

Armed Forces health stakeholder brief

Spring 2024

Welcome to the Spring edition of our Armed Forces health stakeholder brief. It has been a busy start to the year, with January marking the launch of our first ever campaign to raise awareness of Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service. Initially intended to run for six weeks, support from the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) has enabled us to extend the campaign, helping to ensure we reach as many veterans as possible.

We are also delighted to announce the launch of a new campaign, Say You Served, encouraging veterans to tell their GP practice they've served in the UK Armed Forces. This is in addition to a rerun of the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) campaign to encourage GP practices to become veteran friendly accredited. Again, support from the OVA has enabled these campaigns to be delivered and you can read more about this in their associated [press notice](#).

Central to the development of these campaigns has been the involvement of the Armed Forces community, particularly the NHS England Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group, who have informed campaign messaging and creative, along with featuring in associated material and speaking to media. We are grateful for their ongoing support and advice and would like to thank them for their hard work and commitment.

More information on the three campaigns is provided below.

Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service

On 9 January, we [launched the first ever campaign](#) to increase awareness of [Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service](#). The campaign has been well received with nearly 200 items of media coverage and a 200% increase in visits to www.nhs.uk/opcourage. Importantly, Op COURAGE providers have reported an increase in referrals, as more people have heard about this service and sought help.

Recently, we moved into phase two of the campaign, which includes additional social media and press activity, supported by new veteran case studies. To access the updated campaign toolkit, visit [here](#). If not already, you will need to register for access.



Please do use and share these assets via your channels and networks.

As part of the launch of this second phase, we are pleased to share a film made at the London Op COURAGE service which is available on the [NHS YouTube channel](#), as well as www.nhs.uk/opcourage.

Say You Served campaign

Together with the OVA, we are pleased to launch a new campaign aimed at encouraging veterans to let their GP practice know they served in the UK Armed Forces. The 'Say You Served' campaign has been co-developed with veterans, who came up with the messaging shown in the image on the right.

Knowing which patients have served in the UK Armed Forces means GPs can better understand their health needs, particularly any health problems relating to their time in Service. This in turn will help to enable the provision of more informed care and treatment, as well as referrals, where appropriate, to dedicated services, such as [Op RESTORE: The Veterans Physical Health and Wellbeing Service](#).

Campaign activity is focused on geographic areas with higher veteran populations and veteran friendly GP accredited practices. To find out more, the campaign material directs veterans to www.nhs.uk/veterans.

To download the campaign toolkit, visit [here](#), which again requires registration to access it. Please do support the campaign by using and sharing the assets and toolkit.



Veteran Friendly GP accreditation

We have been working with the RCGP and OVA on this week's launch of the next phase of the ongoing campaign to encourage GP practices to become veteran friendly accredited. Targeting practices in areas of high veteran populations, but lower accredited practices, the campaign is supported by a range of media and stakeholder outreach activity. As with all of our campaigns, veterans share their stories by highlighting the difference veteran friendly GP accreditation has made to their care. One such example includes a recent feature on BBC Breakfast, which arose as a consequence of the last phase of campaign activity.



On Friday 23 February, BBC Breakfast featured the RCGP Veteran Friendly GP Accreditation scheme in an 11 minute segment. Reporter Abby Smitten interviewed veterans Jon Lynn and Tom O'Sullivan, nurse Helen Hurst and GP Robin Simpson in a prerecorded segment about the impact of the scheme.

This was followed by a live studio interview with veteran Paul Findlay (above and who is a member of the NHS England Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group) and RCGP veteran clinical champion and veteran, Dr Emily Brookes.

Paul shared his experience of limb loss and the subsequent challenges following an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion in Afghanistan, in 2009. Dr Brooks talked about the benefits to both veterans and GP practices, including referral to services such as [Op COURAGE](#) and [Op RESTORE](#). To find out more about veteran friendly GP practice accreditation, visit [here](#).



Sharing good practice with Nigerian defence colleagues

In December 2023, members of the NHS England Armed Forces health team, together with Op RESTORE and Op COURAGE colleagues, as well as members of our Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group, had the privilege of meeting representatives from the Nigeria High Commission in London, as well as key one and two star level officials from the Nigerian Armed Forces with responsibility for serving and veterans health and wellbeing. This was just one of a number of focused visits in the UK as part of a study tour undertaken by senior officials from the Armed Forces of Nigeria – Veteran Affairs.

As part of this coordinated visit, the meeting presented an opportunity to explain how healthcare has evolved in England for veterans and their families and provide information on the dedicated services available. Discussions also included how we could share our learning with the Armed Forces of Nigeria to look at similar models of care.



NHS England Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group impact report

The NHS England Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group have produced their first report, which provides information on their work to help inform and improve the care and support for the Armed Forces community living in England. The report sets out examples of the impact they have made from 2020 to 2023.

Leading this work was the chair of this group, Nicky Murdoch MBE, who we would like to thank, along with wider members, for their work in developing this insightful report. You can access the report [here](#).

Latest veteran aware and veteran friendly accreditations

Please see below for the current number of accreditations.

Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) veteran friendly	90.1% of primary care networks (PCNs) have at least one Veteran Friendly accredited practice and 3,059 GP practices are accredited across England
Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA) veteran aware	179 NHS trusts accredited (86%)

Veterans Mobility Fund

The government has opened applications for the £2.52 million Veteran Mobility Fund, as part of its commitment to drive better veteran health and recovery. The Fund gives veterans with physical disabilities grants for mobility equipment that is not usually available on the NHS, such as specialist wheelchairs, and mobility scooters, to improve their quality of life. The fund - which is administered by Help for Heroes and Blesma - is open to veterans across the UK and can be accessed through [Op RESTORE](#). Applications can also be made via this [link](#), which provides more information on the Fund.

Female Veterans' Transformation Programme

Over the last five years, research has been undertaken about female veterans, the issues they face and the reasons why more support is needed. At the forefront of spearheading this work has been the COBSEO Female Veterans Cluster, a group of professionals from different organisations across the charity, statutory and academic sector who have expertise or lived experience within this area. NHS England is pleased to be part of this cluster and support the work of the group.

The cluster has set out the thematic objectives that have led to the inception of the Female Veterans' Transformation Programme and the development of an evidence review, 'What does the research in the UK tell us about the specific needs of female veterans?'. This Review brings together the current evidence base of research about female veterans in the British military context. It provides an accessible summary of the specific issues faced by female veterans for stakeholders in the charity, commercial and statutory sectors by highlighting repeated and longstanding findings across numerous studies.

The Programme will build on this review by seeking to identify the specific actions and associated resources needed to address these gaps and then work with partners to design, develop and implement the tools to make transformational change occur. The programme will also gather the views of those with lived experience to identify 'what good looks like' and what practical changes need to be implemented to help the sector have a better awareness

and understanding to deliver the right provision to female veterans. You'll find their new website [here](#).

Wider support for veterans: Defence Discount Service

The Defence Discount Service have produced a short [video](#) to help veterans sign up to get access to a range of benefits. Veterans can also apply for free for a Privilege Card through the [Veterans Gateway](#).