police departments), and was deeply flawed, particularly since it only applied to roughly a quarter of all firearms owners. In contrast, over the last several years, the net program costs of the entire Canadian Firearms Program have averaged \$64.1 million a year,<sup>7</sup> and it applies to ALL gun owners and all types of firearms.

As of December 2011, slightly over 1.9 million firearm owners are licensed,<sup>8</sup> and their licenses must be renewed every five years. This is an ongoing cost, but in most cases, their firearms only have to be registered once. Over 7.8 million firearms including 7.1 million "non-restricted" shotguns and rifles have been registered, to date<sup>9</sup> – this is a "sunk cost," which cannot be recovered. The only guns being registered now are those which are bought, sold or traded, inherited, or modified to the point that it affects their classification.<sup>10</sup> Over the past five years, there has been an average net increase of about 150,000

firearms of all types registered to the system, per year (representing an average 2% year-to-year increase), with the non-restricted “long” guns comprising slightly over 130,000 of that.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, the costs going forward for registration are minimal. According to an independent cost-assessment commissioned by the RCMP, if the government ceases to require the registration of “non-restricted firearms” (rifles and shotguns), the Canadian Firearms Centre would only save between \$1.195 and \$4.03 million a year.<sup>12</sup> Police associations have testified that it equals to the costs of just a couple of ongoing complex murder investigations.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, the loss of long guns in the registry will increase the cost of police investigations involving firearms, as essential information in the trail will be lost. Police will be less able to trace guns to their source, and this will compromise their investigations. It will also reduce their ability to take preventative action, when intervening in domestic violence or suicide calls or executing prohibition orders.

The government has waived or refunded fees associated to licence renewals and registration annually since 2006. The decision to continue waiving licensing and registration fees reportedly cost the Program over \$15 million in 2009 alone,<sup>14</sup> rising to \$21 million in lost revenue in 2011<sup>15</sup> – equivalent to one-third of its current expenditures.<sup>7</sup>

## Putting the Costs in Perspective: What is the Cost of Prevention?

References to “the billion dollar registry” have been without context or explanation. Here are some others costs to bear in mind as points of reference:

- There have been other large government public safety or health programs that have underestimated the amount of work involved and encountered technical difficulties which are nevertheless well worth it in the long run, such as the ‘e-Health’ databases in several provinces, designed to reduce serious illnesses and deaths due to side-effects from too many incompatible medications.
- Prevention is not cheap, it is an investment in our future. We cannot easily measure prevention, but we can certainly measure the effects of ignoring it.
- Gun deaths and injuries in Canada were estimated to cost \$6.6 billion per year in 1995, including the costs of the victims’ families’ lost productivity and pain and suffering.<sup>16</sup> The Institut national de santé publique du Québec has estimated that the 300 deaths the *Firearms Act* (including the long gun registry, which it views as an integral part of it) has been preventing annually have been saving \$400 million a year – **not** including the families’ lost productivity and pain and suffering.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Miller, T.R. and Cohen MA. “Costs of gunshot and cut/stab wounds in the United States with some Canadian Comparisons, accede,” *Anal. Prev.* 1997, 29: 329-41 cited in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* Editorial: “Reasonable control: gun registration in Canada,” *CMAJ*, vol. 168 no. 4, February 18, 2003, available at <http://www.cmaj.ca/content/168/4/389.full>

<sup>2</sup> Graduate Institute for International Studies. *Small Arms Survey 2006: Unfinished Business*. (Oxford University Press, USA), in Chapter 8: “The Instrument Matters: Assessing the Costs of Small Arms Violence.” Available at [www.smallarmssurvey.org/publications/by-type/yearbook/small-arms-survey-2006.html](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/publications/by-type/yearbook/small-arms-survey-2006.html)

<sup>3</sup> Lavoie, Michel, Pilote, Ruth, Maurice, Pierre, Blais, Étienne. *Brief Submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security Concerning Bill C-391, the Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act*. Québec: Institut national de santé publique (May 2010). Available at [http://www.inspq.gc.ca/pdf/publications/1090\\_MemoireProjetLoiC391ArmesFeu\\_VA.pdf](http://www.inspq.gc.ca/pdf/publications/1090_MemoireProjetLoiC391ArmesFeu_VA.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Blais, Étienne, Gagné, Marie-Pier, Linteau, Isabelle. “L’effet des lois en matière de contrôle des armes à feu sur les homicides au Canada, 1974–2004,” *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, Vol. 53, No. 1, January 2011. Available at <http://utpjournals.metapress.com/content/w62r47423r1h41q6/?p=c2fb678181e84927b51e0a6fbc7ccb77&pi=1>

<sup>5</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Canada. *2002 December Report of the Auditor General to the House of Commons*, Chapter 10, “Department of Justice—Costs of Implementing the Canadian Firearms Program,” available at [http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl\\_oag\\_200212\\_10\\_e\\_12404.html](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_200212_10_e_12404.html) and *2006 May Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada*, Chapter 4: “Canadian Firearms Program,” [http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl\\_oag\\_200605\\_04\\_e\\_14961.html](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_200605_04_e_14961.html) See especially “Exhibit 4.1—Net costs of Canadian Firearms Program,” at: [http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/att\\_20060504xe01\\_e\\_14446.html](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/att_20060504xe01_e_14446.html)

---

<sup>6</sup> Peter Martin, Deputy Commissioner, National Police Services of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, November 2, 2006. Available at <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=2470593&Mode=1&Parl=39&Ses=1&Language=E>

<sup>7</sup> The 2008–2009, the Actual Net Expenditures, including both the Direct and Indirect Costs Incurred by the Canadian Firearms Program/RCMP in the Administration of the Canadian Firearms Program, were \$59.5-M, and for 2009/10 and 2010/11 the *Planned* Net Expenditures were \$66.5-M and \$66.4-M, respectively. (Source: Dupuis T, Kirkby C, MacKay R. "Legislative Summary of Bill C-19: An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act," Publication No. 41-1-C19-E, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament, November 1, 2011, at Table 7. Available at: [http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/LegislativeSummaries/bills\\_Is.asp?Language=E&ls=c19&Parl=41&Ses=1&source=library\\_prb](http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/LegislativeSummaries/bills_Is.asp?Language=E&ls=c19&Parl=41&Ses=1&source=library_prb)

<sup>8</sup> RCMP-GRC. "Canadian Firearms Centre Facts and Figures (October - December 2011)." Available at [http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/archives/quick\\_facts/2011/dec-eng.htm#a](http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/archives/quick_facts/2011/dec-eng.htm#a)

<sup>9</sup> RCMP-GRC. "Canadian Firearms Centre Facts and Figures (October - December 2011)." Available at [http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/archives/quick\\_facts/2011/dec-eng.htm#b](http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/archives/quick_facts/2011/dec-eng.htm#b)

<sup>10</sup> RCMP, *Commissioner of Firearms Report – 2010* (Canadian Firearms Program, 2011), <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/rep-rap/2010-comm-rpt/service-eng.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> With data from the RCMP-GRC's annual "Canadian Firearms Centre Facts and Figures (October – December) reports, available at <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/archives/index-eng.htm> and *Commissioner of Firearms, 2008 Report* (available at <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/rep-rap/pdf/2007-comm-rpt-eng.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Hall, Peter for RCMP Canada/ Canadian Firearms Program. (2009) Risks and Benefits of Proposed Firearms Legislation. Ottawa:PLEIAD Canada. Available at [http://beta.images.theglobeandmail.com/archive/01023/Risks\\_and\\_Benefits\\_1023906a.pdf](http://beta.images.theglobeandmail.com/archive/01023/Risks_and_Benefits_1023906a.pdf) See also RCMP-GRC, *Canadian Firearms Program Evaluation*, February 2010, particularly at Finding 9, available at <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/fire-feu-eval/pg13-9-eng.htm> and Gloria Galloway, "Cost of long-gun registry a fraction of what Tories claim, report shows," *Globe and Mail*, November 22, 2010, available at <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/cost-of-long-gun-registry-a-fraction-of-what-tories-claim-report-shows/article1807833/>

<sup>13</sup> Cited by Steven Chabot, then-President, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, in "Public safety will be at risk if gun registry is dismantled", *Toronto Star*, April 10, 2009, available at <http://www.thestar.com/comment/article/616567>

<sup>14</sup> Crawford, Alison. "Ottawa giving up millions in gun registry fees," CBC News, *October 5, 2009* <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2009/10/05/gun-registry-fees-government.html>

<sup>15</sup> MacCharles, Tonda, "Conservatives give up \$21 million in waived gun fees," *Toronto Star*, March 25, 2011. Available at <http://www.thestar.com/mobile/canada/article/960338>

<sup>16</sup> Chapdelaine, A and Maurice, P. "Firearms injury prevention and gun control in Canada," *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. vol. 155 no. 9, November 1, 1996. Available at: <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1335070>