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.


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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

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
- 10.5% 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)

Deployment Experiences and Health

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

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 (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 in greater amounts, more frequently, or for longer than prescribed)