



Summary

Veterans, reservists, serving personnel and military families shared their stories of accessing healthcare, and how the NHS could improve the support they receive.



Mental health services lacked understanding of the unique experiences of this community. We also heard the negative impact serving in the armed forces had on their mental health and the difficulties in accessing support. Others had a stoic attitude and were reluctant to accept help.



Healthcare professionals need more training, knowledge and understanding of the armed forces community. Many felt they experienced the same issues in accessing NHS services as the civilian population, however some veterans shared difficulties receiving priority treatment despite being applicable.



NHS services need to provide more signposting and support to the armed forces community.

Many had not received any signposting from NHS services and were not aware of the Veteran Friendly or Veteran Aware accreditation schemes. They also felt NHS services should provide information about navigating the NHS, and ensuring military families are aware of the help available



GP practices need to be proactive in identifying members of the armed forces. Many had not informed their GP practice or their military background and/or did not know if this information was on their patient records.



The NHS and the military need to work more effectively together. Veterans and reservists shared the challenges they faced in obtaining their medical records and emphasised the need for better collaboration between the NHS and the military.



GP practice and NHS Trust websites need to have more information available for this community. 40% of Veteran Friendly GP practices had no information on their website about registering as a member of the armed forces community and 45% had no signposting. NHS Trusts also had very limited information on their websites.

Recommendations

Our findings have highlighted a range of suggestions to improve the experiences of the armed forces community. We advise the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) Transformation Committee to consider how best to implement the following recommendations:



Increase **awareness of mental health support** and encourage the armed forces community to access help available to them. Priority treatment for this care should be granted if eligible.



Improve **training, awareness and knowledge** amongst professionals to enable better understanding of the needs of the armed forces community.



Signpost the armed forces community to military charities, organisations, local support groups and NHS specific services. This should include ensuring information is readily available within healthcare settings and webpages.



Audit and measure the effectiveness of Veteran Friendly and Veteran Aware accreditations to ensure the required standards are being met.



Review access to **priority treatment** to ensure those eligible are receiving care. Awareness and understanding of eligibility should also be improved amongst professionals and patients.



Consider implementing “**Veteran champions**” within healthcare services and promoting Veteran Friendly and Veteran Aware accreditations (if awarded) to **build trust** with the armed forces community.



Ensure patients are invited to register as a member of the armed forces community and patient records are accurately maintained.



Collaborate more effectively with the military to ensure better **data sharing** and maintaining of patient records.



Consider working with the military to support service leavers with integration and **navigating** the NHS system.