



Assessing the Health Readiness of Coast Guard Reservists

Results from Coast Guard Reserve 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 shows that Coast Guard reservists were comparable to the general population and met Healthy People 2020 goals in some areas but fell short in others.

The percentage of Coast Guard reservists who were obese met the Healthy People 2020 goal. However, the percentage who were at a healthy weight was too low and, therefore, did not meet the Healthy People 2020 goal. Nearly half of Coast Guard reservists did not get an appropriate amount of sleep, falling short of the Healthy People 2020 target.

The percentages of Coast Guard reservists who engaged in binge and heavy drinking exceeded those for the general population, and the percentage who reported binge drinking did not meet the Healthy People 2020 goal. The percentage of Coast Guard reservists who used cigarettes met the Healthy People 2020 goal and was below that of the general population. The percentage who used smokeless tobacco exceeded that of the general population and did not meet the Healthy People 2020 goal.

Levels of psychological distress among Coast Guard reservists were lower than those for the general population, while the level of probable PTSD was higher. The percentages of Coast Guard reservists who reported suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts were at or below those for the general 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 (15.6 percent for the Coast Guard 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



70.0% were **overweight or obese**, according to body mass index



52.1% met **age-appropriate sleep quantity** requirements



15.3% 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

Mental and Emotional Health



- 1.5%** met criteria for **serious psychological distress** in the past 30 days
- 4.7%** met criteria for **serious psychological distress** in the past 12 months
- 4.9%** met criteria for **probable posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** in the past 30 days
- 1.4%** had **thought about attempting suicide** in the past 12 months
- 0.5%** reported a **suicide attempt** in the past 12 months
- 3.2%** **needed mental health services** in the past 12 months **but did not receive them**

17.1% reported **mental health service use** in the past 12 months

27.7% said that seeking military mental health **treatment damages one's military career**

Substance Use



Alcohol, Tobacco, Illicit Drugs, and Prescription Drugs

32.8% 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)

10.8% were **heavy drinkers** (binge drinking at least one or two days a week in the past 30 days)

7.4% viewed **military culture** as **supportive of drinking**

17.8% reported any **current tobacco or nicotine use**

7.7% were **current cigarette smokers**

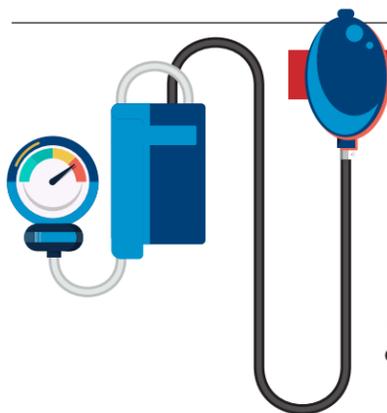
8.4% were **current smokeless tobacco users**

3.7% were **current e-cigarette users**

1.0% reported **illicit drug use** (mostly marijuana or synthetic cannabis) in the past 12 months

No Coast Guard Reserve respondents 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



34.3% reported one or more **chronic medical conditions** (e.g., high blood pressure) in the past 12 months



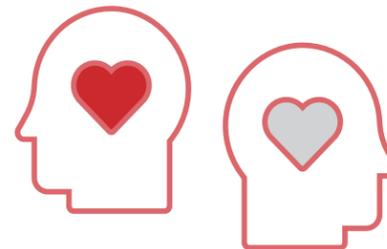
17.6% reported that **pain** (including headaches) had bothered them a lot over the past 30 days



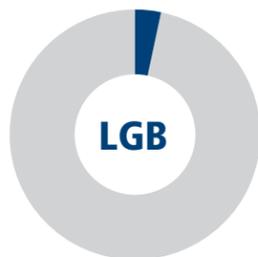
2.4% screened positive for **mild traumatic brain injury**

Sexual Behavior and Health

- 7.9%** had **more than one sexual partner** in the past 12 months
- 32.0%** had sex with a new partner **without using a condom** in the past 12 months
- 1.5%** reported contracting a **sexually transmitted infection** in the past 12 months
- 10.9%** were at **high risk** for human immunodeficiency virus (**HIV**)
- 17.1%** 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
- 1.8%** reported having or causing an **unintended pregnancy** in the past 12 months



Sexual Orientation, Identity, and Health

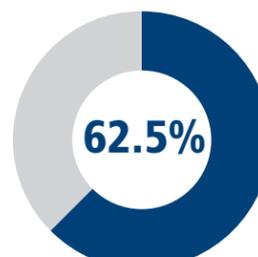


3.6% identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (**LGB**)

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 Coast Guard 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



62.5% reported at least one **prior combat or noncombat deployment**

Among those who had ever deployed:

32.3% reported at least **one lifetime combat deployment**

16.8% reported past **exposure to combat trauma** (e.g., knowing someone wounded in combat)

37.0% 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.

Limited Print and Electronic Distribution Rights: This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law. This representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for noncommercial use only. Unauthorized posting of this publication online is prohibited. Permission is given to duplicate this document for personal use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please visit www.rand.org/pubs/permissions.html.

To view this infographic online, visit www.rand.org/t/IG149z7.

www.rand.org