

16 February 2026

Justice Committee, New Zealand Parliament

Via online portal

Submission on the Arms Bill 2025

Te Whare Piki Ora o Māhutonga – the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) and its Aotearoa New Zealand Trauma Sub-committee are committed to reducing the seriousness and frequency of trauma associated with gun injuries. Surgeons are key members of the teams caring for people injured by firearms. We see first-hand the often-horrendous injuries people suffer and how this affects them and their families. Most injuries from firearms require multiple operations and can result in a greatly reduced quality of life for those injured and their families. Such injuries also impact adversely on the wellbeing of the medical workforce and the capacity of the health system to deliver care.

RACS supports the principles of the Arms Bill 2025 (the Bill) – that the possession and use of arms is a privilege, and that anyone doing anything involving arms must act in the interests of personal and public safety. We support this being achieved by a combination of encouraging a culture of community safety, enabling legitimate possession and use of firearms, ensuring compliance through education and enforcement, and improving the oversight of the firearms regulatory regime to improve public trust and confidence in the system.

RACS supports these provisions

RACS acknowledges and supports the provisions in the Bill addressing important public safety measures for which surgeons have advocated over time, including:

- retaining the ban on Military-Style Semi-Automatic (MSSA) weapons
- retaining universal registration of gun ownership
- stricter gun licensing criteria and protocols
- stricter penalties for non-compliance
- closing loopholes that facilitate illicit transactions
- enabling and mandating better collaboration among government agencies, including law enforcement, and healthcare providers to prevent at-risk individuals accessing firearms.

RACS also supports the following specific public safety improvements in the Bill:

- the ban on possessing new blank-firing guns
- restrictions on the ownership of large-capacity pistol magazines
- banning unlicensed people from possessing blueprints for manufacturing firearms
- preventing persons on the National Gang List from holding a gun licence
- extending health-related licence suspensions from three to twelve months
- requiring business licence holders to notify the regulator of surrendered arms items
- introducing processes to bring unlawful firearms into lawful possession
- establishing an infringement offence regime and adjusting the suspension regime
- updating offences and penalties in response to new trends in criminal behaviour and emerging technology, such as 3D printing.

RACS supports the provisions which establish a new Arms Regulator (Regulator):

- the Regulator to be an autonomous agency within the New Zealand Police
- codifying the relationship between the Regulator and the Police



- clearly defining the functions of the Regulator, including to:
 - o maintain the arms register
 - o monitor and enforce compliance with the Arms Act
 - o collaborate with any government agency that performs functions in relation to arms
 - o promote and educate the public about firearms safety and compliance with the Arms Act.

RACS does not support these provisions

RACS does not support the following provisions in the Bill which are detrimental to public safety, and we recommend the provisions in the current Act be reinstated:

- extending the vetting period for pest controllers who use semi-automatic firearms from 2.5 to five years, with a check-in with regulator at 2.5 years
- allowing employees of dealers and museum workers to handle pistols and restricted firearms without having an appropriate endorsement on their licence
- extending the duration of dealer licences from the current 1 year to 5 years (after a probationary period).

The effects of gun violence are felt throughout society

RACS is committed to reducing the seriousness and frequency of trauma associated with gun injuries. Surgeons work as key members of multi-disciplinary teams including nursing and allied health professionals who provide care from resuscitation through to rehabilitation or end of life care. Most injuries from firearms require multiple operations. The injuries frequently result in permanent loss of function, chronic pain, and psychological trauma. These have long term impacts on quality of life, independence and ability to return to work or education for those directly injured and often for their families.

Gun injuries impose significant costs on the health sector, reducing the capacity of the health system to deliver care. Beyond the direct costs, exposure to violence has been linked to an increase in the risk of other medical illnesses including asthma, hypertension, cancer and stroke, as well as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Gun violence thus has a significant opportunity cost for our country and impacts adversely on the achievement of health targets, including contributing to long surgical waiting lists and lack of access to care for other New Zealanders. The nature of injuries from gun violence also impacts adversely on the wellbeing of the medical workforce, including moral distress and workload.

Reducing access to firearms is a critical suicide prevention measure. Rates of suicide are affected by inequities in access to mental healthcare. Limiting access to highly lethal means of suicide during periods of crisis aligns with a population health and equity-based approach to suicide prevention.

RACS will continue strong advocacy for ongoing review and improvement of the Arms Act to protect New Zealanders from the impact of gun violence.

Nāku noa, nā

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RACS represents more than 8300 surgeons and 1300 surgical Trainees and Specialist International Medical Graduates across Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia.