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Suicide among U.S. Military Service Members

Suicide is a leading cause of death among Service members. Death by suicide has wide-ranging impacts beyond an individual’s family and friends to their unit, installation, and the broader military community. Consequently, suicide prevention and postvention are a high priority. Suicide prevention involves the engagement of the entire community in promoting protective factors, identifying risk factors, and addressing issues through a comprehensive system of care, which provides community programs and clinical services to support the total force. Postvention efforts take place after a suicide to provide support through touchpoints among leaders, family, friends, units, teammates, and the community.

Suicide Rates in the Military

Rates of suicide across the Active Component of the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps increased between 2011 to 2022, peaking in 2020. Trends remained stable for Reserve and National Guard Service members.

Since 2011, suicide rates among Service members have been similar to rates in the U.S. population, after adjusting for age and sex differences, with the following exceptions. In 2012 and 2013, the National Guard rates were higher than those of the U.S. population, and in 2020 the Active Component rate was higher.

While Service members from every demographic group can be at risk, most who died by suicide were male, enlisted, white, and under the age of 30 years. This aligns with the demographic makeup of the Services.

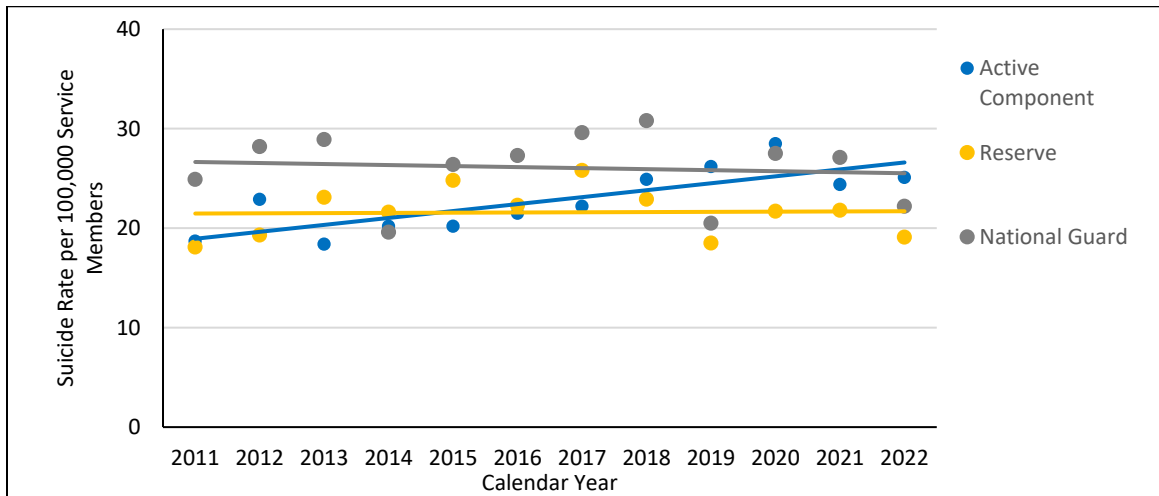


Figure 1. Active Component, Reserve, and National Guard Suicide Rates (Unadjusted), CY2011–CY2022

Lethal Means

Firearms are the most common method of suicide among Service members. In 2022, firearms were involved in 65% of Active Component, 70% of Reserve Component, and 81% of National Guard Component suicides. Across all Components, the percentage of suicides involving firearms was higher than among the U.S. population. Limiting or reducing access to lethal means, including firearms, is important for the prevention of military suicides.

“Lethal means safety” involves making a method of suicide less available and less likely to cause death. The military is promoting a culture of lethal means safety through public education campaigns and efforts to improve safe storage of and limiting access to firearms, medications, substances, and sharp objects (National Strategy for Suicide Prevention Implementation Assessment Report).

Stressors and Protective Factors

Service members experience unique health and life stressors that may put them at increased risk of suicidal behavior. Experiencing these stressors does not mean someone is suicidal, and resources are available to help Service members deal with these stressors.

Health and Life Stressors
<p>Among Active Component Service members who died by suicide in 2022, the Department of Defense Suicide Event Report System showed that—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46% received outpatient mental health services the prior year. • 45% had received at least one behavioral health diagnosis. • 42% experienced intimate relationship problems in the prior year. • 26% experienced workplace difficulties in the prior year. • 26% experienced an administrative and/or legal problem in the prior year. • 14% experienced abuse before age 18. • 10% experienced financial difficulties in the prior year.

Multiple protective factors have also been associated with a lower risk of engaging in suicidal behavior among military and civilian populations.

Protective Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social connectedness and support • Feelings of belongingness and sense of purpose • Access to clinical behavioral health care and non-clinical support services (i.e., Chaplain and life-skills counseling) • Engaged and supportive military leadership • Financial well-being • Lethal means safety

To better understand and address risk and protective factors for Service members and military communities, further investigation to assess disparities of suicide rates amongst types of units and jobs; factors related to adverse childhood experiences; and social determinants of health is needed.

Prevention Initiatives and Resources

The DoD is actively engaged in efforts to prevent suicide across the force and has continuously assessed these efforts to improve effectiveness. The Department recognizes that improving quality of life is crucial. Service members are empowered to access programs that support key aspects of well-being, including housing conditions, financial stability, social connection, and family relationships. Measures to improve programs and healthcare delivery and removal of barriers include hiring a

prevention workforce, promoting self-referral for care, and expanding the availability of tele-health and supportive services.

Leadership’s Role in Addressing Suicide

Leadership engagement at all levels is key for reducing the stigma of asking for help and for improving overall well-being of the military family. Leaders are encouraged to create environments that establish group interaction, the personification of military service values, and supporting member sense of purpose. Additionally, leaders who utilize tools and resources to safely and effectively communicate about suicide and harmful behaviors with Service members, units, and military communities can influence attitudes and behaviors and positively shape the way Service members and their families view seeking help.

Resources for Service Members and their Families

- [Military Crisis Line](#): Dial 988, then press 1; or text 838255
- [Military OneSource](#)
- [Community Resource Guides](#)
- [Defense Suicide Prevention Office](#)
- [Leaders Suicide Prevention Safe Messaging Guide](#)
- [Postvention Toolkit for Military Suicide Loss](#)

Service-specific Programs

- [Army Suicide Prevention Program](#)
- [Navy Personnel Command - Suicide Prevention](#)
- [U.S. Marine Corps Manpower & Reserve Affairs - Suicide Prevention Capability](#)
- [Department of the Air Force Integrated Resilience - Suicide Prevention](#)

Additional Information

- [Defense Suicide Prevention Office Reports](#)
- [Surveillance of Suicidal Behavior Publications \(Defense Centers for Public Health – Aberdeen\)](#)
- [Behavioral and Social Health Risk and Protective Factors \(Defense Centers for Public Health – Aberdeen\)](#)
- [Navy Suicide Prevention Survey Data](#)

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