

Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan

Easier to read version

Who we are and what we do

We are the **Scottish Veterans Care Network**. We are part of the NHS. We care for veterans who have served in the armed forces who live in Scotland, so they can have a healthy and happy life.

This **Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan** wants to make sure as many veterans in Scotland as possible can stay living in their own homes and be part of their local community. We think this helps to keep them happy and healthy.

Sometimes veterans might need extra help with their mental health to stay feeling well. We make sure that they get the right sort of help from people who understand what a veteran needs.

In this Action Plan, we will say the key things that we will do to make this happen.

We will make sure we keep to the **Community Covenant Pledge**. This is a pledge that says everyone who has ever worked in the armed forces should always be treated fairly. It will also soon be illegal to treat veterans in an unfair way.

You can find out more about us and what we do on our [website](#).

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Needs of Veterans in Scotland

There are 220,000 veterans living in Scotland. This is about 4% of the population. 91,000 veterans are between 16 and 64 and 129,000 are over 64.

Veterans are located across Scotland, with a high proportion of veterans living around Armed Forces bases in rural areas.

Almost two-thirds of veterans said they had no long-term health conditions. But evidence suggests that having strong social networks and doing activities like work or volunteering all play a part in keeping well.

There is still quite a large group of veterans who are more at risk of poor mental and physical health.

We estimate that across Scotland there will be approximately 1,900 veterans approaching a service for mental health support for the first time for treatment every year.

Veterans that currently use mental health and wellbeing services in Scotland include the following characteristics:

Childhood Trauma

Veterans are more likely to have experienced physical or emotional abuse as a child.

Moral Injury

This is when someone has experienced something which goes against their strong beliefs. This might mean they have issues with guilt, shame or forming trusting relationships.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

50-70% of veterans who use mental health services suffer from some sort of PTSD.

Chronic Pain

Long term physical problems that cause pain can go alongside mental health issues.

Suicide

Some veterans are at an increased risk of suicide/taking their own life..

Poverty and Inequality

Many veterans live in disadvantaged areas, and about a quarter are unemployed.

Homelessness

35% of veterans that used mental health services report a history of homelessness.

Because of this, our Action Plan aims to provide treatment and early prevention for these issues. We would like veterans to ask for help sooner than they do now.

The Action Plan

The Action Plan has **3 Key Principles**.

Principle 1

Veterans will have the same access to mental health and wellbeing services, no matter where they live

This means services will be:

- Veteran specific so their needs are considered first
- Focused on keeping veterans and their families well by helping them to stay active and take part in their local community
- As close to home as possible – this may mean they have virtual consultations online as well as face to face in person.
- High quality
- Financially sustainable and managed well.

What we will do

We will create a Community Hub to provide the following support for veterans:

- **Peer Support Workers** - these are veterans with who have experienced life in the Armed Forces and have skills they can share on how to move into a civilian life.
- **Psychologists and Therapists** offering a range of high quality mental health therapies specific to veterans' needs.
- Advice on **drug-based treatments and prescriptions**.
- **Community Mental Health Nurses**.
- **Occupational Therapists** to help veterans with significant mental health problems return to meaningful roles like, work, volunteering, education or training.
- **Other wellbeing services**, support networks to keep well and reduce isolation, money and debt advice, housing support and advice and help for wider family members.
- Help for veterans with significant **mental health problems** to return to meaningful roles like work, volunteering, education or training.

We will make sure that veterans have a choice over which services they feel they need.

We will not exclude or leave any veteran out based on:

- How long they have served in the armed forces
- Whether their condition happened as a result of being in the armed forces
- Having a criminal record
- Being dependent on drugs and/or alcohol
- Experiencing physical trauma

We will try and make sure that the service is tailored to suit veteran's individual needs, with options for:

- Self-referral and drop in facilities
- Face to face consultations
- Telephone or online consultations

We will work in partnership with the wider NHS, and several other healthcare and wellbeing service providers in order to make this happen.

Principle 2

Veterans should be able to access the right help at the right time.

What we will do

We will build on existing services to develop a support service / phone line for veterans that:

- Provides crisis support out of hours for veterans and their family members.
- Offers the veteran and their family members a range of options as to where they get help.
- Refers to local Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Services.
- Is facilitated by people who have knowledge and training in veteran-specific issues.
- Has access to online consultation rooms.

We will create a Scottish Veteran Community Online Resource Hub which includes:

- Positive case study videos of serving personnel, veterans and their families.
- Resources for staying mentally and physically well.
- A map of support services on a national and local level.

We will work to improve the process of leaving the armed forces, so that leavers can get the right access to the right care as early as possible.

We will work with local GP practices to make sure they are 'Veteran Friendly'.

We will work with other care agencies such as the criminal justice system, social workers and alcohol and drug services to make sure they refer veterans to the right places for them.

Principle 3

Improved support to groups and organisations that support our veterans

NHS Boards, Health and Social Care Partnerships and Local Authorities should be appropriately supported to meet the needs of veterans and develop and deliver Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Support and Services.

What we will do

- Work with all partners to develop a digitally delivered program that allows veterans and their families to come together for support.
- Develop quality outcome indicators to support Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Services in demonstrating outcomes and improvement.
- Work in partnership with NHS Education for Scotland to develop specific training in veteran informed care.
- Develop an anti-stigma campaign to encourage veterans to seek support if required.
- Work with national campaigns such as 'See Me' and work on suicide prevention to make sure that veterans at risk of suicide are considered in Scottish Government's New Suicide Prevention Strategy for Scotland.
- Deliver a programme of veteran specific suicide prevention training to appropriate partners.

- Develop an area of the Scottish Veteran Online Resource Hub area for professionals.
- Keep raising funds for the delivery of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan.

We have created this Action Plan in consultation with our appropriate partner groups/organisations and a focus group of veterans.