



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Suicide is a serious public health issue for the United States and the Department of Defense (DoD). Every suicide changes the lives of families, friends, and the broader community. We owe our military and their families an unwavering commitment to preventing suicide through a comprehensive and integrated approach that addresses the experiences and challenges Service members face as they carry out the nation's critical national security mission.

Department of Defense Annual Report on Suicide in the Military: Calendar Year 2021

SERVICE MEMBERS | CY 2021 DATA

Suicides per 100,000

24.3 Active Component Service members

21.2 Reserve Service members

26.4 National Guard Service members

519 Service members died by suicide in 2021
328 Active | **74** Reserve | **117** Guard

MILITARY FAMILIES | CY 2020* DATA

Suicides per 100,000

7.7 Family members (spouses and dependents)

13.0 Spouses

4.3 Dependents (minor and non-minor)

202 military family members died by suicide in 2020
133 Spouses | **69** Dependents

Active Component suicide rates have **gradually increased** since 2011, although the **2021 rate was lower** than the 2020 rate.

Reserve and Guard suicide rates fluctuate year to year, but there was **no increasing or decreasing trend** between 2011 and 2021.



The suicide rates for military spouses and dependents in 2020 were **similar to prior years**.

Since 2011, Active Component, Reserve, and National Guard suicide rates were **similar to the U.S. population** in most years when accounting for age and sex differences (the military is younger and mostly male).



In 2020, suicide rates for spouses and dependents were **similar to the U.S. population** when accounting for age and sex differences, except for male spouses who had a higher rate of suicide.

Most Service members who died by suicide were **young, enlisted men**.



SPOUSES

51% female
79% under 40 years old
47% service history

DEPENDENTS

72% male
62% under 18 years old
<5% service history

Most common method of suicide death: **Firearm**

70% Service members



Most common method of suicide death: **Firearm**

60% Spouses **55%** Dependents

*Family member data lag one year based on sourcing from CDC.

DoD Suicide Prevention Efforts in CY 2021: Key Highlights

“Mental health is health, period.” — Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III, July 2021

In 2021: DoD continued to implement an integrated primary prevention approach to suicide prevention to reduce factors that heighten suicide risk and promote factors that lessen risk. DoD advanced initiatives focused on the areas shown below.

Way Forward: In 2022, DoD efforts include assessing current lethal means safety policies and the recommendations of the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee, tasked with identifying ways to strengthen the DoD’s existing suicide prevention programs.

FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR SERVICE MEMBERS AND FAMILIES

Quality of life matters not just in suicide prevention, but also as a key component to force readiness. For example, the DoD’s “Resources Exist, Asking Can Help” (REACH) program is designed to reduce barriers to care.

Fielding a dedicated and specialized **prevention workforce**. Implementation, development, and hiring will continue through CY 2022.

Implemented the **On-Site Installation Evaluation (OSIE)** process at select installations to examine installation-level capabilities to prevent and effectively address risk for suicide.

Commenced **Connect to Protect: Support Is Within Reach**, a yearlong suicide prevention communication campaign that emphasizes the importance of self-care and social connectedness while promoting awareness of support resources.

The Secretary of Defense directed several **actions in response to economic challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic**, e.g., increased housing allowances in response to substantial cost-of-living increases. Similar efforts will continue through CY 2022.

ADDRESSING STIGMA AS A BARRIER TO HELP-SEEKING

In March 2021, the Deputy Secretary of Defense directed the development of specific plans to advance the Department’s **priority focus on people**, including suicide prevention and mental health.

Established a DoD-wide working group to **address stigma toward help-seeking** resulting from perceived impacts on security clearances and career advancement.

Directed DoD to undertake review of policy documents to identify and **rectify language that may inadvertently cause stigma** toward help-seeking.

Continued **focus on educating** Service members on the availability and benefits of support resources.

PROMOTING A CULTURE OF LETHAL MEANS SAFETY

Lethal means safety places time and space between a person in crisis and their access to lethal means, such as firearms and medication, and is a critical focus of suicide prevention efforts with DoD and across the federal government.

Published a **Lethal Means Safety suite of tools** to provide information and resources for Service members, families, leaders, and external partners, such as firearm retailers.

In September 2021, the Deputy Secretary of Defense directed the Military Services to **develop specific plans to promote lethal means safety** tailored to the needs of their Service members.

Continued to expand and evaluate **Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM)**, a training program designed to provide non-medical support providers with counseling strategies to promote safe use and storage of firearms and medication.