



Veteran's Health Report

Warwickshire North, September 2024

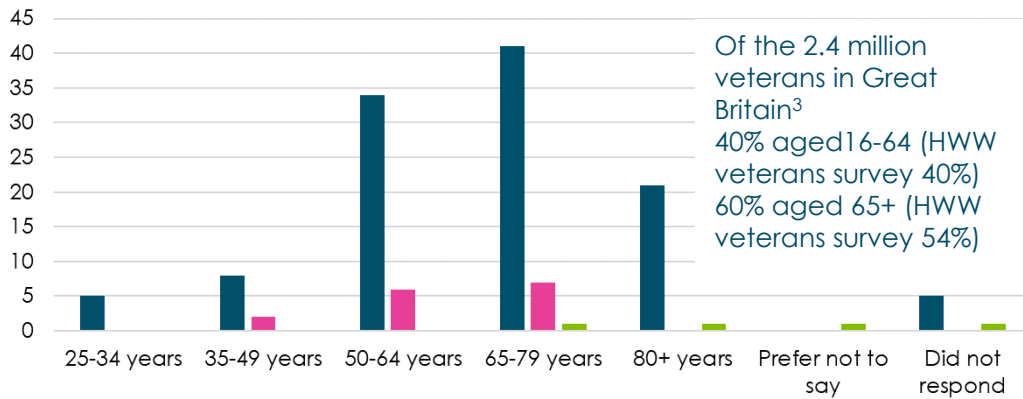
Introduction and Background

Between February and August 2024, we heard from 133 UK Armed Forces Veterans about their experiences of health care and support since leaving service.

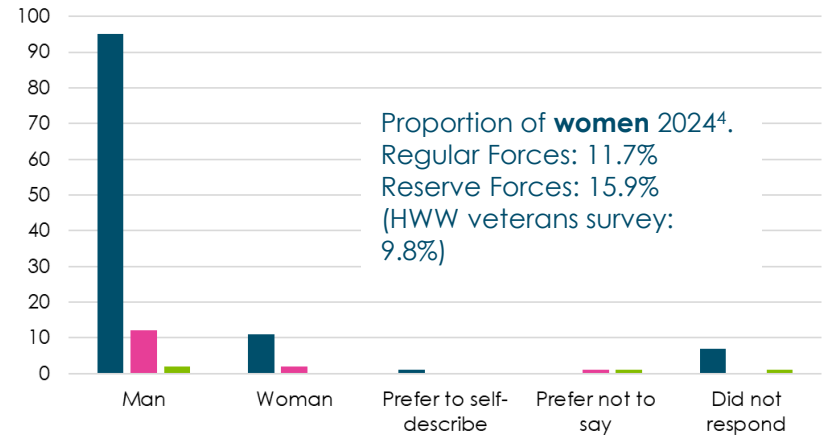
- The Armed Forces Covenant (signed locally as the Armed Forces Community Covenant in 2012), is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly, and states they 'should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.'¹
- Healthwatch Warwickshire (HWW) are signed up to the covenant and are keen to hear resident's experiences of health and social care.
- HWW conducted a survey and engagement work focussed on North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth. According to ONS Census 2021 data the percentage of people aged 16 years and over who had previously served in the UK armed forces was 3.9% (2,128) in North Warwickshire and 4.1% (4,442) in Nuneaton and Bedworth.²
- 114 of the veterans we heard from live in Warwickshire North, 15 live in Coventry or Rugby and 4 live further afield.
- HWW asked veterans about their experiences with GPs and other health care providers. We asked about any Long-Term Conditions. We asked about NHS health checks, and support from other organisations.
- Each veteran chose which questions they were happy to answer, therefore not every question was answered by every veteran.
- 10 of the veterans who completed the initial survey agreed to speak to us either online, by telephone, or in person, to discuss their experiences in more detail. These veterans told us they agreed to follow up with us as some wanted to share their varied experiences of health care, and some wanted to offer potential help to fellow veterans.

Who we heard from

Ages of veterans completing the HWW survey

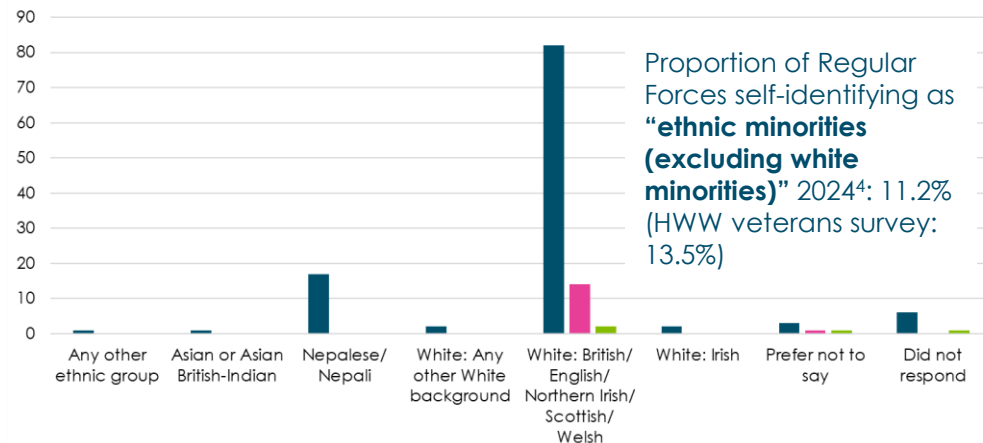


Gender of veterans completing the HWW survey

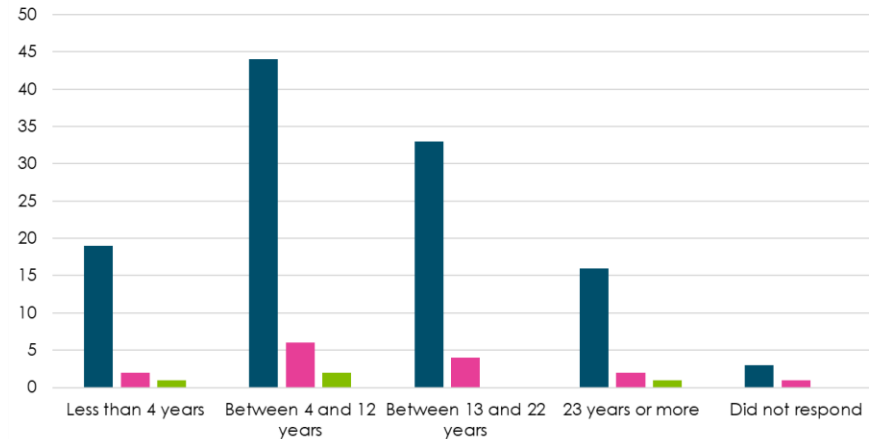


■ Warwickshire North ■ Coventry and Rugby ■ Further afield

Ethnicity of veterans completing the HWW survey

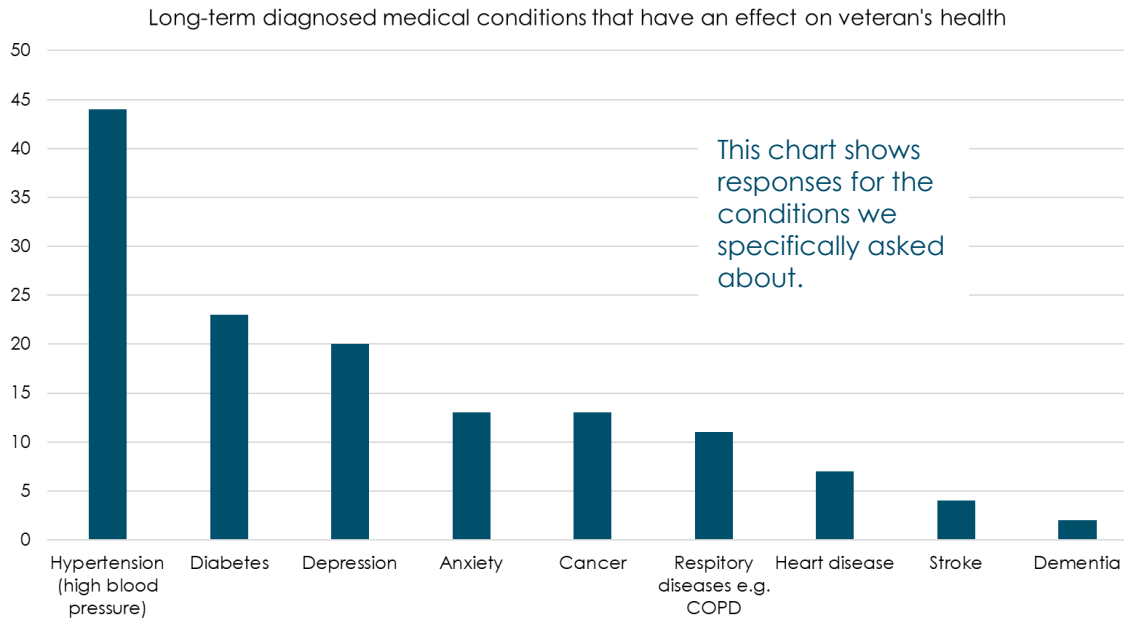


Length of service of veterans completing the HWW survey



What we heard about Long-Term Conditions in Warwickshire North

99 people told us about their diagnosed Long-Term Conditions (LTCs). 48 of these told us about being affected by more than 1 condition.



The ONS Health Survey for England 2021⁵, estimated that 30% of adults had hypertension, compared to 39% of the veterans in Warwickshire North who responded to our survey question.

7.7% of people in England are living with diabetes 2023/2024 according to the Department of Health⁶, compared to 20% of the veterans in Warwickshire North who responded to our survey question.

People also told us about other LTCs that affect them.

The most common of these LTCs were muscular skeletal (25 people), including arthritis, damage or pain in joints, backs and nerves. Both male and female veterans, all over 50 years old.

The second most common were neuropsychiatric or neurological conditions (8 people) including PTSD, epilepsy, and Parkinson's disease. Three of the four male veterans who told us they have PTSD, are aged between 35 and 49 years old.

This is in line with the 'Ministry of Defence Annual Medical Discharges in the UK' data for 2024⁷

6 What do veterans in Warwickshire North do when they are unwell?

“I self- medicate with paracetamol first, then go to the pharmacy. I only go to the GP if necessary, it takes time to get an appointment. My experiences with both the GP and hospital are very positive.”

“I go to the GP, but am not very trusting, due to previous poor decisions and long waiting times.”

“Medical Officers in the army are very good. I had many instances of good, quick, accurate care. Can't help but compare this with long waiting times and poor diagnoses these days.”

“You only get to see a GP if you physically go and stand in reception. I phone NHS 111 if I need advice.”

“If it's a particular issue about my prostate cancer or colitis I go to the hospital.”

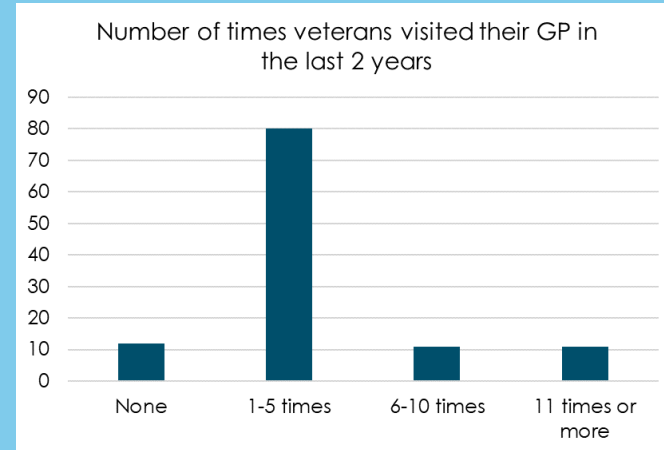
“I self-medicate for minor illnesses. I'd go straight to A&E if I thought it was serious, or if I can't see a GP. Willing to see a nurse.”

“If small and persistent - I would put up with it. If something is broken or bleeding out, I will then go to A&E not GP. Don't want to be fobbed off. I'd go to A&E when I can't see a GP.”

“If it's a physical issue that can be related to ongoing issues, or if it is something new, I would try to see the GP. I need to be quite stubborn and use my personality and personal skills to get the care or treatment I need; I try not to take no for an answer.”

“I call 111 or go to the GP. I'm unlikely to go unless it's very urgent. I'm able to deal with most things myself due to my nursing experiences.”

“See how it goes, self-medicate. See a pharmacist.”



Out of the twelve veterans who told us they have not visited a GP in the last 2 years, one told us they had visited an A&E.

What we heard about experiences with GPs in Warwickshire North

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and NHS England run a program to recognise and support GP practices that provide the best care for patients who have served in the armed forces. The program is called **Veteran Friendly GP practice accreditation**.

- 11 of the 17 surgeries attended by veterans who completed the survey have Veteran Friendly accreditation from the RCGP (June 2024).
- 51 veterans registered with 10 Veteran Friendly accredited GP surgeries told us they had not been asked if they are veterans.

113 of the 114 respondents who live in this area are registered with a GP. 102 people told us about their experiences of being registered with 17 GP surgeries located in Warwickshire North.

- 52 people (51%) have not been asked and chose not to tell their GP they are a veteran.
- 30 people (29%) told their GP they are a veteran, despite not being asked.
- 13 people (13%) were asked and told their GP they are a veteran.
- 2 people (2%) were asked if they are a veteran by their GP but chose not to tell them.
- 5 people (5%) were unsure, either about whether they had been asked, or whether they had informed their GP. 3 people did not respond
- 47 people (41%) who responded in Warwickshire North were aware that veterans may be eligible for priority treatment (subject to clinical need) within the NHS for injuries related to their time in service.

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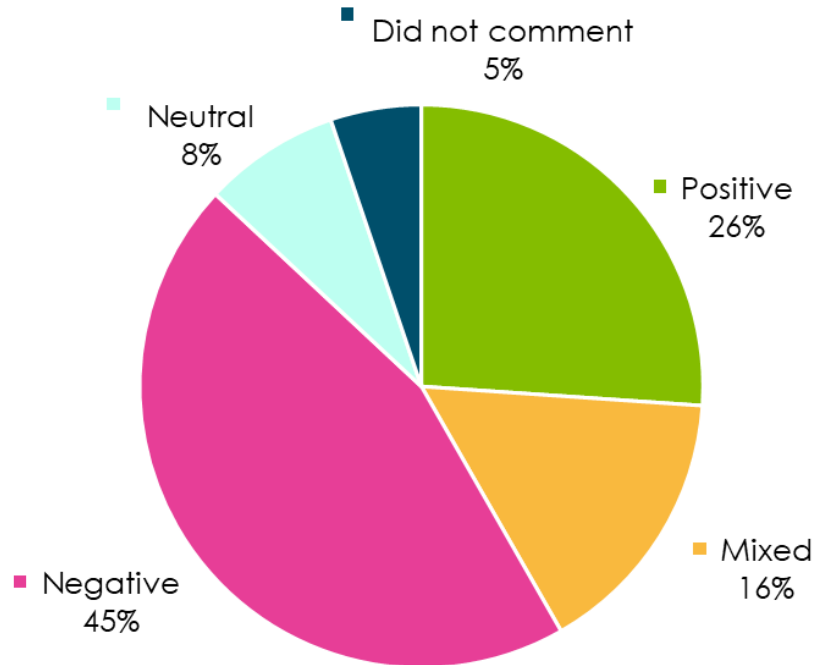
What we heard about experiences with GPs in Warwickshire North

“Generally, it is difficult to get an appointment although I don’t see this as different to the rest of the community. I have never met my doctor. Generally, they have no concept of military service.”

“It can be quite difficult to get an appointment, so I tend not to bother so much. If I do feel a need then my wife will go and book me an appointment as I am extremely deaf, and it makes conversation difficult.”

We found no direct connection between the length of time in service, and the number of times Veterans have visited their GP in the last 2 years.

Sentiment of comments heard about GPs in Warwickshire North



“It has made no difference whenever I informed the surgery about being a veteran and the covenant. My wife, also a veteran, waited nearly 2 years for recent cancer treatment.”

“I cannot fault my GP; they have been outstanding!”

“Very easy to communicate with. I message by phone and doctor calls or messages.”

“Usually OK for appointments but may have to wait a few days, No priority given at all or acknowledgement of my veteran needs really.”

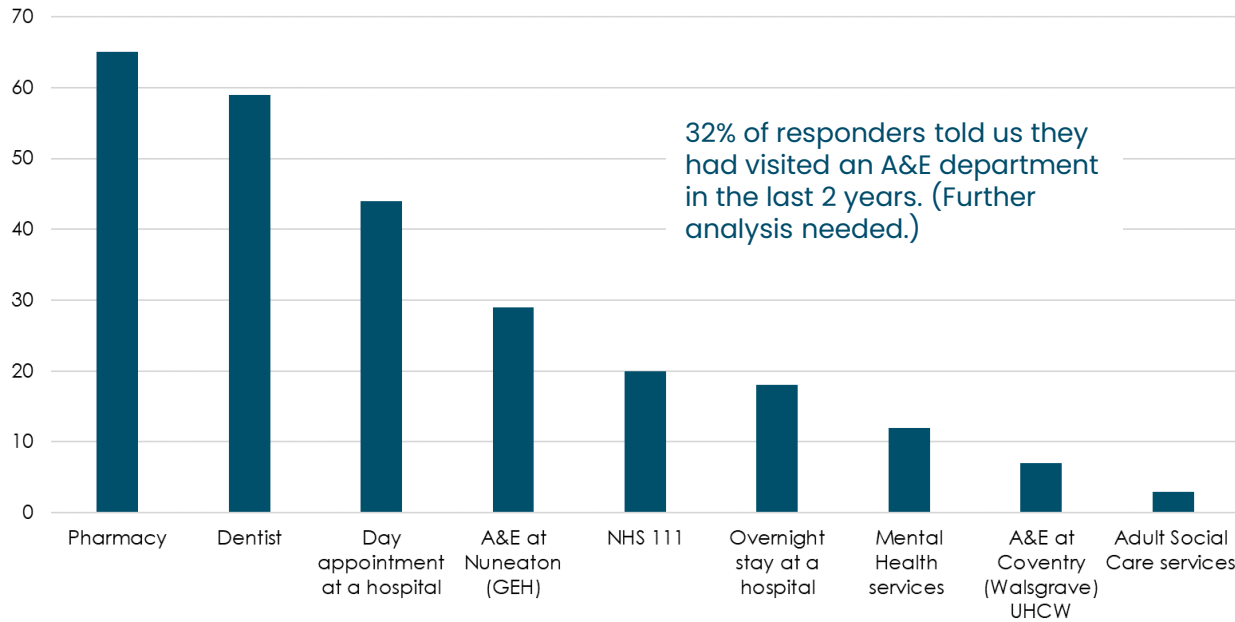
“Can get an interpreter if we ask but it is very difficult, and the doctors have said they can’t provide them.”



What we heard about other health care providers from veterans in Warwickshire North

110 people told us about other health care providers they have been in contact with in the last two years.

Contact with other health care providers in the last two years



“I called NHS111 with sickness and diarrhoea . I got a call back in five minutes and an emergency doctor came out and got me taken into George Eliot overnight.”

“George Eliot has an IBD (inflammatory bowel disease) clinic. There are problems getting my medication, I think there are supply issues of suppositories.”

“I had a phone call from the continence nurse last week to check how I’m getting on.”

“Had a tooth taken out at the dentist, no problem.”

“I’ve been to Avenue House in Nuneaton for EMDR (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing) treatment.”

“I have spoken to a counsellor through the Police Force and Unison.”

“I went to a private clinic in Rugby regarding leg pain.”

“I’ve just gone through my shoulder operation in the Meridian Hospital through NHS.”

6 What we heard about veteran's experience of sharing their veteran status

In follow up conversations we asked if veterans noticed whether care or interactions were different once their veteran status was known.

No one gave us an example of improvements.

“There was no comment at all from the GP surgery after I informed them I am a veteran.”

“I asked the GP receptionist if I could be registered as a veteran and they said they would text me with the information, but they never did.”

“I don't recall telling the Dr until a few years ago when I needed further investigations. Don't feel that this has benefited me.”

“Not made a difference. GP seems unaware of support for ex-armed forces people.”

“I don't know. I was a serving police officer so was pushed to the front of the queue at UHCW six years ago.”

“(A Private Orthopaedic Hospital) suggested I ask the NHS for a referral to physiotherapy. I was told ‘no’ by GEH and got a shrug when I brought this up with my GP and reminded them, I am a veteran. Otherwise, there have been shrugs, and no real recognition that it makes a difference. No thought to look at the whole person or consider what affects being a veteran may have on my current and future health.”



What we heard about support offered on leaving service:

In conversations following the survey we asked people what year they had been discharged and what type, or level, of support they had been given or made aware of, around their health care.

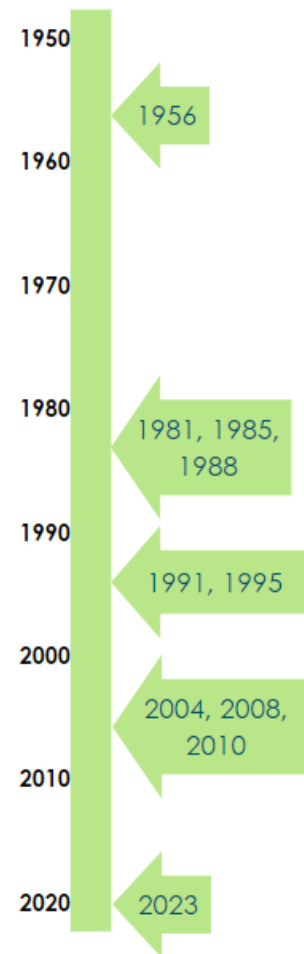
- None of these veterans remember being offered any information or support about health care when leaving service.
- Veterans we heard from left service in 1956, 1981, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1995, 2004, 2008, 2010 and 2023.
- Three of these veterans told us they remember being offered training for future employment.
- Two people told us they found out about war pensions, many years after leaving service.

“There was no support, or information about what to expect or how to transition, given upon discharge.” Discharged 2008

“Disappointing, no support given.” Discharged 2023

“I was offered traders courses - was able to qualify as a plumber, lead worker, bricklayer or tiler.” Discharged 1988

“10 years later I was able to get a war pension after finding out I was entitled to it.” Discharged 2004



What we heard about NHS health checks in Warwickshire North

People who are eligible for the NHS health check, should be invited every five years. 5 veterans did not respond to our questions about NHS health checks.

Who is the NHS Health Check for?



The check is for people who are aged 40 to 74 who do not have any of the following pre-existing conditions:

- heart disease
- chronic kidney disease
- diabetes
- high blood pressure (hypertension)
- atrial fibrillation
- transient ischaemic attack
- inherited high cholesterol (familial hypercholesterolemia)
- heart failure
- peripheral arterial disease
- stroke
- currently being prescribed statins to lower cholesterol
- previous checks have found that you have a 20% or higher risk of getting cardiovascular disease over the next 10 years

You should have regular check-ups if you have one of these conditions. Your care team will be able to give you more information about this.

- 7 veterans who told us they had not been invited for a health check, should be eligible according to the health and age information they shared with us, and the **eligibility criteria used by the NHS**. Two of these told us they did not want a health check.
- 41 veterans told us they had been invited and had attended their NHS health check.
- 51 veterans who told us they have not been invited for a health check, would not be eligible according to the NHS guidelines.
- All 10 of the veterans who told us they were 'not sure' whether they had been invited, would not be eligible.

"I would like one to be honest, it's been a few years since I had one."
Eligible but not invited recently

"Don't need a health check."
Eligible but not invited recently

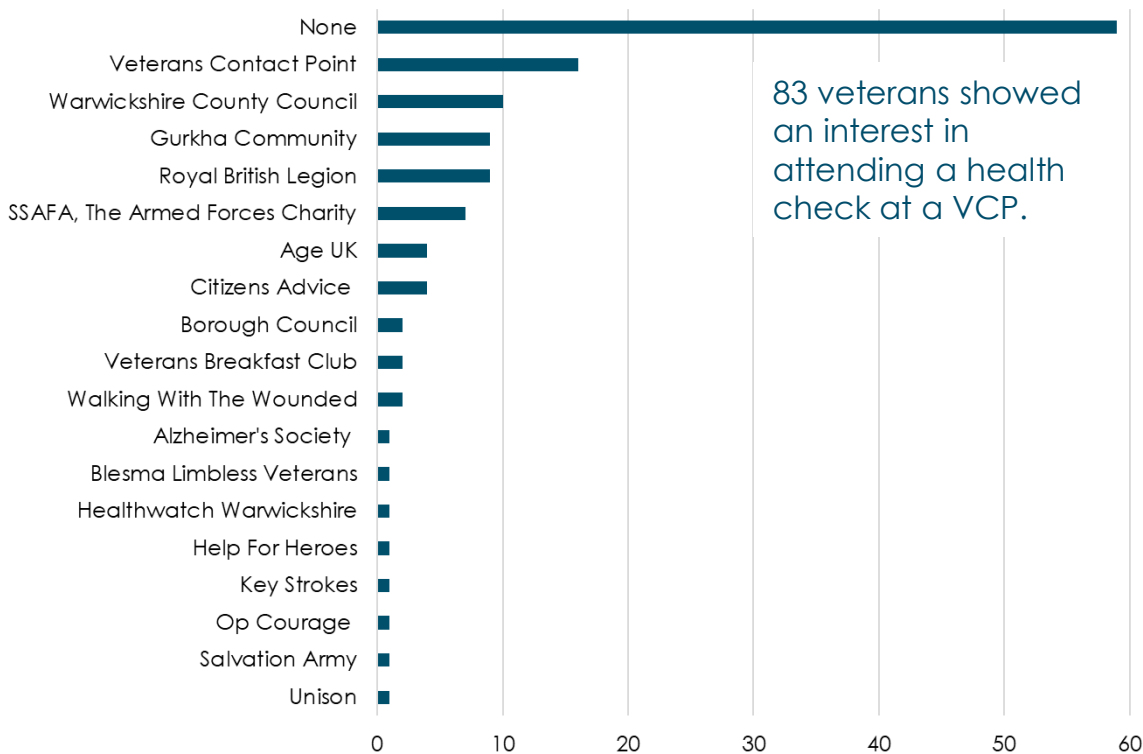
"My last physical health check was with a nurse."
Attended recently

"I used the Gurkha Centre." Attended recently

"I only get a check when I am seen for something else. I am waiting for a heart scan and cardiology appointment." Not eligible due to pre-existing conditions

What we heard about other support organisations from veterans in Warwickshire North

Organisations veterans have used for support in the last two years



83 veterans showed an interest in attending a health check at a VCP.

“I try to keep myself to myself and therefore not take up time in these organisations so others may have access.”

No support services used

“I couldn't get to Nuneaton at the moment due to back pain. I'm waiting for an operation.”

No support services used

“It took too long.”

Citizens Advice

“They weren't helpful for me.”

Warwickshire County Council

I wouldn't go to the Veterans Contact Point for a health check because it is too far away. I can't drive anymore so only use services in Bulkington.

No support services used

- 50 veterans told us 'yes', they would go to the Veterans Contact Point (VCP) in Nuneaton for a health check, 28 said 'maybe'. A further 5 said they would go to one of the other VCP locations.
- 19 veterans told us they are not interested in a health check at a VCP.
- 12 veterans did not respond to this question.

6 What would veterans like from health care/ support?

In follow up conversations we heard about general concerns and suggestions for improvement.

"I need to make sure the GP surgery are aware of me being a veteran."

"I would like to be able to get in to see a GP when needed, without the 2 week wait."

"Not to have to wait on the phone for 45-60 minutes to get through to the receptionist who tells you all appointments have gone."

"It feels like you have to be tech savvy and lie to get an appointment."

"It would make such a difference if they just said, 'we are aware you are a veteran', or 'thanks for your service'."

"I like that the surgeon/ consultant sends a copy of the letter of their findings to me. I want to talk to a human being not a machine."

"It would be good to go to the closest available place. Some places are becoming specialists e.g. dermatology, I had to travel to Walsgrave for my appointment."

"Mental health – seems like poor service, feels like a lack of diagnostic services"

"Wouldn't be a bad thing to come to VCP for a health check."

"Services are in place; people just need to take responsibility."

"I feel that veterans support groups and other organisations do not always work well together. Maybe they are concerned for their own continuation rather than the best way to support individuals."

"A full, holistic health check would be appreciated and should be offered to all veterans (actually everyone) but veterans have come to expect this level of treatment, ...and need it."

Summary:

- Veterans do not feel their health care is impacted by their veteran's status being known, and in many cases do not believe that health care staff know to ask about this status or know what to do if this status is known.
- The information that veterans shared with us about their Long-Term Conditions mirrored national data.
- The majority of veterans we heard from would prefer to see a GP initially when feeling unwell but often struggle to make appointments in a timely way, this experience of GPs is broadly in line with feedback heard by HWW across the county.
- Patients at Veteran Friendly accredited GPs across Warwickshire North are not consistently asked if they are veterans, and a significant proportion therefore choose not to inform their GP.
- 5% of the veterans we heard from had no contact with any health care providers over the last 2 years.
- Those veterans who attend Gurkha Community Support are generally happy with the health and wellbeing support they have received so far.
- Veterans who shared their experience with us did not recall health care or wellbeing support being offered to them on leaving service.
- The number of eligible veterans not being invited/ not attending NHS health checks is low, but awareness around eligibility and benefits of the checks is also low.

Next steps and recommendations:

- We will share these findings on our website and with other stakeholders including: The Office of the Minister for Veterans and People, The Armed Forces Champions in local government, The CSW Armed Forces Network, WCC Armed Forces Covenant Officer, Veterans Contact Point, Gurkha Community Support, George Eliot Hospital, and Primary Care Networks.
- Common understanding of what the Armed Forces Covenant is, and what is in place to support veterans with their health care, is needed.
- Awareness needs to be raised for health care staff, to encourage them to ask about veteran status. Staff should know what impact this status may have on care and be confident in signposting to effective support.
- Eligibility for NHS health checks should be clearly shared with veterans. The benefits of the NHS health check should be shared widely and clearly enough to encourage attendance.

Responses to the draft report:

Thank you to veterans, colleagues and stakeholders for their feedback on the first draft of this report, and to local colleagues who helped share our survey with local veterans.

“Thank you to Healthwatch Warwickshire for their survey work and development of this report for Warwickshire North. It demonstrates the need to encourage veterans to make their veteran status known to NHS services and to raise awareness of the support they can access for injuries and medical conditions arising from their service in the Armed Forces.

Equally, there is more work to be done within the NHS in raising awareness of the need to 'ask the question' and record the answer. Plus, giving tools the knowledge and confidence in engaging with veterans and to know when and how to refer veterans for priority access to services based upon Armed Forces service-related issues.

The Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance and the RCGP Veteran Friendly accreditation schemes are good foundations upon which we can build improved support to deliver better outcomes for our veterans.”

Phil Deakin, Armed Forces Covenant Officer at WCC

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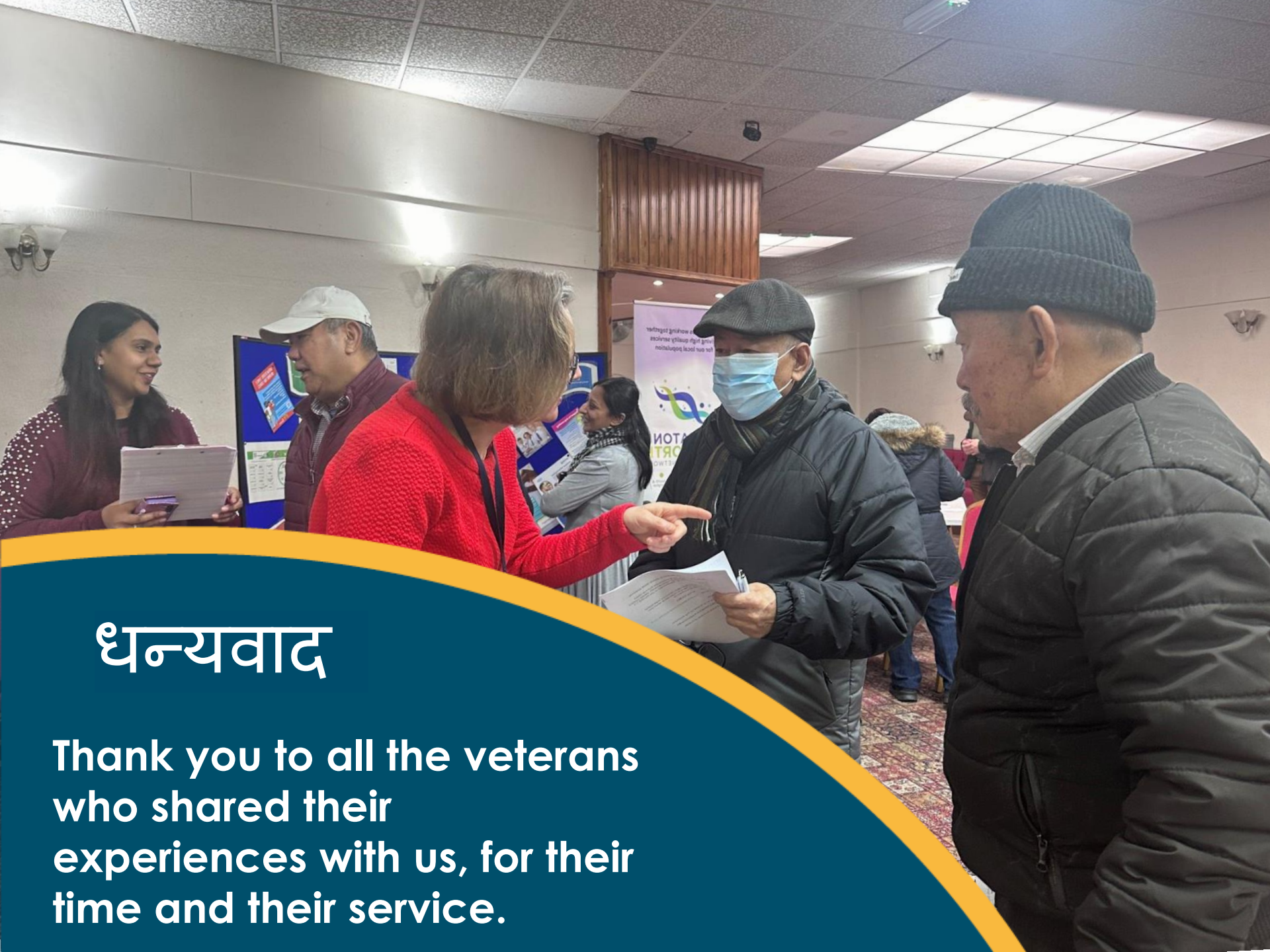
- *“Understanding the barriers when accessing healthcare for Veterans is a key part of George Eliot Hospital Trust’s health inequality strategy. The Healthwatch Warwickshire report gives an important insight into the many challenges Veterans face when leaving service and highlights the gap in support for transitioning to NHS Healthcare. George Eliot Hospital Trust is a Veteran Aware and Silver Defence Employer Recognition Scheme organisation, and we look forward to continuing to work with Healthwatch and organisations in our local area that support Veterans and improves access to Healthcare services in our community.”*
Engagement Team, George Eliot Hospital
- The veterans who agreed to engage with us were keen to assist in improving experiences for fellow veterans. During one of our discussion groups, following the survey, a veteran shared that they had applied for a Veteran Card, other veterans present were unaware of this. ***“It feels good to have ‘proof’ you are a veteran.”***

References:

- 1: Statutory Guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty, Section 2: Healthcare. [Report](#)
- 2: 'UK armed forces veterans, health and unpaid care, England and Wales: Census 2021', ONS website. [Web page.](#)
- 3: Armed Forces Veterans Factsheet [Report](#)
- 4: 'UK defence personnel statistics.' House of Commons Library. Published 13 August 2024. [Report.](#)
- 5: 'UK armed forces veterans, health and unpaid care, England and Wales: Census 2021', ONS website. [Web page.](#)
- 6: Department for Health, Fingertips data. [Web page](#)
- 7: MoD Annual Medical Discharged in the UK 2024. [Report](#)

Appendices:

- NHS Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance. [Web page](#)
- RCGP Veterans Health Hub e-learning. [Web page](#)
- Latest from Ministry of Defence (support offered on discharge). [Web page](#)
- 'Support for service leavers, veterans and their families'. Warwickshire County Council. [Web page](#).
- Preparedness to leave the UK armed forces: Veterans' Survey 2022 UK. [Report](#)
- Life after service in the UK armed forces: Veterans' Survey 2022, UK. [Report](#)
- 'Veterans Mental Health Needs Assessment, Warwickshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2015'. [Report](#).
- NHS Health Check eligibility. [Web page](#).
- 'Apply for an HM Armed Forces Veteran Card.' [Web page](#)
- With thanks to Healthwatch Hertfordshire for their support. 'Improving Healthcare Access for Veterans' report, published March 2021. [Report](#)



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Thank you to all the veterans who shared their experiences with us, for their time and their service.

For more information

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