For active component service members, between the two populations, the adult population do not control comparisons with the general representation. The above existing data. Use of targeted and in conjunction with other suggests that the results should be weighted to represent the 2018 active component.

Comparison with the U.S. General Population

The 2018 HRBS shows that active component airmen generally had better health and health-related behaviors than the U.S. adult population. Airmen met or exceeded Healthy People 2020 goals for weight. Their rates of binge drinking were below those of the adult general population, as were their rates of cigarette smoking. Less than 1% of airmen reported illicit drug use or prescription drug misuse. Airmen fell short of Healthy People 2020 goals for adequate amount of sleep. Rates of e-cigarette use and pipe or hookah smoking were also higher than those for the adult general population, as were use of cigars and smokeless tobacco. The latter were also well above Healthy People 2020 goals. Psychological distress among airmen was as low as or lower than that of the U.S. adult population, while probable PTSD was higher. Suicide thoughts, plans, and attempts among airmen were also roughly comparable to those of the general adult population.

Development of military-appropriate population benchmarks, especially by service branch, could facilitate goal-setting, command visibility, and incremental improvements in health-related readiness.

Limitations

A low overall response rate (16.2% for the Air Force and 9.6% across all services) suggests that the results should be interpreted with caution and in conjunction with other existing data. Use of targeted incentives, modules administered to subsets of respondents, or a service member panel survey could help improve response rates and representation. The above comparisons with the general adult population do not control for demographic differences between the two populations.

Adapted from 2018 Department of Defense Health Related Behaviors Survey (HRBS): Results for the Active Component, by Sarah O. Meadows, Charles C. Engel, Rebecca L. Collins, Robin L. Beckman, Joshua Breslau, Terry L. Schell, and Molly Simmons, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4222-OSD, 2021. The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. For the complete report detailing these and other findings, visit www.rand.org/t/RR4222.

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Assessing the Health Readiness of Active Component Airmen

Results from Air Force Respondents to the HRBS

### Weight and Sleep Issues

- **62.9%** were overweight or obese, according to body mass index
- **43.8%** met age-appropriate sleep quantity requirements
- **19.2%** were moderately or severely bothered by sleep-related lack of energy
- **7.1%** took sleep medications to help them sleep at least three times weekly

### Substantive Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>Use in Airmen</th>
<th>Use in General Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol, Tobacco, Illicit Drugs, and Prescription Drugs</td>
<td>24.1% had engaged in binge drinking in the past 30 days (five or more drinks for men or four or more for women on one occasion)</td>
<td>5.0% were heavy drinkers (binge drinking at least one or two days a week in the past 30 days)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.3% viewed military culture as supportive of drinking</td>
<td>31.2% reported any current tobacco or nicotine use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.6% were current cigarette smokers</td>
<td>11.9% were current cigarette smokers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.9% were current e-cigarette users</td>
<td>8.6% were current smokeless tobacco users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.4% reported illicit drug use (mostly marijuana or synthetic cannabinoids) in the past 12 months</td>
<td>0.0% reported prescription drug misuse in the past 12 months (use without a prescription or use in greater amounts, more frequently, or for longer than prescribed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Mental and Emotional Health

- **4.7%** met criteria for serious psychological distress in the past 30 days
- **9.8%** met criteria for serious psychological distress in the past 12 months
- **6.1%** met criteria for probable posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the past 30 days
- **4.8%** had thought about attempting suicide in the past 12 months
- **0.6%** reported a suicide attempt in the past 12 months
- **4.2%** needed mental health services in the past 12 months but did not receive them
- **20.3%** reported mental health service use in the past 12 months
- **32.2%** said that seeking military mental health treatment damages one’s military career

### Physical Health and Functional Limitations

- **35.6%** reported one or more chronic medical conditions (e.g., high blood pressure) in the past 12 months
- **22.9%** reported that pain (including headache) had bothered them a lot over the past 30 days
- **3.7%** screened positive for mild traumatic brain injury

### Sexual Behavior and Health

- **17.0%** had more than one sexual partner in the past 12 months
- **31.4%** had sex with a new partner without using a condom in the past 12 months
- **3.1%** reported contracting a sexually transmitted infection in the past 12 months
- **19.2%** were at high risk for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (including both monogamous and non-monogamous relationships, noting that “serosorting” with an HIV-negative partner is not enough to avoid infection)
- **13.7%** of those not expecting or trying to conceive a child did not use birth control during their most recent vaginal sex in the past 12 months
- **2.4%** reported having or causing an unintended pregnancy in the past 12 months

### Sexual Orientation, Identity, and Health

- **6.7%** identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB)

Significantly greater percentages of LGB personnel than non-LGB personnel reported serious psychological distress and probable PTSD, suicidal thoughts and attempts, binge and heavy drinking, e-cigarette and smokeless tobacco use, illicit drug use, and unwanted sexual contact.* These results are not specific to the Air Force.

* Unwanted sexual contact in the HRBS is a broader construct than sexual assault, and these survey responses do not represent official reports of sexual assault.

### Deployment Experiences and Health

- **55.0%** reported at least one prior combat or noncombat deployment

Among those who had ever deployed:

- **77.5%** reported at least one lifetime combat deployment
- **25.0%** reported past exposure to combat trauma (e.g., knowing someone wounded in combat)
- **38.4%** reported a deployment in the past 12 months

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