



Royal College of  
General Practitioners



Veterans  
Scotland

# Meeting the Healthcare Needs of Veterans

*A guide for general practitioners*



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Veterans are the men and women who have served in the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force (Regular or Reserve), and who have now left to rejoin civilian life. Because of their military service, their healthcare needs can be different from those of other patients.

The aim of this leaflet is to assist you, their current or new GP, by outlining some of these healthcare needs and to provide you with advice on how best to help veterans whose health has been affected. Thank you for taking the time to find out more.

### **Why are veterans treated as a special group?**

Service in the Armed Forces is different from other occupations. Apart from the obvious uncertainties and dangers, Service people relinquish some of their own civil liberties and put themselves in harm's way to protect others.

As an illustration, the risk of death (occupational attributable mortality) for the Army overall is currently around one in 1000 per year, or about 150 times greater than for the general working population. Risk of serious injury (for example loss of limbs, eyes or other body parts) is substantially increased.

Because of this, the government promises to help and support people in the Armed Forces when they need it most. The UK Government framework for this is the *Armed Forces Covenant*; more information on which is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/armed-forces-covenant>.

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that all Armed Forces personnel serving and veterans living in Scotland are able to access the best possible care and support, including safe, effective and patient-centred healthcare. The Scottish Government's *Renewing Our Commitments* paper (available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/02/1650>) reaffirms this and sets out what has been achieved in the healthcare sphere, particularly in prosthetics, mental healthcare provision and the joining up of processes between the military healthcare and NHS systems, since *Our Commitments* was published in 2012.

The general principle set out by government is simply for 'no disadvantage' to veterans and their families due to their military service, compared with society generally.

## Who exactly is a veteran?

Veterans include anyone who has served for at least one day in the Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve), as well as Merchant Navy seafarers and fishermen who have served in a vessel that was operated to facilitate military operations by the Armed Forces.

Based on an extrapolation of The Royal British Legion Household Survey<sup>1</sup> of 2014 and the PoppyScotland supplement<sup>2</sup> to this it is estimated that there are c. 260,000 veterans living in Scotland, around half of whom are of pensionable age.

Figures from the Career Transition Partnership suggest that around 1200 Service people move back into civilian life in Scotland every year, including around 200 who leave the Services on medical grounds. Veterans may prefer to use other terms to describe themselves, such as 'ex-Serviceman/Service woman' or 'ex-Forces'.



<sup>1</sup> *The Royal British Legion Household Survey 2014*; <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/public-policy-and-research/the-uk-ex-service-community-a-household-survey/>.

<sup>2</sup> *PoppyScotland supplement to the Royal British Legion Household Survey 2014*; <http://www.rblcdn.co.uk/media/2274/poppyscotland-household-survey-report-final.pdf>.

## Medical Records

Most veterans are given a personal copy of their summary medical record when they leave the Services, together with information on how you, as their new or current GP, can obtain their full Service medical record if you need it.

On registering with a GP in Scotland the registration form makes provision for an individual to confirm that they have served in the Armed Forces. If they do so, then there are mechanisms in place for the GP to obtain Service medical records.

However, it is a veteran's personal choice as to whether or not they wish to be identified as a veteran in their NHS medical records.

## Priority Treatment

The Scottish Government has communicated the policy on priority treatment for veterans to all NHS Boards through the Chief Executive's Letter (CEL) 8 (2008).

This states that all veterans should receive priority treatment for health problems as a result of service to their country, subject to the clinical needs of all patients (veterans should not be given priority treatment for conditions unrelated to service in the Armed Forces).

A copy of the letter is available at: [http://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/mels/CEL2008\\_08.pdf](http://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/mels/CEL2008_08.pdf).

You may wish to consider including a note when making referrals to secondary or specialist treatment that the health condition may be related to the patient's service in the Armed Forces, e.g.:

***'As this patient is a military veteran, and his (or her) current condition may be related to military service, this referral should be considered for priority treatment under the policy set out in (CEL) 8 (2008)'***

The concept of priority treatment is not for the veteran to be seen quicker than patients with greater clinical need, but to prevent disadvantage.

## Prostheses

The National Prosthetics Service (NPS) is Scotland's centre for designing and fitting prosthetic (artificial) limbs. If a patient has lost a limb due to their service in the Armed Forces and were not fitted with a prosthetic at that time, you may wish to consider discussing a referral to the NPS with them.

## Mental health

Conditions of military service can affect veterans' mental health. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can occur in a very small minority of veterans. Some mental health problems will be unconnected with military service and can be assessed and managed as with any other patient. However, if a veteran's military experience appears to be a likely exacerbating factor, advice from and referral to specialist help is available if needed.

There is some evidence that Reservists are more likely to develop mental health problems after deployment.<sup>1</sup> Veterans from the Reserve Forces who have returned from operations in 2003 onwards, and who have mental health problems possibly linked to their service, can either self-refer or be referred by you to the same care as ex-Regular veterans.

<sup>1</sup> *Lancet* 2006; **367(9524)**: 1709.

### Veterans First Point (V1P) Scotland

V1P Scotland was developed by NHS staff and veterans to help veterans and their families adjust to civilian life. This includes help with:

- physical and mental health and wellbeing
- family and relationships
- housing
- socialising
- education
- employment

They have drop-in centres across Scotland. [Find your nearest centre.](#)

**Phone:** 0131 221 7090 **Email:** [V1P.Scotland@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:V1P.Scotland@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk)

## Health Behaviours

Veterans may have health and help-seeking behaviours that are influenced by their experience in the Armed Forces. Consultation rates while serving are about twice the non-military average, partly due to a greater rate of musculoskeletal injuries and partly because in the Armed Forces they are not able to self-certify sick leave.

Consequently, they may have chronic, deteriorating service-related conditions that are eligible for priority treatment. A useful set of short e-Learning sessions that explain veterans' health issues in greater detail is at: <http://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/nhs-healthcare-for-the-armed-forces/>.



## Veterans UK

Veterans UK is the Government's statutory agency for veterans. If veterans present with an injury or illness that they believe is related to their service in the Armed Forces, but they do not receive financial assistance, they can be advised by Veterans UK of the following schemes:

- War Pension Scheme (WPS) – for those with an injury or illness sustained on or before 5 April 2005; applications can only be made once the individual has left the Armed Forces.
- Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) – for those with an injury or illness sustained on or after 6 April 2005; applications can be made while serving for injuries or illness after 6 April 2005.

More information is available at:

<http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk/about>.

## NHS Scotland Armed Forces and Veterans Champions

The Scottish Government has communicated the policy on priority treatment for veterans to all NHS Boards through the Chief Executive Letter (CEL) 8 (2008).

CEL 8 (2008) also asks all NHS Boards to appoint a senior member of staff to hold overall responsibility in ensuring the implementation of the priority treatment guidelines.

NHS Champions for Armed Forces & Veterans, a senior member of staff who holds overall responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the priority treatment guidelines, are now in place in every NHS Board.

The Champion acts as the Board's chief representative in achieving its commitment to supporting armed forces personnel, veterans and their families, and also takes the lead in communicating the local implementation of the Scottish Government's policies in the provision of health services to the military community. Their role was set out in CEL 39 (2010), available at: [http://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/mels/CEL2010\\_39.pdf](http://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/mels/CEL2010_39.pdf).

Champions are invited to attend the Armed Forces and Veterans Health Joint Group Meeting, hosted by the Scottish Government, to discuss relevant issues. More information on the Joint Group, including minutes of previous meetings, can be found at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Health/Services/Armed-Forces>.

## Useful Links and Contacts

- Ministry of Defence:  
[www.mod.uk](http://www.mod.uk)
- The Armed Forces Covenant:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/armed-forces-covenant>
- Scottish Government's 'Renewing Our Commitments' paper:  
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/02/1650>
- Scottish Government's policies on Armed Forces and Veterans Healthcare:  
<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Health/Services/Armed-Forces>
- Veterans Health on mygov.scot:  
<https://www.mygov.scot/veterans-health/>
- NHS Inform – Health Rights for Veterans:  
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/health-rights/access/health-rights-for-veterans>
- Veterans Assist – run by Veterans Scotland:  
<http://www.veterans-assist.org/>
- Veterans UK:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk/about>  
Tel. 0808 1914 2 18  
(Freephone UK only)
- Combat Stress:  
[www.combatstress.org.uk](http://www.combatstress.org.uk)  
Tel: 01372 587 080

## For enquiries about Service medical records

- **Royal Navy:**  
The Medical Director  
General Medical Records  
Release Section  
Institute of Naval Medicine  
Alverstoke  
Hants PO12 2DL  
Tel: 023 9276 8063
- **Army:**  
Army Personnel Centre  
Disclosure 3  
Mailpoint 525,  
Kentigern House,  
65 Brown Street  
Glasgow G2 8EX  
Tel: 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





Royal College of  
General Practitioners



### About the Royal College of General Practitioners

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is a network of over 40,000 family doctors working to improve care for patients. We work to encourage and maintain the highest standards of general medical practice and act as the voice of GPs on education, training, research and clinical standards.

Royal College of General  
Practitioners  
30 Euston Square,  
London, NW1 2FB.  
Tel: 020 3188 7400  
Fax: 020 3188 7401  
[www.rcgp.org.uk](http://www.rcgp.org.uk)

Registered Charity Number: 223106

### About NHS Scotland

NHS Scotland consists of 14 territorial NHS Boards, seven Special NHS Boards and one public health body.

Territorial NHS Boards are responsible for the protection and the improvement of their population's health and for the delivery of frontline healthcare services.

Each NHS Board is accountable to Scottish Ministers and all NHS Boards work collaboratively for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

Planning & Quality Division  
Directorate for Healthcare Quality and  
Improvement  
Scottish Government  
St Andrews House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh EH1 3DG  
Tel: 0131 244 9259

### About Veterans Scotland

Veterans Scotland aims to enhance the welfare of the veterans community in Scotland by acting as the prime vehicle for joint working between its member charities; for the dissemination of information to its members and the coordination of joint approaches to UK and Scottish Governments; Local Authorities, and other organisations whose business is benefit to veterans.

Veterans Scotland  
New Haig House  
Logie Green Road  
Edinburgh  
EH7 4HR  
Tel: 0131 550 1569  
Fax: 0131 557 5819  
[www.veteransscotland.co.uk](http://www.veteransscotland.co.uk)

Registered as a Charity in Scotland,  
Scottish Charity Number. SC033880.