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## Asylums

### **Introduction**

According to Gun Violence by the Numbers, “seven children and teens are killed with guns in the US on an average day.” Over the past years, gun violence has become a major issue not only in homes but in schools as well. Many of these violent gun outbreaks, has been traced back to people having a mental illness. However, as these reoccurring acts continue to worsen, the government has yet intervened in order to change the legal limits of coming in contact with armed weapons and giving background checks. They have failed to become more involved in America’s health which leads to people injuring themselves or others. President Trump has proposed the idea of bringing back asylums however, many people are disagreeing with the idea because mental institutions were around back then but they failed to treat their patients showing they had no improvements on their health (Carey). After long treatments, they still went back to their old habits which makes people believe this could happen again. Others are proposing ways to improve mental institutions. They are calling for the government to fund the asylums to maintain them open and have sufficient rooms and treatments for their patients. It is unlikely that mental institutions will go into effect soon since the government is worried about the cost that it will take to place people in a mental institution, thus making health care at the bottom of their list. Many areas, especially schools such as Sandy Hook, Parkland, and Great Mills High School in Maryland have been affected by assault weapons due to gun stores permitting teenagers,

individuals with a criminal history, or are linked to being mentally ill are able to come in contact with them. It has led to many deaths and the solution to controlling gun violence as mentioned by President Trump is to create asylums to prevent people from harming themselves or others around them.

### **Context and Background**

According to "Gun, Violence, and Mental Health, "13% of people with a serious mental illness reported having committed assaultive acts during the previous year." The number of people and schools like Parkland, Great Mills High School in Maryland, and Sandy Hook have been traumatically affected by tragedies involving gun violence. Yet, not many laws have been passed to prevent people with a mental illness from coming in contact with an armed weapon. There are flaws in who are able to have an armed weapon, and most stores that sell weapons do not do background checks or they have a low age limit to possess a weapon. Trump has discussed some changes he wants to make in order to prevent shootings from occurring. His solution was to bring back asylums. Asylums will help people who have a mental illness to get treatment and unlike jails, you are able to place someone in an institution if you believe they are acting suspiciously. According to the article, "Trump Wants More Asylums and Some Psychiatrists Agree," Dr. E. Fuller Torrey, founder of the Treatment of Advocacy Center believes that bringing back mental institution will be a great idea if the government will invest more on maintaining them open. The government needs to work on ways to make health care the main issue and help fund asylums to prevent people with a mental illness from harming others. Also, gun shops need to increase the age limit and have background checks before they sell any armed weapon to their customers.

In 1752, the first asylums to be built was in Philadelphia by the Quakers. The rooms were located in the basement with shackles on the walls that would house a few mentally ill patients. In order to maintain people with a mental disability in the mental hospitals, the Virginia Legislature gave them funds to build more hospitals in other places such as Williamsburg. Patients that were placed in mental hospitals had very little space, privacy, and they were placed under maximum security. Reasons that these institutions were shut down was because they became too over capacitated and they became very abusive towards their patients. In 1961, Enoch Powell, a Minister of Health spoke at the National Association for Mental Health and discussed how the government wanted to remove mental institutions because it was unnecessary to continue funding asylums to recondition and upgrade (The History of the Asylum).

### **Overview of Other Proposals**

Throughout the years' reformers such as Dorothea Dix, Moses Sheppard, and Thomas Scattergood have proposed other methods as to how asylums today should care for their patients. They have argued for new asylums where mentally ill patients will receive the proper care and treatment they deserve. According to Improving Long-Term Psychiatric Care: Bring Back the Asylums, reformers Dix, Sheppard, and Scattergood want their patients to have a "protected place where safety, sanctuary, and long-term care for the mentally ill would be provided." They addressed ways to move forward with the issue of perfecting asylums. They discuss how people who are mentally ill cannot be left alone in their homes without appropriate support to make sure they are not wandering in the streets or harm themselves and others. If mental institutions were to come back they would not be the solution to reoccurring problems of the United States Mental health system. According to the reformers, they believe that "fully integrated, patient-centered long-term psychiatric care can now exist in the United States." They want an institution

similar to that in Massachusetts known as the Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital that have a wide variety of treatments, psychiatric research, and medical education programs. Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital are known to have confidential rooms and “recovery-inspired residential design.” The cost to build this hospital was about \$300 million and have a budget of \$60 million per year. By seeing this example, more mental institutions should be created similar to this hospital. However, it will not function unless the government decides to fund that much money to build and maintain them for patients to use. Since the United States is in debt it is difficult to convince them that health is a big issue today and even though it will cost a lot of money it will save many lives.

Another proposal is made by the World Health Organization (WHO) in which suggest creating an "optimal mix of service pyramids." This means that the least expensive health care services will be the base of the pyramid since they are used more often and the more expensive facilities for the mentally ill or long termed patients are at the top of the pyramid. In order to create this pyramid, they believe that "limiting the number of mental institutions, build informal community mental health services and promote health care" will allow more people to become aware of the situation and how health has become the least of the governments' worries. This has been tried before in past years, though issues involving mental health are still occurring because all the strategies that the WHO proposed will require investment by the global health community according to the article "Improving Mental Health Care." It will not work because of expenses but most people have lost interest in fighting for better health care funding because they know that getting the government to fund will not be easy or if they do agree it will not be for long.

### **Explanation of Proposal and Its Naysayers**

Imagine sending your child to school and then in the middle of the day, you receive a call that your child school is on lockdown because there is an active shooter in the building. As you drive towards the school you hear on the radio that four people are dead and several are injured. Unless something is done more and more families will be facing a major loss in their lives because people who are minors, classify as having a mental illness, or having a criminal history have been able to possess armed weapons without having a background check.

In order to solve this issue, laws need to be made for gun shops to raise the age level and give background checks before releasing an arm weapon. Also, creating mental institutions to prevent from an event like the Parkland, Sandy Hook and Great Mills High School in Maryland shootings. After the incident with the Parkland School shooting President Trump has proposed that bringing asylums back will allow people to report other who show suspicious signs of danger (Carey). To create and maintain these asylums the government will need to create fundings in order to provide help for these people. The process of creating asylums could take years due to many circumstances since health has been at the bottom of the government's list for several years. That was the main reason asylums closed down in the beginning because of cost. If Trump decides to pass these laws and create mental institutions, not only will it prevent people from harming others, it could also decrease the amount that the government has to spend for people with mental illness who end up in prisons. The government spends more for special treatments for those with a mental problem compared with other inmates who do not have a disability. In "Trump Wants More Asylums and Some Psychiatrists Agree," Dr. E. Fuller Torrey who is the founder of the Treatment Advocacy Center favors the idea of bringing back asylums as long as the government funds these institutions. Asylums were used in 1752 by the Quakers.

However, there were many reports of patients being mistreated back then and if asylums were to come back there would be many changes in making them better for patients.

### **Response to Naysayers**

As this proposal is still undergoing many processes there are many people who disagree that these mental institutions will improve the health of people facing a disability. Jennifer Mathis, a director of the policy and legal advocacy at Bazelon Center believes that placing people in a room and giving them medical care for years is not a treatment. She states, “we did this before, and it failed and failed badly- it’s crazy and discriminating” (Carey). The only reason it did not work back then was because patients were mistreated and did not receive the proper care they needed. I believe that Mathis is wrong because there are still possibilities that if people receive the right kind of treatment, even if it takes years positive outcomes can occur to treat their mental illness. In the Article "No Asylums for Asylums," Dr. Ezekiel Emmanuel, a principal advisor to former President Barack Obama and a health advisor states "inexorable loss of money, leaders and control over admissions and policy coupled with overcrowding and ideological drift that doomed the once-human institutions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leading asylums to become the “snake pits” of that time. We don’t need to repeat our mistakes again in the 21<sup>st</sup> century." Though money and overcrowding have been a major issue that the government faced back then they could limit to people who need to be hospitalized immediately and for long terms or create two different institutions for those who need to be hospitalized short-term and those who need to be hospitalized long term. They could also fund these institutions a certain amount a year. To prevent people from being controlling in these institutions they could place surveillance in the institutions and watch how nurses and doctors react with their patients and have them undergo various training programs.

There are still various steps that must be taken to bring back institutions and could take years before the government decides to make health a major issue that is affecting the country. As of today, only minor proposals have been creating by the president that could have a positive result for the country.

### **Conclusion**

“For every one person killed with guns, two or more are injured” (Gun Violence by the Numbers). This is what America has begun to face and will continue to face unless major changes towards health are made. In order to stop violent gun outbreaks, the government needs to set laws to set a higher legal limit to purchase armed weapons, have gun shops do mandatory background checks to see they do not have a criminal history or mental illness that could lead to self-harm or harming others. They also will need to set funds in order to maintain asylums open to stop people from committing criminal acts. If asylums were created the death rate by guns would decrease and suspicious activity can be reported and sent to a mental institution if they haven't committed a crime to prevent people from getting harmed

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