

## HOMICIDE IN CALIFORNIA, 2019

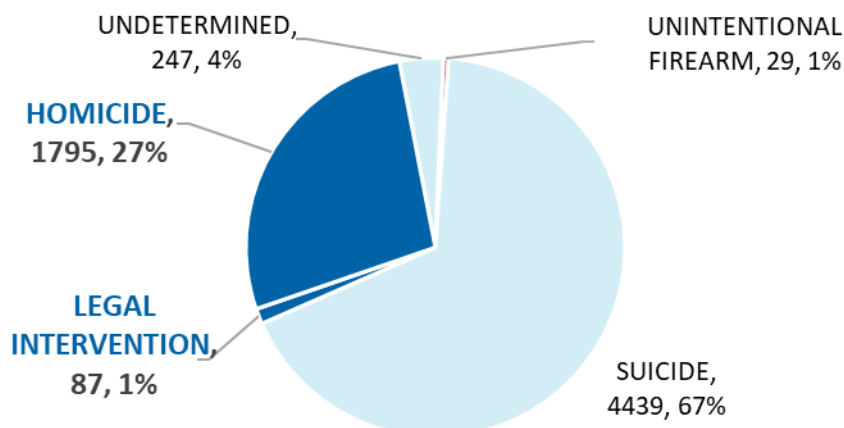
Vital statistics data are collected from death certificates for all violent deaths that occur in California. Enhanced surveillance through CalVDRS is completed for a subset of participating counties by linking vital statistics data to data abstracted from coroner and medical examiner reports, toxicology reports, and law enforcement reports. Circumstances that contributed to the death that were documented in these reports were included in the surveillance system. This additional data can address the **who, what, where, when, and how** of the deaths to help us try to understand **why** they occurred and prevent similar deaths from occurring in the future.

This document summarizes demographic data for homicide deaths of California residents in 2019. Additionally, data regarding the circumstances surrounding the death are summarized for homicides that occurred in the subset of 30 participating CalVDRS counties using data from multiple sources. Legal intervention deaths, a subset of homicide in which the death results from law enforcement acting in the line of duty, are grouped with homicides in this report.

### STATEWIDE HOMICIDE DATA

- There were 6,597 violent deaths to Californians in 2019.
- Nearly one-third of these were due to homicide (1,882), including the 1% legal intervention deaths (deaths that result from law enforcement acting in the line of duty).
- The homicide rate was 4.7 deaths per 100,000 population.

### Violent death among CA residents, 2019



### About CalVDRS

*The California Violent Death Reporting System (CalVDRS) is housed in the [Injury and Violence Prevention Branch](#) in the California Department of Public Health. CalVDRS is funded by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) to conduct statewide surveillance on violent deaths that occur in California. Violent deaths include homicide (including legal intervention deaths that result from law enforcement acting in the line of duty), suicide, unintentional firearm deaths, and deaths of undetermined intent that meet the CalVDRS definition. CalVDRS collects data from multiple sources (i.e., death certificates, medical examiner/coroner reports, and law enforcement reports) in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the circumstances surrounding these deaths. The goal of this system is to promote development of data-driven public health prevention strategies that aim to reduce the number of violent deaths that occur each year.*

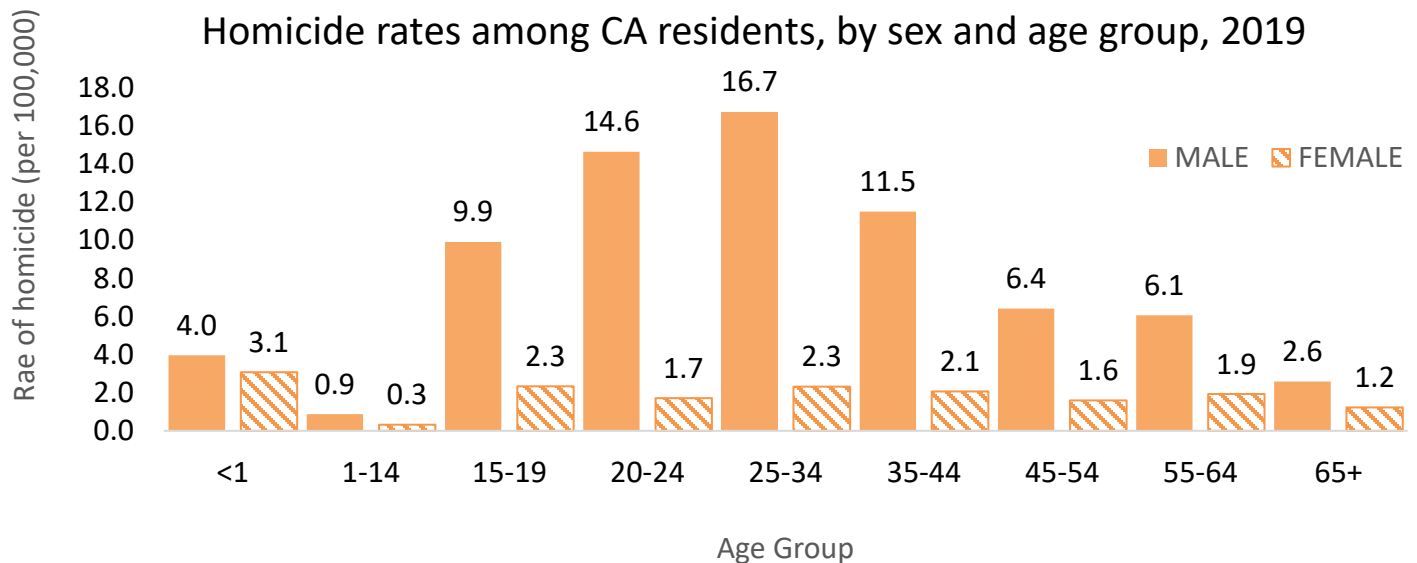
## HOMICIDE DEMOGRAPHICS

### Sex

- More than four out of every five homicide victims were male (83%).
- The rate of homicide among males (7.8 per 100,000) was nearly 5 times the rate among females (1.6 per 100,000).

### Age

- Rates of homicide among males were higher than females at all ages.
- Rates were highest in young adult males, aged 20-34 years.
- Among male victims, the rate of homicide decreased with age after the peak in young adulthood.
- While deaths among infants (children less than one year of age) made up less than 1% of all homicides, rates in this age group are among the highest for females. (Note: rates in this age group are based on small numbers and may be unstable).



Note: Rates among those <1 year of age are based on small numbers and may be unstable.

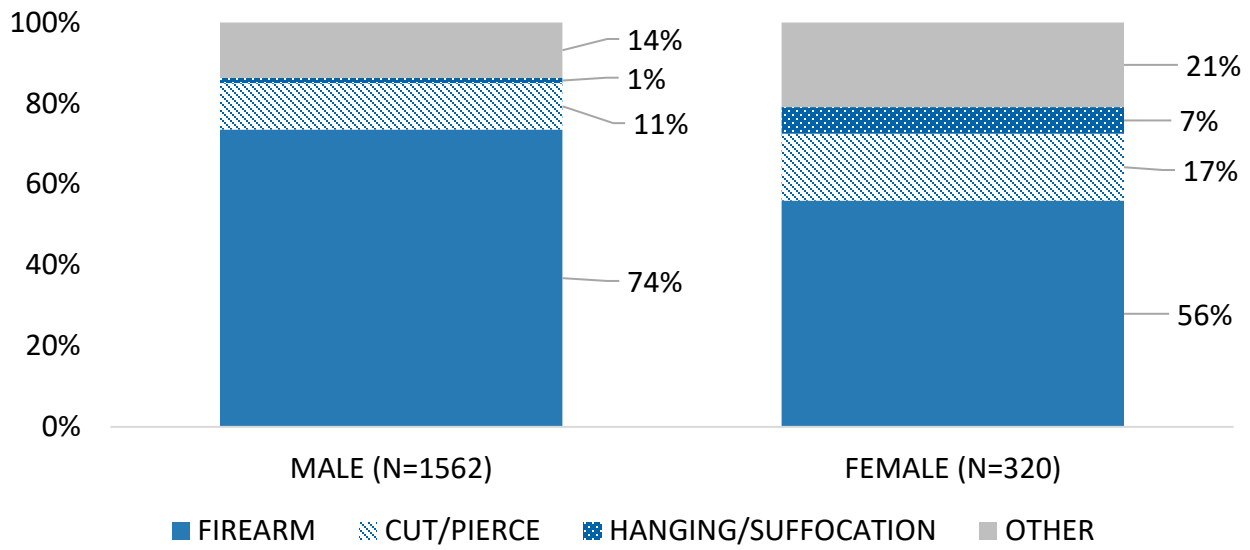
### Race/Ethnicity

- Most homicide deaths were among Californians who were Hispanic (46%), followed by those who were White (20%) and those who were Black (26%).
- The rate of homicide among people who were Black (21.8 per 100,000) was more than four times the overall rate. People who were Native American also had a higher rate of homicide (8.7 per 100,000).

### Mechanism of Homicide

- Firearms were used in 71% of all homicide deaths, followed by sharp instruments in 12%.
- Among male victims of homicide, firearms were the weapon used in nearly three out of every four deaths (74%).
- Among female victims of homicide, firearms were used in more than half of deaths (56%).

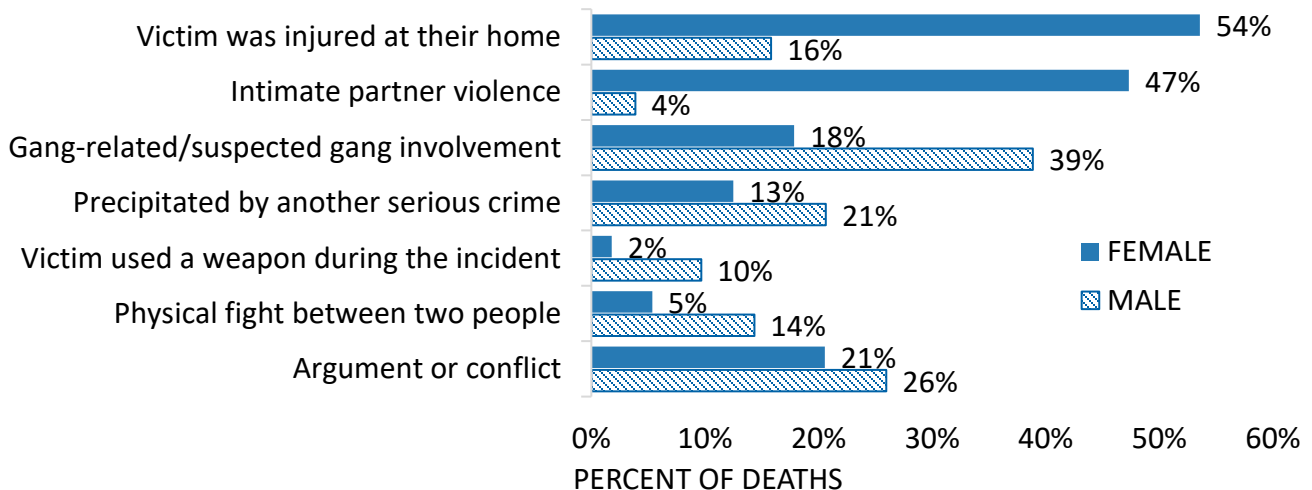
## Mechanism of homicide among CA residents by sex, 2019



### HOMICIDE CIRCUMSTANCES (in CalVDRS counties)

- There were 946 homicides in CalVDRS counties with supplemental data from coroner/medical examiner or law enforcement reports (including legal intervention deaths). 77% had at least one circumstance documented (n=732).
- 9% of homicide victims were known to be experiencing homelessness and 7% of victims had an alcohol and/or other substance abuse problem.
- 7% of homicides had drug involvement (i.e., drug dealing or drug use was suspected to have played a role in the incident).

### Percent of homicides in CalVDRS counties with given circumstance, by sex, 2019



- Overall, 22% of homicides occurred at the victim’s home. This was true in more than half of homicides where the victim was female and in 16% of deaths where the victim was male.
- Violence or conflict with a current or previous intimate partner (IPV) was a contributing factor in nearly half of homicides among females (47%) and 4% of homicides to males.
- The homicide was gang-related, or had suspected gang member involvement, in 39% of homicides in males and 18% in females.
- The homicide was precipitated by another serious crime (e.g., assault, robbery, drug trade) in 19% of all homicides: 21% of homicides in males and 13% in females.
- The victim used a weapon during the incident in 10% of homicides in males and in 2% in females.
- A physical fight between two people contributed to the death in 14% of homicides in males and in 5% of homicides in females.
- An argument or conflict contributed to one in four homicides in males (26%) and one in five in females (21%).

### HOMICIDE CIRCUMSTANCES AMONG YOUNG CHILDREN (in CalVDRS counties)

- 2% of deaths with known circumstances occurred to children younger than 5 years of age. While this is a very small sample (n=13), it can be revealing:
  - In most cases the death was directly related to abuse or neglect by a caregiver.
  - The weapons used most often were blunt instruments and personal weapons (e.g., hands, fists, and feet used in actions such as punching or kicking).
  - In half of these deaths, the victim was the suspect’s child.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR PREVENTION

#### Focus on Firearms:

The fatal weapon for most victims of homicide was a firearm (71%). Strategies to facilitate safe firearm storage (i.e., gun locks, gun safes) or those that may limit access to firearms may help to prevent these deaths in the future.

#### Focus on Risk Factors:

It may be beneficial to address risk factors that are relevant to the different types of homicides so that prevention efforts can be focused on supporting communities to create policy change and help those who are most at risk of violent death.

- **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV):** Implement strategies to prevent IPV and increase awareness for the need to promote healthy relationships. Increase awareness of and access to resources for victims of IPV.
- **Gang-Related Violence:** Often associated with at-risk youth and younger victims, prevention strategies should identify various points of intervention across the life course of youth and young adults at risk of exposure to gang-related violence.
- **Child Abuse and Neglect:** [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) (ACEs) are traumatic events that occur before the age of 18, including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, emotional or physical neglect, and other types of household changes, such as mental illness, substance use, incarceration, parental separation or divorce, or witnessing domestic violence. Experiencing four or more ACEs is associated with significantly increased risk for nine out of ten leading causes of deaths, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and suicide. Prevention strategies that can improve the lives of children and prevent child maltreatment include those that strengthen economic support and create social norm change.

## RESOURCES FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The following are technical packages from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and include strategies that can prevent homicides in California:

[Firearm Violence Prevention](#)

[Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices](#)

[A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors](#)

[Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Technical Package for Policy, Norm, and Programmatic Activities](#)

[Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\): Leveraging the Best Available Evidence](#)

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### Notes about CalVDRS data

- Thirty counties participated in CalVDRS data collection for 2019 deaths: Amador, Butte, Colusa, Fresno, Glenn, Humboldt, Imperial, Kern, Kings, Lake, Lassen, Los Angeles, Marin, Modoc, Mono, Orange, Placer, Sacramento, San Benito, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Siskiyou, Solano, Sonoma, Tehama, Trinity, Ventura, and Yolo Counties.
- Together, the CalVDRS counties represent 57% of the homicide deaths that occurred in 2019 in California and cover a mix of both urban and rural counties across the state.
- Data regarding the circumstances surrounding the death are reported as a percentage of deaths with at least one known circumstance; circumstances were known for 77% of abstracted homicide deaths in the 30 CalVDRS counties.
- Circumstances contributing to the homicide are not mutually exclusive, and more than one can be indicated for a single homicide death.

### Data Sources

- *California Violent Death Reporting System (CalVDRS), Injury and Violence Prevention Branch, Center for Healthy Communities, California Department of Public Health (CDPH).*
- *Vital Statistics data: California Comprehensive Master Death File (CCMDF), CDPH, 2019.*
  - Homicides are identified in the CCMDF as an underlying cause of death with ICD-10 codes X85-X99, Y00-Y09, or Y87.1. Legal Intervention deaths are identified as an underlying cause of death with ICD-10 codes Y35.0-Y35.4, Y35.6-Y35.7, or Y89.0.
- *Population numbers used for the calculation of rates: California Department of Finance, Report P-3: State and County Population Projections by Race/Ethnicity, Detailed Age, and Gender, 2010-2060.*

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**For more information on CalVDRS, please contact [IVPB@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:IVPB@cdph.ca.gov).**



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