

Armed Forces briefing

23 September 2022

Welcome to September's stakeholder briefing from the Armed Forces Health team, with what can only be described as a unique month. Much work is planned, including procurement of the new Op COURAGE service and the new service for veterans in the criminal justice system, both of which will launch in the first quarter of 2023.

Our work within Armed Forces Health has been affected this month by recent events. In the first week of September, we had the announcement of a new Prime Minister and, subsequently, Cabinet, including a new Minister of State for the Armed Forces and Veterans, James Heapey. We will, in due course, be briefing Minister Heapey on the work the NHS is leading on meeting the health needs of the Armed Forces community.

In the same week, we received the sad news that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had passed away and our condolences go to the Royal Family, the wider Royal Household, to those who are serving and to our veterans who pledged an Oath of Allegiance. As former Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, we know that this may be a difficult time for the Armed Forces community, particularly for those with loss or grief related trauma. If you or someone you know is struggling as a result of the death of Her Majesty the Queen, [Op COURAGE](#) may be able to help you. If you are not a Service leaver or veteran and need help, please find your local wellbeing service [here](#).

Winter vaccine campaign – COVID-19 and flu

The seasonal flu and COVID-19 booster campaign has now launched, with people over 75, frontline health and care staff and those with weakened immune systems being invited to [book an appointment](#) for vaccination.

Australian Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran suicide

The Australian Royal Commission, as part of its international enquiry and fact-finding remit, spent the first week of September in the UK. The enquiry process, which involved speaking with a range of experts and those with lived experience, included a series of round-table meetings on specific and related issues to suicide in serving and veterans, including family, clinical and wider support. The NHS England Armed Forces Health Team were represented across several sessions, presenting information alongside a range of partners, stakeholders and collaborative charitable organisations.

The NHS Armed Forces Health Podcast

The full series has now been published and is accessible [here](#). The series, led by the NHS England Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group, has covered a range of health topics relevant to the Armed Forces community, including mental and physical health, families and children, GPs and health care when leaving the Armed Forces.

Supporting veterans in the criminal justice system

We have concluded engagement activity to inform the design of a forthcoming service to support veterans in the criminal justice system. Thank you to those who shared their views, which have helped to inform final arrangements. An overview of the engagement and key findings are due to be published in a report in the near future. The Invitation to Tender (ITT) has been published, with further information [here](#).

Veteran friendly GP accreditation uptake

We are delighted to confirm that as of 30 August 2022, there are 1,534 veteran friendly accredited GP practices across England. This is over 21% of GP practices, with more practices committing to accreditation continually. Accrediting GP practices as veteran friendly is a commitment set out in the Office for Veterans' Affairs -[Veterans Strategy Action Plan 2022 - 2024](#), the [NHS Long Term Plan](#) and the [NHS Armed Forces Forward View](#), with work progressing to ensure that every primary care network has a veteran friendly accredited GP practice by 31 March 2023.

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) veteran-friendly practice accreditation programme is designed to help GP practices provide better care for veterans. The programme is supported by NHS England, who are working closely with RCGP colleagues to encourage practices to sign up.

For practices to be accredited as veteran friendly, they must provide evidence that they are supportive of veterans' healthcare and work towards improving identification and understanding of veteran's needs, in addition to referring to dedicated veteran services and priority treatment where appropriate. The RCGP veteran accreditation programme helps fulfil the NHS commitment towards the Armed Forces Covenant, whereby veterans should face no disadvantage because of their military service. Accreditation lasts for three years, and practices must commit to the following:

1. Ask patients registering with the surgery if they have ever served in the British Armed Forces.

2. Code it on the GP computer system using the term 'Military Veteran'.
3. Have a clinical lead on veterans in the surgery.
4. This clinical lead is asked to stay up-to-date with the latest training, knowledge and thinking.
5. Eligible practices should have a CQC 'good' rating or higher.

To find out more, visit [here](#). Additionally [this article](#) from the BMA shares the positive impact a veteran friendly GP, and GP practice, can have.

Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance

Join the national Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance annual 'best practice' symposium

The Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA) is to hold its annual best practice symposium on 28 September 2022.

The VCHA exists to drive up standards in the care and support of the Armed Forces community by accrediting trusts as 'veteran aware'.

This national event will celebrate what has been achieved by the VCHA programme and NHS trusts and also look to the future in terms of continuous healthcare improvements for the military community and widening its scope.

Confirmed speakers include:

- Col David Richmond CBE, the Government's independent Veterans Advisor
- Kate Davies CBE, Director of Health and Justice, Armed Forces and Sexual Assault Services Commissioning, NHS England
- Prof Tim Briggs CBE, Chair and National Lead for the Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA).

Veteran Aware NHS trust representatives will also be speaking about their experiences and the benefits of this important accreditation.

The VCHA's aim is to accredit all NHS providers in England as Veteran Aware by March 2023. Accreditation involves providers sharing good practice and linking with local services for the Armed Forces community and raising staff awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant. To date, 119 NHS trusts have received VCHA accreditation.

The Veteran Aware model encourages providers to identify those patients who currently work, or who have worked in the military, as well as service families, to ensure they are not disadvantaged in the care they receive and where possible, that they receive personalised care and improved patient outcomes.

As set out in the [Veterans Strategy Action Plan 2022 – 2024](#), the VCHA programme is widening its scope to pilot the accreditation of both the independent sector, such as care homes and nursing homes, and hospices.

For more details on the event please click [here](#). To find out more about the VCHA, visit [here](#).

Veterans Trauma Network

The Veterans Trauma Network (VTN) provides specialist care and support for veterans who have physical health problems from their time in the UK Armed Forces. In operation since 2017, it has been shortlisted for an HSJ award in the category 'Military and civilian health partnership'. This is an outstanding achievement and we wish the VTN team every success for when they make their presentation to the judges this month.

On Wednesday 9 November, the VTN are hosting their annual conference in London. The conference will be of interest to clinicians, commissioners and charities either working in or with an interest in veteran care. Invitations have been sent to those who have registered an interest but further details can be requested [here](#).

How can veterans access the VTN?

Access to the VTN is via GP referral only. Referrals should be made by emailing england.veteranstraumanetwork@nhs.net and a referral form will be provided. For more information on the VTN, visit [here](#).

Ministerial visits to services for veterans

On 23 August 2022, Mr Johnny Mercer MP and then Minister for Veterans' Affairs, visited Project Nova in the North West to see the valuable work they do in supporting veterans who have been, or are at risk of, being arrested.

Project Nova/RFEA provides specialist support and care coordination to veterans. Their model seeks to support individuals within seven identified needs, namely: accommodation; physical and mental health; alcohol and substance misuse; children and families; attitudes thinking and behaviour; finance benefits and debt; and employment, training and education. The aim of their work is to support veterans who have been or are at risk of arrest to improve their health and overall wellbeing by providing a care coordinator function; ultimately reducing reoffending.

Armed Forces families

[Military Maternity Voices Partnership](#) (MMVP) is being piloted in Lincolnshire in partnership with Lincolnshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) local maternity and neonatal system (LMNS). MMVP aims to amplify the voices of those from the military community using maternity services across Lincolnshire, to ensure that the services commissioned are done so in a way that is supportive of serving families.

Maternity Voices Partnerships (MVPs) have been in operation across the UK for approximately five years replacing (in most areas) Maternity Services Liaison Committees (MSLCs). They bring together local commissioners, service users and healthcare professionals to coproduce local services that are reflective of the needs of the local community with a focus on amplifying seldom heard voices. Recently, MVPs have been included as part of the assurance requested in reports such as Ockenden. Lincolnshire's MMVP exists alongside their regular [MVP](#).

Upcoming events

28 September 2022	Veteran's Covenant Healthcare Alliance , best practice symposium , for NHS trusts and commissioners and clinicians.	Birmingham
09 November 2022	Veterans Trauma Network , annual conference, for clinicians, veteran charities and commissioners. Email: ENGLAND.veteranstraumanetwork@nhs.net	11 Cavendish Square, W1G

Engagement opportunities

The below engagement opportunities may be of interest. Please note that whilst these may be of interest, they may not necessarily be associated with NHS England.

LGBT Veterans independent review	Call for evidence .	Closes 15 November 2022
University of Chester	Perceptions of healthcare professionals working with veterans	Closes June 2023

**Suicide
Bereavement UK
NHS funded study**

As part of this study, authors would like to speak to serving Armed Forces personnel or veterans who have lost a serving or veteran friend, colleague or family member to suicide in the last 10 years, so that they can speak to and learn from them about their experiences.

TBC

**To share your views or for more information,
contact:**

Dr. Sharon McDonnell

Managing Director of Suicide Bereavement UK

Honorary Research Fellow, University of Manchester

Tel: 01706 827 359

Email: sharon.mcdonnell@suicidebereavementuk.com