Assessing the Health Readiness of Army National Guard Members

Results from Army National Guard Respondents to the HRBS

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 data indicate several health concerns for Army National Guard members.

- Their body weight was comparable to the general population but did not meet Healthy People 2020 goals. Less than half received adequate amounts of sleep, well below the Healthy People 2020 goal.
- Their levels of binge drinking were above those of the general population and did not meet the Healthy People 2020 goal.
- They experienced significantly higher levels of psychological distress and probable PTSD.
- They had markedly higher rates of smoking-related health problems.
- They reported higher rates of mental and emotional health service use and met Healthy People 2020 goals.
- Their rates of use of tobacco and nicotine products was greater than that for the general population.
- They had significantly higher rates of obesity, heart disease, and stroke.
- They also had significantly lower rates of receiving mental health services.

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 (6.3 percent for the Army National Guard 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.

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, 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/HRBS2018.

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