

# Armed Forces Charities' Physical Health Provision

The UK armed forces population is estimated to include over ten million individuals, some of which may have physical health problems. Within the past year over 2,500 Serving-personnel were medically discharged.

Physical health provision refers to services which promote the recovery, fitness and general good health of the armed forces community. It also includes services, which are directed specifically at beneficiaries with physical health problems, which more broadly aim to improve their quality of life, such as housing, employment and social inclusion services.

Many charities offer physical health support regardless of whether injury/illness is attributable to Service or not, most provide 'support for life' which often extends beyond beneficiaries' military careers and is especially relevant to an ageing veteran population.



# Methodology

- DSC maintains a database containing information on over 1,200 armed forces charities.
- To identify forces charities which make provision for education and employment, systematic keyword searches of DSCs database, the three UK charity regulator websites: (CCEW, OSCR and CCNI).
- Data was also gathered via extensive examination of individual charities' annual accounts, website content, and where available impact reports.
- To bolster this data, DSC also conducted a survey, which achieved a 48.8% response rate from charities represented within this report.

## Key Findings

### Level of Provision

In total, 121 charities were identified as making provision for physical health, which accounts for approximately 10% of all armed forces charities in the UK. At least 250,000 beneficiaries accessed physical health services within the previous year. This was 7 times greater than the number of beneficiaries accessing education/employment (N≈35,000) and 25 times greater than the number accessing mental health (N≈10,000) services within the same period

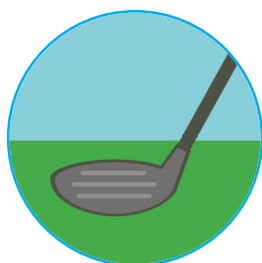
Forces charities dedicated at least £103million to physical health provision within the last year. Again, this was substantially greater than the amount dedicated to education/employment (N≈£26million) and mental health (N≈£28million) in 2016.

### Range of Services

Charities were found to undertake a wide variety of services, which included clinical and holistic approaches to physical healthcare. Services ranged from accessible housing to nursing care and adapted scuba diving.

The most commonly provided physical service was recreation, delivered by over two-fifths (41%) of charities, closely followed by adapted housing (38%) and sports/fitness programmes (37%).

Only 17% of charities delivered 'clinical services' i.e. services administered by a qualified healthcare professional, such as nursing or physiotherapy.



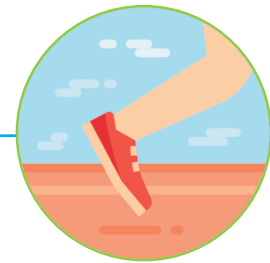
41%

provide recreational activities



38%

provide adapted housing



32%

of charities provide sports/fitness programmes

## Collaboration & Evaluation

DSC found extensive collaboration within the voluntary sector, almost two-thirds (61%) of charities partner with other voluntary organisations. However, partnership with the NHS (17%) and MoD healthcare services (14%) were less common.

The vast majority of charities which delivered clinical services themselves (N=19) were found to adhere to clinical guidelines or accepted best practice. In total, 90% were registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) or national equivalents (SCC and RQIA). Almost one-third (30%) also followed NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) and NMC (Nursing and Midwifery Council).

Less than one-half (45%) of charities evaluated the impact of their health services. When undertaken, questionnaires were the most popular method of evaluation, carried out by roughly one-third (33%) of charities.



61%

partnered with other charities



17%

partnered with the NHS



17%

partnered with MOD healthcare services

## Conclusions and recommendations

In mapping the diverse range of physical health provision available from forces charities, this report has largely debunked the perennial myth that 'there are too many service charities'. Only one-tenth of all forces charities deliver physical health support, and fewer still (N=40) are 'primary providers' of physical health support i.e. this is their main charitable remit.

Cross-sector collaboration should be encouraged in order to avoid duplication, and is a valuable means by which to share resources and expertise. This is evident in some recently launched initiatives, such as the Veterans Trauma Network and The Hospital Alliance.

Although the majority of clinical providers adhered to clinical care guidelines, in some cases, details of registration and outcomes were difficult to obtain. DSC recommends that charities providing clinical services ensure that they are transparent about adherence to guidelines, in order to promote public trust and better inform their beneficiaries.

Additionally, DSC recommends that all charities should show greater commitment to measuring their impact, which would help them to assess whether services were effective and identify any gaps in provision.

## About the report

DSCs armed forces research continues to be generously funded by Forces in Mind Trust.

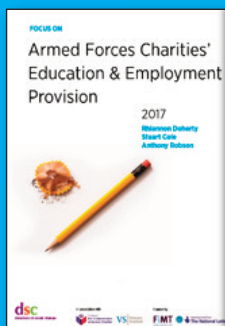
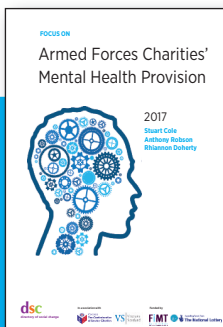
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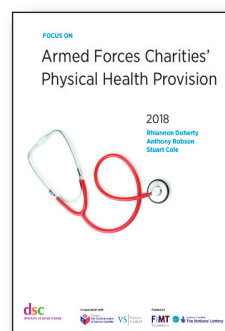
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We help independent charities, voluntary organisations and community groups to achieve their goals by:

- Providing practical tools that organisations and activists need, including publications, training courses, 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.



*'This detailed report provides an important insight into the physical health support a relatively small number of charities provide to the Armed Forces Community across the UK.'*  
**Air Vice-Marshal Ray Lock, Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust.**

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