

Should Mental Health Patients Have Gun Rights?

In the wake of the tragedy at Sandy Hook, the nation's gun-control debate, as well as discussions over mental health, have been intense. Many have advanced the need for stricter **gun control** in the United States, but their cries are met with caution, especially from the mental health community. There is significant concern that further limiting access to guns for those with mental health challenges may prevent those who need help the most from seeking it.

Addiction and mental health helpline provider Lighthouse Network urges common sense when considering or implementing gun-control regulations for those with mental health issues. The group is actually demanding that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) provide access to reinstatement of gun privileges for those who have shown successful recovery, especially from addiction. For the past 20 years, recovered addicts have had no way to have gun rights reinstated based on a budget issue: The ATF has no budget for staff to review and process reinstatement applications.

"It seems ridiculous and unfair that someone who was addicted to alcohol in college and is now 15 or 20 years sober while showing a responsible track record of healthy living can't apply for and have reinstated gun rights in order to be able to hunt with family or friends or protect his home and family from intruders," said Dr. Karl Benzio, psychiatrist, founder and executive director of Lighthouse Network.

"It is true that the consequences of our actions follow us for years and that is one risk of poor behavior," Benzio added. "However, once dues are paid and an addict has sought help and shown proof of responsible and safe decision-making, an individual should be able to move forward, carry on a normal

life, and have privileges restored. When privileges are not restored, it is just this sort of isolation and singling out that makes life more difficult and painful for the addict, and could in fact drive him to turn his back on sobriety.

“For others, it may be just the excuse they need to say, ‘I’m not going to get help in the first place.’ A common-sense balance between consequences for negative behaviors and rewards for positive behaviors when it comes to gun regulations for addicts or mental health patients is needed in order to prevent further damage to their already battered psyche.”

What’s your take? Should recovering addicts and other mental health patients have gun rights? Or is this a dangerous proposition?