

# Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members who have served since 1985: suicide monitoring 1997 to 2020

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In 2014, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) established a partnership to build a comprehensive profile of the health and welfare of Australia's veteran population.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, *Serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members who have served since 1985: suicide monitoring 1997 to 2020* (released 16 November 2022), is the fifth annual update on suicides among serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members.

## A note about the data

The data used in this report includes members with at least one day of service between 1985 and 2020, with suicides monitored from 1997 to 2020.

By the end of 2020, almost 379,000 Australians had served at least one day in the ADF between 1985 and 2020. Of these, just over 362,000 were still alive, comprising of 60,000 permanent, 39,000 reserve and 263,000 ex-serving.

As the monitoring period has expanded since previous reports, a greater number of suicides are reported. However, the general patterns, rates of suicide and comparisons with the general Australian population remain similar to previous studies.

Care should be taken when comparing data from previous publications. Therefore, it is recommended to focus on suicide rates, rather than the number of deaths.

The larger study population enables more detailed analysis, providing greater insight into the risk and protective factors for suicide within the permanent, reserve and ex-serving populations.

Detailed technical notes can be found [here](#).

## Key findings

The following points provide a high-level summary of the data. Please note that the groups can overlap, and should not be seen as mutually exclusive.

### Permanent and reserve males have a lower risk of suicide:

- Compared to the Australian males, permanent (49% lower) and reserve males (46% lower) are about half as likely to die by suicide as Australian males.

### Ex-serving males and females have a higher risk of suicide:

- Overall, ex-serving ADF members are at a higher risk of suicide than other Australians.
- Ex-serving males are 27% more likely to die by suicide, and ex-serving females are 107% more likely to die by suicide. However, rates of suicide vary within subpopulations of the ex-serving cohort.

### Males who separate for involuntary medical reasons have an increased risk of suicide:

- The suicide rate for ADF ex-serving males who separate voluntarily is similar to the general Australian population.
- The suicide rate for ex-serving males who separate involuntarily for medical reasons (69.8 per 100,000) is higher than those who separated voluntarily (22.5 per 100,000).

**Older age groups have lower rates of suicide:**

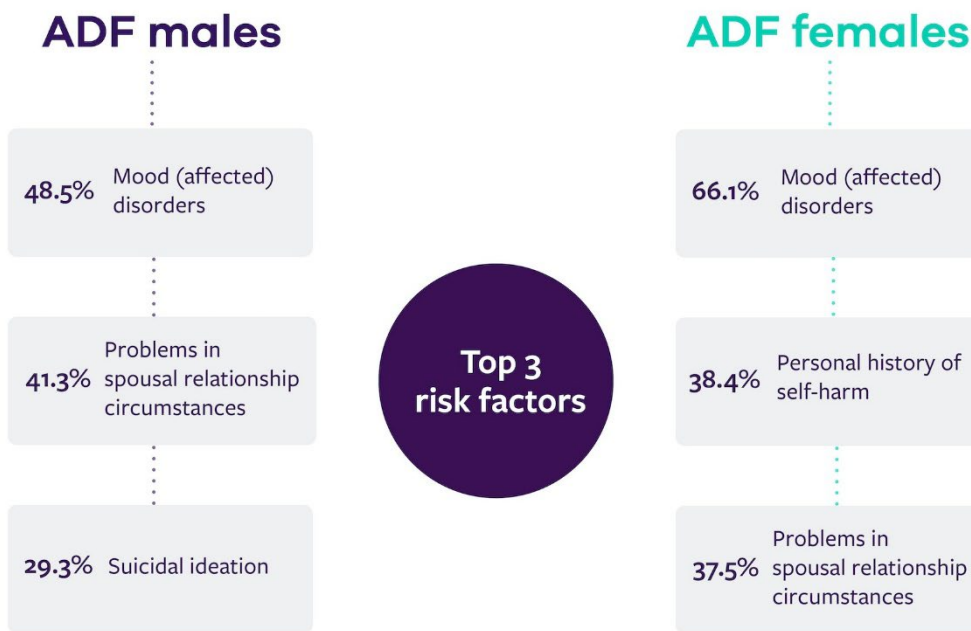
- The suicide rate for ex-serving males aged 50 years and over (19.8 per 100,000 population per year) was significantly lower than the rate for ex-serving males under 50 years of age (36.8 per 100,000 population per year).

**Common risk factors among ADF members:**

- 80% of males and 84% of ADF females who died by suicide had at least one psychosocial risk factor.

[View the AIHW report: Serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members who have served since 1985: suicide monitoring 1997 to 2020](#)

# Risk factors



Data sourced from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) *Serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members who have served since 1985: suicide monitoring 1997 to 2020*; Common risk factors identified among ADF males and females who died by suicide, 2001-2020, and Australian males and females who died by suicide, 2018.

