



Scottish Veterans
Care Network



Annual Report 2021/22



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Foreword

It has been two years since I was appointed Clinical Lead of the Scottish Veterans Care Network (SVCN). I am immensely proud of what the programme team and our members have achieved in this short time.

We have brought together partners from Third Sector organisations, NHS, Ministry of Defence (MoD), Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Scottish Government, Health and Social Care, Universities, Police, Prisons and, most importantly, over eighty veterans that have lived experience of navigating health and wellbeing support in Scotland.

The views and expertise of our stakeholders have formed the basis of the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan, published in December 2021. The SVCN recognise that most military personnel transition well to civilian life. For those do not share this positive experience, we hope that this comprehensive, veteran designed, clinically informed plan will provide more timely and appropriate support to those that have served in HM Forces.

We were delighted to listen to the cross-party support for the plan and all of its thirty-eight recommendations at Holyrood in March 2022. We strongly hope that these recommendations will be implemented at pace to ensure that all our veterans can live full and rewarding lives post-service.



Dr Lucy Abraham, SVCN Clinical Lead



Executive Summary

Welcome to the second Annual Report from the Scottish Veterans Care Network (SVCN). The SVCN is a collaborative National Strategic Network that works across geographical and organisational boundaries to support a 'Once for Scotland' approach to the planning, design and delivery of an integrated, holistic, person-centred care pathway across the health and social care system.

The SVCN provides national strategic leadership and advice to NHS Boards, Integrated Joint Boards (IJBs) and other partners in relation to the delivery of services, using the most up to date evidence base and in line with strategic local, regional and national NHS and IJB priorities.

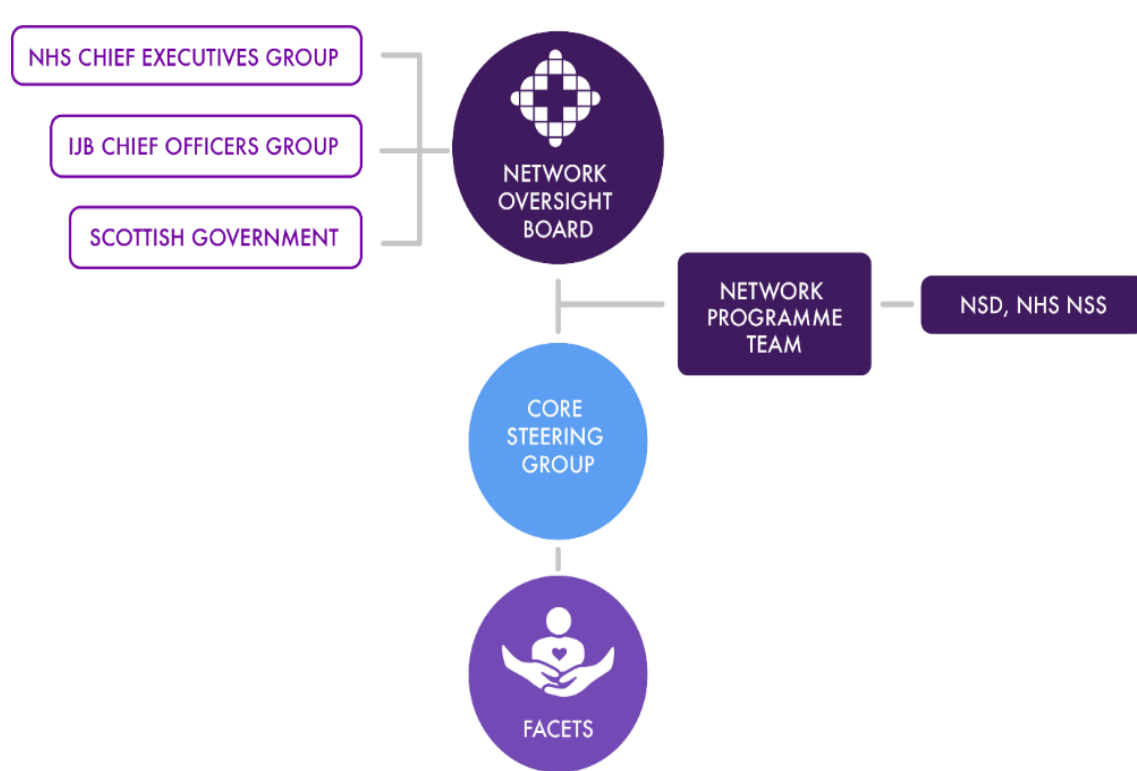
The SVCN is proud to have worked in collaboration with our stakeholders, the veterans community and Scottish Government to develop the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan which was published in December 2021.

This was the culmination of a number of national mapping questionnaires, forums and engagement events that took place throughout 2021. The Action Plan was widely endorsed and received cross-parliamentary support in a Scottish Parliament debate on veterans' mental health and wellbeing in March 2022, with an ask from MSP's to implement its thirty-eight Recommendations in full.

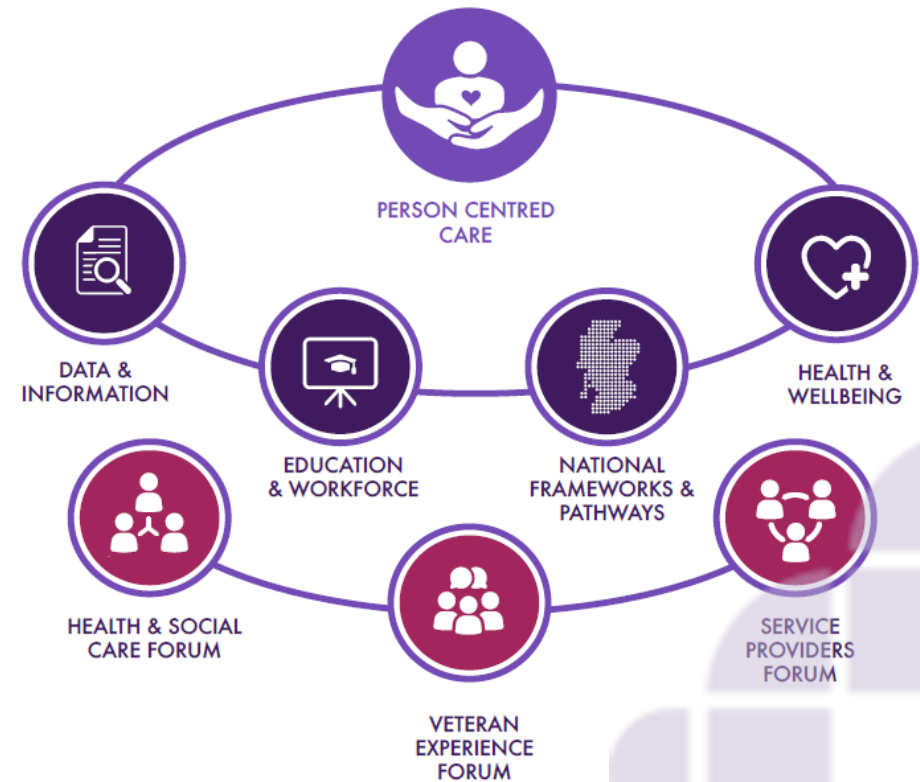
The Network continues to work towards delivering its remaining objectives, including developing a better understanding of the needs of the veteran's population including its size and characteristics through its Data & Information working group and improving awareness, knowledge and understanding of veterans' needs and characteristics.

The SVCN team would like to pay particular tribute to Kate Burley, Associate Director for Strategic Networks in NHS National Services Scotland. Kate's leadership, vision and energy helped bring the SVCN to life and we wish her well in her new role with NHS England.

Governance and Strategy



SVCN Governance Structure



SVCN Facet Diagram



Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan



The work of the SVCN this year was dominated by the development of the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan (MHWAP), which sets out a distinctive Scottish approach to improving mental health and wellbeing services for veterans in Scotland. To ensure the development of a comprehensive Plan, the SVCN undertook a wide range of activities:

**Service
Mapping**

**Engagement
with
Veterans
Community**

**Literature
Review**

**Analysis of
Quantitative
Data**

**Engagement
with
Experts**

**Consultation
and
Engagement
Event**

Building the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan

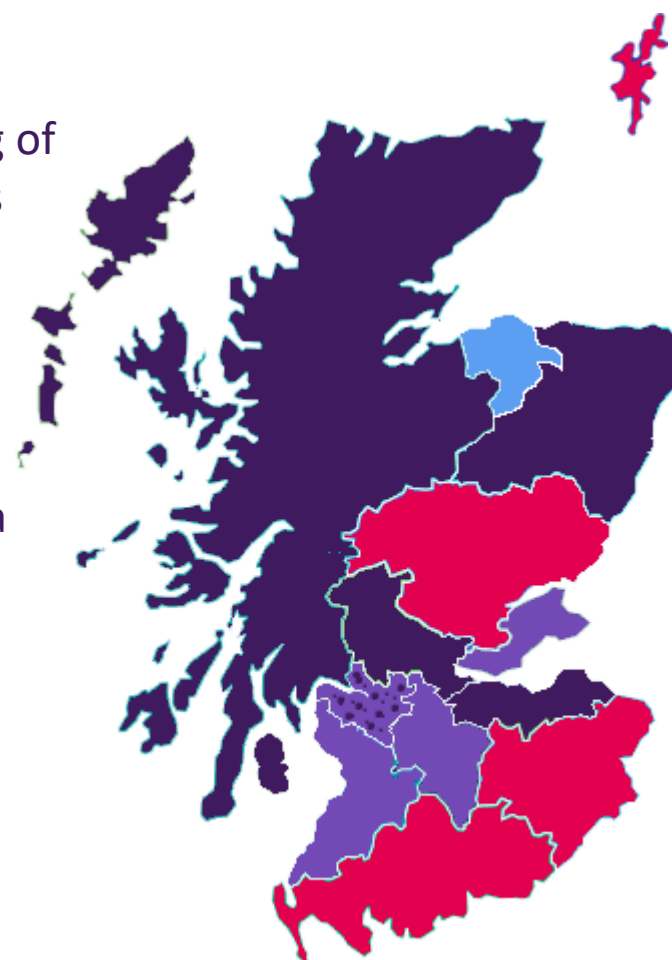


Service Mapping

A key objective for the Network was to deliver a mapping of stakeholders/specialist veterans' health and care services available in Scotland. The focus of the mapping was on mental health and wellbeing, in order to inform the development of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan.

A series of questionnaires were developed to collate data and intelligence from :

- Integrated Joint Boards/ NHS Boards
- Service Providers (Third Sector and NHS)
- Ministry of Defence
- NHS National Boards



MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR VETERANS BY IJB / HSCP

- Veterans can access mainstream statutory community mental health services – there are no veteran specific services. 45% of respondents
- Veterans can access veteran specific statutory community mental health services. There is no acute specialist inpatient provision. 36% of respondents
- Veterans can access veteran specific statutory mental health services - both community services and acute specialist inpatient services. 5% of respondents
- Not completed 14% of respondents



Building the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan



Engagement with Veterans Community

The SVCN was clear that the voice of veterans should be at the heart of the development of the Action Plan.

Semi-structured, open ended questionnaires were developed in consultation with the SVCN Health and Wellbeing working group and Veterans Scotland, with over 80 members of the veterans' community participating in regional focus groups:

- 31 May - North of Scotland (Highland, Grampian, Tayside, Islands)
- 7 June - West of Scotland (Dumfries & Galloway, Ayrshire & Arran, Lanarkshire)
- 14 June - Greater Glasgow & Clyde
- 21 June - South East (Lothian, Borders, Fife, Forth Valley)
- 15 July - Scotland (mop-up session)

Thematic Analysis

The transcripts from the forums were analysed and a thematic analysis produced. Prevalent themes from the focus groups included accessibility, coordination and consistency of services.

"There needs to be some sort of structure/central database for people to be directed to after answering a few questions and directed to the correct place, instead of being led down a blind alley."

"It has to work across the country and not be a postcode lottery. We need them to be aware of what is happening in the veterans community and value it. There needs to be proper resource – not just statutory services but third sector groups. Veterans deserve it."

"Where do people go? There should be a single point of contact for the veteran, no matter their problem, that triages them. You should feel like are being guided through it, instead of it happening by accident."

Building the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan



Literature Review

To inform the development of the recommendations, the SVCN Programme Team analysed UK and international peer reviewed qualitative data, as well as grey literature such as policies, clinical guidelines and organisation evaluations. The results of the search strategies were further augmented by combining the reference lists of the selected articles.

This allowed the SVCN team to theme the literature into key areas to provide academic credibility to the recommendations and ensure there was a robust evidence for the proposals.

Williamson et al. *BMC Psychology* (2019) 7:75
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-019-0351-7>

BMC Psychology

RESEARCH ARTICLE

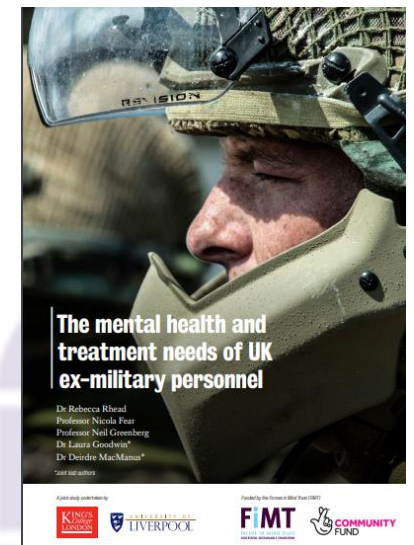
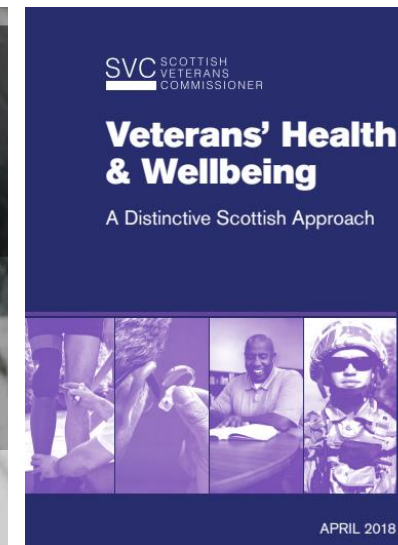
Open Access

Perceived stigma and barriers to care in UK Armed Forces personnel and veterans with and without probable mental disorders

Victoria Williamson^{1*}, Neil Greenberg^{1†} and Sharon A. M. Stevelink^{1,2†}



An Evaluation of Veterans First Point Scotland:
Scotland's Specialist Mental Health Service for Veterans



Building the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan



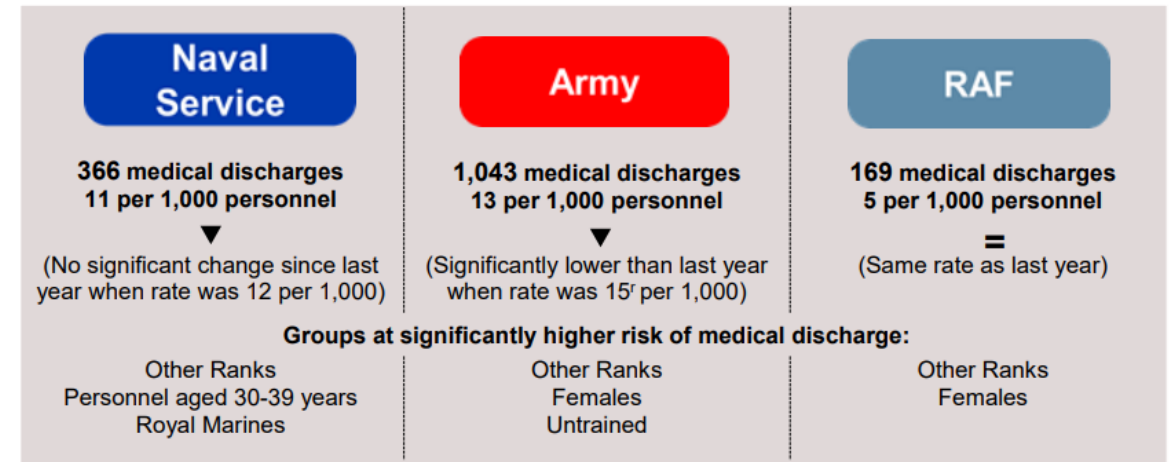
Analysis of Quantitative Data

The Scottish Veterans Commissioner's Veterans Health & Wellbeing Paper and the UK Government's Strategy for our Veterans highlighted the need for better data collection, recording and sharing between organisations such as the NHS, MoD and wider stakeholders.

Based on referral rates reported by service providers in the SVCN Service Mapping, we can estimate that there could be up to 1,750 - 2000 veterans approaching a service for mental health and wellbeing support every year in Scotland.

The SVCN acknowledges this is an estimate based on incomplete data. Therefore, further work is required to develop a more robust assessment of need. This will be a priority of the SVCN Data & Information working group.

Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 (2019/20):



For all three services, the main causes of medical discharges were **Musculoskeletal Disorders and Injuries** and **Mental and Behavioural Disorders**. This was in line with findings from previous years.

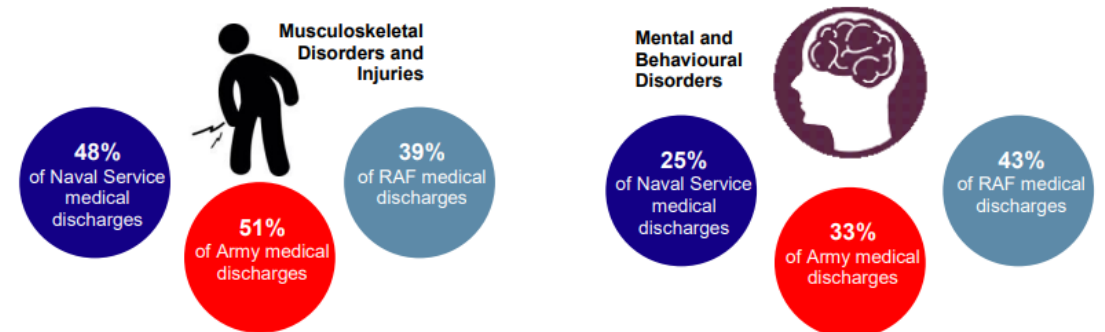


Image courtesy of Ministry of Defence (Annual Medical Discharges in the UK Regular Armed Forces – 2019/20)

Building the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan



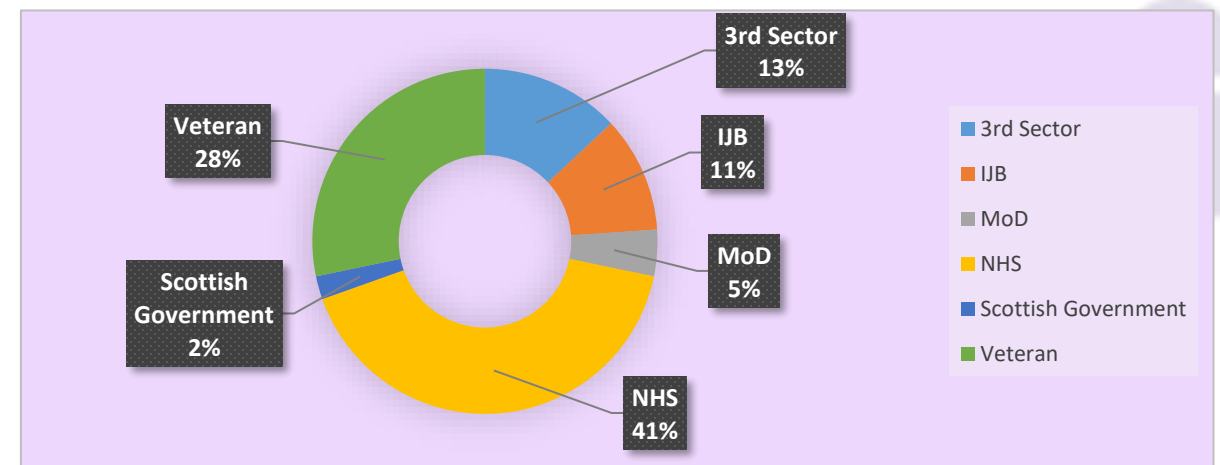
Engagement with Experts

The Action Plan was developed through extensive engagement and collaboration that included:

- Veterans and members of the veterans' community
- Members of SVCN Health and Wellbeing Working Group
- Third Sector veterans' mental health and wellbeing services
- Cobseo (The Confederation of Service Charities) Contact Group
- The Ministry of Defence (MoD)
- NHS Armed Forces and Veterans Champions
- National NHS Boards
- Experts from across the UK
- Academics

Consultation and Engagement Event

Once the draft Recommendations were developed their desirability, feasibility and practicality were tested at a Consultation Event on 26 August 2021. Attendees included veterans, NHS clinicians and managers, Third Sector and Social Workers from across Scotland, with significant representation from remote and rural areas.





Building the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan



Support and Endorsements for the Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan

Scottish Executive Nurse Directors Group

"SEND are committed to supporting this development, enabling the success of the Scottish Veteran's Care Network, and endorse this action plan for veteran's mental health and wellbeing."



"We are very supportive of the MHWAP, which seeks to address the issues that we repeatedly hear matter most to veterans and their family members: high quality, evidence-based mental health and wellbeing support - with veteran peer support at the heart of that."



"Veterans Scotland welcomes the principles in the Veterans' Mental Health Action Plan and looks forward to supporting their implementation in 2022"



"There was overwhelming endorsement of the Plan's depth and rigour, and the team were congratulated on their work. A strength of the plan is the clear statement of the expected service deliverables."



"I am delighted to support the publication of this plan of action plan. It is a 'blueprint' for better designed and planned mental health and wellbeing services Scotland-wide, which can be delivered in a way that suits veterans' needs."

A man in a military uniform is seen from the back, working at a desk. He is wearing a headset and looking at a computer monitor. The monitor displays a video call with a woman and some graphics. A desk lamp is visible on the left side of the desk.

Building the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan



Dr Linda Irvine-Fitzpatrick, Strategic Programme Manager, Edinburgh HSCP and Chair of SVCN Health & Wellbeing Facet Working Group

I was privileged to Chair the SVCN Health and Wellbeing facet working group to develop the Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan. It is an area of work that I am passionate about and committed to.

The team did a fantastic job of reaching out to veterans and the many organisations who provide care, treatment and support. This ensures that the Action Plan reflects the aspirations and ambitions of all.

The Health and Wellbeing working group members challenged one another in order to build consensus around the Action Plan's thirty-eight recommendations, whilst ensuring we delivered on a comprehensive plan on time.




As we move to the next stage, I am confident that we will continue to keep the voices of veterans and their families at the heart of the implementation of the Action Plan.



Facet Deliverables






HEALTH & WELLBEING

Deliverable 	Progress/Next Steps 	Benefits 
Deliver Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan	Achieved: MHWAP published December 2021 in full and on schedule. Draft financial costings and plan for implementation sent to Scottish Government September 2021.	A framework to drive consistency in service quality and equity across Scotland to support mental health service delivery for veterans
Develop national clinical guidance to support implementation of MHWAP Principle 1	Achieved: Terms of Reference for Clinical Reference Group drafted Next steps: Finalise membership and governance procedures that will allow for pathway decisions for complex cases to be developed	Healthcare professionals and mental health and wellbeing services across Scotland have guidance to support veterans that are clinically informed and follow quality standards
Develop a clinical model to support development of mental health and wellbeing services	Achieved: agreement from HWB members to undertake this deliverable Next Steps: Review group membership to ensure the correct expertise can contribute to achieving this deliverable	To oversee implementation of Principle 1 of the MHWAP - "Veterans will have equal access to mental health and wellbeing services, regardless of where they live"- and its 14 associated recommendations.

Facet Deliverables






DATA & INFORMATION

Deliverable 	Progress/Next Steps 	Benefits 
Establish working group and structure for delivery	Achieved: Appoint chair, Scott Heald, Interim Director of Data & Digital Innovation & Head of Profession for Statistics, Public Health Scotland. Continually review group membership to ensure deliverables can be taken forward.	Network Structure is fit for purpose and can drive and implement improvements through collaborative work with key stakeholders.
Collate existing data and intelligence on the veterans' community in Scotland to better understand the needs of the veterans' community	Achieved: Service mapping exercise undertaken in 2021 Next steps: Short life working group confirmed to explore data landscape and data points in healthcare system for veterans in order to coordinate data reporting strategies in Scotland	Clear information systems available to Health and Wellbeing services to ensure that patient pathways and transfer of relevant records is seamless
Have processes in place to monitor service quality and drive quality improvement, including collating data on nationally agreed measures (to be developed) which encompass clinical and wellbeing outcomes and effectiveness.	Achieved: Regular dialogue established with Royal College of Psychiatrists and Heads of Psychological Services Next steps: Develop RCP Quality Standards for Veteran Mental Health Services in Scottish context for statutory and third sector services.	Regular qualitative and quantitative data feeding into Network regarding quality of Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Services

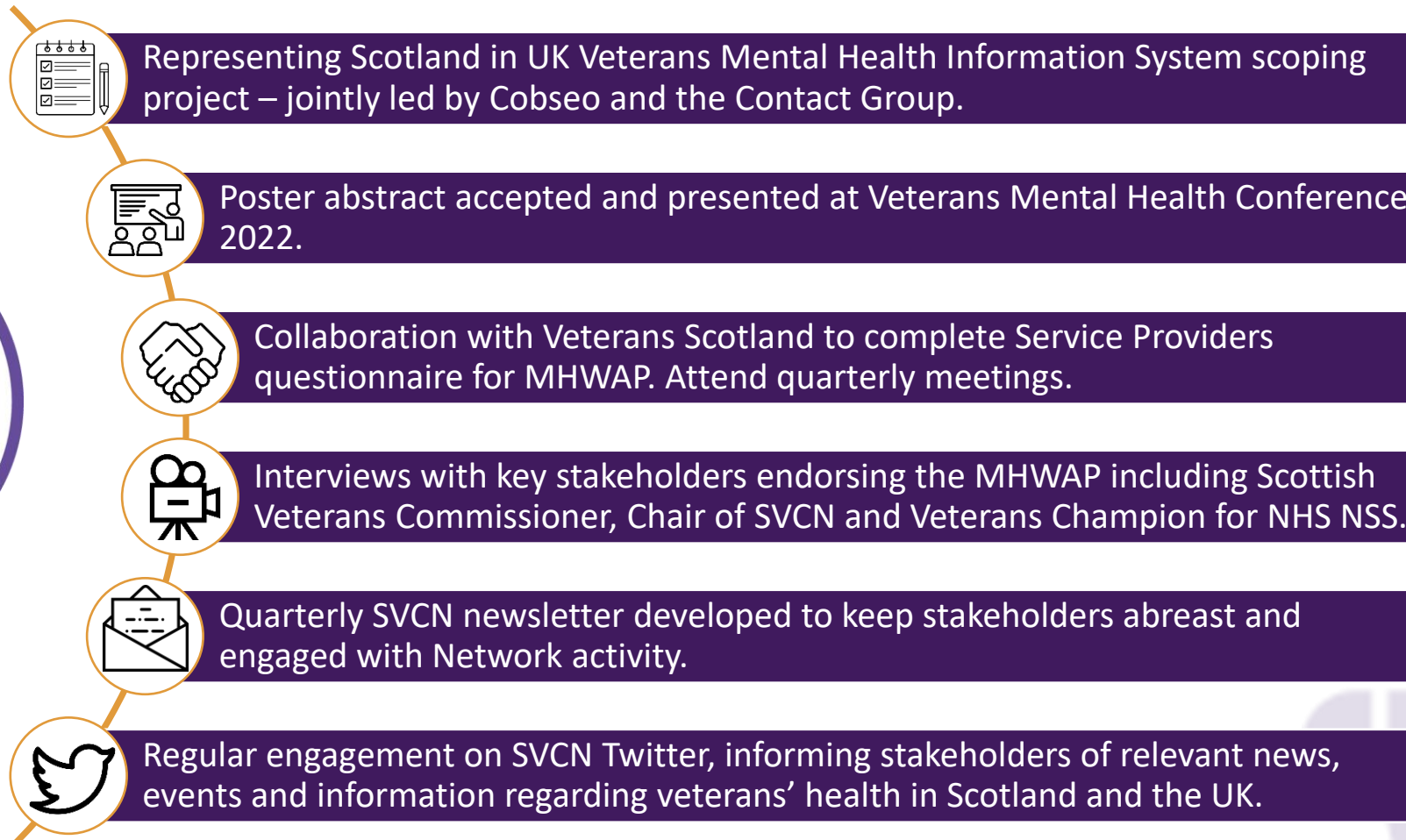
Facet Deliverables



EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Deliverable 	Progress/Next Steps 	Benefits 
Establish structure for delivery	Next steps: Group membership and chair being finalised to ensure deliverables can be taken forward.	Network Structure is fit for purpose and can drive and implement improvements through collaborative work with key stakeholders.
Improve awareness, knowledge and understanding of veterans' needs by working in partnership with NHS Education for Scotland to develop specific training in veteran informed care.	Achieved: initial discussions taken place with NHS Education for Scotland and Public Health Scotland Next steps: Working group to study current resources and determine if these can be adapted, or new resources created, to produce a training package of veteran-specific resources for workforce.	Ensure that workforce for veterans' health care are trauma informed and receive appropriate training and development, and that specific training in veteran informed care will be available to all whom require it
Develop an anti-stigma campaign to encourage veterans to seek support if required.	Next steps: Work alongside national campaigns to develop anti-stigma communications and frameworks for veterans. This could tie in with work on suicide prevention through the Suicide Prevention National Leadership Group, as well as delivering veteran specific suicide prevention training.	Ensure that veterans at risk of suicide are considered in Scottish Government's New Suicide Prevention Strategy for Scotland.

Communications and Wider Engagement



Network Programme Team



Dr Lucy Abraham
Clinical Lead



Kate Burley
Associate Director
Until February 2022



Hannah Cornish
Senior Programme
Manager



Andrew Clark
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Kirstin Davidson
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Support Officer
Until July 2021



Cat Golden
Programme
Support Officer
From October 2021

If you would like to find out more about the Network, please contact the team on

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