

# Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group

impact report 2020-2023



**Our  
voice**



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# Foreword

## Welcome to the first impact report from the NHS England Armed Forces Healthcare Commissioning Team and its Patient and Public Voice Group (PPV Group).

Many of you reading this may know that the NHS is required to engage and consult with patients, families and carers on the services that are delivered across the NHS. This is a legal requirement and so you will see patient and public engagement groups in GP practices, NHS hospital trusts and the newly formed integrated care boards. This ensures that patient needs are central to the services that are commissioned and delivered.

The NHS England Armed Forces Healthcare Commissioning Team work as equal partners with its PPV Group to ensure that the needs of the whole community are considered when it is designing services. As part of this, it has a range of PPV partners who contribute to ensuring the range of needs are highlighted and understood.

PPV partners act as critical friends, advisors, advocates and communicators. They also provide assurance to the Armed Forces community, the NHS England Armed Forces Healthcare Commissioning Team and the Clinical Reference Group that 'lived experience' is at the centre of Armed Forces commissioning.

This collaborative working to identify the issues and challenges that the Armed Forces and their families face has contributed to increasing the resources to deliver services.

PPV Group members are drawn from serving personnel, reservists, veterans and their families, including children and young people, across the three Services. This includes individuals who have been involved in conflicts, ranging from Northern Ireland, the Falklands and the Balkans, through to recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their lived experience spans all types of injuries and illnesses, with individuals contributing by sharing their lived experience and most importantly what could have been done better to improve services.

We hope this first impact report will show how much PPV partners are valued and the positive difference their extensive work with the NHS England Armed Forces Healthcare Commissioning Team makes to health services for the Armed Forces community.

Nicky and I thank all of our team for their continued commitment and hard work, as well as the whole of the Armed Forces community for their service to our Nation.



**Kate Davies CBE**

Director of Health & Justice, Armed Forces and Sexual Assault Services Commissioning, NHS England



**Nicky Murdoch MBE**

Independent Chair of the NHS England Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group

# Introduction

**People and communities have the skills and insight to help transform how health and care is designed and delivered. Working with them as equal partners to help them take more control over their health is an essential part of securing a sustainable NHS.**

Patient and public voice groups play an important role in ensuring the NHS meets its statutory duties to involve people and communities in the commissioning of services.

These duties require NHS England to act fairly and inclusively when making plans, proposals and decisions in relation to the health services it commissions.

In addition, arrangements must be made to ensure that individuals, to whom services are being or may be provided, are engaged and involved in the development and planning of commissioning arrangements. In the case of the Armed Forces, the NHS must also ensure due regard is paid to the relevant commitments of the Armed Forces Covenant<sup>1</sup>.

NHS England is committed to ensuring that the lived experience of patients and their families is at the centre of shaping our healthcare services. As such, patient and public voice (PPV) partners play a crucial role in healthcare services commissioned for Armed Forces personnel, those registered with Defence Medical Services (DMS) and specialist services for veterans.

The Armed Forces PPV Group is represented on NHS committees and groups to ensure that the views of patients, families, carers and the public are at the heart of all we do and that our decisions are informed by those that use and care about our services.

Armed Forces PPV Group members work as equal partners with the NHS England Armed Forces Healthcare Commissioning Team and Armed Forces Clinical Reference Group who have dedicated expert advisory groups that inform clinical commissioning policy and service specification development. The inclusion of PPV representation is to ensure that patient insight and experiences relevant to the clinical policy area are represented.

All three Services are represented and the group shares experience of deployment in a variety of conflicts over the past forty years, as well as people with lived experience of Service attributable physical and mental health injuries and illnesses. The group also includes the voices of underrepresented populations of the Armed Forces, such as women, those from ethnic minority groups, members of the LGBT+ community and veterans with experience of the justice system.



The following is an example of activity which members support:

- Co-development of engagement and consultation activity and supporting materials.
- Participation in engagement and consultation activity.
- Informing the development of clinical policies and service specifications.
- Participation in the procurement process for services.
- Supporting the launch and promotion of services.
- Participation in the review and assurance of services.

The Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group is comprised of a partnership group and a lived experience network which represent the entire Armed Forces community.

Members are drawn from serving personnel, reservists, veterans and their families, including children and young people across the three Services who have been involved in conflicts ranging from Northern Ireland, the Falklands and the Balkans, through to recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

# Improving care and support for the Armed Forces community

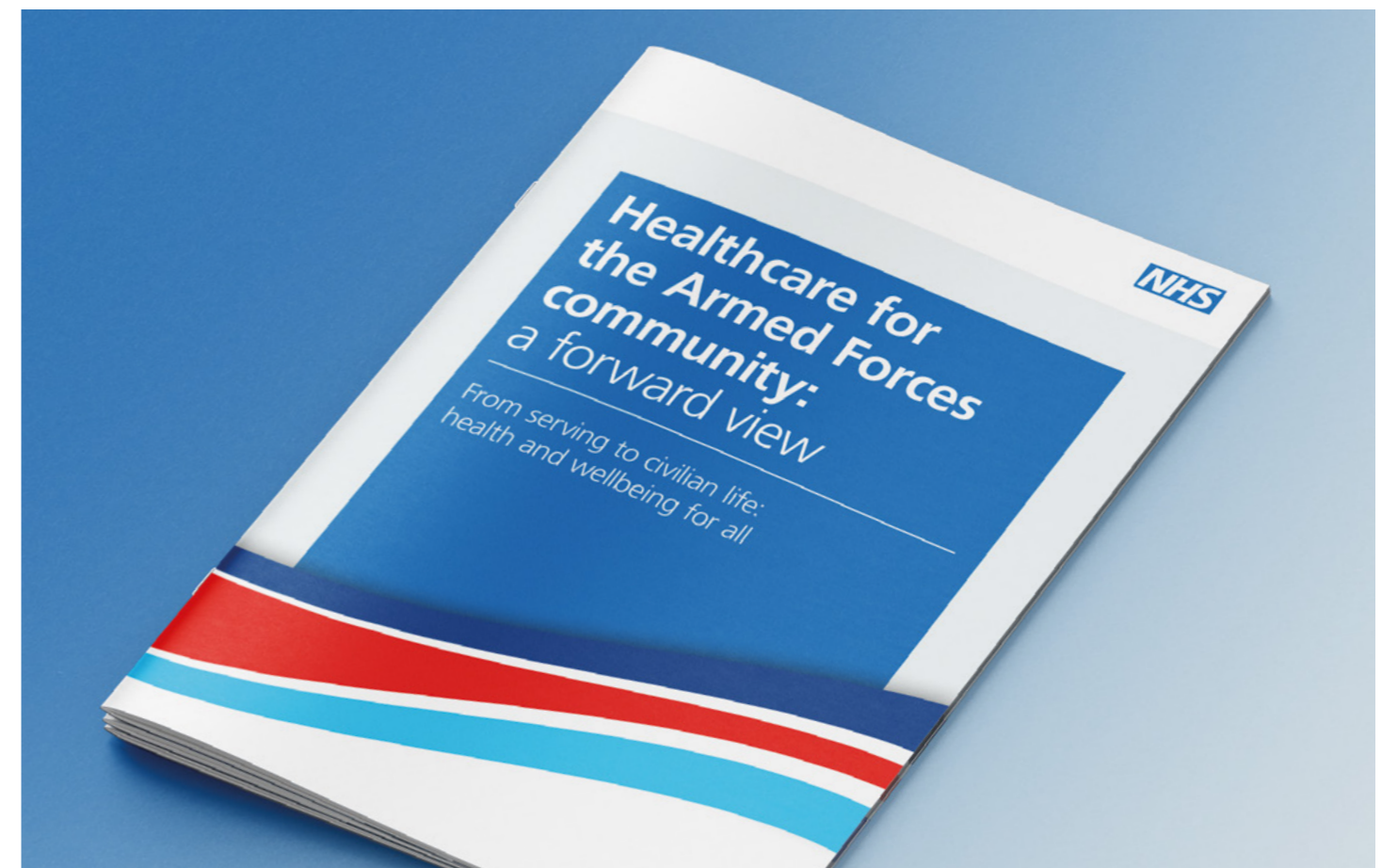
Healthcare for the Armed Forces community: a forward view<sup>2</sup> builds on the foundations of the NHS Long Term Plan<sup>3</sup> and the Armed Forces Covenant to set out nine commitments from serving to civilian life, expressing NHS England's ambition for future healthcare for the Armed Forces community.



The nine commitments, which have been informed by the views and experiences of the Armed Forces community, provide information on what the NHS will do, in partnership with the Ministry of Defence (MOD), the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA), Armed Forces charities and other organisations to deliver on them.

Evidence tells us that health and care services are most effective when decisions are informed by people with lived experience who use and care about these services – the Armed Forces community is no exception.

**This report presents some of the activities, achievements and outcomes between 2020 and 2023 of the Armed Forces PPV Group's work. These are aligned to the commitments set out in the document, Healthcare for the Armed Forces community: a forward view.**



# Impact 2020-2023

2020

Contributed to the commissioning of the **Veterans' Mental Health High Intensity Service**

Supported the refresh of the Armed Forces section of the **NHS website**

Contributed to the development of the **Armed Forces Forward View**

Partners in the development and delivery of the **Armed Forces families engagement**

2021

Supported the **Veterans' Mental Health High Intensity Service launch**

Production of an **Armed Forces health podcast series**

Developed a new name and supported the development of a brand identity for veterans mental health services: **Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service**

Contributed to national work on the treatment of former **LGBT+ Armed Forces serving personnel**

Featured in the **Prime Minister's World Mental Health Day** social media video

Supported the **We Also Served: The Health and Well-Being of Female Veterans in the UK project**

Attended a **Female Veterans Roundtable event** hosted by former health minister Nadine Dorries and Leo Docherty MP

2022

Partners in developing **Op COMMUNITY: Armed Forces Community Support**

Contributed to developing and delivering the **veterans health engagement**

Launched the **NHS Armed Forces health podcast**

Involvement in clinical priority reviews, resulting in gambling addiction support being included in the new **Op COURAGE service model**

Initiation of the task and finish group on **'hearing the voice of the Armed Forces Community'** in the Devolved Administrations

Contributed to the development of the **Duty and Care: Armed Forces Family Mobility and Health Care Report**

Initiated a **research project on ethnic minorities within the Armed Forces community**

Informed the development and launch of the **Maternity Military Voice Partnership pilot**

Recruited GP practices to become **GP friendly**

2023

Partners in the development of the **Op COURAGE campaign**

**Influenced Health Innovation Funding** awarded by the Office for Veterans' Affairs

Contributed to the commissioning and launch of **Op COURAGE and Op NOVA: Supporting Veterans in the Justice System**

Instrumental in the naming and branding of **Op RESTORE: The Veterans Physical Health and Wellbeing Service, Op COMMUNITY and Op NOVA**

Supported the work of the **digital records programme**

Corporal Alena Gurung  
AGC (SPS)



## Influencing the commissioning of safe, high-quality care for serving personnel and their families

The NHS has committed to commissioning high-quality, safe and effective secondary care services to meet the needs of the serving Armed Forces community, from a wide range of hospitals across England.

The Armed Forces PPV Group actively seeks to help commissioners, health and social care practitioners, government bodies and voluntary sector and community leaders to understand the unique needs of the Armed Forces community.

Achievements during the period relating to this report include the following:

- Sharing lived experience content at NHS and social care seminars and conferences to improve awareness and understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces community.
- Highlighting the issues faced by those with hidden harms relating to sexual trauma, domestic violence, suicide, gambling and poor mental health to improve understanding of their needs.
- Collaborating with specialist Armed Forces partners to ensure lived experience is used in the design, development and evaluation of services for serving personnel and their families.
- Armed Forces PPV Group representation on the Department of Health and Social Care and MOD Partnership Board, Veterans Advisory Board and the OVA's Health Innovation Fund Steering Group, which ensures the patient voice is heard at the highest level.
- Assisting with the review of NHS England clinical policies to make sure the health services that are commissioned are evidence based and updated.

## Supporting the design of family-friendly services for the Armed Forces community

For families of the Armed Forces community, life can have additional worries and complications. This can include separation from spouses, partners, families and friends, social isolation, sudden caring responsibilities, frequent and unplanned moves and bereavement.

By working with families, carers, children and young people, the Armed Forces PPV Group has helped to influence the design of family-friendly healthcare services for the Armed Forces community.

Achievements during the period relating to this report include the following:

- Working with commissioners, ICB colleagues and families to inform the development and naming of Op COMMUNITY: Armed Forces Community Support to provide a single point of contact and improve continuity of care and accessibility of services for families who move frequently. Members will continue to inform the development and roll out of Op COMMUNITY as it evolves from pilot status to an England wide service.
- Gathering the views of service users to help shape the MOD's Armed Forces Family Strategy.
- Supporting the development of the Naval Families Federation childcare survey and report, which reflected Royal Navy families' voices, experiences and concerns about finding suitable and affordable quality childcare.
- Contributing to the Duty and Care: Armed Forces Family Mobility and Healthcare report<sup>4</sup>, which provides practical recommendations to inform and tackle disadvantage, as well as improve health outcomes for Armed Forces families.



As a member of the NHS England Armed Forces team and part of a serving family, I have been honoured to work alongside our PPV group. Hearing and being entrusted with their lived experience is nothing short of a privilege and has a direct impact on the work we do.



# Helping Service people transition from the Armed Forces to civilian life

Most serving personnel make the transition from the Armed Forces to civilian life successfully. For some Service leavers and their families, when the change is unplanned or when an individual has complex and enduring health issues, the transition can be more difficult. Service leavers can face a range of barriers in accessing the right care, including a lack of understanding of their illness or injuries and a failure to recognise the impact of traumas they may have experienced in Service. They may also have limited knowledge of the services available to them and may seek treatment options outside the NHS without a proper assessment of their needs.

The Armed Forces PPV Group has helped to drive the development of several support mechanisms, such as:

- collaborating on the design of the Armed Forces Services Leavers' Guide<sup>5</sup>, which offers information, advice and guidance on the discharge process, resettlement, pay, pension, benefits, how to access NHS services and sources of additional support
- developing and delivering an Armed Forces healthcare podcast series to help those leaving the Service understand how they can take ownership of their own health and care
- influencing and supporting policy makers to understand the lived experience of serving in and transitioning from the Armed Forces. In particular, members helped shape key considerations for the effective design of policy and services to reduce homelessness, suicide and gambling in the veteran population
- contributing to Integrated Personalised Care provision for those leaving Service with complex health and care needs to ensure continuity of high quality personal care.

## Did you know...

most health services, including those for the Armed Forces community, are commissioned locally by integrated care boards (ICBs)

# Supporting the NHS to identify veterans and their families to enable targeted healthcare provision

Veterans, their families and carers are a diverse group. Without understanding this population, the NHS cannot offer the support required. The first step in meeting the health needs of veterans and their families is to find ways of identifying them. The first barrier to this is identifying veteran patients, since there is no national record of this information.



Lived experience member Andy Cave has made it his personal mission to encourage GP practices across the Midlands to become accredited as veteran friendly under the RCGP scheme. So far Andy's efforts have resulted in over 80 practices being accredited, which is an outstanding achievement and a great example of the power of lived experience involvement.

To support the NHS with this challenge, the Armed Forces PPV Group has:

- worked with the NHS England Armed Forces Healthcare Commissioning Team and the Royal College of General Practitioners to support GP practices to become veteran friendly accredited
- campaigned for veterans to understand the benefit of declaring their veteran status and ensure this is recorded in their patient record
- participated in veteran awareness training, sharing their lived experiences with healthcare practitioners, including GPs, to help them better understand the Armed Forces population.
- members who are part of the national Veteran Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA) which is a group of NHS providers, including acute, mental health, community, and ambulance trusts that have agreed to be exemplars of the best care for, and support to, the Armed Forces community.



## Driving the design of services to improve the mental health of veterans and their families

Although evidence suggests that veterans health and wellbeing is generally consistent with – or better than – the rest of the population, leaving the Armed Forces and its culture can sometimes create challenges. This can include loss of social support networks, relationship problems and difficulty finding employment.

Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service<sup>6</sup> is an NHS-led service that provides a single point of access to specialist mental health support for those due to leave the military, reservists, veterans and their families. It combines several services (the Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS), the Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment Service (CTS) and the Veterans' Mental Health High Intensity Service (HIS )) into a new personalised care approach and means that veterans can access the most suitable level of service for them across seven geographical regions in England.

## OpCOURAGE

The Armed Forces PPV Group played an instrumental part in the collaborative design, development, branding and launch of Op COURAGE by:

- delivering a presentation on the community's mental health needs at Downing Street
- acting as passionate ambassadors for this service, directing those in need to it and raising its profile among the Armed Forces community, NHS and general public through appearances on a range of media, including podcasts, radio and TV
- helping to develop and deliver engagement activity to inform the Op COURAGE service specification
- supporting the procurement of this service.

Members of the Armed Forces PPV Group have become recognised as thought leaders and influencers on the subject matter of military suicide. They have been invited to participate in research with UK authorities, the NHS and charities to improve the range and quality of suicide prevention services for veterans and their families.

### Jo Brettell (formerly Jukes), Lived Experience Member, Armed Forces PPV Group

Jo's husband LCpl Dave Jukes died from suicide in October 2018 after suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and acute depression. At his inquest, the coroner ruled LCpl Jukes took his own life through PTSD-related suicide and that there were 'missed opportunities' to have helped him. LCpl Jukes' death was recorded as the first military Armed Forces veteran suicide.

Jo has provided invaluable advice and support to academia, the NHS England Armed Forces Healthcare Commissioning Team and charities based on her lived experience to improve understanding and influence service design, as well as raise awareness of the issues facing veterans and their families.



In an interview<sup>7</sup> with ITV News, Jo said,

**“As time goes on it becomes less about me and Dave and even though he’s the person that I originally started it for and because of, it’s not just him. It’s for all the people that served in all their Services and all the families that are supporting them and those who are left behind. I hope that Dave would be proud of what I’ve done.”**

"You do an amazing job. You truly are a great person. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you. I'd be dead or in jail and I mean that."  
Op NOVA service user

# Supporting veterans in the justice system

An estimated 3.6% (1,768) of the prison population in England and Wales<sup>8</sup> is made up of Armed Forces veterans – proportionally low compared to the general population. Veterans with complex needs, however, can be at increased risk of offending if they are not properly supported before, during or after custody and may have long-term and complex needs, including substance and alcohol misuse or mental illness.

The Armed Forces PPV Group have been proactive in working with the NHS England Armed Forces Healthcare Commissioning Team, Service charities and partners to identify and make recommendations on support for veterans within the justice system.

During the period relating to this report, a lived experience member, former Royal Marine Anthony Muckell, wrote a blog about his experiences in the justice system to support others as they readjust to life outside of prison. His insight also guided the development of the specification and evaluation of provider bids for a new service to better support veterans and their families who find themselves in the justice system. Other members of the Armed Forces PPV Group also supported this activity, along with participating in an engagement exercise to inform a name for this new service, which is Op NOVA: Supporting Veterans in the Justice System.



**NHS** This video highlights some of the challenges faced by veterans in the justice system: <https://youtu.be/8B7IDwqZYNM>



# Improving physical health and wellbeing support for veterans

**Op RESTORE: The Veterans Physical Health and Wellbeing Service** is an NHS service that supports individuals who have served in, or are leaving the UK Armed Forces, and have continuing physical health injuries and related medical problems attributed to their time in the Armed Forces.

The service is hosted by Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and works alongside military and civilian medical professionals, along with Armed Forces charities. The Op RESTORE team understands military life and the longer term care and support that may be required for veterans, Service leavers, reservists, families and carers.

Since launching in 2016 and up to December 2023, Op RESTORE has supported over 870 veterans, including 260 since April 2023. Two members of the Armed Forces PPV Group sit on the Op RESTORE Programme Board, with this increasing to three members in 2024. The PPV members help to steer the direction of travel for the service ensuring that the voice of the veteran remains at the heart of all decisions and Op RESTORE continues to be designed by veterans for veterans.

In addition, they have helped to promote Op RESTORE, along with developing its name as part of its evolution from the Veterans Trauma Network. In December 2023, PPV members also attended an Op RESTORE reception at 10 Downing Street to celebrate and acknowledge the positive impact of this service.



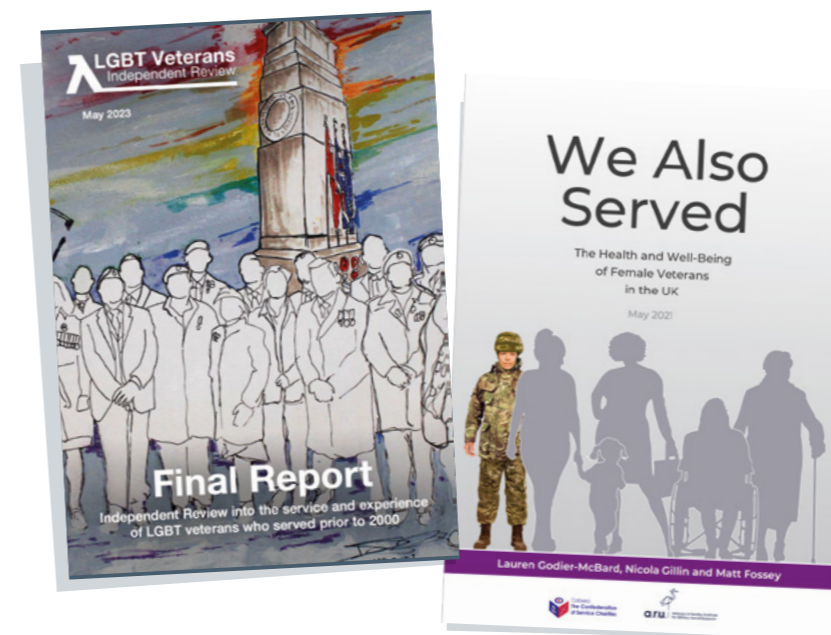
# Supporting the NHS to better identify and address health inequalities

Tackling health inequalities is a key priority for the NHS. The Armed Forces PPV Group works closely with NHS England's Armed Forces Healthcare Commissioning Team to support their understanding of the needs and sensitivities of communities whose voices are seldom heard or who are often overlooked to help ensure services are accessible and meet their needs.



Activities during the period relating to this report include the following:

- Providing insight on a wide range of topics, such as digital accessibility, homelessness, justice system experiences, sexual assault and abuse services, mental health, suicide prevention and bereavement.
- Contributing to ethnic minority, female and LGBT+ forums and working groups, with members from minority groups sitting on a range of NHS and partner forums.
- Working with the NHS England Armed Forces Healthcare Commissioning Team to support understanding of sexual assault and abuse, domestic violence and raise awareness among the community of both relevant civilian and Armed Forces services available to them.
- Supporting the MOD's domestic abuse working group to reduce the prevalence and impact of abuse, increase the safety and wellbeing of all those affected and assist the justice process.



# Driving research and innovation in Armed Forces healthcare

**NHS England has an ambition to support and encourage investment in areas of research and innovation believed to be potentially transformative for the Armed Forces community, including research into areas where the evidence base is less clear.**

The insight provided by the Armed Forces PPV Group has been instrumental in funding multiple research projects into the needs of different sectors of the community. Successes include:

- securing additional resources and facilitating the commissioning of NHS research into the needs and support requirements of minority communities, including LGBT+, women and religious or ethnic minority communities
- ensuring the Armed Forces patient voice is heard through members' additional roles in the healthcare system. This includes the NHS health inequalities forum and NHS employment forums, NHS non-executive director and Chair roles, as well as membership on local and regional patient and public engagement groups.
- gaining funding from the government for further research into the specific needs of women who serve and the inequalities they face. This data will be used to inform future commissioning decisions

**6%**  
of people accessing Op COURAGE are women

# The Armed Forces community as NHS ambassadors

Armed Forces PPV Group members act as ambassadors for Armed Forces healthcare commissioning and regularly represent the Armed Forces community in diverse forums and commemorations. For example, some members of the group were selected and participated in the 75th anniversary of D Day, The Cenotaph parade on Remembrance Sunday and wreath laying at the Memorial Gates on Commonwealth Day. These televised events are watched and commented upon by global audiences. In addition, members ensure the patient voice is heard through their additional NHS integrated care board roles and via regional and local patient and public involvement groups.



**Nicky Murdoch MBE**  
Chair



**Anthony Muckell**



**Karen Ross**



**Rob Munro**  
Primary Care Lead



**Sue Liburd MBE DL**  
Race and Ethnicity Lead  
and Vice Chair



**Rob Hall**



**Chris Cardwell**  
Visual Impairment Lead



**Caz Evans**  
RAF Families Federation



**Eric Crossfield**



**Ali Brown OBE**  
Female Lead and  
LGBT+ Lead



**Jenny Ward**



**Elaine Walker**



**Alison Cotton**



**Rob Shenton**



**Tom Fox**  
Mental Health Lead



**Katie Morris**



**Paul Findlay**  
Trauma Lead



**Alena Gurung**

# Armed Forces health podcast

In 2022, members of the PPV group worked together with The Drive Project<sup>9</sup> to produce a podcast series focussing on Armed Forces health. Each podcast episode focuses on a different aspect of health featuring interviews with PPV members and NHS staff. The podcast can be found on the Defence Medical Services YouTube channel using the QR below:



[youtube.com/playlist?list=PLM9SsyZesWUMICd5AK4u\\_A1USAEZ8LgAj&feature=shared](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLM9SsyZesWUMICd5AK4u_A1USAEZ8LgAj&feature=shared)

## Accessing care and support as a member of the Armed Forces community

For information on NHS services available to the Armed Forces community across England, please visit [www.nhs.uk/armedforceshealth](http://www.nhs.uk/armedforceshealth). The content on these web pages has been informed by members of the Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice Group to help ensure information on dedicated services for the Armed Forces is accessible and easy to understand.

The Armed Forces PPV Group has supported the commissioning, naming, launch and promotion of the following dedicated health services for veterans:

### Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service

Op COURAGE provides a broad range of specialist mental health and wellbeing care and support for Service leavers, reservists, veterans and their families. The mental health or wellbeing concern does not need to be attributable to the person's time in Service.

Individuals can self-refer to their local service or ask a healthcare professional, charity, family member or friend to do this for them.

### Op RESTORE: The Veterans Physical Health and Wellbeing Service

Op RESTORE provides care and treatment to those with ongoing, Service-attributable physical injuries and associated problems. Located in 13 major trauma centres (Plymouth, Oxford, London (three centres), Birmingham, Nottingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Cambridge, Brighton and Middlesbrough), with links to four NHS trusts, the network works closely with Defence Medical Services, national centres of clinical expertise, Op COURAGE and military charities, to provide holistic care.

Access to Op RESTORE requires a GP referral by emailing [imperial.oprestore@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.oprestore@nhs.net)

### Op NOVA: Supporting Veterans in the Justice System

Op NOVA provides one to one non-clinical support to veterans who are at risk of being arrested or already have been, are due to leave prison or have been released from prison. Veterans accessing the service have access to a range of practical and emotional help, along with being supported by an expert case worker.

Forces Employment Charity has been commissioned to provide this service by NHS England. More information can be found at [www.forcesemploymentcharity.org.uk/opnova](http://www.forcesemploymentcharity.org.uk/opnova)

# References

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- 3 [www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/](http://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/)
- 4 [nff.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Duty\\_and\\_Care.pdf](http://nff.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Duty_and_Care.pdf)
- 5 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/service-leavers-pack>
- 6 [www.nhs.uk/opcourage](http://www.nhs.uk/opcourage)
- 7 <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-01-21/widow-of-army-veteran-who-lost-husband-to-ptsd-positive-after-meeting-with-minister>
- 8 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/635960e5d3bf7f0bd83e21d5/Ex-service\\_personnel\\_in\\_the\\_prison\\_population\\_2022.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/635960e5d3bf7f0bd83e21d5/Ex-service_personnel_in_the_prison_population_2022.pdf)
- 9 [www.thedriveproject.co.uk](http://www.thedriveproject.co.uk)

