

# Speech: Defence Secretary Op-Ed for the Mail on Sunday on mental health

Our Armed Forces do a magnificent job. It's my privilege to see the incredible work they do all around the globe – every hour of every day. In Iraq I've spoken to our impressive air men and women who have been hammering barbaric Daesh fighters in Iraq to destroy the death cult that has brought bloodshed to the streets of Britain. In Poland I've met inspirational soldiers – not simply supporting and leading NATO missions in Eastern Europe but underpinning our security at home. And in the North Atlantic and the Gulf I've listened to the sailors protecting our precious undersea communications cables and patrolling our vital trading routes. All the while, our dedicated submariners maintain our nuclear deterrent – our nation's ultimate armour against the most extreme threats to our way of life.

These people are the greatest of their generation. And they have the right to expect more than simply the best jets, warships and tanks to help them do their duty. It is also their right to expect the best possible support care on and off the battlefield. In the not too distant past that would have meant treating the physical scars of conflict. There wouldn't have been much thought about helping heal the invisible wounds war leaves behind. But times have changed. We now understand the importance of a healthy mind as well as a healthy body. That's why the Ministry of Defence is now spending around £20 million a year on mental health services to treat the trauma life on the front line can bring. But while things have vastly improved – they are not perfect. We should never be too afraid or too timid to tackle the stigma of mental illness and look at new ways to offer help. That's why I want to commend the Mail on Sunday's Helpline for Heroes campaign for shining the spotlight on this critically important issue. It's simply unacceptable that serving personnel with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, suicidal or negative thoughts, should suffer in silence.

So I have now agreed to spend an extra £20m over the next decade to improve mental health services in the Armed Forces – £2m more every year for vital services. That's at least £220m over the next 10 years. Today we launch the Military Mental Health Helpline for serving personnel and their families while bolstering the care currently on offer. We are forming a deeper partnership with Combat Stress – the leading charity in the UK for supporting veterans with mental health problems. The charity already helps a small number of serving personnel through their 24-hour helpline, but we will be enhancing this service with additional funds and creating the entirely new Military Mental Health Helpline with its own memorable number – 0800 323 4444. This will be specifically targeted at serving personnel and their families – allowing them to access help anywhere, anytime. It will be staffed by professionals and will benefit from improved information sharing with the military, so those in need get the vital help they need. We have examined the choices closely and believe this will deliver the best service for our Armed Forces.

The freephone number will take calls from midday today. And it will be backed up by a major internal marketing campaign. The truth is we've not always been the best at talking about these issues in the military. So I will personally be working with the Service Chiefs to make sure there isn't a single person in the forces who doesn't know where to turn in times of trouble.

But I don't just want people to know who to call when they need to talk to someone. I want them to know what else is on offer.

I want them to know about the 20 sites providing mental health care for the military in the UK and abroad – bringing together psychiatrists, mental health nurses, clinical psychologists and social workers to help manage the mental health needs of those in difficulty.

I want them to know about the service provided by NHS England – the Transition, Intervention and Liaison Mental Health Service – which seeks to increase the access to, and treatment of, mental health services for those approaching discharge who may have mental health needs.

I want them to know more about the Veterans Gateway – offering current and former personnel support on everything from financial assistance to property problems.

I want them to know about our ground-breaking partnership with Prince Harry and the Royal Foundation – raising awareness about the importance of good mental fitness, drawing on the best research and putting a wealth of information online.

And I want them to know we have a mental health strategy that can work for them. It's about educating our chain of command and working with our people and their families. It's about spotting the early warning signs of mental illness. It's about encouraging those who need help to get it quickly. And it's about prevention – building that vital awareness of good mental health fitness into training so that our troops are better equipped to deal with operational stress before, during and after combat as well as the stresses of day-to-day living that we all experience.

Next month the King's Centre for Military Health Research will be holding a conference uniting leading experts from across the UK and the world to discuss mental health challenges encountered by personnel from the day they join through to retirement. Their work is increasingly important.

As the dangers our nation faces become ever more intense and ever more complex, whether from aggressive states such as Russia, terrorism or cyber warfare, it's vital for us to keep our brave men and women at the top of their game both physically and mentally.

But there's always more we can do to help those who find themselves isolated or feeling low. So make no mistake, it is one of my top priorities as Defence Secretary to make sure everyone in the Armed Forces feels valued.

At home, as well as across the world, our Service personnel remain Britain's

finest. And if the ever-evolving nature of conflict demands that we keep adapting our approach then, have no doubt, we are ready and willing to do so. No-one in our Armed Forces need suffer in silence. Our heroic men and women are the backbone of our nation. They lay their lives on the line for us every single day. They are the very best of British. And they deserve nothing less than the very best support.

---

## [Speech: Defence Secretary Op-Ed for the Mail on Sunday on mental health](#)

Our Armed Forces do a magnificent job. It's my privilege to see the incredible work they do all around the globe – every hour of every day. In Iraq I've spoken to our impressive air men and women who have been hammering barbaric Daesh fighters in Iraq to destroy the death cult that has brought bloodshed to the streets of Britain. In Poland I've met inspirational soldiers– not simply supporting and leading NATO missions in Eastern Europe but underpinning our security at home. And in the North Atlantic and the Gulf I've listened to the sailors protecting our precious undersea communications cables and patrolling our vital trading routes. All the while, our dedicated submariners maintain our nuclear deterrent – our nation's ultimate armour against the most extreme threats to our way of life.

These people are the greatest of their generation. And they have the right to expect more than simply the best jets, warships and tanks to help them do their duty. It is also their right to expect the best possible support care on and off the battlefield. In the not too distant past that would have meant treating the physical scars of conflict. There wouldn't have been much thought about helping heal the invisible wounds war leaves behind. But times have changed. We now understand the importance of a healthy mind as well as a healthy body. That's why the Ministry of Defence is now spending around £20 million a year on mental health services to treat the trauma life on the front line can bring. But while things have vastly improved – they are not perfect. We should never be too afraid or too timid to tackle the stigma of mental illness and look at new ways to offer help. That's why I want to commend the Mail on Sunday's Helpline for Heroes campaign for shining the spotlight on this critically important issue. It's simply unacceptable that serving personnel with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, suicidal or negative thoughts, should suffer in silence.

So I have now agreed to spend an extra £20m over the next decade to improve mental health services in the Armed Forces – £2m more every year for vital services. That's at least £220m over the next 10 years. Today we launch the Military Mental Health Helpline for serving personnel and their families while bolstering the care currently on offer. We are forming a deeper partnership with Combat Stress – the leading charity in the UK for supporting

veterans with mental health problems. The charity already helps a small number of serving personnel through their 24-hour helpline, but we will be enhancing this service with additional funds and creating the entirely new Military Mental Health Helpline with its own memorable number – 0800 323 4444. This will be specifically targeted at serving personnel and their families – allowing them to access help anywhere, anytime. It will be staffed by professionals and will benefit from improved information sharing with the military, so those in need get the vital help they need. We have examined the choices closely and believe this will deliver the best service for our Armed Forces.

The freephone number will take calls from midday today. And it will be backed up by a major internal marketing campaign. The truth is we've not always been the best at talking about these issues in the military. So I will personally be working with the Service Chiefs to make sure there isn't a single person in the forces who doesn't know where to turn in times of trouble.

But I don't just want people to know who to call when they need to talk to someone. I want them to know what else is on offer.

I want them to know about the 20 sites providing mental health care for the military in the UK and abroad – bringing together psychiatrists, mental health nurses, clinical psychologists and social workers to help manage the mental health needs of those in difficulty.

I want them to know about the service provided by NHS England – the Transition, Intervention and Liaison Mental Health Service – which seeks to increase the access to, and treatment of, mental health services for those approaching discharge who may have mental health needs.

I want them to know more about the Veterans Gateway – offering current and former personnel support on everything from financial assistance to property problems.

I want them to know about our ground-breaking partnership with Prince Harry and the Royal Foundation – raising awareness about the importance of good mental fitness, drawing on the best research and putting a wealth of information online.

And I want them to know we have a mental health strategy that can work for them. It's about educating our chain of command and working with our people and their families. It's about spotting the early warning signs of mental illness. It's about encouraging those who need help to get it quickly. And it's about prevention – building that vital awareness of good mental health fitness into training so that our troops are better equipped to deal with operational stress before, during and after combat as well as the stresses of day-to-day living that we all experience.

Next month the King's Centre for Military Health Research will be holding a conference uniting leading experts from across the UK and the world to discuss mental health challenges encountered by personnel from the day they

join through to retirement. Their work is increasingly important.

As the dangers our nation faces become ever more intense and ever more complex, whether from aggressive states such as Russia, terrorism or cyber warfare, it's vital for us to keep our brave men and women at the top of their game both physically and mentally.

But there's always more we can do to help those who find themselves isolated or feeling low. So make no mistake, it is one of my top priorities as Defence Secretary to make sure everyone in the Armed Forces feels valued.

At home, as well as across the world, our Service personnel remain Britain's finest. And if the ever-evolving nature of conflict demands that we keep adapting our approach then, have no doubt, we are ready and willing to do so. No-one in our Armed Forces need suffer in silence. Our heroic men and women are the backbone of our nation. They lay their lives on the line for us every single day. They are the very best of British. And they deserve nothing less than the very best support.

---

## [Press release: Transformational investment in off-road self-driving technology](#)

- 22 connected and autonomous vehicle (CAVs) R&D projects will share funding to boost the UK's leadership in disruptive technologies and services which will shape the future of transport
- a central part of the government's [Industrial Strategy](#), the successful projects include the development of off-road autonomous technology that will look to improve productivity in industries such as mining and construction
- the £22.4 million investment will bring the total number of government funded R&D projects in self-driving vehicles to 73, in a portfolio worth around £180 million with over £120 million of government grants.

Off-road autonomous vehicles that will operate in some of the most extreme environments and could revolutionise productivity in the construction and mining industries is just one of the projects supported by government in the latest round of autonomous vehicle funding.

Automotive Minister Richard Harrington has announced a total of 22 projects

that will be supported through the latest round of connected and autonomous vehicles (CAV) funding, including projects from sector-leading companies such as Jaguar Land Rover and Caterpillar.

The £22.4 million of government funding will also be used on projects to develop technology that will allow self-driving vehicles to function in situations where weather visibility is so poor human drivers would struggle to navigate, while other projects will look to trial autonomous 'Mobility as a Service' (Maas) services in London, Cambridge and Didcot.

The funding builds on the government's Industrial Strategy commitment to ensure the UK is a world-leader in new technologies that will boost our competitiveness, and is a central part of our Future of Mobility Grand Challenge which includes a commitment to have fully self-driving vehicles on UK roads by 2021.

[Automotive Minister Richard Harrington talks about the CAV3 Competition announcement](#)

Automotive Minister Richard Harrington said:

Through these competitions, we are offering innovative businesses support to take their projects to the next level and help them achieve commercial success. The projects that we are nurturing mean that we are a step closer to securing our place as a world leader in self-driving vehicles.

This significant investment is a mark of the innovation that is at the heart of our modern Industrial Strategy. The development of new technologies is a cornerstone of the UK's world-class science and research and will ensure that we deliver a Britain fit for the future by creating jobs and the skills needed to succeed.

Other projects include looking into solving drivers' parking woes with the consortia Parkopedia Limited using their funding to develop autonomous valet parking systems (AVP) which will allow drivers to leave their car at their final destination and the car will park itself. And T-CABS will use its funding to build a fleet of 15 seat pods and use them to demonstrate a fare paying public transport service in Cambridge. These investments mean the UK Government is now supporting 73 connected and autonomous vehicle R&D projects; a portfolio worth around £180 million.

These investments mean the UK Government is now supporting 73 connected and autonomous vehicle R&D projects; a portfolio worth around £180 million.

Innovate UK Chief Executive Ruth McKernan said:

The quality and commercial potential of these successful projects demonstrate how UK businesses are developing pioneering connected and autonomous vehicle technologies. The impact will benefit our

thriving automotive industry and the economy as a whole.

The government will be launching further competitions later this year worth up to £45 million in total. This includes the second CAV testing infrastructure competition with Meridian, the UK's CAV coordination hub, and a further CAV R&D competition.

[List of CAV3 Competition winners](#) (MS Word Document, 47.8KB)

---

## **Press release: Defence Secretary shows commitment to Armed Forces mental health with over £220-million funding and new helpline**

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson has today (25 February) pledged to increase funding for Armed Forces mental health services to £220-million over the next decade and launched the new 24/7 Military Mental Health Helpline.

The new number – 0800 323 4444 – will be open and ready to take calls from midday today (Sunday). It will be backed up by a major internal communications campaign on mental fitness across the services.

The Armed Forces mental health services will also be boosted by an extra £2million a year, it was announced today.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Every hour of every day our safety, security and way of life are protected by our courageous Armed Forces personnel. They are always there for us – often risking life and limb and making huge personal sacrifices – and we must be there for them in their own time of need.

Mental illnesses caused by life on the battlefield can have a devastating impact on our brave heroes and their families. It is our moral and professional duty to ensure that we do all we can for our world class troops.

That's why we have commissioned the new 24/7 Military Mental Health Helpline and will spend an extra £2-million a year on mental health services for the next decade on top of the £20-million we already spend each year.

I will personally be working with all the service chiefs to make sure there isn't a single person in the forces who doesn't know where to turn in times of trouble.

0800 323 4444 will be targeted at serving personnel and their families – allowing them to access the help, advice and support they need anywhere, anytime.

Surgeon General of the British Armed Forces Major General Martin Bricknell said:

This number will complement the range of mental health services, including our Departments of Community Mental Health, which we provide for our serving personnel. It is important to deliver a holistic service to ensure our Armed Forces have every opportunity to access the help and care they need and deserve. We must do all we can to provide easy access to the support available.

0800 323 4444 will act as a memorable and accessible gateway to mental health services for service personnel and their families.

Combat Stress – the leading veterans mental health charity – has been commissioned to run the new helpline service for serving troops 24 hours a day. The new line will be backed up by a deeper partnership between the MOD and the charity and run by a team of specially-trained professionals. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) will provide additional funds to enhance Combat Stress' existing service – predominantly aimed at veterans – and are working together to develop information sharing processes with the military to ensure any serving service personnel in crisis are provided with the appropriate support tailored for their needs.

Chief Executive of Combat Stress Sue Freeth said:

We welcome the opportunity to work with the MOD to provide mental health support to serving personnel. A significant minority of servicemen and women develop mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. We know they can delay seeking treatment while in the Armed Forces, with some preferring to come forward for help after they have left the military.

Left untreated, mental health problems can become more complex and have a devastating impact on those with the condition, as well as their loved ones. It's vital that people seek help as soon as they notice a change in their mental health.

Combat Stress has delivered a 24-hour Helpline service since 2011. With almost a century's experience of supporting veterans with mental health issues, we have the knowledge, expertise and



understanding to assist serving personnel.

The Combat Stress helpline is the only service in the country, tailored towards the Armed Forces community, which talks to callers whilst simultaneously providing practical help by calling the emergency services if needed.

Alongside this announcement, the Defence Secretary has also agreed to spend an extra £2-million a year for the next ten years to improve mental health services in the Armed Forces on top of the £20-million per year that is currently committed. The additional money, which brings the total planned spending to £220-million over the next decade, will be put towards an increase in mental health specialists and bolstering existing provision.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

Wellbeing is not just about physical fitness but mental fitness too. Perhaps as we can't see it, and are less inclined to step forward, mental fitness has not received the attention it deserves. The brain is just another muscle we must look after.

By choosing to work with Combat Stress, we are deliberately choosing to work with the leading organisation in the country for providing this specialist mental health service. We are changing the stigma associated with mental health.

It's a complex science and there is always room for improvement. Therefore we will be building a stronger and deeper partnership with Combat Stress to deliver the best possible service for our people.

The MOD currently has a network of 20 'hub and spoke' mental health centres, comprising of 11 hubs and a further nine teams. Regular visiting clinics are also held at other military centres across the country.

Last year the MOD launched its Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy focusing on preventative measures to protect our personnel. MOD also partnered with the Royal Foundation, a charity setup by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry, to improve training and education alongside the strategy to promote mental fitness.

There are a range of services provided by partners working with MOD and through the Armed Forces Covenant, including the NHS, other Government departments and charities which serving personnel, veterans, and their families can access.

Ends

Notes to editors:

- You can read Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson's OpEd [here](#).
  - Defence images can be found on [www.defenceimagery.mod.uk](http://www.defenceimagery.mod.uk).
  - The UK Armed Forces Mental Health Annual Statistics: Financial Year 2016/2017 can be found [here](#).
  - For more information, please contact the MOD press office on 020 7218 7907.
- 

## [News story: UN Security Council: explanation of vote on the Syria resolution](#)

On 24 February the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2401 demanding a cessation of hostilities in Syria to enable delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The United Kingdom welcomes the adoption of Resolution 2401 and in particular we applaud your work, together with Sweden as penholders.

But this is not a moment for self-congratulation. It's taken us far too long to agree this resolution. While we have been arguing over commas, Assad's planes have been killing more civilians in their homes and in their hospitals, imposing unbearable suffering. And despite the amount of time we have spent in this chamber over many years discussing the devastating humanitarian crisis, we have still not been able to achieve the peace and security that the Syrian people so desperately need.

As the conflict enters its eighth year, the situation in Eastern Ghouta and elsewhere in the country is far worse than we ever thought imaginable. The barbarity and depravity of the Assad regime shows no limits.

We must never lose sight of the fact that the pictures we see and the stories we hear from this comfortable chamber are the agonising reality for hundreds of thousands of civilians. For men, women and children who are being forced to eke out an existence underground to avoid being killed by a regime that commits daily atrocities against its own people.

I've heard some say that the information about the situation in Eastern Ghouta is propaganda. A doctor in Eastern Ghouta, having heard these comments, said this morning: "Amid the chaos and the bombs, it is not being believed that almost hurts the most. We are dying here every day and when people say that they do not believe us, that is pain upon pain."

This isn't propaganda; it is a living hell for hundreds of thousands of residents of Eastern Ghouta. As we have repeated many times, the intentional and systematic targeting of civilians and civilian objects not only violates international humanitarian law, it is a war crime. And the UK will be unrelenting in our campaign to ensure accountability.

By voting in favour of this resolution today, we are standing up and saying that we will not stand by and let this happen. In the face of escalating violence, devastation and suffering, we must all now take practical steps to improve the situation for those living and dying in a hell of one man's making. This resolution demonstrates our resolve to put a stop to the brutal violence. It demands all parties cease hostilities without delay. That means right now; immediately.

The role and responsibility of this Council does not end with the passage of this resolution. Quite the opposite. All UN Member States, but particularly Council Members, must now take responsibility for ensuring that this resolution is implemented in full, without delay.

The resolution calls for the Council to review implementation within 15 days, but we must all be active in supporting and monitoring implementation from the moment we step out of this room.

If we see any of the parties violate the terms of this resolution, we must bring it back to the Council immediately.

Those with any influence over the Syrian regime – Russia, Iran – have a particular responsibility to ensure that this ceasefire is respected in full and without delay, that all sieges are ended and that humanitarian aid is delivered. This is the absolute minimum that the people of Syria deserve.

As much as we welcome the passing of this resolution today, it is only a small step.

Just as 1 aid convoy in 3 months to a besieged area cannot even begin to address the humanitarian crisis, one resolution alone cannot solve the situation in Syria. We must do everything in our collective power to ensure that this resolution is effective in delivering for those whom we have failed to date. And we must all send a clear message to the Assad regime: abandon your attempt to pursue a military strategy; stop fighting and engage seriously in UN-led political talks in Geneva.

In conclusion, let me reiterate the words of my Foreign Secretary. The entire world is looking at the Assad regime, Russia and Iran: you hold the keys not only to the end of this obscene conflict, but to the safety, humanitarian aid and basic medical treatment that is being denied to millions of people right now in Syria. For the mother giving birth underground in Eastern Ghouta, for the child unable to learn as schools are closed for yet another day, for the doctor battling airstrikes to treat patients in Idlib, all of us sitting here today owe it to the people of Syria to work together, with renewed and unyielding energy, to achieve a political solution that will bring peace to the Syrian people.