

Briefing

August 2021

Armed Forces healthcare briefing and latest updates on COVID-19

This monthly brief is intended to keep you up-to-date on the provision of NHS services for the Armed Forces community, as well as latest information and guidance relating to COVID-19.

Supporting our Armed Forces community following events in Afghanistan

Kate Davies CBE, Director of Health and Justice, Armed Forces and Sexual Assault Services Commissioning, NHS England and NHS Improvement and Nicky Murdoch MBE, Independent Chair of the NHS England and NHS Improvement Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group share a message of support to the Armed Forces community.

“Many of you and the veterans and families you support and work with, will be impacted and affected by the recent events in Afghanistan. We know many of you are involved professionally and as volunteers by working in the NHS, Defence and military charities and that you are continuing to make a difference as you always have.

We have been working to ensure that we meet the challenge that the current situation demands for our Armed Forces community. We are working very closely with the Secretary of States for Defence and Health and their Ministers, alongside charitable partners from across the military charity sector to ensure that we get the support that is required for those serving, the reservists, veterans and their families.

You will have seen posts on media channels from individuals and charities all playing their part in supporting the different parts of the Armed Forces community and we are doing the same at a National level to deliver our role in the overall plan in collaboration and partnership, including the devolved administrations, because there is a UK Armed Forces community, and the NHS England and NHS Improvement Armed Forces team are at the vanguard of the activity, and because we have a responsibility for the health and wellbeing of all elements that make up this amazing community.”

Follow us on Twitter today – dedicated NHS Twitter account for Armed Forces health

NHS England and NHS Improvement have launched a dedicated Twitter account for Armed Forces health in England. You can follow us for service signposting and information on [@NHSArmedForces](https://twitter.com/NHSArmedForces)

Op COURAGE: The Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Service

We are encouraging service providers, partners and advocates to widely promote the [Op COURAGE](#) service. It is important at this time to support those impacted and affected by recent events in Afghanistan, including veterans and their families.

Below is newsletter article/bulletin copy for you to use as appropriate:

The first call for help takes courage. If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health or wellbeing problems, expert help is available from Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service.

If you're due to leave the Armed Forces, just left the Armed Forces or left many years ago, Op COURAGE is here to help. You will be able to speak to people who:

- understand the Armed Forces and military life
- are either from the Armed Forces community or highly experienced in
- working with Serving personnel, Reservists, Veterans and their families
- will work with you to make sure you get the right type of specialist care, support, and treatment.

The service can be contacted directly by yourself or you can ask your GP, a charity or someone else, such as a family member or friend, to do this on your behalf.

What will happen when you contact Op COURAGE

To make sure you get the right care and support, you will first have an assessment by someone who understands the specific needs of the Armed Forces community.

The service offers a range of treatment, which includes:

- working with Defence Medical Services to make sure you get mental health care and support as you transition from the military to civilian life
- recognising the early signs of mental health problems and providing care and treatment for this
- therapeutic treatment for more advanced mental health conditions and psychological trauma
- intensive emergency care and treatment if you're in a crisis
- helping you to access other NHS services if needed, such as 'Improving access to psychological therapies' (IAPT) and eating disorder services
- working with charities and local organisations to support you with your wider health and wellbeing needs, such as housing, relationships, finances, employment, drug and alcohol misuse and social support.

For more information, visit the NHS website at www.nhs.uk/opcourage

Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service is the new name for the Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS), Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment Service (CTS) and Veterans' Mental Health High Intensity Service (HIS). The new name has been developed following feedback from veterans and their families to make it easier for those leaving the military and veterans to find help.

Other supporting materials:

- The ****updated**** Op COURAGE services **map leaflet** is attached to this briefing.
- You can [download the social media assets](#) in two sizing formats for sharing on your social media channels and to share with your networks for distribution.

Social media copy is below:

Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service. Specialist care and support for Service leavers, reservists, veterans and their families.

<https://www.nhs.uk/opcourage> #OpCourage #NHSArmedForcesHealth #Veterans

Supporting veterans through the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) veteran friendly accreditation

Recent events in Afghanistan may have an impact upon patients who have links with the country, including members of the Armed Forces community, veterans, their families or those with close family ties to the country. It is possible that mental health issues including PTSD, depression and the use of recreational drugs may increase with consequences both upon themselves and those around them.

The RCGP has developed a wide range of material to assist practice teams in supporting military veterans and their families. Details on how to become accredited are [here](#). There are also some specific e-learning and webinars that can be accessed to provide up to date information on how care of the military community is the same or different from other patients. See [here](#).

Please use the below copy in your newsletters and bulletins to encourage more GP practices to become accredited.

Become an RCGP veteran-friendly accredited practice

If your practice is not yet accredited, show your support by signing up to the RCGP veteran-friendly accreditation programme.

There are an estimated 2.4 million veterans in the UK, some of whom have complex needs. There are veteran-specific services tailored towards this potentially vulnerable patient group. Veterans may also be entitled to priority treatment for conditions related to military service.

Becoming a veteran friendly accredited practice is a simple on-line process and helps to raise awareness, improve understanding and better equip and facilitate GPs in their duty of care to veterans.

Further information can be found at <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/resources/a-to-z-clinical-resources/veteran-friendly-gp-practices.aspx>

For expressions of interest please contact veterans@rcgp.org.uk

Digital assets:

- **Social media quote cards** - [download the social media assets](#)
- **Share content** by The Royal College of General Practitioners [@rcgp](#)

Example social media copy

Becoming a veteran friendly accredited practice is simple. Show your support by signing up today www.rcgp.org.uk/veterans

#RCGP #VeteranFriendly

Please contact [Carrie Fleming](#) if you require any of the supporting communications materials to be sent directly.

Celebrating and supporting the female veteran's community

In the coming weeks, we will be sharing more information on the work the NHS is doing to better support female veterans, through a new **Serving and Ex Serving Women's Health Improvement Steering Group**. Nicky Murdoch MBE, Independent Chair of the NHS England Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group, says: *"We work to represent the needs of patients and their families across the Armed Forces community when designing new services for them. This includes helping the NHS understand the challenges women face as a result of their service."*

If you can support our communications with a case study or further information on how your service / region is supporting female veterans, please contact [Carrie Fleming](#).

COVID-19 updates

New guidance on COVID-19 vaccinations for children

On 4 August 2021, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) published an updated statement on COVID-19 vaccination of children and young people aged 12 to 17 years to advise that all 16 to 17-year-olds should be offered a first dose of the Pfizer vaccine.

This is in addition to the existing offer of two doses of vaccine to 16 to 17-year-olds who are in 'at-risk' groups. We have [published a letter](#) with updated guidance in relation to COVID-19 vaccinations for children and young people following the JCVI statement.

People aged 16 and 17, and children aged 12 to 15 who are eligible, will be contacted by a local NHS service such as a GP surgery to book their vaccination appointments.

Those 18 or over can:

- [book COVID-19 vaccination appointments online](#) for an appointment at a vaccination centre or pharmacy
- [find a walk-in COVID-19 vaccination site](#) to get vaccinated without needing an appointment
- wait to be contacted by their GP surgery and book appointments with them

Watch an [NHS YouTube video](#) explaining what's in the COVID-19 vaccines and how they work.

Resources relating to the vaccination programme for young people are available on the [government website](#).

Health and wellbeing updates

NHS Chief Executive appointed

Amanda Pritchard has been [appointed NHS Chief Executive](#) and will be the first woman in the health service's history to hold the post, which she took up on Sunday 1 August. She will lead the NHS at a hugely important time as the health service emerges from a pandemic and having led the biggest and fastest vaccination programme in this country's history. She could have had no better preparation for the role than serving as the NHS' Chief Operating Officer during the greatest health emergency in its history. Our Chief Executive's office has always championed our areas of work and we look forward to the same collaborative relationship. We wish Amanda every success in her new role.

Integrated care systems

With the Health and Care Bill passing Second Reading, practical preparations for statutory integrated care systems (ICSs) can get underway given the degree of confidence that Parliament will legislate. Recent decisions from Government on ICS boundaries brought certainty about geography, and also unlock the appointment process. Read the [ICS statement](#) from the Minister of State for Health.

Attached to this briefing is a letter from Kate Davis, Director of Health and Justice, Armed Forces and Sexual Assault Services Commissioning, containing information on the ICS position for Armed Forces health commissioning.

Flu vaccination: who should have it this winter and why

Public Health England has [updated its guidance for the 2021/22 flu vaccination season](#). This guidance explains to patients how they can help protect themselves and their children against flu this winter. It includes information for children, eligible adults and pregnant women, and details why it's very important that people at increased risk from flu, or who care for someone vulnerable, to have their free vaccination every year.

Armed Forces Community Research International Webinar Series

The seventh session of the, Armed Forces Community Research International Webinar Series, takes place on Thursday 30 September 2021 at 4.00pm. These free webinars take place every two months. You can book on via [Eventbrite](#)