

# Supporting *Military Veterans* in Residential Care



A practical guide

# Foreword



When it comes to how we as a nation care for those who served in the Armed Forces, 'dignity' and 'respect' should be the watch words. Just as each and every one of us has a unique life story, there is no such thing as a typical veteran. There is no one size fits all answer to meeting the care needs of our veterans.

By drawing on best practice, Demos have put together a practical guide for care managers and staff – a quick read that offers tips and resources to deliver bespoke care. Great care is personal – its quality comes in the relationships we have, and when what matters to our quality of life, and who we are, is always at the heart of practice.

While there are specialist providers who cater to the care and support needs of those who have served, increasing lifespans mean that any care home could have veterans in their midst, hidden in plain sight.

For many, the experience of serving in the Armed Forces will be central to who they are as a person – a source of friendship, purpose and pride. For others it will be a source of trauma and loss, and for some a part of their life they don't want to be reminded of. The message from this guide is clear: 'do your homework, and don't assume'.

One of the key findings of Demos' Commission on Residential Care, which I chaired, was the importance of relationships – of maintaining the everyday rhythms that give life meaning and purpose. Getting it right for veterans means being aware of the service they served in, their rank and the sort of service and deployments they saw.

Anyone serious about offering great care to veterans should read this guide. Its practical five steps along with the wealth of resources it signposts to make it easily accessible for managers and staff, regardless of where care is delivered.

**Rt Hon Paul Burstow**  
Chair, Social Care Institute for Excellence



### *Step 1: Identify your veterans*

Remember there is no national register for veterans in care, but due to long periods of National Service it is likely very many older people you support will have a military background.



### *Step 2: Explore their sense of identity*

Discuss service, rank, deployments, memories, friendship groups. Talk to the veterans you support about how their service influences their identity, interests and friendships, and how this might influence the support you provide.



### *Step 3: Shape support plans*

Use this information on identity, including forms of address, preferred activities, interests, routines, anniversaries and celebrations to guide the support you offer. Be sensitive to possible bereavement and trauma in veterans' past experiences, and how this may affect mental wellbeing.



### *Step 4: Do your research*

Identify important dates and events, including remembrance services, museums, air shows, etc. to help guide conversation and organise trips out. Learn more about the different services to better understand individual veterans' needs and how you can help them.



### *Step 5: Reach out for help and advice*

Make use of the many veterans' charities and associations (some listed in this guide) to help organise volunteers to buddy or visit the veterans you support, arrange social trips out and remembrance services, to get in touch with the wider veterans community, or to access additional resources and equipment.

### *Who is this guide for?*

This guide is for care home managers and staff, to help support military veterans of all ages who may be living in residential or nursing care, or those on a respite stay. It is written in partnership with a group of care homes who specialise in providing residential care for veterans of different ages. We wanted to share practical tips and advice, based on good practice that has been developed over many years, so that managers and staff in non-military specialist homes can be helped to provide more personalised support for their own veteran-residents.

### *Veterans – who do we mean?*

This guide talks about “veterans”. This means men or women who have served in the Armed Forces, for any length of time – from one day to several decades. Veterans in care homes can be any age – from young people injured in recent conflicts to the elderly who served in World War II, and everything in between.

There is no official register of veterans in the UK, or any way of knowing precisely how many live in residential care settings. We think there are around 2.8 million veterans (around 1.1 million of whom are aged 16–65 and 1.7 million over 65) in the UK, with up to around 300,000 veterans living in “community settings” (which includes residential care).<sup>1</sup>

Although we don’t know exactly how many veterans live in care homes, it is very likely that residents over 70 will include a large proportion of those who were called to National Service, and therefore have a military background and first-hand service experience.<sup>2</sup>

### *Why is it important to know about Veterans in care?*

The secret to good quality care and support is personalisation – it is central to the Care Quality Commission’s “Five Key Questions,” used in their inspection reports.<sup>3</sup> All good care homes strive to meet each person’s needs and preferences and to treat them as individuals.

1 2014 UK Household Survey of the Ex-Service Community

2 UK implemented National Service (also known as conscription, or Military Service) between 1916 and 1920, and between 1939 and 1945, and then in a more limited way up until 1960.

3 <http://www.cqc.org.uk/what-we-do/how-we-do-our-job/five-key-questions-we-ask>

As with all forms of support planning, it is important to work in partnership with residents regarding how they would like their experiences of military service to shape their care and support. Each veteran will take a different view as to how important these experiences are to them. For many veterans, their military service forms a large part of their identity,



their memories, and the basis of their friendships beyond the care home. It can help people make new friends in residential care based on common life experiences, and it can also help explain some of the long-term conditions they may be living with, especially their mental health. Younger veterans in particular may still want to engage with the active military community and this can play an important part in their rehabilitation, especially improving their mental well-being and possibly their physical health too. However, some veterans do not identify with their service, or may not want to be reminded of their experiences of military service.

It is vital, therefore, that you know:

- 1) if any of the people you support are veterans; and then
- 2) how you can use this information to help deliver more personalised care and support.

### *What sorts of information could be useful?*

First of all, it is important to know that veterans are not all alike. Veterans may be male or female, young or old, and they may vary in terms of how much they identify with their experience in the Armed Forces.

Some further important differences may relate to which service they served in, and at what rank. These services include: the Royal Navy (including the Merchant Navy and the Royal Marines<sup>4</sup>), the British Army (including the Home Guard), the Royal Air Force, and the Reservists.

4 The Royal Marines use the same rank structure as the British Army.

Within each service there are different ranks. These are listed in the following table, in order of seniority. The first portion of the table refers to “commissioned” ranks – often referred to as “officers”. These are more senior than non-commissioned ranks (sometimes called “enlisted” ranks) and currently make up around 17% of the armed services. Commissioned officers receive their commission to serve in the Armed Forces by the Head of State (i.e. The Queen), and usually have additional leadership or management training alongside their military training at an academy (such as Sandhurst). Non-Commissioned ranks join the armed services independently, but can be promoted to a Commissioned Officer once they reach a certain rank, if they complete their military academy training.

Note that all services have Reservists (members of the military reserve force).

<b>Commissioned Officers</b>		
<b>Army</b>	<b>Royal Air Force</b>	<b>Royal Navy</b>
General	Air Chief Marshal	Admiral
Lieutenant-General	Air Marshal	Vice Admiral
Major-General	Air Vice-Marshal	Rear Admiral
Brigadier	Air Commodore	Commodore
Colonel	Group Captain	Captain
Lieutenant-Colonel	Wing Commander	Commander
Major	Squadron Leader	Lieutenant-Commander
Captain	Flight-Lieutenant	Lieutenant
Lieutenant	Flying Officer	Sub Lieutenant
Second Lieutenant	Pilot Officer	Acting Sub Lieutenant
<b>Non-Commissioned Ranks</b>		
Warrant Officer Class 1	Warrant Officer	Warrant Officer
Warrant Officer Class 2	Flight Sergeant	
Staff Sergeant	Chief Technician	Chief Petty Officer
Sergeant	Sergeant	Petty Officer
Corporal	Corporal	Leading Hand
Lance Corporal	Junior Technician	
Private	Senior Aircraftman	Able Rating
	Leading Aircraftman	
	Aircraftman	



Knowing the difference between these ranks and services can be important: some veterans may prefer being addressed by their rank rather than “Mr or Mrs” or even their first names, while each service has different cultural references and important dates and ceremonies they may wish to recognise (see below). A

veteran with a naval background, who spent a lot of time at sea, may have different memories and interests than, say, a veteran who flew in the RAF.

In addition to understanding the sort of service each veteran may have experienced, different deployments are also culturally important. The very oldest care home residents may have served in World War II, but the majority of veterans in care will have been called to National Service. National Servicemen could have been posted across Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East – making friends and memories specific to the types of duties they undertook in those regions.<sup>5</sup> Veterans may also have been deployed in Korea, Northern Ireland, the Falklands, the Balkans and the Middle East, either in active conflict or as part of peace-keeping missions. Others may have served in the UK only.

Finding out about veterans’ service history can help you better understand the things that are important and of interest to them. Preferred forms of address, important memories, friendships and service history may all become critical parts of a veteran-resident’s support plan and “one page profiles”. These could help strengthen the relationships between them and their support workers, and can also help generate ideas for meaningful activities in and outside of the care home which may engage and enthuse the veterans living there. Military history can help to inform everything from day trips out, to identifying guest speakers, and reminiscence activities for those living with dementia.

5 To learn more about National Service, see <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/what-was-national-service>



Equally, some veterans may find some aspects of their military backgrounds deeply upsetting. They might be unwilling to talk about it, even regarding events which occurred 50 or more years ago. Again, being aware of this and sensitive to possible past trauma and bereavement can

help improve relationships, and help you develop a better understanding of that veteran's mental wellbeing. For younger, disabled veterans, supporting their mental health needs will often be just as important as attending to their physical impairment. A better understanding of the types of experiences they may have had will help you develop strategies to support them day to day – there are also specialist organisations that can support you in this task, listed at the end of this guide.

### *Good practice across the sector*

In this section, we provide some examples of the types of support and activities undertaken by care homes that specialise in supporting veterans of different ages. They tend to use:

- a) The ambience of the environment (through artwork, regimental plaques, and military memorabilia in or around veterans' rooms), as well as military displays in care homes for residents to touch, talk about, and reminisce; and
- b) Specific events and activities to reflect or celebrate military life, particularly at key times of the year such as Remembrance Day and Armed Forces Day.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See the following section for some important dates to consider and organisations who can help organise remembrance ceremonies.



## Real Life Examples

*One specialist military care home keeps a list specifically detailing the service history of residents, and organises a monthly meeting for the different Services represented – this works well and gives a common ground for reminiscence sessions.*

*The **Royal British Legion** in Solihull visit the local **Royal Star & Garter Home** for a monthly coffee morning which helps keep residents connected with the military family.*

Other things to consider are:

1. Arranging visits to local armed forces regiments, squadrons and bases. These often have open days, but serving personnel are also usually happy to visit and give talks
2. Hosting reminiscence groups (perhaps themed by type of service, or a particular country/region) where veterans living in the wider community could be invited in to join residents in sharing their experiences<sup>7</sup> – this is particularly important for residents with dementia and in nursing settings, where day trips out may be harder to arrange due to higher levels of frailty.
3. Arranging for veterans to attend local military concerts and parades, military museums, memorials and air shows. Often these may be linked to different anniversaries and celebrations (see below).
4. It is also worth contacting local military charities and associations (see below) and asking about buddying schemes, where volunteers with military backgrounds can accompany care home residents to social activities or military events. This may be particularly important for younger veterans who may want to maintain more active links with military life and friendship groups.

<sup>7</sup> See the following section on how best to get in touch with veterans living locally.

5. Daily routines and language might also be influenced by military life – such as referring to the dining room as the “mess” and using the 24 hour clock to denote meal times. In some care homes, it may be possible to group veterans together into a small unit with a designated staff team in order to shape routines around the group as well as capitalise on the group’s common interests and culture.<sup>8</sup>
6. While flexibility and personalisation are central to good residential care practice, it is also worth bearing in mind some veterans may actually prefer more strictly “regimented” daily routines, another area worth exploring when setting out a resident’s support plan.
7. We know younger veterans in care homes often like to maintain what they describe as a “sense of service” – being able to feel useful and contribute to the running of where they live in some way. This might include tasking veterans with organising activities and helping around the home and grounds, using the skills they gained while in the military.
8. There are veterans badges and medals that can be applied for from the Ministry of Defence, free of charge – you could help fill out the relevant paperwork.
9. For some veterans, appearance is very important in general – being smartly dressed, the wearing of the correct jacket, or particular colours or medals for special occasions needs to be considered carefully.
10. At end of life, military recognition may be very important – funerals for veterans can follow a specific order of service, with the veteran’s service standard (flag) and medals on display. A representative of The Royal British Legion (see contact details on page 13) can also attend, and in some cases, the Government can help with funeral costs. The families of those you support may be aware of military funeral traditions, but it is worth being informed in case you are asked to help or support staff who are invited to attend.

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<sup>8</sup> See Demos, 2014 Commission on Residential Care for good practice examples of larger care homes creating small units and resident groups to improve personalisation and personal relationships between staff and residents.

### *A Real Life Example*

**Dunkirk Memorial House** was rated by the CQC as ‘Outstanding’ — below are some observations from the Inspection Report

*“Staff told us that due to their military backgrounds many people liked to have a structured life and they tried hard to provide this. There was set times for meals and information was provided to everyone about what activities were planned each day. Where people did not require this structure, routines were more flexible. We saw one person had a late breakfast in their room and staff told us ‘They never like to eat too early.’”*

### *A Real Life Example*

**Princess Marina House** was rated by the CQC as ‘Outstanding’ — below are some observations from the Inspection Report

*“The home was decorated with RAF memorabilia from different regiments, photographs and medals. These created a conversation point for people, who were often observed looking at the displays and engaging in conversations about them and therefore enabling people to reminisce. People were encouraged to look for their particular squadron badge and photograph and would often involve other people in their search... This provided an ice-breaker for people and enabled people to socialise and form friendships with like-minded people...”*

### *Key events*

The military calendar is full of Remembrance, commemoration and celebration days, offering lots of opportunities for days out and/or themed events hosted in residential care settings. Some of the key dates include:

- **Armistice Day** is held on the 11th of November each year. It is intended to remember those service men and women who have died on active service since the beginning of the First World War. It includes a Two Minute Silence at 11am to remember the end of World War I.



- **Armed Forces Day** (usually the last Saturday in June) celebrates the contribution of current military personnel and veterans, and includes local ceremonies where veterans are presented with medals or veterans badges.
- **Remembrance Sunday** is held on the Sunday closest to the 11th November, which includes the National Service of Remembrance held at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London. Veterans participate in the March Past (parade) each year, and usually apply to do so through their relevant service associations (see contact details at the end of this guide). In addition, Remembrance services take place at local war memorials in most cities and towns across the UK.
- There are also many anniversaries celebrated by the specific armed services – these may commemorate particular battles (**Dunkirk, Trafalgar, Ypres**, and so on) or dates important to different regiments, fleets and squadrons. It's useful to know the military background of the veterans you support to help you identify which dates might be important to them.

### *A Real Life Example*

**Pembroke House** was rated by the CQC as 'Good'  
— below are some observations from the Inspection Report

*"A lot of places and events visited outside of the home had a naval or armed forces connection as this was what people wanted and was a tradition of the home. These types of events included; Armed Forces Day, Cenotaph parades and an annual visit to Buckingham Palace. Many other visits outside of the home took place that did not have a naval connection."*

## *Available support*

There are many military charities and associations who will provide information, advice and additional resources to help you. Some can help arrange day trips and ceremonies, or put you in touch with local veterans and serving personnel who will volunteer to “buddy” with veteran-residents. Others offer grants and equipment for eligible veterans. Some of the most useful are:

- **The Royal British Legion**<sup>9</sup> supports serving members of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines, British Army, Royal Air Force, Reservists, veterans and their families. Their support starts after 7 days of service and continues long after life in the Armed Forces. The Royal British Legion helps veterans young and old transition into civilian life, helping with employment, financial issues, respite and recovery, through to lifelong care and independent living. There are also over 2,000 local branches, the most active of which provide ‘Visiting Volunteers’ who can regularly visit a veteran whilst they are living in a care home, to help address social isolation and maintain a link to their service history (please contact the Royal British Legion to see if this is available locally).
- **SSAFA – the Armed Forces charity**<sup>10</sup> – the oldest national charity supporting people serving in the three Armed Forces, veterans and their families. It provides a wide variety of support in an appropriate and timely way: advice services on a range of financial, health and other issues, practical help to obtain mobility and specialist equipment, household goods for formerly homeless veterans, support for veterans with mental health needs and mentoring for veterans during transition to civilian life.
- Benevolent Funds – the **Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund**<sup>11</sup>, the **Royal Naval Benevolent Trust**<sup>12</sup> and **ABF The Soldiers Charity**<sup>13</sup> provide financial assistance to veterans and their families, which may include helping to pay towards care home fees, and for mobility equipment.

9 <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/>

10 <https://www.ssafa.org.uk/>

11 <https://www.rafbf.org/>

12 <http://www.rnbt.org.uk/>

13 <https://www.soldierscharity.org/>

- The **Not Forgotten Association**<sup>14</sup> – a unique charity which provides entertainment and recreation for the serving wounded, injured or sick and for ex-service men and women with disabilities. They arrange lunches, trips and social events for veterans, including those in residential care.
- Condition specific support – charities such as **Blind Veterans UK**<sup>15</sup> and **Blesma, The Limbless Veterans**<sup>16</sup> provide one to one support, specialist equipment and arrange social activities for people with specific conditions who have served in the military, including those in residential care. You can contact them for funding of equipment or support workers if you have any eligible residents.
- **Combat Stress**<sup>17</sup> is the largest charity supporting veterans with mental health needs. They have a 24 hour helpline and operate specialist treatment centres around the UK, but also have peer-support schemes (where veterans can support each other) and offer occupational therapy workshops.
- There are also several military associations for different armed services, including the **Royal Naval Association (RNA)**<sup>18</sup>, the **Royal Marines Association (RMA)**<sup>19</sup>, the **Royal Air Forces Association (RAFA)**<sup>20</sup>, the **Officers Association**<sup>21</sup> and so on. These provide comradeship and offer opportunities to socialise and keep in touch. Some also provide advice about benefits and housing, as well as operating a benevolent fund which eligible members can apply for to get small amounts of financial assistance. Some also have specific support schemes such as **Project Semaphore**<sup>22</sup> which offers iPads for digitally isolated naval veterans over 65.

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14 <http://www.nfassociation.org/home>

15 <https://www.blindveterans.org.uk/>

16 <https://blesma.org/>

17 <https://www.combatstress.org.uk/>

18 <https://www.royal-naval-association.co.uk/>

19 <https://royalmarinesassociation.org.uk/>

20 <https://www.rafa.org.uk/>

21 <https://www.officersassociation.org.uk/about-us/>

22 <https://www.royal-naval-association.co.uk/about-us/case-studies/project-semaphore/>

- **Veterans' Gateway**<sup>23</sup> is the first point of contact for veterans, their families and carers seeking support. No matter the issue, they can help connect you with their network of over 30 partners who specialise in different issues from pensions and families to physical health and mental wellbeing. **You can get their advice 24 hours a day via their helpline (0808 802 1212) or online via self-help guides.**

### *Research used in this guide*

This guide has drawn on primarily two pieces of Demos research, which are both free to download:

Under-Served (2015), which focuses on Veterans aged under 65 in residential care. It explores their priorities – the aspects of care they value and the aspects they would like to change – and the challenges faced by those who seek to provide that support. It includes some examples of good practice and practical recommendations.

The Commission on Residential Care (2014), which presents a vision for the future of residential care and housing with care drawing on a variety of international examples on how people with different needs (including a focus on dementia) are supported in innovative ways.



23 <https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/>

This guide has been produced by the independent research organisation Demos, in partnership with the Forces in Mind Trust and Cobseo The Confederation of Service Charities.

Its aim is to help care home managers and their staff understand more about how to support veterans living in residential care, taking into account their military service and backgrounds, and thereby addressing their specific needs and preferences in a more personalised way.

We have drawn insights and good practice examples together from a range of specialist military care homes to provide practical tips on how to better support veterans, and have included at the end of the guide contact details of several military charities and associations who can provide advice, information and support, and additional resources or funding to help care homes achieve this.

