For reserve component service members

DoD HEALTH RELATED BEHAVIORS SURVEY

Assessing the Health Readiness of Air Force Reservists

Results from Air Force Reserve Respondents to the HRBS

RAND CORPORATION

The **Health Related Behaviors Survey** (HRBS) is the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD's) flagship survey for understanding the health, health-related behaviors, and well-being of service members.

- The HRBS allows leadership to better understand the health-related readiness of the force.
- The HRBS is used to facilitate benchmarking in combination with Healthy People benchmarks (designed for the general U.S. population).
- Results are weighted to represent the 2018 reserve component.

Comparison with the U.S. General Population

The 2018 HRBS shows that Air Force reservists generally reported comparable or better health and health behaviors than the general population, with some areas of concern.

Air Force reservists met Healthy People 2020 goals for normal weight and for obesity. Their rates of illicit drug use and prescription drug misuse were low, with less than 1 percent reporting such use in the past 12 months. They also met Healthy People 2020 goals for binge drinking, and fewer engaged in heavy drinking than in the general population.

Their use of tobacco and nicotine products was mixed. Although Air Force reservists met the Healthy People 2020 goal for cigarette smoking, they did not do so for cigar smoking and smokeless tobacco. The percentages of Air Force reservists who used e-cigarettes, cigars, and smokeless tobacco also exceeded those for the general population. They did not meet Healthy People 2020 guidelines for appropriate amounts of sleep. Their levels of psychological distress were about the same as those for the general population, but their levels of probable PTSD were higher.

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 percent for the Air Force Reserve and 9.4 percent 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.

Weight and Sleep Issues

64.4% were **overweight** or **obese**, according to body mass index

50.2% met **age-appropriate sleep quantity** requirements

12.3% were moderately or severely bothered by **sleep-related lack of energy**

4.7% took **sleep medications** to help them sleep at least three times weekly

Mental and Emotional Health

2.8% met criteria for **serious psychological distress** in the past 30 days

4.9% met criteria for **serious psychological distress** in the past 12 months

5.5% met criteria for **probable posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** in the past 30 days

2.5% had **thought about attempting suicide** in the past 12 months

0.1% reported a **suicide attempt** in the past 12 months

2.2% **needed mental health services** in the past 12 months **but did not receive them**

13.8% reported **mental health service use** in the past 12 months

32.2% said that seeking military mental health **treatment damages one's military career**

Substance Use

Alcohol, Tobacco, Illicit Drugs, and Prescription Drugs

21.7% 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)

3.9% were **heavy drinkers** (binge drinking at least one or two days a week in the past 30 days)

15.4% viewed **military culture** as **supportive of drinking**

19.0% reported any **current tobacco or nicotine use**

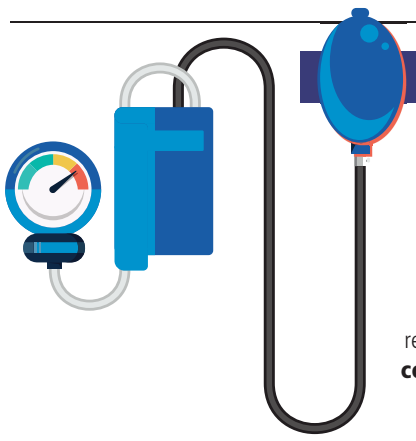
7.7% were **current cigarette smokers**

4.8% were **current smokeless tobacco users**

5.9% were **current e-cigarette users**

0.2% reported **illicit drug use** (mostly marijuana or synthetic cannabis) in the past 12 months

0.6% 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)



Physical Health and Functional Limitations

32.7% reported one or more **chronic medical conditions** (e.g., high blood pressure) in the past 12 months

17.0% reported that **pain** (including headaches) had bothered them a lot over the past 30 days

2.6% screened positive for **mild traumatic brain injury**

Sexual Behavior and Health

12.3% had **more than one sexual partner** in the past 12 months

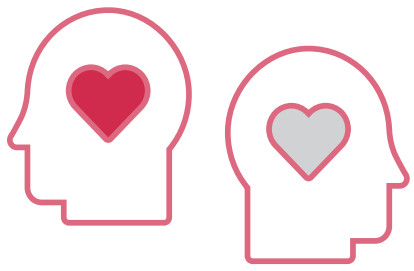
26.3% had sex with a new partner **without using a condom** in the past 12 months

1.7% reported contracting a **sexually transmitted infection** in the past 12 months

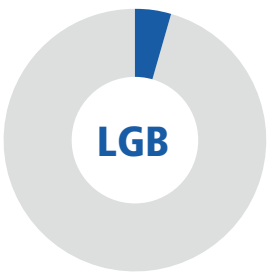
14.6% were at **high risk** for human immunodeficiency virus (**HIV**)

18.4% 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

1.9% reported having or causing an **unintended pregnancy** in the past 12 months



Sexual Orientation, Identity, and Health

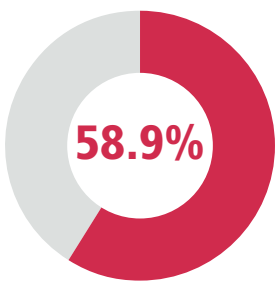


4.7% identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (**LGB**)

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; cigarette, e-cigarette, and smokeless tobacco use; illicit drug use; unwanted sexual contact;* and having been physically assaulted. These results are not specific to the Air Force Reserve.

* 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



reported at least one **prior combat or noncombat deployment**

Among those who had ever deployed:

74.1% reported at least **one lifetime combat deployment**

25.4% reported past **exposure to combat trauma** (e.g., knowing someone wounded in combat)

29.5% reported a **deployment in the past 12 months**

Adapted from *2018 Department of Defense Health Related Behaviors Survey (HRBS): Results for the Reserve Component,* by Sarah O. Meadows, Charles C. Engel, Rebecca L. Collins, Robin L. Beckman, Joshua Breslau, Erika Litvin Bloom, Michael Stephen Dunbar, Mary Lou Gilbert, David Grant, Jennifer Hawes-Dawson, Stephanie Brooks Holliday, Sarah MacCarthy, Eric R. Pedersen, Michael W. Robbins, Adam J. Rose, Jamie Ryan, Terry L. Schell, and Molly M. Simmons, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4228-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/RR4228. *This infographic was updated in July 2026 to correct a coding error that impacted calculations of the prevalence of probable PTSD.*

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