



## What is the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC)?

The AFC is a **pledge** by the nation to ensure that the Armed Forces and Veterans community are not disadvantaged by their service.

It is also a **legislative duty** for NHS boards across primary<sup>1</sup> and secondary<sup>2</sup> healthcare, and the local authorities across local authority-delivered healthcare, education and housing services.

The duty says that the NHS and local authorities must pay due regard to the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces through the principles that:

- **the disadvantages faced by the Armed Forces and Veterans community as a result of service should be removed**
- **special provision may be justified for those, who have given the most such as the bereaved and the injured**

Veterans are defined as anyone, who has served for at least one day in His Majesty's Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve), the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, Royal Naval Auxiliary or Merchant Naval Seafarers, who have seen duty on legally defined military operations.

**Who is covered by the pledge?** The pledge covers:

- serving members of His Majesty's Forces (Regular and Reserve)
- serving members of British Overseas Territories' Armed Forces, who are subject to UK Service law
- veterans, who are ordinarily resident in the UK, including Royal Fleet Auxiliary, Royal Naval Auxiliary Service or Merchant Naval Seafarers, who deployed on legally defined UK military operations
- relevant family members

**Relevant Family Members/ Military Connected Families?** This includes service spouses and partners, service children, spouses and partners of veterans, children of veterans, former spouses or partners of service personnel or veterans, and in some cases, the parents of service personnel and veterans.

**Who is covered by the duty?** The duty covers:

- serving members of the His Majesty's Forces (Regular and Reserve)
- serving members of British Overseas Territories' Armed Forces, who are subject to UK Service law
- veterans, who are ordinarily resident in the UK (not including RFA, RNXS or MN veterans)
- relevant family members.

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<sup>1</sup> Primary care is often your first point of contact with the NHS and is delivered by your GP, practice or community nurse, allied health professionals such as your physiotherapist or occupational therapist, dentist, pharmacist or optometrist.

<sup>2</sup> Secondary Care is specialist healthcare and is delivered in hospitals, or by specialist clinics and community services; for example, a community mental health team or a rehabilitation service.



**Why is the AFC important?** There are a number of ways that the AFC can be applied to support you. These examples are not exhaustive.

- If an injury, illness or condition is likely linked back to service, access to specialist services should be prioritised in line with clinical need.
- If a service family member moves to a NHS board's area (because their spouse, partner or parent is posted/ assigned) whilst receiving treatment, they should resume their treatment with the least delay possible.
- If a service family member moves to a NHS board's area (because their spouse, partner or parent is posted/ assigned) whilst on a waiting list, they should retain their relative place on the new NHS board's waiting list.

**In line with clinical need?** Clinical need is determined by the clinician or specialist. It means that those with the greatest or most urgent need will go first.

**It's not in my military medical records!** It is not necessary for the illness, injury or condition to be recorded in your military medical records. It is recognised that many service personnel chose not to disclose physical and mental health issues for a variety of reasons; for example, the stigma of reporting injury.

**What can you do to ensure that the AFC is applied?** Please do the following:

- Speak to your GP surgery so that they can flag your Armed Forces and Veteran's status on the system.
- Highlight to anyone referring you into specialist services (for illnesses, injuries or conditions linked to service) that you should be considered for prioritised access in line with the Armed Forces Covenant.
- If you are on a waiting list and have just moved to a new NHS board's area, please share any letters that you have received from your previous NHS board or trust area with your GP. Key information is the date that you were referred because this provides your new NHS board with the start date for their waiting list.

**Where can you or your GP go for advice?** Every NHS board has an Armed Forces Champion. Their contact details can be found the Veterans Assist website - <https://www.veterans-assist.org/veteran-support/veterans-champion/>

**Where can my GP find Armed Forces and Veterans Awareness training?** There is training available on TURAS Learn - <https://learn.nes.nhs.scot/65580/scottish-government-armed-forces-and-veterans-recognition-scheme-healthcare>

**Reference Document:** Statutory Guidance on the AFC Duty. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1116148/Armed\\_Forces\\_Covenant\\_Duty\\_Statutory\\_Guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1116148/Armed_Forces_Covenant_Duty_Statutory_Guidance.pdf)