



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Innovative project launched to improve social connections for over 25,000 veterans

A new project has been established which will benefit the tens of thousands of Armed Forces veterans and their partners living in care homes across England.

The Veteran Friendly Framework (VFF), launched on Thursday 19 October, aims to tackle loneliness and isolation, and deliver improved health and wellbeing outcomes for over 25,000 veterans living in care homes across England. It will support the practical, emotional and social needs for the Armed Forces community by providing care homes with resources to assess and improve their offer.

One care home said they were forging links with military groups in the area as a result of the VFF. Lightbowne Hall in Manchester also said the VFF had created bonds among its veteran residents and brought them closer together, while also enabling staff to improve the person-centred care they deliver.



The Framework has been praised by government minister Rt Hon. Johnny Mercer MP and Professor Deborah Sturdy CBE, the Chief Nurse for Adult Social Care in England.

The VFF is a two-year collaboration between Armed Forces charities Royal Star & Garter, the Royal British Legion and the NHS Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA – an NHS flagship Armed Forces programme), with funding support from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. This project, focusing on care homes, follows on from the Veteran Friendly accredited GP scheme run by the Royal College of General Practitioners and the VCHA NHS accreditation scheme.

Care providers will need to meet eight standards to complete their accreditation. These will include provisions to identify the wellbeing needs of veterans and their partners by ensuring that Armed Forces status is included in care planning; addressing social isolation; and providing signposting to local statutory and charitable support services.



There are around 15,000 care homes in England, but only 20 currently offer specialist support to those who served in the Armed Forces and their partners. During an initial pilot phase of the VFF, ten care homes have met the required standards including all Royal Star & Garter and five Royal British Legion homes (with a sixth and final home about to achieve accreditation).

More than 670 veterans and partners are now benefiting from enhancements made resulting from the Framework and over 1,200 staff have received enhanced training and guidance in better engaging with the unique military experience. This will result in an increased understanding and awareness of the needs of the veteran community.



The Veteran Friendly Framework (VFF) will support veterans living in care homes across England

A further 20 care homes are in the process of gaining VFF accreditation. They include Ascot Care which has seven homes in the North-East, and Anchor, England's largest not-for-profit provider of housing and care for people in later life, which has seven homes in the North West. They are already starting to see direct benefits for their residents from identifying members of the Armed Forces who had not previously shared their status as veterans, to connecting individuals within their homes and creating friendships and vital social interactions on the basis of their service. The scheme aims to accredit hundreds more care homes over the next 18 months.

Lightbowne Hall, run by Anchor, is a non-military care home currently working through the Framework. Home Manager Rebecca Mardy said: "It was very much in the best interests of our residents to be part of this exciting new venture. As a care home we have learned just how much help and support is available. Staff have a much better understanding of our veterans, and it has opened a completely new field of conversations. We are looking forward to contacting our local Veterans Breakfast Club and forging links with our local cadets to invite them to visit the home."

Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Rt Hon. Johnny Mercer MP, said: "The Veteran Friendly Framework will make sure that veterans living in care homes understand and are fully aware of the services that are available to them. It's all about making this the best country in the world to be a veteran. I pay tribute to Royal Star & Garter, Royal British Legion, VCHA and everyone who has helped with this."



Professor Deborah Sturdy said: "Social care is a vital part of our public services and it's really important that we support our veterans to both access those services and support them while they're living within them. The launch of the Veteran Friendly Framework is a really important step forward. The partnership and opportunity that it presents to make sure people live well and have a fulfilled and interesting life is absolutely critical. I'm delighted to be supporting this and I know that this will make a real difference, not only to the veterans who live with us, but also the understanding and the quality of care they receive."



RAF veteran and Royal Star & Garter resident Michael thinks the VFF is a "marvellous idea"

RAF veteran Michael has been a resident at Royal Star & Garter for three years. He said: "I think the Veteran Friendly Framework is a marvellous idea. It will provide support to thousands of veterans living in non-military care homes across the country. At Royal Star & Garter, this is something I really value, and I'm delighted that veterans in other care

Royal Star & Garter Chief Executive Andy Cole said: "We're very proud to be launching the Veteran Friendly Framework with Royal British Legion and the NHS Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance. In 2018, Royal Star & Garter set out our plan to significantly increase the number of veterans we support, and the VFF is a major step in achieving this. We have over a century's worth of experience caring for the nation's military family, and we are delighted to be sharing it with care homes across the country, so that veterans in other homes can receive outstanding support."

RBL Director General Charles Byrne said: "The Royal British Legion is extremely pleased to be a partner in the Veteran Friendly Framework (VFF) for care homes scheme along with Royal Star & Garter and the Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA). Most veterans are cared for in civilian homes that in some cases, may not fully understand their social, emotional or physical needs. The exciting potential of this project is to raise the standards of care received by all members of the Armed Forces community living in all care homes. We want to showcase the thought and creativity that goes into care for veterans so it can be shared across the sector. Then, a much wider group of people could benefit from a more tailored approach to their care



Jo-Anne Wilson MBE, from Royal British Legion's Galanos House (centre), with Kathryn Glass, VFF Project Lead (right), and other staff with their VFF-approved certificate



which, where appropriate, takes into account their Armed Forces experience and celebrates their service."

Professor Tim Briggs, CBE, VCHA National Chair, said: "Thousands of veterans live in residential and care homes across the country, so it was only right that the VCHA accreditation programme was extended beyond NHS trusts, independent healthcare providers and hospices, thereby creating touch points for veterans across the whole of the health and social care system.

"Royal Star & Garter and Royal British Legion are both experienced in running care homes for the veteran community so they are our perfect partners in helping us to deliver on the Government's promise to make the UK the best country in the world to be a veteran."

Any care homes interested in receiving more information about the VFF can visit www.starandgarter.org/veteran-friendly-framework, email VFF@starandgarter.org or call 07435 326070.

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Notes to editors:

National census data (2021) identifies direct veteran status;

- Of the 340,355 care home residents in England and Wales, 26520 (7.79%) were veterans, 25,085 of these are in England.
- Nearly half (46.50%) of the 15,765 communal establishments classed as care homes in England and Wales housed at least one veteran.

We do not know the number of partners and widow(er)s of veterans in care homes, so members of the Armed Forces community in care homes will be much higher than the Census data on veterans alone indicates. The Veteran Friendly Framework is designed for this wider Armed Forces community.

The VFF is currently a two-year programme funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, Royal British Legion and Royal Star & Garter, running to April 2025.

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Royal Star & Garter provides loving, compassionate care to veterans and their partners living with disability or dementia, helping them to lead happy, fulfilled lives. Their three Homes offer specialist full time and short break residential care, along with a programme of outreach services including Lunch Clubs and telephone support.

The Royal British Legion has six care homes providing residential, nursing and respite care for hundreds of older veterans and their dependants. They also support individuals needing specialist dementia care and provide a unique environment that recognises and celebrates residents' service to the country.

Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance The NHS in England is committed to raising standards among healthcare providers of Veterans' services. The Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA) is a group of NHS providers, including acute, mental health, community, and ambulance trusts that have agreed to be exemplars of the best care for, and support to, the armed forces' community. They do this through their Veteran Aware accreditation model, which has been widened to include the independent sector and hospices, which encourages providers to identify those patients with an armed forces background.