

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.
- 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.