

Armed Forces stakeholder brief

November 2023



Welcome to the November Armed Forces health stakeholder brief.

As we approach Remembrance Day, many people will be reflecting on those who have given their lives in conflicts across the years and the families left behind. We also reflect on the commitments made by past and present service people, reservists and their families that offer critical support, including within the NHS.

The detailed news coverage of current conflicts across the globe are potentially very distressing for many who have served in the Armed Forces. Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing

Service can support anyone veterans and reservists living in England if they are struggling with their mental health as a result. Details can be found at www.nhs.uk/opcourage.

Thank you for all you continue to do to support our Armed Forces community.

Sexual safety charter

On 4 September 2023, NHS England launched its first ever sexual safety charter in collaboration with key partners across the healthcare system. Signatories to this charter commit to taking and enforcing a zero-tolerance approach to any unwanted, inappropriate and/or harmful sexual behaviours within the workplace, and to ten core principles and actions to help achieve this. It is expected that signatories will implement all ten commitments by July 2024. NHS leaders can sign the charter on behalf of their organisation by emailing england.domesticabusesexualviolence@nhs.net

Additionally, sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) offer medical, practical and emotional support to anyone who has been raped sexually assaulted or abused. They have specially

trained doctors, nurses and support workers who provide a safe space and dedicated care. Help is available 24 hours a day for everyone, whether the incident was recent or non-recent.

All members of the Armed Forces community, including service personnel and veterans, can access NHS SARCs for confidential support. Further information is available at www.nhs.uk/sarcs.

Ministers visit Op RESTORE: The Veterans Physical Health and Wellbeing Service



On Tuesday 29 August, Secretary of State for Health, Steve Barclay and Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Johnny Mercer met with colleagues from NHS England, the wider NHS, Armed Forces charities and veterans who have benefited from Op RESTORE: The Veterans Physical Health and Wellbeing Service.

Funded by NHS England and hosted by Imperial College NHS Trust, Op RESTORE supports veterans with ongoing, service attributable physical health needs. Available across England, the service helps veterans access the most appropriate NHS pathways whilst providing wrap around support from Armed Forces charities to ensure the veteran 'waits well' for their care.

Both ministers are keen to support the Armed Forces healthcare programme of work by using government and parliamentary communications routes to share messaging and drive an awareness of the services available to veterans.

Recognising the best practice model of care that Op RESTORE delivers, Steve Barclay was keen to see similar approaches to delivery replicated within the NHS. He said:

"Veterans have given so much to this country and when they need support as a result of their dedicated service, it's only right that the NHS is there for them."

The ministers used the visit as an opportunity to encourage those who have served in the UK Armed Forces, to identify themselves as veterans with healthcare professionals in order to improve access to the range of dedicated services.

Suicide after leaving the UK Armed Forces

Cathryn Rodway and colleagues from Manchester University have published a retrospective [cohort study of suicide in personnel who left the UK Armed Forces](#) between 1996 and 2018. Their findings indicate that the overall rate of suicide was lower in veterans than the rest of the population, however there were some groups which had a higher rate.

Veterans under the age of 25, both male and female, were two to three times more likely to die by suicide than the same age groups in the general population. Factors associated with an increased risk included:

- male sex
- Army service
- discharge between 16-37 years of age
- being untrained upon discharge
- under 10 years service.

Factors associated with a decreased risk included being married, of a higher rank and deployment on combat operations. This study is the first in recent years and that reflects the wider context of the Armed Forces following years of intensive operations.

Latest veteran aware/friendly accreditations

Please see below for the current number of accreditations.

| | |
|---|---|
| Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) veteran friendly | 77% of primary care networks (PCNs) have at least one Veteran Friendly accredited practice with a total 2,370 GP practices accredited across England. |
| Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA) veteran aware | 175 NHS trusts accredited (76%) |

Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA) best practice conference

The VCHA held their annual best practice conference on 20 September. The conference began with the sharing of an [animated video](#), which asks staff to remember to always ask the question: "Have you, or anyone in your immediate family, ever served in the British Armed

Forces?” The video was conceived by Jordana Wright, an Advanced Clinical Practitioner with Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust.



Kate Davies CBE, Director of Health and Justice, Armed Forces and Sexual Assault Services Commissioning for NHS England (pictured), provided an overview of the Armed Forces healthcare programme of work, led by NHS England. This included an overview of healthcare responsibilities and commissioned services for the Armed Forces community.

Keynote speakers included the veterans minister, the Rt Hon. Johnny Mercer MP, as well as Col (Retd) David Richmond CBE, the Independent Veterans Advisor for the Government.

Mr Mercer thanked the National Chair of the VCHA, Professor Tim Briggs CBE, for his continued hard work and also referenced Op COURAGE and Op RESTORE. He reiterated that it was critically important that while we are designing pathways, the main access points have to be GPs or our NHS trusts.

David Richmond said the health sector could take ‘considerable satisfaction’ from the offer for veterans and added: “I think what the VCHA is doing is providing the framework within which you can deliver your initiatives. The support available for veterans and their families is simply unrecognisable compared to that available in 2006/07 when we were in Afghanistan and Iraq.”

Other presentations included an overview of the veteran friendly framework which extends Veteran Aware accreditation into care homes and hospice, along with hearing from the Defence Medical Welfare Service, Dr Jonathan Leach on Op COURAGE and Dr Emily Brooks on the RCGP Veteran Friendly accreditation scheme.

The VCHA has accredited 76% of NHS trusts, with significant improvement made in engaging NHS trusts on this national initiative.

VCHA Chairman, Professor Tim Briggs CBE, said, “If we can get it right for veterans, we will see improvements across the NHS for all patients”.

A recording of the event has been uploaded to the VCHA’s [YouTube channel](#).

Office for Veterans' Affairs launches employers guide to hiring veterans

The OVA have launched a [new guide](#) to assist employers with recruiting veterans and members of the Armed Forces community. The guide offers advice and guidance to employers on how to recruit, retain and support the career development of veterans and features case studies and examples of best practice.

Members of the Armed Forces community, including veterans, looking for work or a new career can take advantage of [Step into Health](#). Step into Health is an NHS England funded programme that supports members of the Armed Forces community applying for jobs throughout the NHS and setting up training and work placement opportunities.

Launch of anti-racism framework for mental health trusts and mental health service providers

NHS England have [launched their first ever anti-racism framework](#), the Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework (PCREF), for all mental health trusts and mental health service providers to embed across England. This mandatory framework will ensure trusts and providers co-produce and implement concrete actions to reduce racial inequality within their services.

Engagement opportunities

Bravo Victor
(approved by
Northumbria
University ethics
board)

[Head injuries \(TBI\) and Health Outcomes Survey](#)

Civilians and veterans are welcome to take part as are people living with or without disability.

University of Chester

[Exploring the Employment Experiences of Spouses/Partners of British Armed Forces Personnel](#)

This project is informed by co-production with military spouses/partners and funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. It aims to identify the challenges spouses / partners may experience when accessing employment.

Office for Veterans'
Affairs

[Veterans consultation](#)

Collecting evidence from across the UK on the needs of veterans and their families, and the support services available to them.

For healthcare providers to complete.

Upcoming events

Little Troopers

Information session for healthcare professionals

Find out more about how Little Troopers can support and the resources available to healthcare settings.

Virtual session, email info@littletroopers.net for more information.