

Doctors: Gun registry helps prevent suicide

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OTTAWA — Scrapping Canada's long-gun registry would undermine significant gains in suicide prevention since the registry was put in place, emergency doctors and public health organizations say.

In an open letter to MPs Wednesday, 28 medical and health organizations said most firearms deaths in Canada are suicides, and the guns most frequently used are rifles and shotguns. They argued gun-related deaths and suicides in particular have diminished since the gun-registry law was passed in 1995.

"As a coroner, I go to lots of gun-related suicides," said Dr. Alan Drummond of the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians. "I'm telling you it's difficult, it's gut-wrenching."

A private member's bill to scrap the registry, put forward by Tory Candice Hooppner, is before the House of Commons.

The health groups said most firearms deaths "occur when an ordinary citizen becomes suicidal or violent," perhaps as a result of alcohol or drugs, or because of a personal crisis such as job loss.

Drummond said, "Suicide is not a premeditated act usually; it's usually impulsive, somebody feels overwhelmed, the gun is available, they pull the trigger."

He said the registry is particularly helpful when police or a family member bring someone who is depressed or suicidal to an emergency department. If there is a gun in the home, physicians can recommend police remove it.

But Gary Mauser, professor emeritus of political science and criminology at Simon Fraser University, said the long-gun registry has had no real impact on suicide rates.

"The gun registry only keeps track of guns; it does nothing to screen individuals," he said.

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