

New study to understand effect of COVID-19 on veterans

The work is sponsored by the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) and will be undertaken by the world leading King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR), King's College London.

The study will look at whether COVID-19 has had any specific impact on the veteran community in the UK. This in turn will allow policy makers in government to understand potential issues affecting veterans and respond accordingly based on expert advice and evidence.

The work will collect data on loneliness, social support, alcohol consumption, mental health, gambling and general well-being. It will also explore the resilience of veterans and whether their experiences in the Armed Forces have actually better prepared them for the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data will be collected through an online survey starting on Monday 15th June.

The OVA has been working closely with the charity sector throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This has included the creation of a £6 million COVID-19 impact fund, to support charities to continue their essential work during this challenging period. This new study is a further important step to ensuring that government continues to drive forward its ambition to ensure the UK is the best place to be a veteran anywhere in the world.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

We have seen a great contribution from veterans during the pandemic; from the amazing Captain Sir Tom Moore, to all those who have volunteered in their communities.

It is important that we understand the effect of this terrible pandemic on the veteran community too, so we can provide effective support, tailored to their needs.

This new study is an important part of that.

Co-Director of the KCMHR, King's College London, Professor Sir Simon Wessely said:

This study has been measuring the health and well-being of a large sample of our Armed Forces, starting in 2003. We have followed their progress, some for nearly 20 years, through service in conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and then as many returned to civilian life.

Now it is time to see how they are coping with a different challenge, that of COVID-19.

The first results of this new work focussed on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are expected to be published in autumn/winter 2020.

KCMHR will draw on their world-leading research into veterans' health and for this study researchers will be approaching those veterans living in the UK who took part in the last KCMHR health and wellbeing study (2014-2016).

This forms part of a unique cohort of 20,000 former service personnel that was originally created in 2003 to monitor the mental health and social consequences of deployment and has become a reliable and trusted source of information on mental health and wellbeing of both serving personnel and veterans.

The Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA), which was created last year, is ensuring that the whole of government is delivering better outcomes for veterans, particularly in areas such as mental health, employment and housing. It is working in partnership with government departments, the Devolved Administrations and charities to coordinate activity across the United Kingdom.

The Role of the OVA includes:

- Pulling together all functions of government, and better coordinating charity sector provision, in order to ensure this nation's life-long duty to those who have served
- Ensuring that every single veteran and their family knows where to turn to access support when required
- Helping to generate a 'single view of the veteran' by making better use of data to understand veterans' needs and where gaps in provision exist
- Improving the perception of veterans