Assessing the Health Readiness of Air National Guard Members

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

Air National Guard members reported health and health behaviors that were comparable to the general population in some areas but that were concerning in others. Air National Guard members were comparable to the general population and Healthy People 2020 goals for body weight. Their rate of binge drinking was also comparable to the general population and the Healthy People 2020 goal, while their rate of heavy drinking was less than that of the general population. Their average amount of sleep was below Healthy People 2020 goals. Higher percentages of Air National Guard members than of the general population reported any current tobacco and nicotine use, as well as use of e-cigarettes and smokeless tobacco. Air National Guard members did not meet the Healthy People 2020 goal for smokeless tobacco use, but their rate of cigarette smoking did meet the goal.

Substance Use

- Alcohol, Tobacco, Illicit Drugs, and Prescription Drugs

  24.9% 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)
  4.9% were heavy drinkers (binge drinking at least one or two days a week in the past 30 days)
  20.3% viewed military culture as supportive of drinking
  25.0% reported any current tobacco or nicotine use
  8.8% were current cigarette smokers
  9.3% were current smokeless tobacco users
  8.0% were current e-cigarette users
  0.6% reported illicit drug use (mostly marijuana or synthetic cannabinoids) in the past 12 months
  0.7% 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)

Weight and Sleep Issues

- 67.0% were overweight or obese, according to body mass index
- 50.8% were not age-appropriate sleep quantity requirements
- 13.4% were moderately or severely bothered by sleep-related lack of energy
- 5.3% took sleep medications to help them sleep at least three times weekly

Mental and Emotional Health

- 2.9% met criteria for serious psychological distress in the past 30 days
- 5.4% met criteria for serious psychological distress in the past 12 months
- 5.9% met criteria for probable posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the past 30 days
- 2.8% had thought about attempting suicide in the past 12 months
- 0.3% reported a suicide attempt in the past 12 months
- 3.1% needed mental health services in the past 12 months but did not receive them
- 15.9% reported mental health service use in the past 12 months
- 31.2% said that seeking mental health treatment damages one’s military career

Physical Health and Functional Limitations

- 32.0% reported one or more chronic medical conditions (e.g., high blood pressure) in the past 12 months
- 15.3% reported that pain (including headache) had bothered them a lot over the past 30 days
- 3.0% screened positive for mild traumatic brain injury

Sexual Behavior and Health

- 11.7% had more than one sexual partner in the past 12 months
- 28.8% had sex with a new partner without using a condom in the past 12 months
- 2.1% reported contracting a sexually transmitted infection in the past 12 months
- 13.7% were at high risk for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
- 19.1% 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
- 1.5% reported having or causing an unintended pregnancy in the past 12 months

Sexual Orientation, Identity, and Health

- 3.8% identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB)

Deployment Experiences and Health

Among those who had ever deployed:
- 76.2% reported at least one lifetime combat deployment
- 21.0% reported past exposure to combat trauma (e.g., knowing someone wounded in combat)
- 40.8% reported a deployment in the past 12 months

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 National Guard.

* 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.

To view this infographic online, visit www.rand.org/IG/16492.

www.rand.org