

## Clinical Commissioning Groups

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Dear colleague

### **Important resources for GP practices on improvements to the mental health care of veterans**

We are writing to you in relation to the vital role GP practices have in supporting improvements being made to healthcare for Armed Forces veterans and their families. An important element of this is identifying and recording which patients are veterans, understanding their specific health needs and being aware of the additional dedicated care and support available to them. The enclosed comprehensive package of resources will help GPs to support the health commitments of the [Armed Forces Covenant](#), as referenced in principle four of the [NHS Constitution](#).

It is also important to be aware that the [NHS Long Term Plan](#) sets out a commitment to improve care for veterans, with a particular focus on enhancing mental health services for ex-forces. This will include the expansion of care and treatment opportunities for this patient group, as well as the roll out of veteran friendly GP accredited practices over the next five years. We are supporting GP practices to apply for veteran friendly practice accreditation as it becomes available across England. This is vital in helping to ensure that all ex-forces are able to receive the best possible care, regardless of where in the country they live.

#### **Veterans health**

The vast majority of veterans have similar levels of health to the general population, however, the most frequent reasons for medical discharge from the Armed Forces include health issues relating to back, knees, mental health and hearing.

Following Mental Health Awareness Week (13 – 19 May 2019), we would like to take the opportunity to highlight the dedicated NHS services available for those veterans who have poor mental health and to dispel some of the myths.

Mental health affects everyone; around 6.2% of veterans will suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is broadly equivalent to the incidence rate amongst civilians. For those individuals who deployed when serving, rates of PTSD are higher at 9% and up to 17% for those who deployed in a front-line, infantry combat role. Other mental health issues include anxiety, depression and problems

NHS England and NHS Improvement



related to alcohol.

In support of those individuals who require care and treatment for mental health conditions, the **Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison service (TILS)** and the **Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment Service (CTS)** have been set up.

Enclosed is a comprehensive package of resources to help provide tailored support to veterans, including links to useful sites.

Please ensure this information is available to front line staff with a request to make every effort to support the commitments of the Armed Forces Covenant and raise awareness of the health needs of veterans and the dedicated services available to them.

Should you have any queries relating to the information in this letter, please email [england.armedforceshealth@nhs.net](mailto:england.armedforceshealth@nhs.net).

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kate Davies', on a light-colored background.

Kate Davies CBE  
Director of Health & Justice,  
Armed Forces and Sexual  
Assault Services Commissioning

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Leach', on a light-colored background.

Dr Jonathan Leach  
NHS England Medical Director for Armed  
Forces and Veterans Health and Joint  
Honorary Secretary Royal College of  
General Practitioners

**Enc:**  
Top tips for providing care to veterans

## Top tips for providing care to veterans

- The Armed Forces Covenant states the following:
  - The Armed Forces community should enjoy the same standard of, and access to healthcare as that received by any other UK citizen in the area they live.
  - Family members should retain their place on any NHS waiting list, if moved around the UK due to the service person being posted.
  - Veterans should receive priority treatment for a condition which relates to their service, subject to clinical need.
  - Those injured in service should be cared for in a way that reflects the nation's moral obligation to them, by healthcare professionals who have an understanding of the Armed Forces culture.
- A veteran is anyone who has served for at least one day in the Armed Forces, whether regular or reserve. It means the same as 'ex service personnel' or 'ex-forces', although not all veterans know, choose or want to associate with the term 'veteran'. This is particularly the case amongst younger veterans who often refer to themselves as 'ex-forces', due to the common belief that a veteran is someone who fought in the First / Second World War.
- When a patient registers with your practice, ask if they have served in the Armed Forces (the **family doctor services registration GMS1 form** includes a specific question to help with this and can be ordered [here](#).) If they have, Read code them as 'Military Veteran' on your computer system. There are also Read codes for 'Member of Military Family'.
- Knowing whether a patient is a veteran will help to determine if any health issues they have are attributable to their time in service. Although most veterans are happy to disclose that they have served, a few may prefer to keep this private or may be concerned about disclosing information about their time in the Armed Forces due to confidentiality agreements that they have signed.
- There are sometimes additional or different referral pathways available which may be more suitable for ex-forces, such as the **Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS)** and the **Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment Service (CTS)**. For more information, visit the [NHS website](#) and see this [leaflet](#). For those injured during their time in service, there is also the **Veterans Trauma Network**, which is aligned with the TILS and CTS. For further information, visit the [NHS website](#).
- Veterans may also benefit from using the [Veterans Gateway](#), which provides information, advice and support on a range of areas (telephone: 0808 802 1212) and the [Big White Wall](#), which is a free online mental health resource.
- When referring a veteran to secondary care, ensure that this status is noted in the referral letter, as they may be entitled to priority treatment if their condition is attributable to their time in service.
- Treatment for veterans is normally the same as for the wider population; it is the context, language and understanding of their Armed Forces experiences that is important.
- The families of unwell veterans may suffer as well, so please ask what services they might need.
- To learn more about the health needs of veterans and the wider Armed Forces community (which includes serving personnel (regulars and reserves) and their families), complete the **[e-learning for health training session: NHS healthcare for the Armed Forces](#)**, the **[e-learning for health training session: health needs of military veterans](#)** and the **[RCGP learning: military veterans](#)**. Please also see the Armed Forces healthcare pages on the [NHS website](#).
- If you have not yet signed up to become a veteran friendly accredited GP practice and would like information on this, please email [veterans@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:veterans@rcgp.org.uk).
- For advice on treating veterans, please email [england.armedforceshealth@nhs.net](mailto:england.armedforceshealth@nhs.net).