

Community JSNA “Have you served?” project 2018

Project approach

Background

Introduced in 2000, the Armed Forces Covenant is a statement of society’s collective obligation to ensure that those who serve in the Armed Forces “should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services”, and in some cases (e.g. when injured) may be entitled to special consideration (e.g. expedited care).

In recent years, steps have been taken by local authorities, healthcare providers and others to identify and address gaps in the provision of services that might disadvantage ex-service men and women. The NHS, for example, now employs teams of specialists in mental health who have an expert understanding of the armed forces. The Royal College of GPs supports a Military Veteran Aware Accreditation scheme, which allows practices to qualify for veteran friendly status if they can offer additional support to ex-military personnel. Much of this work has focused on support provided by statutory bodies (e.g. MoD; NHS), but many veteran-specific services are provided by voluntary, community, and faith sector (VCFS) organisations.

In 2011 the CVS Community JSNA project conducted research exploring veterans’ experiences of accessing healthcare support through their local NHS providers, and invited GP practices to share their experiences of supporting veterans in their surgeries. Following on from this research, the 2018 project aimed to better understand the broader provision of services available to veterans in Cheshire East by examining the needs of those veterans who seek support, and the types of support offered by local VCFS organisations.

Aims and objectives

Aim:

To better understand the existing provision of voluntary, community and faith sector services to military veterans within Cheshire East.

Objectives:

- To identify the needs of veterans in Cheshire East.
- To identify gaps in the provision of services to veterans in Cheshire East.
- To identify opportunities for improvement in the provision of services to veterans in Cheshire East.

During scoping of the project, stakeholders asked for the estimated numbers of veterans to be calculated and as a result, the public health intelligence team at Cheshire East Council undertook the analysis and provided this information, together with numbers of those in receipt of armed forces compensation or pension schemes. They also provided key findings from national surveys to

estimate the numbers of veterans in Cheshire East with different health needs and employment status. This information has been incorporated into the Community JSNA report.

Engagement with veterans and VCFS organisations in Cheshire East

In order to better understand the provision of services within Cheshire East, the project generated data on the views and experiences of:

- a. Veterans who are accessing support, and
- b. Staff who work for the VCFS organisations that provide veterans with support.

Veterans

The project aimed to engage with all veterans who were seeking or accessing support in Cheshire East in order to understand any similarities and differences in the needs, priorities, and experiences of veterans from different age groups (e.g. retired; working age) and military backgrounds (e.g. length of service; type of military role). For this project a 'veteran' was defined as "anyone who has served for at least one day in HM Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve) or Merchant Mariners who has seen duty on legally defined operations" (MoD).

Data on veterans' assessment of their health and wellbeing needs and their experiences of accessing services were generated through an online survey and a small number of interviews. The online survey was distributed to veterans via VCFS service providers and publicised by CVS, through social media channels, and in the local press. Researchers also attended several veteran-focused events, including Crewe Armed Forces Day, where a paper copy of the survey was also made available.

35 veterans completed the survey. Two of the veterans who completed the survey also participated in a one-to-one qualitative interview over the phone. A small focus group of veterans was also arranged by a service provider: two veterans attended.

VCFS Organisations

The project sought to engage with two types of VCFS service provider:

- Organisations whose services are commissioned (e.g. by Clinical Commissioning Groups)
- Organisations that are operating independently.

Service providers were identified with the help of the designated Armed Forces lead Community Development Officer at Cheshire East Council and the CVS Cheshire East database. The project also worked extensively with the Cheshire East Armed Forces Network, which had been established by the Armed Forces lead Community Development Officer.

Representatives from 14 service providers completed the survey, nine of whom also participated in an in-depth face-to-face qualitative interview. Two offered further insights via email or over the phone.

Review of the literature and secondary data sources

A review of existing research and secondary data sources informed both the research design (e.g. survey questions), and the analysis and reporting of the data generated by the surveys, interviews and focus groups.

Triangulating the findings from the Community JSNA project with existing research and data on the health and wellbeing needs of the veteran population and their experiences of accessing services enabled comparisons to be made between national and local populations. It also facilitated evaluation of the scope and limitations of the Community JSNA data, ensuring claims made in the report are reliable and accompanied by caveats where necessary.

Secondary sources included:

- National surveys of veterans (e.g. British Legion Household Survey, 2014; ONS Annual Population Survey);
- Local surveys of veterans (e.g. those conducted by NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups in Portsmouth and Liverpool to explore veterans' experiences of accessing local healthcare services);
- Academic research (e.g. studies conducted by Kings College Centre for Military Health Research);
- Accounts from service providers that include a review of their activities and reach (e.g. SSAFA Impact Reports; British Royal Legion Annual Reports).

Recommendations

The opportunities for improvement identified in the Community JSNA report were discussed and agreed with the commissioners of veterans' services and the Cheshire East Armed Forces Network and Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector key contributors.

Partners

We would like to thank the following organisations for the valuable contribution they made to this project and its recommendations.

- Age UK Cheshire East
- Blind Veterans UK
- Combat Stress
- Cheshire East Council Homelessness and Home Choice
- Defence Medical Welfare Services (DMWS)
- Help for Heroes
- LOL Foundation
- Project Nova
- PTSD Resolution
- The RAF Association
- Royal British Legion

- SSAFA
- Veteran to Veteran Counselling