

Chairman's announcement - Military healthcare inequality project

A joint bid (from the Council Public Health team, BSW ICB, Salisbury Hospital and Defence Primary Health Care Central and Wessex) has successfully secured a small amount of funding for a project looking at healthcare needs and inequalities in the Regular Armed Forces and dependant population in Wiltshire.

Funding begins on 1 April 2024 and the project will therefore shortly start. Healthwatch Wiltshire will undertake the research and have a detailed plan in place. Initial meetings have taken place so that they will start on time. It is hoped to use evidence from this 'scoping project' to inform future health needs assessments and also to guide future work, so that stakeholders have a better understanding of the issues facing military patients and can ensure they address them structurally. Relevant feedback will be provided to stakeholders as it is identified.

To maximise outputs from the limited resource, it was agreed to focus on Regular Service personnel & their dependants based in Wiltshire, which has the highest proportion of military personnel. Depending on the outcome, further work may be needed to look more deeply into specific areas. It would also be sensible for similar work to look more widely across the military community (at Veterans and Reservists) and to widen the same approach across the rest of BSW. In the meantime central government continues to pursue a further [expansion](#) of health services to former armed forces personnel.

Public bodies have a limited understanding of the nature of the military population that passes through their area, both in terms of numbers, socio-demography and the specific issues they face generated by high levels of mobility, separation from their family etc. There are many reasons for this. The military population and their dependants are very different in make-up when compared to the general population, and likely have differing needs to them. Health and care service commissioners and providers are often unaware of what those needs are.

This project seeks to generate new evidence from quantitative and qualitative research and merge with existing research in this area to inform future needs assessments in Wiltshire. It is hoped that the work can also be shared more widely with other LAs and ICBs who might have a smaller military population.

The final report should be available for formal review by the HWB by April 2025. Questions about the project can be raised with Colonel Ricky Bhabutta OBE, Regional Clinical Director, Defence Primary Healthcare.

An item on local implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant statutory duty will also feature at the next Board meeting.