

Veteran suicide figures to be recorded for the first time

A new method of recording veteran suicides in England and Wales has been announced, alongside a 10 year look back to examine veteran deaths through suicide.

For the first time, numbers of ex-service personnel who take their lives will be recorded officially by the government, following an agreement between the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA), the MOD and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

This data will be used to further understand where there is a need for dedicated services in England and Wales. The data will allow the government to ensure that these targeted services are signposted to veterans, where they are needed most.

The new reporting method will use data collected from the recent veterans question in the 2021 Census and match it with ONS-held data on suicides. This will allow the government to produce a statistic, known as a national measure, of the total number of veterans who die by suicide each year. This is the first time such a figure will be produced. It is expected that the first annual statistics will be published in 2023.

To better understand the lives lost prior to 2022, the government is also conducting a 10 year look back to examine veteran deaths through suicide. This research will be published in 2022.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Leo Docherty said:

Any suicide is a tragedy and collecting better data on these instances will help government better target support for those who need it.

This builds on a number of studies which are already taking place to better understand why some veterans take their lives.

Support is out there and hope that today's agreement will help us reach more people who may be struggling.

Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician, said:

The Office for National Statistics is constantly working to provide new insight that can be used to make a real difference to some of the most vulnerable in society.

Understanding an issue is the first step to solving it and

producing this new measure will help inform decisions to tackle deaths by suicide of our incredible armed forces veterans.

It is important that we invest the time and effort to produce high quality estimates that properly shine a light on this critical issue.

Hannah Blythyn, Wales' Deputy Minister for Social Partnerships, including veterans' support, said:

One life lost is always one too many. Their service for our country has enabled us to live in the safe communities we have today.

Preventing suicide is complex and no one organisation can tackle the issues in isolation. Strengthening the data is a key element of helping us to understand the risk factors and to better target preventative approaches.

We continue to prioritise the mental health of our veterans and have recently invested an additional £235,000 annually into Veterans NHS Wales.

This ensures that specialist, priority support is available for individuals who have served in the Armed Forces and are experiencing mental health difficulties related specifically to their military service.

Current data on veteran suicide is drawn from bespoke research projects examining specific veteran cohorts. The new data from the census will offer a new opportunity to identify veterans and match this information to other datasets to better understand veterans' experiences. Approaches for replicating this in Scotland and Northern Ireland are being investigated. It is a robust solution that will allow for high quality and consistent data to feed into future policy making.

The statistics will be kept up to date through a new agreement between the OVA, MOD and ONS on data sharing for those leaving the military each year.

The new work will continue alongside existing research into the mental health and frequency of suicide within the veteran community. In addition to this new reporting method, the OVA is funding the next stage of a study by Kings Centre for Military Health Research looking at all aspects of the lives of veterans, including mental health.

Through the statistics and data from the 2021 Census, the government will be able to ensure that support services will be targeted to regions of higher levels of suicide in veteran populations.

The government is also providing £2m from 2019/20 to 2020/21 to the Zero Suicide Alliance, which aims to achieve zero suicides across the NHS and in

local communities by improved awareness and prevention training and developing a better culture of learning from deaths by suicide across the NHS.

The MOD continues to monitor deaths in those who served in the 1982 Falklands campaign and the 1990/1991 Gulf conflict to understand the long term impact of military service. They are also finalising a study to track the cause of deaths, including suicides, in all personnel who have served in the UK armed forces since 2001.

This work forms part of the government's commitment to improve the collection and analysis of data on veterans to inform future policy, as set out in the Strategy for our Veterans.

For veterans who may be struggling with their mental health, there is support available across the United Kingdom for them and their families:

- in England, veterans and their families in England can get specialist help from the NHS Op COURAGE service
- in Wales, you can reach out to Veteran Therapists in each Local Health Board through Veteran NHS Wales
- in Scotland, veterans can access veteran-led mental health and welfare support through Veterans First Point, part of NHS Scotland
- in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office links individual veterans, veterans' groups, statutory and non-statutory bodies, and charities supporting veterans
- anyone in the UK or overseas can also contact the Veterans' Gateway helpline on 0808 802 1212, or visit the website for advice and signposting to further support, including for families and the bereaved

If you are a journalist covering a suicide-related issue, please consider following the [Samaritans' media guidelines](#) on the reporting of suicide because of the potentially damaging consequences of irresponsible reporting. In particular, the guidelines advise on terminology to use and include links to sources of support for anyone affected by the themes in the article.