



# East of England Armed Forces Conference

## 24<sup>th</sup> April 2025



Stephen Heard

Royal Air Force Air Traffic Controller 1972 - 1986

Territorial Army and Voluntary Reserve Royal Corps of Transport 1971 - 1972

EoE Regional Lead RCGP/NHSE Veteran Friendly Accreditation Programme for Primary Care Jan 23 to Mar 25

Vice Chair of the EoE Veteran Advisory Pensions Committee (VAPC)

Regional VAPC lead on Health and member of national VAPC Health and Wellbeing Common Interest Group

Member of the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board



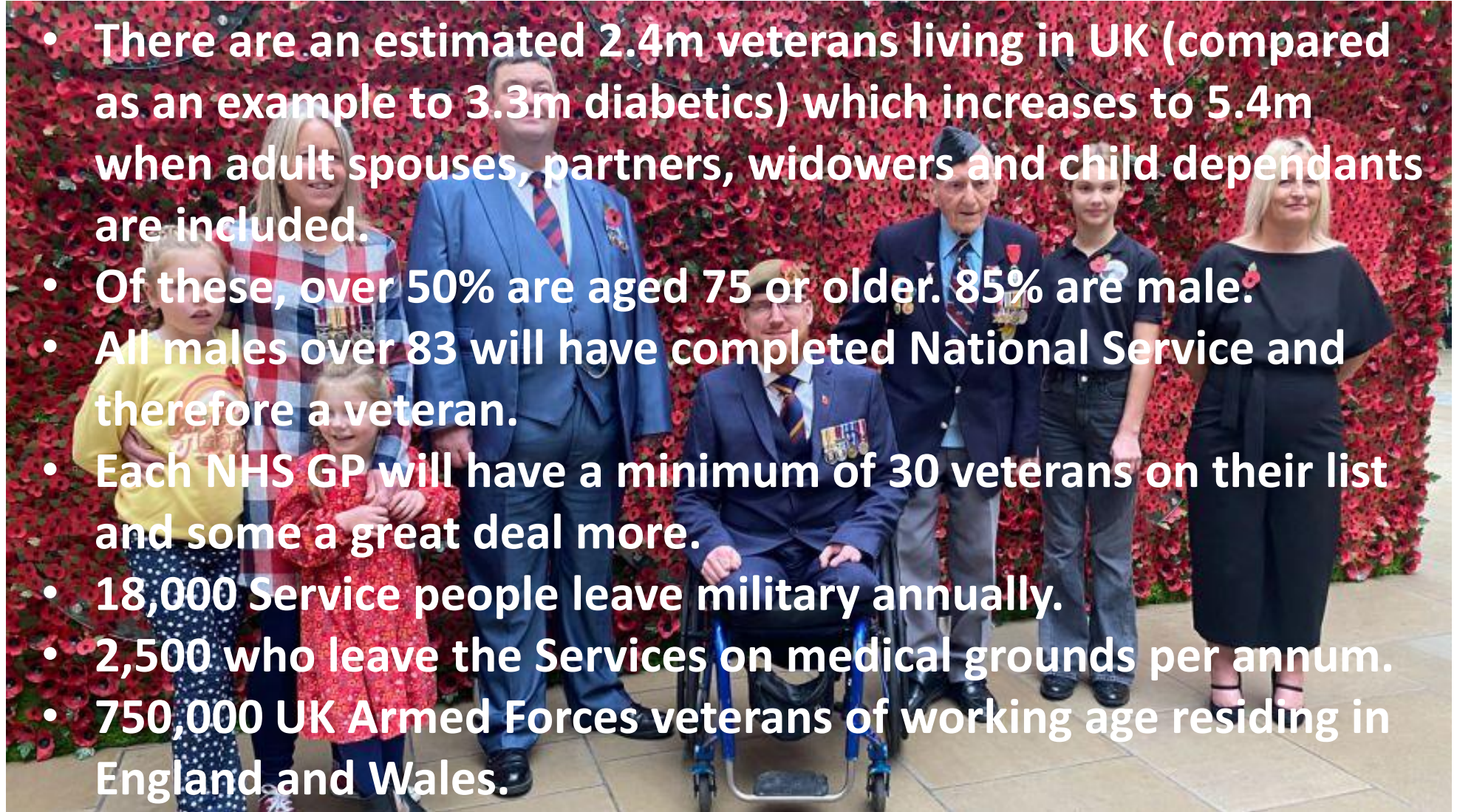
**ARMY**



# We know who are Veterans... but do we?



- There are an estimated 2.4m veterans living in UK (compared as an example to 3.3m diabetics) which increases to 5.4m when adult spouses, partners, widowers and child dependants are included.
- Of these, over 50% are aged 75 or older. 85% are male.
- All males over 83 will have completed National Service and therefore a veteran.
- Each NHS GP will have a minimum of 30 veterans on their list and some a great deal more.
- 18,000 Service people leave military annually.
- 2,500 who leave the Services on medical grounds per annum.
- 750,000 UK Armed Forces veterans of working age residing in England and Wales.



# The Regional Perspective Mar 25

## Practices


ICB	Total	Yes	No	Veterans
<b>SNEE</b>	91	91	<b>0</b>	0
<b>C&amp;P</b>	86	81	<b>5</b>	1,568
<b>N&amp;W</b>	105	94	<b>11</b>	3,763
<b>BLMK</b>	87	64	<b>23</b>	5,119
<b>MSE</b>	145	99	<b>46</b>	7,934
<b>HWE</b>	127	77	<b>49</b>	11,135
<b>Totals</b>	641	506	<b>134</b>	29,519

<b>Impact</b>	<b>Not</b>	29,519	13.27%
	<b>Yes</b>	192,905	86.72%
	<b>Veterans</b>	222,424	99.99%



# So what?

Clinical: 



**OpRESTORE**

The Veterans Physical Health and Wellbeing Service

Referrals into Op RESTORE continue to increase, with the first six months of 2024-25 seeing 259 referrals; an increase of 40% on the same time last year.



**OpCOURAGE**

The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service

There have been over 30,000 referrals to date  
The annual spend in 21/22 was £17m rising to £22.5m in 23/24

Non-Clinical:



**OpNOVA**

Judicial System



**OpFORTITUDE**

Housing



**OpCOMMUNITY**

Single Point of Contact



**THE FORCER PROTOCOL**



**OpSterling**

LBGT Community

Links to:



Police access to veterans' details

**Op ASCEND**  
Supporting veterans in growing their careers.



# What and who are the VAPC?



- The VAPC is an Advisory Non-Departmental Public Body (ANDPB)
- 12 independent UK area committees established under Section 25 of the Social Security Act 1989
- The statutory purpose was to:
  - To enable and foster local consultation with Ministers
  - Help to increase awareness of war pensions and AFCS benefits
  - Monitor the Veterans Welfare Service performance and raise awareness of the services it provides
  - Liaising with other relevant organisations to aid the welfare of Veterans and their dependents
  - Assisting individual recipients and others claiming war pensions or AFCS benefits with problems or complaints regarding pensions or the welfare services
- Following The Veterans Transition Review, undertaken by Lord Ashcroft in 2014, the VAPC was additionally tasked with helping local authorities and practitioners pursue best practice in delivering the Community Covenant
- The development of the Armed Forces Covenant and the subsequent ‘Duty to Consider’ has broadened the involvement of the VAPC to require it to provide advice to the Veterans Minister on all aspects of the Covenant
- In addition, a quinquennial review of the VAPCs in 2022 resulted in a Private Members Bill being passed on 18 September 2023, requiring the role of the VAPCs to be updated to broaden their responsibilities to cover all aspects of veteran support.



# The so what question again?

- Raise awareness on all matters affecting Veterans
- Support the MOD AF Covenant Team and AFVS in promoting and developing support activity for the veteran community

- Signpost veterans and their families to get the help they need

So what?

Clinical:  **OpRESTORE** The Veterans Physical Health and Wellbeing Service **OpCOURAGE** The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service

Non-Clinical:  **OpNOVA** Judicial System **OpFORTITUDE** Housing **OpSterling** LGBT Community

Links to:  **VETERAN AWARE** Acute Hospitals **STEP INTO HEALTH** Employment **OpASCEND** Supporting veterans in growing their careers. **THE FORCED PROTOCOL** Police access to veterans' details **Voluntary Sector Network**

 **ArdentGEM**  **Armed Forces veteran newly accredited GP practice**

- Advise and represent the interests of the veteran community with departments of state, local authorities and across the third sector
- Consult with the veteran community to gather evidence of good practice and identify areas of potential concern

# Eastern VAPC Matrix Approach

	Norfolk	Essex	Cambs	Suffolk	Beds	Herts
Education						
Employment						
Finance & Debt						
Health & Wellbeing						
Housing						
Offenders/Justice						
Welfare						

Chair                      Malcolm Johnstone  
Vice Chair                Stephen Heard  
Secretary                Kath Hutton  
National Chair         Stewart Blackburn

## EVAPC Volunteer Committee Members

Andrew Catton  
Barrie Griffiths  
Christopher Ali  
Darren Hickie  
Ben Conway  
Diane Palmer  
Ian Andrews  
Philip Wilson  
Robert Catton  
Sean Costello

# VAPC Common Interest Groups



- Health and Wellbeing



- Education



- Finance and debt

- Veterans and the law



- Employment and transition



- Housing



# Reporting & Performance

1. VAPCs are required to report to the Minister once each year to inform him of the evidence gathered in relation to his annual tasking instruction to the VAPCs
2. In addition, the VAPC have a standing requirement to:
  - Seek to identify examples of good practice and to share these across the other area VAPCs.
  - Investigate any reports of poor performance in relation to the delivery of the AF Covenant and report these to the AF Covenant Team
  - Monitor the performance of the AFVS departments through their performance management meeting held every 2 months.
3. Individual members are required to submit a self assessment form at least once during their tenure and the chairs is required to report on these reports before passing them on to the Sponsor Department performance
4. Once each year each Area VAPC chair will brief the UK CVC on the structure and activities of their area VAPC.

# Op Valour

- The change in Government and the appointment of the new Minister for Veterans and People (Min. V&P) Alistair Carns on 9<sup>th</sup> July 24 (the position is now that of a parliamentary under-secretary of state, the most junior level of minister) continues to hold the VAPCs in limbo. The 50% increase in portfolio responsibility that the new minister has been given, including the serving military community, seems to have undermined the Veterans agenda.
- The Minister has commissioned a new study called Op Valour.
- Three 1\* officers (military, civil service and voluntary sector) have been appointed to report on what is happening in the veteran's space (gleaning information from various reviews, charities and veteran support agencies).
- The report is due to be presented to the minister some time in December.

# Current concerns - 2025

- Strategy Action plan demise, review outcomes and OP VALOUR
- The moratorium on recruiting VAPC members and chairs is already causing concern with some regions being up to 16 members short. Many regions are co-opting but this is an unsatisfactory and untenable solution.
- Effectiveness of targeted and funded programmes approach ~noted, limited scope
- Impact of reduction of major charity capability and capacity, government reliance continues
- Female Veterans – appropriate support services needed
- Veterans in Crisis – support hubs to provide a one-stop shop
- Health and Wellbeing – consider mandating a common assurance model
- Housing – need for a UK-wide housing framework for veterans
- Education – academies should be brought into line with state schools for service children

# Key Recommendations

- No wrong door for veterans to access assistance
- Data collection providing evidence-based support
- Strategic Communication
- Improve targeting of funding for AF community
- Health & wellbeing

# STOP PRESS



Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2025.

Meeting with Alastair Carns Minister for  
Veterans and People and the UK  
Council of VAPCs.



Royal College of  
General Practitioners



Armed Forces veteran  
friendly accredited  
GP practice

Veterans Advisory  
and Pensions  
Committees  
(VAPC)



# Thank you

*The scars of conflict  
aren't always visible*

For more information, please get in touch:

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