

Veterans step up to support those in need during COVID pandemic, new research finds

The study, carried out by King's College London, found that 60% of veterans have volunteered in their community to help individuals affected by the pandemic.

Of those veterans already volunteering, 66% reported as having increased their time spent helping others, as a result of COVID.

The initial finding from the OVA sponsored study underlines the contribution that ex-service personnel make to society at large. Many use their skills learnt from the armed forces, as well as their public service ethos, to play an important role in their communities.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

These findings show the huge contribution that veterans make to their communities.

Their commitment to serving this country does not end when they leave the military.

It's humbling to see that so many have stepped up to help those in need during this extraordinary year.

As we approach Christmas, Veterans Minister Johnny Mercer is also urging veterans struggling with their mental health to reach out for support.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

Christmas can be a difficult time for many, particularly this year with the effects of COVID.

But help is available and I urge any veteran who may be struggling with their mental health or loneliness to access the range of support that is available.

A range of support is available for those struggling with their mental health over the Christmas period, including:

- The Veterans' Gateway, a first point of contact which puts veterans in touch with local support services. Anyone can call 0808 8021212 to reach their helpline, which is running 24/7 over Christmas and New Year, or text 81212.

- The Veterans' Welfare Service, part of Veterans UK, is trained to provide free, confidential advice and support on a wide range of issues. Anyone in need of support can call 0808 1914218 and ask for contact from the Veterans Welfare Service. Read details of the helpline's Christmas opening hours.
- Veterans can also call the free Samaritans helpline on 116 123, which is running 24/7 over Christmas and New Year.

Support for loneliness for veterans includes:

- Mind is a leading mental health charity that offers wide ranging support for a number of issues. Their befriending service can help veterans feel connected to others through frequent conversation and companionship. Find out more about Mind's services to prevent loneliness.
- The Royal British Legion offer localised support to prevent isolation in the veteran community, including a telephone buddy service and a home visiting service. Contact the Legion to find out more.

As well as the increased time spent volunteering, the King's study, called Veterans-CHECK, has today found that 88% of veterans gave to charity in the last 12 months. The study also found that 20% have given more to charity this year, because of their desire to help more during the pandemic.

Professor Sir Simon Wessely, Director, King's Centre for Military Health Research, King's College London said:

What this study shows is that our veterans have been affected by the COVID pandemic in similar ways to all of us.

But they have also continued to contribute to this country, much as they did during service, with so many of them now employed as key workers or volunteering.

I am sure everyone will want to acknowledge and thank the veteran community for all they are doing to support the nation at this time. The spirit shown by Cpt Tom Moore continues through the generations.

The Veterans-Check study will continue into the New Year, where it will report on the health effects on veterans during the pandemic.

In England, mental health services now includes:

- The Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS), an enhanced service for veterans which helps tackle early signs of mental health difficulties
- The Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment service (CTS), which helps veterans who have complex mental health problems emanating from their military service
- Over 800 accredited 'veteran friendly' GP surgeries, which have been specially equipped to care for ex-forces personnel

- Over 50 Veteran Aware hospitals

The work of the OVA includes:

- Pulling together all functions of government, and working closely with the charity sector, 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