



# 75 percent of young Americans cannot join the military

## Who is ineligible?

According to the Pentagon, seventy-five percent of young Americans cannot join the military.

In some cases, there may be only one problem keeping a potential recruit out. However, many potential recruits have overlapping reasons such as a serious criminal record, a problem with their weight, and occasional asthma.

## The three most common causes behind this problem:

**School failure:** Approximately **one out of four lack a high school diploma** and are disqualified by their education level. While students with GED's can receive a waiver if they score high enough on the academic sections of the military entrance exams, most have not acquired the necessary math or reading skills they would need to qualify.

**Criminality: One in ten** cannot join because they **have one or more prior convictions** for a felony or serious misdemeanor, or have a serious criminal record and at least one other disqualification.

**Weight problems: 27 percent** of young Americans are too overweight to join the military.

**Additional reasons beyond the top three:** Many young people are disqualified from service for various medical problems, such as asthma, mental health problems, hearing problems, or recent treatment for Attention Deficit Disorders. Others have dependent children or other non-medical reasons making them ineligible.

To sum up: two out of ten young people are fully eligible, some others can join with a minor medical waiver or another exception to the recruitment standards, but - for one or more reasons - seventy-five percent of young Americans cannot currently join the military.

## Strategies to strengthen America's young people:

**Increasing graduation rates:** High-quality early education is the most proven way to increase graduation rates. The Perry preschool program raised graduation rates by 44 percent. Other high-quality pre-kindergarten programs also deliver solid results, such as the Chicago Child-Parent Centers that raised graduation rates by 12 percent.

**Crime prevention:** High-quality early education and care programs cut crime. For example, the Perry Preschool program found that, by age 40, individuals in the program were half as likely to have been arrested for a violent crime. A program where nurses coached low-income young mothers in effective parenting skills before and after they gave birth cut crimes by the children over the next 15 years by more than half.

**Developing more fit Americans:** In the past three decades, obesity rates have quadrupled for children ages 6 to 11. This is a societal problem requiring society-wide solutions. The National Institutes of Health are supporting community-wide programs that can help reverse this growing epidemic.

## We must invest wisely now

America produces the best ships, planes, and tanks, but we must also produce enough educated, fit, and law-abiding young Americans to serve in our military. If we provide America's youth with strong academic and social skills training now, they will be ready for tomorrow's career options, including a career in the military if they choose to pursue one.

America needs to ensure the future strength of our economy and our military. The retired military leaders of Mission: Readiness urge lawmakers to invest now in research-based programs that will give our children the right start in life.

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