



Meeting the healthcare needs of **Armed Forces personnel**,
their **families** and **veterans**

This leaflet is designed to help regular Armed Forces personnel, their families and veterans to understand how to access the health services they need, and what to do if things go wrong. The leaflet applies to health services in England.



Armed Forces

As a member of the UK Armed Forces you are entitled to access healthcare at NHS hospitals on the same basis as other members of the public. Over and above access to NHS facilities, the Defence Medical Services has contractual arrangements in place to provide accelerated access to healthcare. While serving in the Armed Forces you have to register with a military GP, as required by NHS regulations; during this time, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) takes responsibility for your general medical healthcare. However, where you do not have ready access to your military GP (e.g. when on leave) you are permitted to apply to join the list of a civilian general practice and see a civilian GP as a temporary patient under the NHS.

Armed Forces serving overseas

As a member of the Armed Forces serving overseas, you are entitled to full use of NHS specialist care facilities, without charge, if you return to the UK for treatment. Your specialist care will usually be provided by one of the six nominated NHS hospitals with which the MOD has a contract.

Family dependants

Medical services

Eligible family members will normally be registered with a civilian GP and access NHS services in the same way as other members of the public.

Alternatively, on units with the capacity (usually those identified as training units for military medical staff) family members may have the option of being registered with a military GP. In this case, they will access NHS services through the Defence Medical Services.

Dentistry

Service families can access NHS dental services in the same way as other members of the public.

Unless you are exempt from charges, you will be required to pay one of three standard rates, depending on your course of treatment.

NHS primary care trusts have been asked to ensure that they plan to meet the needs of Service families in their areas.

Before moving into a new area, it is recommended that you identify NHS dentists in the area – your current dentist may be able to suggest someone. If you are having a problem with an appointment or need an urgent appointment for NHS dental services, you can call the dental helpline for the primary care trust, which will be able to advise you. Dental helpline numbers can be found on the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk or by calling **NHS Direct on 0845 4647**.



Family dependants living overseas

Eligible family members living overseas can access healthcare through the Defence Medical Services, and are entitled to full use of NHS specialist care facilities without charge if they return to the UK for treatment.

Hospital waiting lists

By the end of December 2008, NHS patients in England can expect to start their consultant-led treatment within a maximum of 18 weeks from referral, unless they choose to wait longer or it is clinically appropriate that they do so. This commitment also covers patients who move home and move between hospitals.

If you or a member of your family are currently on a waiting list for NHS treatment and are required to move between hospitals as a result of having to fulfil military duties, we would encourage you to discuss arrangements for transferring your care with the clinician who is currently treating you. We would also encourage you to contact your new GP and/or hospital as early as possible after you have moved, to discuss and confirm the arrangements for your treatment.

If you are moving within the UK, previous waiting time will be taken into account, with the expectation that treatment will be within national waiting time standards. Like anyone else moving between hospitals in the UK, you will be treated as quickly as possible based on clinical priority. This could mean in practice that you sometimes have a different time to wait if moving to another part of the UK.

The MOD has committed itself to ensuring that, if a member of the Armed Forces or their partner is undergoing IVF treatment, they do not move until their cycle of treatment is complete.



Veterans

The vast majority of those leaving the Armed Forces will do so fit and well. If you have recently left military service, you should have received a copy of the Service Leavers Pack from the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency which contains helpful advice. You can also contact the free **Veterans Helpline on 0800 169 22 77** or visit the Agency website at **www.veterans-uk.info**.

Veterans are defined as:

'Anyone who has served for at least one day in HM Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve) or Merchant Navy Seafarers and Fishermen who have served in a vessel at a time when it was operated to facilitate military operations by HM Armed Forces.'

On leaving the Armed Forces, you will need to register with your local NHS GP. Make sure that your GP has the information they need about your current health. You should have a summary record of your health history given to you on discharge, along with details about how your GP can obtain your medical records.

If you have a health problem that you think is related to your service in the Armed Forces, you may wish to raise this with your GP – they may be able to get you referred more quickly for any hospital care that is needed (but please note that this is subject to the clinical needs of others). NHS Choices at **www.nhs.uk** or **NHS Direct on 0845 4647** can help you identify GPs in your area.

The MOD is working with the NHS to ensure that the NHS will be able to maintain and replace the prostheses of amputees discharged from the Armed Forces in future. You should be informed of these arrangements on discharge.

Being on active service can in some instances lead to mental health problems, including some that may occur some time after discharge. If you are at all concerned about your mental health, do seek help from your GP as soon as possible. Please be assured that there is no stigma attached to asking for help – you have served your country and you deserve support if your military experiences impinge on your well-being, physically or emotionally.

The MOD Medical Assessment Programme (MAP) offers expert mental health assessments to any veteran with mental health problems who has served in operations since 1982. The MAP can be contacted on **0800 169 5401** (freephone).

If you have problems

Whether you are currently serving in the Armed Forces, a family member or a veteran, if you are unhappy about the healthcare services you have received, you should first discuss any problems with your clinician if possible.

If you are attending an NHS hospital or clinic, you can also talk to Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) staff or the complaints manager. They can usually resolve your concerns on the spot, or can provide you with details of how to complain.

You can also visit NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk or call **NHS Direct** on **0845 4647** for advice about what to do.



Useful contacts

NHS Choices
www.nhs.uk

NHS Direct
Tel: 0845 4647

Department of Health
www.dh.gov.uk; Tel: 020 7210 4850; Textphone: 020 7210 5025

Ministry of Defence
www.mod.uk

Service Personnel and Veterans Agency
www.veterans-uk.info
Tel (freephone): 0800 169 22 77 (UK only), +44 1253 866043 (overseas); Textphone: 0800 169 34 58 (UK only)

HIVE (information network for the Service community)
www.hive.mod.uk; Tel: 01722 437980

Naval Personal and Family Service and Royal Marines Welfare
www.rncom.mod.uk (click on the 'Family Wellbeing' link)

Army Welfare Service
www.army.mod.uk (click on the 'Welfare and Support' tab);
Tel: 01722 436569

RAF Community Support
www.rafcom.co.uk (click on the 'Medical & Dental' link)

Royal British Legion
www.britishlegion.org.uk; Tel: 08457 725 725

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA)
www.ssafa.org.uk; Tel: 0845 1300 975

The British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association (BLESMA)
www.blesma.org; Tel: 020 8590 1124

Combat Stress
www.combatstress.org.uk; Tel: 01372 841600

St Dunstan's
www.st-dunstans.org.uk; Tel: 020 7723 5021

Families federations

Naval Families Federation
www.nff.org.uk; Tel: 023 9265 4374

Army Families Federation
www.aff.org.uk; Tel: 01980 615525

RAF Families Federation
www.raf-families-federation.org.uk; Tel: 01780 781650





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