

News story: MOD launches Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Tobias Ellwood, Minister for Defence People and Veterans, has today launched an innovative strategy to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the Armed Forces, their families, veterans, and Defence civilians.

While rates of mental disorder are slightly lower in the Armed Forces (3.2%) than in the general population (3.5%), the challenge of improving the mental health of the MOD's entire workforce is an important one. The Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2022, launched by Mr Ellwood at an international conference with counterparts from the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, builds on five years of research and aims to build a coordinated approach to prevent, detect, and treat mental health and wellbeing issues, as well as introduce measures to promote the importance of mental health.

The new Strategy will include plans to:

- Encompass all Defence People – serving Armed Forces members (Regulars and Reserves), military families, veterans, and MOD civil servants;
- Introduce standardised mental health and wellbeing education and training for all those working in Defence;
- Invest in research on resilience training to ensure that individuals are as mentally fit as they can be to prevent depression and anxiety and monitoring of groups who are more likely to suffer from mental health issues, such as combat troops and medical personnel in support of them;
- Improve access to clinical assessment (such as through digital delivery) and prioritisation for treatment;
- Develop partnerships with key service charities in order to continue anti-stigma campaigning initiatives and share best practice;
- Improve communication to the workforce about what help is on offer.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

A fitter force is a more effective force and keeping our people

healthy helps keep this country safe. This new strategy recognises the importance of mental health, alongside physical injuries and will improve the prevention, detection, and treatment of mental health issues which is vital to the wellbeing of our military.

I'm also delighted to host Ministers from some of our key partner nations, to consult and share best practice on veterans' issues.

Yesterday, ahead of the International Ministerial Conference on Veterans' issues held at Royal Chelsea Hospital, the Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon and Mr Ellwood attended a reception at No.10 Downing Street. This was held to bring the community that supports veterans together and was attended by several Chelsea Pensioners. It also provided an opportunity to provide an update on plans for the Invictus Games, which this year will take place in Toronto in September.

Tomorrow, Ministers will discuss how best to improve the transition into civilian life for veterans, including hearing how Governments may be able to use new technology to bring about new opportunities to make the transition smoother; the importance of partnering with the health and charity sector, and the Armed Forces Covenant.

Mr Ellwood and his international counterparts agreed that the sharing of ideas has an important part to play in building a greater common understanding of veterans' issues and that there must be an ongoing commitment to ensure support services continue to meet the needs of our serving personnel, their families and veterans.