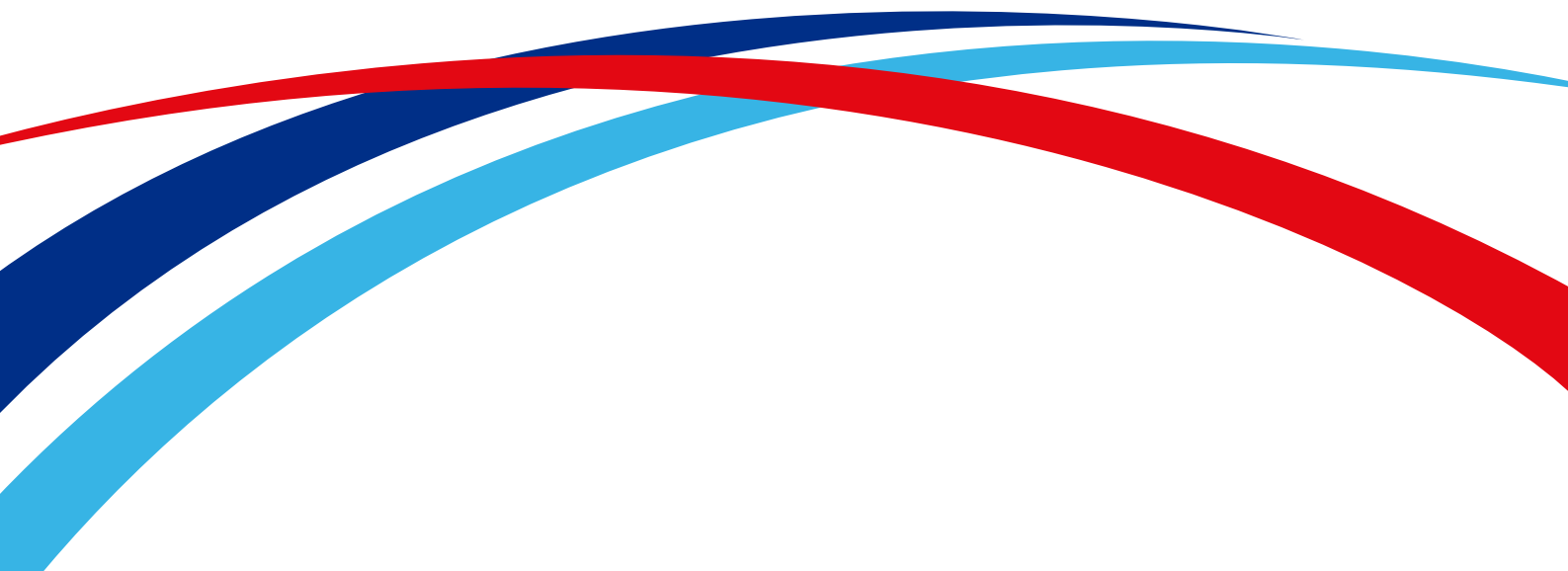




England

Veterans in the criminal justice system service - engagement findings

January 2023



Background

The NHS England document, 'Healthcare for the Armed Forces community: a forward view', sets out nine commitments to improve care and support for individuals during Service, leaving Service and after Service. Commitment six focuses on 'supporting veterans in the criminal justice system', which sets out details to develop a service model that meets the needs of veterans pre, during and post prison custody.

To help inform this work, NHS England undertook a programme of engagement to seek views on a proposed service model to support veterans pre, during and post prison custody. The proposed service model set out intentions for a non-clinical service pre and post prison custody and a prison officer and healthcare staff training package during prison custody. Views were captured from veterans and their families with lived experience of the criminal justice system, as well as from individuals working in this area.

This report sets out the findings from the engagement.

Separate engagement activity was undertaken by Breaking Barriers Innovations to inform the development of a joint strategic needs assessment for the proposed service model. These findings have been reported on separately.

What we did

From 25 July 2022 to 12 August 2022, a series of virtual focus groups and one to one discussions were held, with separate sessions for veterans and their families, as well as for individuals working in this area. An online survey was also shared, again with different versions for veterans and their families, and individuals working in this area.

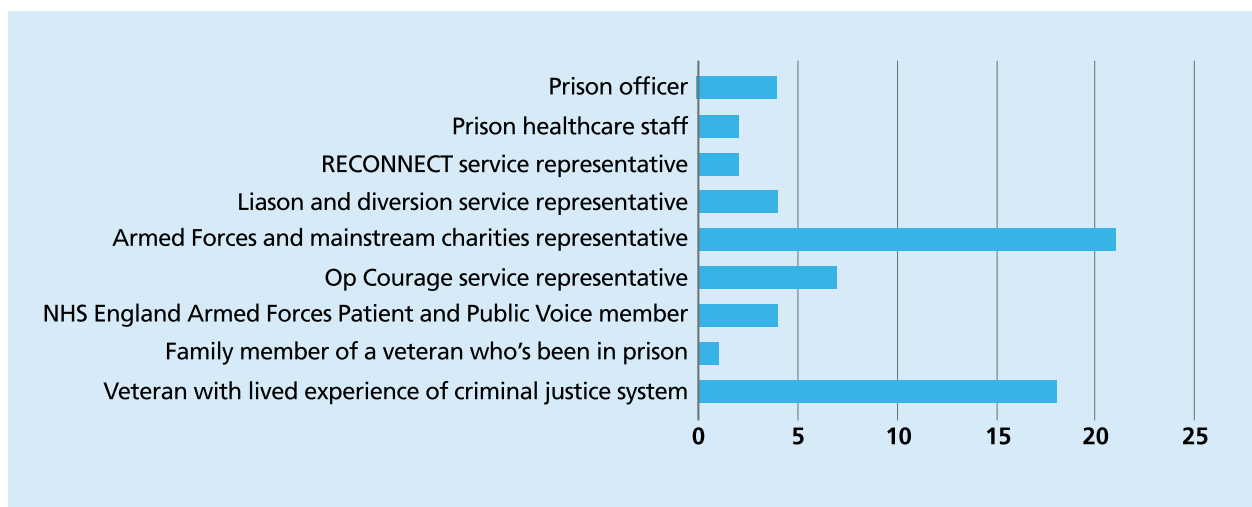
Who we heard from and how people shared their views

63
responses

12
focus groups

28
completed surveys

Stakeholders who took part in a focus group or completed a survey



What people told us: key findings and themes

General

- There is a need for this proposed service, however, care and support are essential pre, during and post prison custody - a whole pathway approach that is trauma informed is critical.
- In many regions, Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service is already doing what this proposed service will do for those that come into contact with the criminal justice system. The recommissioning of Op COURAGE will align this care and support across England, therefore opportunities for collaboration and co-delivery should be considered.
- The prompt identification of veterans is important in order to build trust and support them appropriately on their journey through the criminal justice system. Multiple opportunities should be provided to disclose this information with the benefits of doing so made clear (noting that not all those who have served in the military identify with the term 'veteran'). It may be beneficial to ask a question along the lines of 'Have you ever served in His Majesty's Armed Forces as you may qualify for ENHANCED support?'
- The proposed service should provide support with finances, education, training, accommodation, housing and employment (including support with redeployment to the Armed Forces), as well as support for families. This is important to minimise the risk of the veteran reoffending / generational offending is minimised.

Veterans in the criminal justice system service - engagement findings

- It is important to effectively promote this service and be clear on how individuals can contact / refer to it. Clarity is needed on whether veterans and their family members can contact the service for help / refer themselves.
- Collaborative working is key and relationships should be established with relevant organisations and agencies (ie police forces, liaison and diversion services, magistrates, courts, the prison service and probation) to facilitate partnership working. This should be at local, regional and national levels in order to support the movement of veterans around the criminal justice system.
- As part of the above point, there is a need for robust processes on how information on veterans is shared with law enforcement agencies, health and social care and other key partners, as well as across regions and borders, recognising that the movement of veterans in the criminal justice system can vary.
- Consistency and equity of care across the criminal justice system is vital, as is the need for the service to be sufficiently agile to accommodate the varying amount of time veterans can spend in each phase. For example, some will be arrested and go straight into custody, whilst for others it will be a protracted process. Equally, veterans can be moved across the prison estate, spending varying amounts of time in different prisons dependent on whether they are on remand, sentenced or due for release. The service needs to accommodate this variation, along with providing in-reach at the early stages for those leaving the military or a military corrective training centre.
- The new service needs to support the specific health and wellbeing needs of veterans, including vulnerable women, LGBT+ people, older people, individuals with dementia and male victims of domestic abuse. Education around this is important and should be offered to partner organisations / agencies.
- Aside from the importance of having veterans supporting veterans (ie peer mentors, support workers and buddies) as part of this proposed service, the appointment of suitably experienced and qualified staff is vital.

Pre prison custody

- This element of the proposed service had the most support from respondents, with individuals across all stakeholder groups generally happy with what was proposed.
- Whilst it was acknowledged that there was a wide range of interventions and support available at this time, there were some concerns that this may be a lot to fulfil and could be overwhelming for veterans. It was queried whether there should be a 'less is more' approach. Furthermore, caution was advised for the service not to make promises it is unable to deliver on, otherwise trust with veterans will be lost.

During prison custody

- This stage of the proposed service, ie a training package for prison healthcare staff and prison officers, generated the most debate, with the majority of respondents stating that it would be insufficient. The need for a single care pathway to effectively support veterans pre, during and post custody was deemed crucial. In line with these concerns, equivalence of care to that offered to veterans in the community was a key theme.

- It was widely agreed that this is an opportune and timely stage to engage veterans as a 'captive audience' without the outside influence of life's stressors, such as work and families. As part of this, veteran specific therapeutic care and support are important for treating and stabilising their health needs. It was felt that this was particularly important given an already busy prison healthcare and prison officer service.
- Consistency and equity of care across prisons was a key theme, recognising the differences for those on remand and those who have been sentenced / are due for release. The proposed service needs to be clear on how veterans are supported at these different stages and as and when they are moved across the prison estate. As part of this, the service also needs to build links with magistrates, courts and probation etc to improve understanding of and support for veterans.

Post prison custody

- Whilst this element was generally supported, there were concerns about offering support that only started 12 weeks pre-release, which was considered too short to prepare veterans for release. Furthermore, there was concern that RECONNECT would not have the resources, military / veteran understanding or Armed Forces connections to provide effective support at this important stage. The importance of having veteran case workers / support officers / mentors etc, working alongside RECONNECT was stressed. That said, there was widespread positivity on the REGROUP service and the impact it is already having on veterans in the criminal justice system.
- Support in the first few weeks of individuals leaving prison is critical, otherwise they could default to criminal behaviour - a robust support plan is vital, recognising in particular the need for mental health / addiction support.

You said, we did

Findings from the engagement have been considered by NHS England Armed Forces Health commissioners and as a result, the following has been undertaken:

- The above 'general' key themes and findings from the engagement were shared as part of the 'Invitation to tender documents' for the veterans in the criminal justice system service and are included in the final service specification. Interested bidders were asked to consider how they would address these as part of their tender submission for this service.
- Due to concerns over the in prison custody proposal focusing solely on a training and education package, which the majority of respondents felt was insufficient, this element of the veterans in the criminal justice system service has been removed for now. As such, just the pre and post prison custody services are being commissioned for a 1 April 2023 launch.

Armed Forces health commissioners have committed to gathering more evidence and information to inform the model of support for veterans serving a custodial sentence. It is intended that this phase of scoping and options appraisal will take place in the 2023/24 financial year.

Engaging with stakeholders, including veterans, their families and individuals working in this area, will help design what this stage of the service should look like, which will be commissioned as part of a phase two roll out of this national service.

- Noting concerns regarding proposals for the post prison custody service and associated support to start 12 weeks pre-release, the service specification now reflects requirements for support to commence no later than 12 weeks pre-release. Furthermore, direct support for up to six months following release from custody will be offered.
- Effectively marketing this service was highlighted as critical, as was the need to have an appropriate name to support understanding and awareness of it. An important element of this is recognising that veterans using this service could access it at different times throughout their journey through the criminal justice system and therefore different places in England. This means that regardless of where a veteran is arrested and where he ends up in prison and subsequently released, the name of this service should be the same, thus supporting ease of access and continuity of care. To help inform the name of the service, NHS England is making arrangements to run an engagement exercise to seek the views of veterans, families and individuals working in this area.

Next steps

Following a robust procurement process for the pre and post prison custody elements of this service, appointed providers will commence mobilisation arrangements in January 2023, ahead of it launching on 1 April 2023. Alongside this, arrangements are progressing to launch a naming convention exercise to inform a new name for this national service. This will be followed by scoping arrangements for the prison custody model that will be commissioned as part of a phase two roll out.

For further information on this new service and to be kept informed or involved in its progress, please email england.armedforceshealth@nhs.net

For more information on NHS services
for veterans, visit the NHS website at
www.nhs.uk/armedforceshealth

