Substance abuse among members of the U.S. military and their families has become a public health crisis, according to a new report. The Defense Department's approaches to preventing and treating substance abuse are outdated, the report states.

The Institute of Medicine report, which was requested by the Defense Department, found about 20 percent of active duty service members say they engaged in heavy drinking in 2008, the latest year for which data is available. The Associated Press reports binge drinking increased from 35 percent in 1998, to 47 percent a decade later.

The report also found the rate of prescription drug abuse is on the rise. In 2002, an estimated 2 percent of active-duty personnel said they misused prescription drugs, compared with 11 percent in 2008.

"We commend the steps that the Department of Defense and individual service branches have recently taken to improve prevention and care for substance use disorders, but the armed forces face many ongoing challenges," Charles P. O'Brien of the University of Pennsylvania, who chaired the committee that wrote the report, said in a news release. "Better care for service members and their families is hampered by inadequate prevention strategies, staffing shortages, lack of coverage for services that are proved to work, and stigma associated with these disorders. This report recommends solutions to address each of these concerns."

O'Brien said military doctors tend to be reluctant to prescribe medications to treat addiction. "Modern treatment of substance abuse does involve medications. There are FDA-approved, effective medications that could be used and should be used much more than they are," he said.

He added that the military tends to rely too much on hospitalization and in-patient rehabilitation, instead of outpatient treatment. The report also called for updated training for military counselors.

The report recommended integrating prevention and treatment efforts more into primary health care, to reduce the stigma associated with seeking help for substance abuse. The military also should do more to preserve the confidentiality of those seeking assistance, the report noted.

Click here to read the "Report Brief: Substance Use Disorders in the U.S. Armed Forces."

To read more about Veterans and Drugs, click here.