

Armed Forces Charities' Mental Health Provision

As with all members of society, our life experiences can affect our mental health, and the armed forces community is no exception to this. British military personnel face unique occupational risks and some require specific mental health services tailored to their needs.

Recent statistics from the Ministry of Defence (MoD, 2016) show a 78% increase in the number of armed forces personnel presenting with mental health problems between 2007/08 and 2015/16. It remains unclear whether this increase is driven by the success of anti-stigma campaigns, changes in detection rates and referral behaviour – or a real rise mental health disorders. Regardless, there is an unquestionable need for support from charities.

New research from DSC provides a comprehensive account of the range and diversity of mental health support from UK armed forces charities.



Methodology

- DSC maintains a database containing information on over 1,200 armed forces charities.
- To identify forces charities which make provision for mental health, systematic keyword searches of DSC’s database were conducted in addition to searches on three charity regulator websites: (CCEW, OSCR and CCNI) and charities’ websites.
- Data was gathered via the extensive examination of annual accounts, website content and charity regulator information.
- To bolster our data, DSC also conducted a survey, which achieved a 59% response rate from charities identified within this report.

Key Findings

Level of Provision

76 charities were identified as making provision for mental health. This comprises 6% of all armed forces charities in the UK.

Approximately 7,000-10,000 beneficiaries receive mental health from charities per year. Veterans were the most common type of beneficiaries supported by 91% of charities, followed by serving personnel and spouses/partners, supported by 71% of charities.

Forces charities spend in the region of £28million on mental health provision per year. Approximately one third (34%) of charities are classified as ‘primary’ providers of mental health, where mental health support is their sole primary object.

Services

Three quarters (75%) of charities provide support for PTSD, one half provided support for depression and anxiety (57%) and over two thirds for substance misuse (44%). Less than one fifth (18%) of charities in our dataset provide clinical treatments. The most popular mental health services is counselling (offered by 45% of charities), followed by helplines and recreational activities (40% respectively).

‘With respect to mental health services and ex-service personnel, decisions on delivery, funding and even times of treatment are often too vulnerable to a lack of understanding. We hope that this report, will bring insight to those involved in supporting our armed forces.’

Air Vice-Marshal Ray Lock, Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust



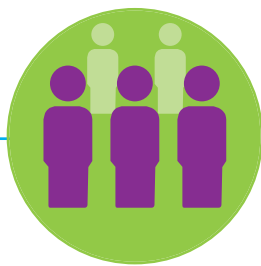
76

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Forces charities spend over £28million on mental health provision per year.



7,000-10,000

7,000-10,000 beneficiaries access mental health support from charities per year

Collaboration & Evaluation

Over two thirds (68%) of our survey respondents collaborated with other charities to deliver metal health support. Whilst over a third (35%) partnered with the NHS. Evaluation by University was the most popular form of evaluation, undertaken by 12 charities. Relatively few charities (5 in total) had conducted randomised control tests of their services.



6%

of forces charities deliver mental health provision



68%

collaborated with other charities to deliver metal health support



35%

partnered with the NHS

Conclusions and recommendations

In mapping the diverse range of mental health provision available from forces charities, this report has largely debunked the frequently cited myth that ‘there are too many service charities’.

Approximately 6% of forces charities deliver mental health provision, many of which provide extremely specialist services.

During analysis, DSC found that many charities’ failed to clearly communicate what provision they make for mental health. DSC therefore, recommends increasing public facing information on services provided in order to and enable more collaboration, signposting and public understanding of services on offer.

DSC also found that few charities reported adopting statutory guidelines of best practice although this is not necessarily indicative of non-compliance, as some non-clinical (81% of providers) services may not be fully evidence based.

DSC recommends that service charities adopt standardised principles of veterans’ care, such as Greenberg’s MAC Principles; which can be recognised by beneficiaries, other charities and statutory care professionals.

This is particularly relevant for clinical providers of mental health care notably, membership organisations such as Cobseo and Veterans Scotland have recently taken steps to encourage the widespread adoption of quality standards.

About the report

DSC's armed forces research continues to be generously funded by Forces in Mind Trust.

The authors would like to thank all armed forces charities which provided invaluable information during the data-collection phase of the project.

Special thanks go to Veterans Scotland, Cobseo and Combat Stress for their support during the writing process.



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About DSC

The Directory of Social Change (DSC) has a vision of an independent voluntary sector at the heart of social change.

We help independent charities, voluntary organisations and community groups to achieve their goals by:

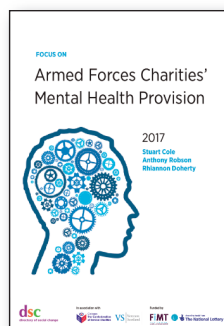
- Providing practical tools that organisations and activists need, including publications, training courses, and conferences. and research
- Acting as a 'concerned citizen' in public policy debates, Leading campaigns and stimulating debate on key policy issues
- Carrying out research and providing information to influence policymakers

This publication is the first of six thematic reports, to be delivered during 2017-2019 as part of DSC's Focus On series, which illuminates the armed forces charity sector.

The series follows on from DSC's two Sector Insight reports, UK Armed Forces Charities, 2014 and Armed Forces Charities in Scotland, 2016.



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