

# News story: MOD launches biggest ever mental health awareness week with new confidential support for personnel on operations

This comes as the MOD announces a series of new joint projects with leading mental health charity Samaritans.

The initiatives, backed by £3.5 million in LIBOR funding, will build on the charity's digital technology to offer military personnel at home and on operations abroad access to confidential support. Online and face to face training in listening skills will also be offered to serving personnel and families, in order to give them confidence and expertise in encouraging others to not suffer in silence.

As part of the partnership with Samaritans, a confidential webchat service is being developed allowing military personnel, who often live in shared living quarters, particularly when serving on operations abroad, the ability to talk in confidence with a trained staff. Pocket guides are also being produced which will provide information and emotional support for when people are in isolated locations, particularly on operations.

Samaritan volunteers with military experience will also be trained in how to address mental health issues in a military environment, based on cutting-edge research from King's College London.

## **Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:**

We are absolutely committed to making sure that no one in our military suffers in silence.

I've stepped up our support for mental health in the Armed Forces, with an extra £2 million of funding a year and a new 24-hour mental health hotline.

I'm delighted to announce that personnel serving abroad will be able to access a new confidential system to help them in their time of need.

A range of events and activities will take place across the military and the MOD to mark Mental Health Awareness Week.

Civilian and military teams are being encouraged to use the week to hold conversations on mental health issues. Managers, using the recently launched Mental Health Guide for Managers, will also outline the support which is available across the MOD, including the recently launched Combat Stress 24-

hour mental health hotline. Discussions on stress and resilience will be held on the MOD's internal Defence Blog, the Land Warfare Centre will hold a wellbeing symposium and Joint Forces Command will also promote an online self-help programme available to personnel.

**Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:**

We have long recognised the importance of treating the physical effects of battle but any invisible scars experienced by our brave service personnel were given less attention.

We are determined to change this and encourage a more open culture in talking about mental health. With our comprehensive mental health and wellbeing strategy, 20 specialist military mental health sites around the country, a 24/7 helpline and a partnership with the Royal Foundation, we are now far better placed to provide the comprehensive support our armed forces deserve.

As we mark Mental Health Awareness Week, I want everyone in the military to adopt the mindset that mental wellbeing matters just as much as physical health.

The Defence Secretary in February increased funding for Armed Forces mental health services to £220 million over the next decade and launched the new 24/7 Military Mental Health Helpline, in conjunction with Combat Stress. The new number – 0800 323 4444 – has already received over 350 calls.

The MOD currently has a network of 20 'hub and spoke' mental health centres, comprising of 11 hubs and a further nine teams. Regular visiting clinics are also held at other military centres across the country.

Last year the MOD launched its Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy focusing on preventative measures to protect our personnel. MOD also partnered with the Royal Foundation, a charity set up by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry, to improve training and education alongside the strategy to promote mental fitness.

There are a range of services provided by partners working with MOD and through the Armed Forces Covenant, including the NHS, other Government departments and charities, which serving personnel, veterans, and their families can access.