

POLICY BRIEFING

Current and Future Needs of Veterans in Northern Ireland (NI)

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It is necessary to have an understanding of veterans’ needs and their perspectives and experiences of services in order to improve engagement rates and outcomes for the veteran population in Northern Ireland (NI). The **Current and Future Needs of Veterans in Northern Ireland** (see Armour et al, 2017) report is the second of a series of reports from the Northern Ireland Veterans’ Health and Wellbeing Study (NIVHWS) (funded by Forces in Mind Trust). This

research sought to fill a large gap in information about the support needs of the veteran population in the region. The findings represent evidence collected through a series of focus groups and interviews with veterans and service providers in the statutory, voluntary and community sector and Ministry of Defence. This briefing outlines the findings of this first ever qualitative assessment of NI Veteran needs, which are complex and interrelated.

Key Findings And Recommendations

Key Findings	Implications	Associated Recommendations
Veterans believe that the public, voluntary and community service providers need to be more aware of military culture.	Veterans have security and trust issues and military training means they have a culture of their own and find it hard to relate and make the transition to civilian life and orientations.	Local Authorities should work with Armed Forces Charities to identify ways in which community integration activities could be undertaken. Awareness training could improve trust and understanding and help to increase rate of help seeking for some services.
Veterans often live a considerable distance from support or cannot afford travel expenses.	Veterans may find it hard to access existing services.	More services need to be localised and sources of information should be reasonably local, with a trusted point of contact.
Veterans in NI can have complex needs which may grow with age, and an individual veteran can have multiple needs.	The services available to veterans should match the needs that exist.	Further develop the infrastructure of support that is available to veterans. Specialist support for ageing veterans should be an important step forward.

Key Findings	Implications	Associated Recommendations
Some veterans have concerns that seeking help for mental health difficulties is a sign of weakness or being 'different'.	Some veterans may be reluctant to engage in treatment.	Reduce stigma around mental health problems in the veteran population. Increase awareness of mental health issues in the veteran population.
Some veterans have negative attitudes and poor perceptions of the effectiveness of mental health interventions.	Some veterans may be reluctant to engage in treatment.	Ensure the development of appropriate mental health services for veterans. Develop and improve clinical mental health interventions so that they better suit local conditions. Increase service providers' awareness and understanding of veterans' mental health needs.
Security concerns can deter help-seeking behaviour.	Some veterans may be reluctant to seek help, or to integrate into their community, and can become increasingly isolated, which may be harmful to their mental health and wellbeing.	There needs to be more community integration and building of relationships to help normalise relationships across NI. A better understanding of veterans' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of healthcare and other services could improve engagement rates. Training could improve understanding of veteran related issues in public sector service providers. There should be a designated contact for veterans in regional agencies delivering housing, employment and health and social services support across NI.
The needs and demographic characteristics of veterans will change as it is an ageing population.	Service providers will need to be flexible enough to adapt to shifting needs.	Service providers should implement long-term planning. Ex-service charities should begin to develop pro-active strategies to prepare for changing demographics.

References

Armour, C., Walker, E.J., Waterhouse-Bradley, B., Hall, M., & Ross, J. (2017). Current and Future Needs of Veterans in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Study. Retrieved from: <https://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/20171206-CURRENTANDFUTURENEEDSREPORT-FINAL.pdf>

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