

## Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Suicide Monitoring 2001-2019 report: Serving and ex-serving ADF members

Released by AIHW on Wednesday, 29 September 2021

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, *Serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members who have served since 1985: suicide monitoring 2001 to 2019* (released Wednesday, 29 September 2021), is the fourth annual update on suicides among permanent, reserve and ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and the first to include the population of ADF members who served in the ADF between 1985 and 2019 by using data from historical ADF personnel systems.

### A note about the data

Previous editions included members with at least one day of ADF service since 1 January 2001. The current report expands on this earlier work by including members with at least one day of ADF service since 1 January 1985, following extensive investigation and validation of historical data sources.

- This more than doubles the population under consideration; 149,000 ex-serving ADF members in addition to the 125,000 ex-serving ADF member population in previous reports.
- 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.
- Because the ex-serving population included in this report is more than double that of previous studies, the numbers of suicides reported are larger; however, the general patterns, including rates of suicide and comparisons with the general Australian population, remain similar to previous studies.

### About the report

- 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.
- This report includes numbers of suicide deaths between 1 January 2001 and 31 December 2019 and rates of suicide from 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2019.
- As of 31 December 2019, almost 373,500 Australians had served at least one day in the ADF between 1 January 1985 and 31 December 2019. Of these, just over 358,000 were still alive, of which 59,000 were permanent, 38,700 reserve and nearly 261,000 ex-serving.

### Key findings

The following groups and risk factors below outline the high-level summary of results. 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

- Permanent and reserve males are about half as likely to die by suicide as Australian males (51% and 48% lower respectively).

#### 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, with males 24% more likely to die by suicide, and females 102% more likely (or about twice as likely). However, some subgroups of the ex-serving ADF members have different rates of suicide.

### Members who separate voluntarily have lower rates of suicide

- The suicide rate for ex-serving males who separate voluntarily is around one-third of the rate of those who separate for involuntary medical reasons (73.1 compared with 22.2 per 100,000 population per year).

### Younger age groups are at greater risk of suicide

- Ex-serving males aged under 50 were more likely to die by suicide than those aged over 50 years (35.2 compared with 18.9 per 100,000 population per year).

### Those who separate as commissioned officers have lower rates of suicide

- The suicide rate for ex-serving males who separated as commissioned officers is about half the rate of those who separated at any other rank (15.5 compared with 31.8 per 100,000 population per year).

### Those with a longer length of service have lower rates of suicide

- The suicide rate for males who served for more than 20 years was about one-third of the rate of those who served for less than a year (15.4 compared with 46.4 per 100,000 population per year).

### Time since separation is not a key factor

- Regardless of the length of time since separation, the rate of suicide for ex-serving males is similar.



AIHW analysis of linked Defence Historical Personnel data 1985-2019; Defence population snapshots, 2002-2019.

Notes on measuring death by suicide information are presented in three ways in this report.

- Actual numbers of suicides are presented to indicate the total number.
- Suicide rates are reported to compare between groups within the permanent, reserve and ex-serving population to take into account the size of the underlying population.
- Age-adjusted suicide rates or Standardised Mortality Ratios (SMRs) are used to compare rates of suicide between groups with different age structures, such as comparing the permanent, reserve and ex-serving populations with the general Australian population.

**[View the AIHW report: Serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members who have served since 1985: suicide monitoring 2001 to 2019](#)**