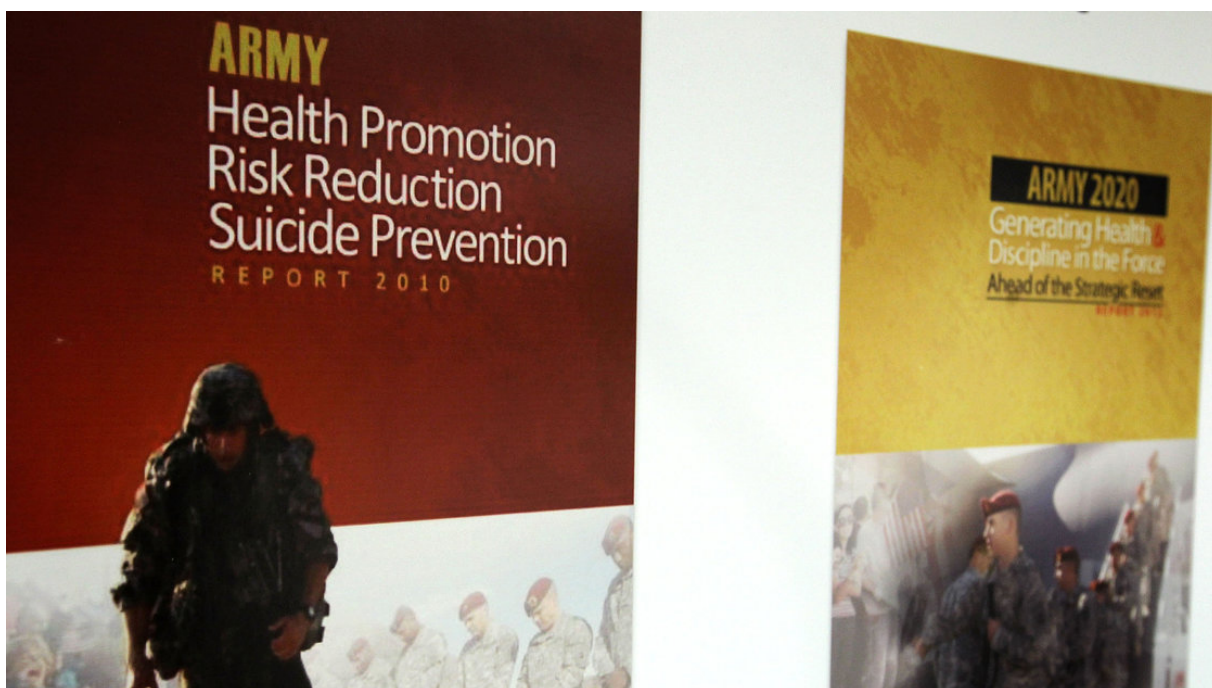




## U.S. Military's Suicide Rate Surpassed Combat Deaths In 2012

by Bill Chappell

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U.S. military suicides rose in 2012. Here, the Army's "Generating Health and Discipline in the Force" report, right, is seen last January. The report was a follow-up to its "Health Promotion/Risk Reduction/Suicide Prevention" report.

Alex Wong/Getty Images

The number of suicide deaths in the U.S. military surged to a record 349 last year — more than the 295 Americans who died fighting in Afghanistan in 2012. The numbers were ; NPR has confirmed them.

The new figures show that the number of military suicides rose from 2011, when 301 such deaths were reported. And people who work with veterans say the numbers could grow worse, as returning soldiers adjust to civilian life. The AP says the numbers are considered to be "tentative," pending review.

On , NPR's Pentagon correspondent Tom Bowman tells co-host Audie Cornish that the figures represent "active duty and reserve ... the largest portion were the active duty Army; 182 took their own lives in 2012."

Tom says the military's suicide problem is a complex one. "Most of those committing suicide are young men, 18-24," he says, who are worried that asking for help will undermine their career.

While some of the deaths can be linked to the stresses of being deployed in a war zone, a third or more of those who killed themselves were never deployed, Tom says. They seem to have been made desperate by financial or personal problems.

The military has sought to improve mental health issues and especially to boost , particularly after it saw a spike in suicides in 2009. The (1-800-273-8255) is one such effort.

"They now have resiliency training," Tom says, "which is basically teaching people how to deal with stress, in boot camp."

But while work has also been done to remove the stigma of asking for help, Tom says it can still be difficult for military personnel to find counseling.

Kim Ruocco, who directs a suicide prevention program for Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, or, tells the AP that when they leave war zones, troops enter "the danger zone, when they're transitioning back to their families, back to their communities and really finding a sense of purpose for themselves."

As Tom notes, Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., that seeks to lower the number of military suicides. Its provisions include peer counseling, which would pair returning service personnel with veterans who have made the transition to civilian life. The bill was signed into law on Jan. 3.

"This is an epidemic that cannot be ignored," Murray said Monday, according to the AP. "As our newest generation of service members and veterans face unprecedented challenges, today's news shows we must be doing more to ensure they are not slipping through the cracks."

The military says that its suicide rate remains lower than that of America's civilian population. The AP cites the Pentagon as saying "the civilian suicide rate for males aged 17-60 was 25 per 100,000 in 2010, the latest year for which such statistics are available. That compares with the military's rate in 2012 of 17.5 per 100,000."

[minor typos corrected]

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/01/14/169364733/u-s-militarys-suicide-rate-surpassed-combat-deaths-in-2012>