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Veteran / Ex-Service Personnel Health

Guidance for General Practices in Wales

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Canolfan Datblygu ac Arloesi
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Primary and Community Care
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The development of this guidance has been a collaborative process. We would like to thank everyone who has contributed, authored and provided advice to inform the development of the guidance.



1. Introduction

The healthcare needs of Serving members of the Armed Forces are generally met by military general practitioners (GPs) in their respective service (i.e. Royal Navy, Army, Royal Air Force), and they would therefore not usually register with a GP as an everyday civilian.

Reserve members of the Armed Forces, however, are not eligible to receive primary care by the military and so will be registered with a NHS GP. Despite them being Reserves they may still have health care needs relating to their service, for example, needing to pass a physical fitness test every year or needing to be declared fit to deploy.

Once an individual leaves military service they will then need to register with a general practice to access primary healthcare services, alongside their family. Younger individuals who have left the Armed Forces do not associate themselves as veterans and tend to use the term ex-service personnel. For the purpose of this guidance a veteran will be used to describe any individual who has served and has left military service.

A veteran is commonly defined as;

Anyone who has previously served in the UK Armed Forces, both regular Forces (including National Service or the Home Guard) or Reserve/ Auxiliary Forces, the Mercantile Marines in hostile waters; the Allied Civil Police Forces; full-time, in uniform for a Volunteer Aid Society in direct support of the Armed Forces; or as a British subject serving under British command in the forces of an allied nation.’ (Royal British Legion, 2014)

Estimations have been made about the current number and future projections of veterans living in Wales using data from the Public Health Wales Observatory;

In 2020 an estimated 162,410 veterans aged 16+ were resident in Wales with projected figures for 2025 and 2030 being 126,000 and 98,000 respectively.



General practices have a role in providing care for all patients registered with their practice. This may involve direct care, or where appropriate, referral to dedicated NHS services. Based on figures from the Ministry of Defence (2015);

An average GP practice in Wales could have around 450 veterans registered, with a greater concentration in locations with barracks.

Most veterans and their families will have health and social needs similar to those in the general population. Some, however, will have physical or mental health conditions directly related to their military service. It is also important to note that active Service families may also suffer disadvantage such as delays in treatment or lack of continuity with a healthcare professional due to the mobile nature of their Serving family member.

There are specific arrangements in place for Service personnel and their families to be able to access health services and receive priority care for military attributable conditions, subject to clinical need. These apply to the entire Armed Forces community including Serving personnel (Regular and Reserves), their families and veterans. These arrangements are set out in the [Armed Forces Act 2021](#), which received Royal Assent in December 2021 and enshrined the [Armed Forces Covenant](#) (2011) in law.

Both aim to prevent Service personnel and veterans being disadvantaged when accessing services like healthcare, education and housing. The Armed Forces Act 2021 should also increase awareness among public bodies of the unique nature of military service, improving the level of service for members of the Armed Forces community, no matter where in the UK they live.

Information and support for Serving personnel, veterans or their families settling in Wales or posted to another part of the country and already on a NHS waiting list is provided [online](#) and also detailed in [Welcome to Wales Supporting and investing in our Armed Forces Community in Wales](#).



2. Background

The duty of the NHS to deliver on a number of health commitments in relation to the Armed Forces community is set out in the [Armed Forces Covenant](#) and is based on two key principles:

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.

Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

Over the past 10 years the Armed Forces Covenant has provided a framework for charities, policymakers, businesses and the Armed Forces themselves to deliver improvements and address the needs of the Armed Forces Community.

For English GP practices, there is a voluntary [Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation Scheme](#) which accredits GP practices that are 'veteran friendly'. The scheme is supported by a [Veteran Healthcare Toolkit](#) which provides guidance for GPs and their staff on how to support the healthcare needs of veterans and their families. The scheme is run by the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), working with NHS England and NHS Improvement, and as a result the Veteran Healthcare Toolkit predominantly signposts to English centric resources. Wales is exploring this model and its suitability for use in Wales.

For GP practices in Wales, the Welsh Health Circular, [Armed Forces Covenant – Healthcare Priority for Veterans](#) (September 2017) sets out guidance on the care expected to be provided by **all** GPs for veterans registered with the practice. Further detail is provided in section 4 - [Guidance for General Practices](#) of this document. To note, the Welsh Health Circular was due for review in 2020 but was deferred due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Further guidance and information on services for veterans living in Wales can be accessed [online](#).



3. Purpose of this Guidance

Wales's policy has been to provide priority healthcare provision to veterans living in Wales universally across all the NHS. This has been mandated through the aforementioned 2017 [Welsh Health Circular](#).

This guidance is intended to remind general practices of their responsibility in identifying veterans registered with the practice and ensuring they receive priority access to NHS care (including hospital, primary or community care) for any conditions arising as a result of their military service. It includes a checklist of baseline actions that any general practice should be routinely implementing, simple tools to identify military-related healthcare conditions, and a summary of information resources for both general practices themselves and for signposting purposes.

The need to prepare this guidance document is based on evidence from across the UK that the healthcare provision for the Armed Forces community could be improved.

- Findings from a Royal British Legion commissioned survey of 1,351 NHS healthcare professionals across the UK in 2016 found, 74% of healthcare professionals knew '**Nothing at all**' or '**Not very much**' about priority treatment and 70% of survey respondents **did not know** how to apply the policy in their work practices or believed it did not apply to them.
- The [Defence Select Committee](#) in 2019 expressed "deep concern" about the lack of knowledge of the Covenant in civilian service providers, and previous research carried out by the RBL corroborates these concerns.
- [The Armed Forces Covenant, Reflections on a decade of the nation's promise](#) report, highlighted the geographical restrictions placed on the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant and recommended they should be overcome to enable members of the Armed Forces community to be supported wherever they reside.



4. Guidance for General Practices

A checklist of what GP practices are expected to offer to veterans registered with their practice in accordance with the Welsh Health Circular [Armed Forces Covenant – Healthcare Priority for Veterans](#) is provided below.

CHECKLIST FOR GP PRACTICES

- ☒ **Identify** individuals as veterans by asking whether they have ever served in the Armed Forces.
- ☒ **Gather further information** about their service if clinically relevant and, with consent, record this on their clinical record if appropriate.
- ☒ **Record** the veteran status by use of a consistent clinical code in their patient electronic record, either
 - 13q3 'Served in Armed Forces'** or
 - Ua0T3 'Served in Armed Forces'** or
 - 224355006** which is the SNOMED-CT ID equivalent

However, if a veteran does not want the GP to record their veteran status, the information should not be included.
- ☒ Upon consultation identify if their presenting issue/condition is service related and if so **offer priority access** to NHS care (including hospital, primary or community care).
- ☒ When **referring** a veteran for further care a GP should consider if, in their clinical opinion, the condition may be related to the patient's military service. Where this is the case, and with the patient's agreement, the following wording may be used to **request priority treatment**:

This patient is an Armed Forces veteran. I consider that his/her current condition may be related to military service. This referral should be considered for priority treatment under Welsh Health Circular WHC (2017) 41.
- ☒ Assess whether the individual would benefit from **referral** to any support services for mental or physical health. See [Appendix 2](#).

Practices may also wish to consider running veteran awareness training for practice staff and clinicians.



The flow diagram in [Appendix 1](#) uses the principles of **Very Brief Advice** (Ask Advise Act) to provide a simple aide memoire tool to facilitate these discussions.

When leaving military service a veteran enters normal NHS care and a copy of their full medical record is given to the veteran. They are also provided with contact details for a GP to request copies. GPs will either receive a copy from the Ministry of Defence or can request a copy from the services detailed in **Table 1** below.

Table 1- Contact details to request medical records

| Service | Address | Telephone number |
|-----------------|--|------------------|
| Royal Navy | The Medical Director General Medical Records Release Section Institute of Navy Medicine Alverstoke, Hants PO12 2DL | T: 023 9276 8063 |
| Army | Army Personnel Centre Disclosure 3 Mailpoint 525, Kentigern House 65 Brown St, Glasgow G2 8EX | T: 0845 600 9663 |
| Royal Air Force | Medical Casework 6 Air Manning Medical Casework Headquarters Air Command Room 1 Building 22, Royal Air Force High Wycombe, Walters Ash, Buckinghamshire HP14 4UE | T: 01494 497410 |



5. Continuing Professional Development

A learning resource, [Veterans' health and wellbeing](#), was created by Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) in 2012. It is currently under review but nevertheless in its current format it provides information to help health workers in the community better understand the specific health and wellbeing issues that apply to veterans and their families. Topics covered in the learning package include: social, psychological, and mental health issues; and chronic pain syndrome.

An interactive resource entitled [Health and Wellbeing Needs of Armed Forces Veterans](#), provides an overview of the health needs of the Armed Forces veterans' community as well as signposting to a number of further reading sources.

For further resources please see section 7 - [Bibliography](#).

6. Support Services

The [Veterans Gateway interactive local support map](#) highlights the support services available in each area of Wales according to the following categories;

- Employment
- Family and Communities
- Finances
- Housing
- Legal Support and Advocacy
- Local Government Support
- Mental Wellbeing
- National Charities/Organisations
- Physical Health

The table of local, regional and national support services along with the appropriate contact details is provided in [Appendix 2](#). Details of local contacts are provided in [Appendix 3](#).



7. Bibliography

- [Armed Forces Bill \(2021-22\)](#)
- [Armed Forces Covenant. \(2016, December 16\).](#) Ministry of Defence
- [Armed Forces and veterans.](#) Welsh Government
- [Cultural Awareness of the Veteran Context.](#) Glyndwr University
- [Health and Wellbeing Needs of Armed Forces Veterans.](#) Hywel Dda Health Board and Public Health Wales
- [Mental Health and the Armed Forces, Part Two: The Provision of Care.](#) House of Commons Defence Committee. (2019)
- [NHS Healthcare for the Armed Forces.](#) NHS England
- [The Veteran friendly practice accreditation.](#) The Royal College of General Practitioners
- [The Armed Forces Covenant: Reflections on a decade of the nation's promise.](#) The Royal British Legion and Poppyscotland. (2016).
- [Veterans Gateway. Find support in your local area.](#)
- [Veteran Healthcare Toolkit.](#) The Royal College of General Practitioners
- [Veterans' health and wellbeing.](#) Health Education and Improvement Wales
- [Welcome to Wales Supporting and investing in our Armed Forces Community in Wales.](#) Welsh Government
- [Welsh Health Circular: Armed Forces Covenant – Healthcare Priority for Veterans.](#) Welsh Government. (2017)



Appendix 1 – Very Brief Advice - Guidance for GP Practices

ASK

"Have you, or a member of your family, ever served in the armed forces?"

YES

Record further details about their service in the clinical record [\[See note 1\]](#)
Consider if the presenting complaint is service-related.

NO

No further action required

ADVISE

"As a veteran you're entitled to priority access to NHS care if your issue is service related. There are also a number of other services which can support you. You (and your family) will not be at a disadvantage compared to non-Armed Forces personnel."

ACT

Record the veteran status by inserting a code on their clinical record using **13q3** 'Served in Armed Forces', **Ua0T3** 'Served in Armed Forces' or **224355006** which is the SNOMED-CT ID equivalent

If appropriate, note the following to request priority treatment "This patient is an Armed Forces veteran. I consider that his/her current condition may be related to military service. This referral should be considered for priority treatment under Welsh Health Circular WHC (2017) 41."

Note 1

- Which service were you in – Army, Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Royal Air Force?
- For how long did you serve?
- How long ago did you leave?
- What was your job?
- Where in the world did you serve?
- Did you have any health problems whilst you were serving, or after you left?

Note 2

- Would the individual benefit from referral to any support service for mental or physical health?



Appendix 2 – National Support

| Name | Description of Support |
|--|--|
| Adferiad Recovery | Adferiad Recovery is a new organisation (April 2021) to provide support for vulnerable people in Wales and their families and carers. It combines the skills and expertise of its founding charities (Adferiad Recovery, CAIS, Hafal and WCADA) to provide services for people in Wales with mental health problems, substance misuse problems, and those with co-occurring and complex needs. |
| ATS and WRAC Association Benevolent Fund | Auxiliary Territorial Service Comrades Association (ATS) and Women's Royal Army Corps Association (WRAC) Benevolent Fund awards one-off and recurring financial grants to purchase specific goods, services or facilities for eligible former servicewomen, or their dependents, in need. Contact 0300 400 1992 for more information. |
| Blesma | Supports limbless veterans to lead independent and fulfilling lives. Blesma is dedicated to assisting serving and ex-service men and women who have suffered life-changing limb loss or the use of a limb, an eye or loss of sight. They do not provide members' prosthetics, but they do help prosthetists develop their skills at undergraduate and PhD level. |
| Combat Stress | The UK's leading mental health charity for veterans. They provide free specialised clinical treatment and support to ex-servicemen and women across the UK with mental health conditions. |
| Contact | A group of charitable, support and state organisations that have joined forces to enhance mental health support available to the Armed Forces community. The partnership consists of Big White Wall, Cobseo, Combat Stress, Help for Heroes, The Royal British Legion, Walking With The Wounded, the NHS, MOD, UK Psychological Trauma Society and King's College London. C |
| Defence Medical Welfare Service | Provides emotional and practical support to the Armed Forces community when they are on a health care pathway, receiving treatment in hospital, community based health care, or at home. DMWS work with the individual, their family, carers, and health and social care partners, to find solutions and provide onward supported referrals to other organisations for services beyond the scope of DMWS intervention. |
| Dewis Cymru | The Dewis Cymru website provides information and advice about a range of well-being services across Wales under the themes of: being well, being social, being at home, being safe, managing your money and looking after someone. |
| NHS Wales Prosthetic and Amputee Rehabilitation services | Delivered by three specialist centres in Cardiff, Swansea and Wrexham. Enhanced prosthetic services for veterans with a forces-attributable injury living in Wales will match the leading technology provided by the MOD. |



Appendix 2 – National Support

| Name | Description of Support |
|--|--|
| Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) | Supporting Service men and women, veterans and their families for over 130 years, SSAFA can be accessed by anyone who has completed National Service. SSAFA helps the armed forces community in a number of ways, though the focus is on providing direct support to individuals in need of physical or emotional care e.g. addiction, relationship breakdown, debt, homelessness, post-traumatic stress, depression and disability. Individuals can access help via a freephone confidential helpline. |
| Royal British Legion | 100 branches in Wales. In local communities branches play a vital role in helping hard-to-reach individuals and tackling problems like loneliness and isolation. |
| TGP Cymru | Service to provide support for Veterans and their families to help build positive relationships, minimise conflict leading to family breakdown and empower them to seek specialist services when needed. |
| Veterans' Gateway | For any ex-service personnel and their families looking for advice or support, 24 hours a day. It is the first point of contact to a network of military and non-military partner organisations to help veterans and their families find exactly what information, advice and support they need, when they need it - across key areas from physical and mental health to employability, housing, finances, personal relationships and more. An interactive map sources local support groups and organisations. Find local support for veterans with this interactive map . |
| Veterans' Gateway App | Helps veterans find support organisations in their area using their smartphone or tablet. These organisations cover both the Armed Forces sector and wider charity and not-for-profit sectors. Based on the location, individuals can access support for finances, housing, employment, relationship, physical and mental health, and more. The directory groups all NHS facilities across the country, and over 2,000 charitable organisations either via a map tool to look for organisations in your area, or search field. |
| Veteran NHS Wales | Veterans' NHS Wales is a specialised, priority service for individuals who have served in the Armed Forces, at any time in their lives and who are experiencing mental health difficulties related specifically to their military service. Any veteran living in Wales who has served at least one day with the British Military as either a regular service member or as a reservist who has a 'service related psychological injury' can access support. Each Local Health Board should have an experienced clinician as a Veteran Therapist (VT) with an interest or experience of military (mental) health problems. |
| Veterans Trauma Network | The SWTN covers South Wales, West Wales and South Powys and can provide direct referrals for VTN Wales services within the Welsh tertiary centres. For patients in North and Mid-Wales, VTN Wales is closely linked with equivalent colleagues in VTN England working across Liverpool, Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent and can arrange any necessary referrals appropriately. Referrals can be made via VeteransTraumaNetwork@wales.nhs.uk |
| Woodies Lodge | A meeting space where those who've served can find expert advice across a range of topics as well the chance to make new friends and re-connect with their loved ones. |



Appendix 3 – Health Board and NHS Wales Local

Please note, the information included in the table below was correct at the time of publication. Whilst every effort will be made to maintain this as an accurate record there may be instances whereby contact details change.

| Health Board | Details* |
|--|--|
| Aneurin Bevan UHB | <p>Please contact the team on 01873 735240 or email abb.adminvnhsw@wales.nhs.uk</p> <p>For veterans resident in Newport, Caerphilly, Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent & Monmouthshire, and for veterans resident in the Powys areas of Brecon & Radnorshire.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vanessa Bailey - Clinical Lead in Veterans NHS Wales Supported by a multidisciplinary team Keith Sutcliffe – Veterans Champion Vacant – Executive Lead |
| Betsi Cadwaladr UHB | <p>Please contact the team on 03000 857 964 or e-mail BCU.Admin-veterans@wales.nhs.uk</p> <p>For veterans resident in Gwynedd, Isle of Anglesey, Conwy, Flintshire, Denbighshire and Wrexham, and for veterans resident in the Powys area of Montgomeryshire.</p> <p>A multidisciplinary team consisting of veteran therapists, peer mentors and an administrator. Working in partnership with Change Step to offer peer mentoring support to veterans who need therapy or support in adjusting to civilian life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nick Lyons – Executive Lead and Armed Forces Champion (AFC) Ian Donnelly – Veteran Healthcare Collaborative Strategic Lead Zoe Roberts - Veteran Healthcare Collaborative Lead and AFC <p>Armed Forces community - Home (sharepoint.com) (intranet) BCUHB - Armed Forces Reservists & Veterans (smartsurvey.co.uk) Survey calling Armed Forces community personnel to identify themselves to assist in building our own Armed Forces network for NHS staff across North Wales.</p> |
| Cardiff & Vale UHB | <p>Please contact the team on 029 2183 2261 or email admin.vnhswc&v@wales.nhs.uk</p> <p>The main office and clinic is based in Cardiff Royal Infirmary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr Neil Kitchiner - Director and Consultant Clinical Lead Supported by a multidisciplinary team David Edwards – Veteran Champion Fiona Jenkins – Executive Lead |
| Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB | <p>Please contact the team on 01443 443 443 Ex. 75411 or e-mail CTT_adminVNHSW@wales.nhs.uk</p> <p>For veterans resident in Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. A multidisciplinary team of veteran therapists and administrator.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mel Jehu – Veteran Champion Sharon O'Brien – Executive Lead |



Appendix 3 – Health Board and NHS Wales Local

| Health Board | Details* |
|--|--|
| Hywel Dda UHB | <p>Please contact the team on 01570 422577</p> <p>Hywel Dda UHB Veterans webpages include information relating to accessing primary care services. The service in Hywel Dda has set up a Facebook group containing podcasts on topics relevant to veterans' mental health, patient stories and other useful information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Julie Campion - Clinical Lead Julie is supported by a veteran therapist and administrator Delyth Raynsford – Veteran Champion Anna Bird – Deputy Executive Lead |
| Powys Teaching HB | <p>Please contact Amy O'Sullivan VNHSW Hub Secretary on 029 2183 2261, or email admin.vnhswhc&v@wales.nhs.uk.</p> <p>In Powys the Veterans' NHS Wales service is delivered by neighbouring Health Boards.</p> <p>Betsi Cadwaladr UHB for those who live in Montgomeryshire, Aneurin Bevan UHB for those who live in Brecon or Radnorshire and Swansea Bay for those who live in Ystradgynlais.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vacant – Veteran Champion TBC – Executive Lead |
| Swansea Bay UHB | <p>SBU.veterans@wales.nhs.uk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Victoria Williams - Clinical Lead in Veterans NHS Wales. Steve Spill – Armed Forces Champion steve.spill@wales.nhs.uk Christine Morrell – Executive Lead |
| Public Health Wales | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jan Williams – Veteran Champion Rhiannon Beaumont-Wood – Executive Lead |
| Velindre NHS Trust | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vacant – Veteran Champion Vacant – Executive Lead |
| Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prof Kevin Davies – Veteran Champion Andy Haywood – Executive Lead |
| 160th (Wales) Brigade (The British Army HQ in Wales) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capt Martin Walkinshaw - SO2 PRU Major Donna Geaves - SO2 Pers and Ceremonial Jason Hart - SO2 Med Health |
| Armed Forces Liaison Officers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every region of Wales has an AFLO who can provide signposting to information and support to the whole Armed Forces community. To find out who your local AFLO is contact your Local Authority. |

*Accurate at time of publication.

