

STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2025

OUR VISION

We want all former servicemen and women with complex mental health issues to live full and meaningful lives.

LASTING RECOVERY STARTS WITH COMBAT STRESS

“**COMBAT STRESS HAS GIVEN ME BACK THINGS THAT I THOUGHT HAD BEEN TAKEN AWAY.**”

After serving in Afghanistan, Army veteran Hugh knew that something wasn't right but pushed it to the back of his mind. It wasn't until over five years later when he thought about taking his own life that he eventually began to receive our help for his PTSD.

“I wasn't physically lonely, but I'd experienced mental loneliness with my PTSD and at Combat Stress I found there were other people like me who had lived through the same thing.

“I would say to other veterans that there is help out there if you need it and it's not a sign of weakness to ask for it.”

WELCOME

For over 100 years, we have provided specialist mental health support to veterans – no one knows veterans' mental health better than us. Whilst the conflicts have changed enormously over the years, demand for our services remains high and our commitment remains the same – to provide treatment and support to former servicemen and women to help them tackle the past and take on the future.

We want every veteran in the UK with complex mental health problems to know that the journey to lasting recovery starts with Combat Stress. By 2032, veterans will receive comprehensive treatment and support for the whole person, through a system of high-quality collaboration between Combat Stress, sector partners and the NHS, to meet the needs of all UK veterans with complex mental health problems.

As an organisation we are continually evolving and developing to meet the changing needs of veterans today and in the years ahead. This strategy sets out what we plan to achieve in the next three years.

Jeff Harrison,
CEO



In the past, veterans were in-patients at our recuperative homes



Today many veterans receive our specialist treatment online

OUR VISION

We want all former servicemen and women with complex mental health issues to live full and meaningful lives.

This is our fundamental vision and, if you've known us a while, you'll notice it hasn't changed. That's because our cause is as relevant now as it was in 1919 when the charity was founded in the aftermath of the First World War.

WHY NOW?

It has never been a more crucial time to support our work with veterans. Demand continues to outstrip our capacity for treatment – greater numbers of younger veterans are coming forward to seek our help much sooner than in the past placing increased pressure on our scarce resources.

The high tempo and frequency of deployments surrounding recent conflicts have impacted on the mental health of returning servicemen and women. Research has shown that among veterans who have served in a combat role in Afghanistan or Iraq, 17% reported symptoms suggesting probable Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

(source: King's Centre for Military Health Research).

Those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan now make up the largest group we support. These horrendous conflicts seriously traumatised many servicemen and women. It means we're now seeing a particularly complicated form of PTSD, where veterans are also battling with moral injury.

Many of those who served in these conflicts are traumatised by the high numbers of civilian injuries and fatalities, including children. Witnessing, being involved in or being unable to stop catastrophic situations can change how veterans view themselves – and that's at the very heart of moral injury.

This moral injury can destroy their self-worth and many come home so paralysed with shame and guilt that they can't function without specialist treatment.

Our own data, and that of the NHS and MOD, forecasts that demand for veteran mental health services will continue to grow over the next decade.

We estimate that there are already over 1,000 veterans with complex mental health problems every year who we are unable to offer our specialist treatment due to lack of funding. We urgently need your help now to reach them all.

WE NEED TO DO MORE BECAUSE:

- We know there are thousands of veterans struggling today who would benefit from our help – particularly those from underrepresented groups.
- We know the average age of a veteran who seeks our help is 44 and that they are often in pain for years before they receive our life-changing treatment.
- We know that more veterans, particularly those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, are going to need our specialist help in the next decade.
- We know that veterans' needs are evolving and that we need to continue to ask questions, monitor need and adapt to be available at the end of the phone, in person and online when they need us most.
- We know that if we build on our family services we can increase the chances of veterans achieving lasting recovery.
- We know that our team can do more to involve a veteran's support network and have a meaningful impact on the long-term well-being of carers, partners and children.
- We know that charity sector, NHS and veterans' services can do more if we work better together and share our expertise.

Our strategic plan for 2022-2025 has been developed to help address these needs and mean that in the future, every veteran in the UK with complex mental health issues knows that the journey to lasting recovery starts with Combat Stress.

OUR STRATEGIC AIMS

AIM 1: QUALITY

We believe that veterans should have the best possible mental health treatment. We will deliver the most effective service for veterans with complex mental health needs, supporting their families and network too. We will deliver this directly and in partnership with others.

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

- We are embedding a continuous quality improvement plan. **Working with the internationally renowned not-for-profit Virginia Mason Institute**, the plan will help ensure we continue to provide better outcomes from veterans.
- Through our involvement in the Quality Network for Veterans' Mental Health Services* peer review and accreditation system, we will **help promote quality and improvement within veterans' mental health services**.
- As one of the four Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust Strategic Leads for Veterans' People, Pathways and Places Programme (VPPP), we will **continue to provide clinical governance oversight to other military mental health charities involved**, contributing to the quality, effectiveness and safety of the sector. We will also share our expertise in providing services to veterans with mental health issues by delivering specialist training for colleagues participating in the VPPP projects.
- To help us better understand the needs of the veteran community, our **research department will continue to explore innovative and effective ways of treating veterans**. We will use this knowledge to develop and deliver evidence-based specialist treatments.

*The Quality Network for Veterans Mental Health Services promotes quality improvement within and between veterans mental health services. Led by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the network is made up of over 30 NHS and third sector services.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- We will **complete the roll-out of VICTOR (Veterans' Intensive Complex Trauma Organised Recovery)** to ensure we meet the needs of veterans who require this level of support.
- **Every interaction a veteran or their family has with Combat Stress** to contribute positively to their recovery.
- **We will be recognised as excellent** by the relevant clinical regulator for each of our hubs.
- We will make a **meaningful contribution to the quality, effectiveness and safety of the veterans' mental healthcare sector**.

OUR STRATEGIC AIMS

AIM 2: SERVICE

For veterans with complex mental health problems we currently provide the only multidisciplinary intensive mental health treatment service available in the UK. We want to enhance our leading role in the veterans' mental healthcare sector to deliver the best possible service ensuring veterans get treatment from the right organisation at the right time.

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

- We will **collaborate and work in partnership with other services** so veterans, and their families, can access the best available support.
- We will contribute to the **development of a "no wrong door"** mental health care system that aims for every veteran and their family to be able to access the best available support in a timely, safe and effective way, no matter where in the UK they are.
- We will strive to **better understand the unmet complex mental health needs of veterans** to help raise funds for support, so we can contribute to a sector-wide strategy via our partners at Cobseo, the Confederation of Service Charities, and the Contact Group.
- We will **shorten the path into treatment** to ensure veterans are seen as quickly as possible.
- Under our equality, diversity and inclusion action plan for veterans and their families, we will **engage and reach out to underrepresented groups** so that our services are more widely known by all parts of the Armed Forces family.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- **Closer collaboration with the NHS** to help deliver OpCourage as well as with other military service charities.
- By building this network and collaborating with others, **veterans will be better guided to the right resources** at the right time.
- Recognising the unmet need of veteran families and how integral that is to a veteran's overall recovery, **roll-out a programme of family support across the UK.**
- **Increase our footprint across the UK through our hub locations.** Where possible we will co-locate with partners, service charities and other third sector organisations to build and enhance relationships.
- **Reduce the time** between referral and treatment.
- Treat more veterans from **underrepresented groups.**

OUR STRATEGIC AIMS

AIM 3: IMPROVEMENT & INNOVATION

Advance and share our knowledge for the benefit of the veteran community. Veterans are at the heart of everything we do. We involve them in every area of the charity and share our knowledge with peers and partners.

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

- Expand expertise and knowledge in veteran mental health issues by **providing specialist training internally and externally** and through attendance at seminars and other events.
- Continue to **undertake ground-breaking research** into veteran and family needs and the level of demand to develop novel treatment.
This will include:
 - The **largest ever dedicated study** on the needs of female veterans to help ensure services understand and reflect their needs
 - Use of **virtual reality** in treating Complex-PTSD
- We will continue to **develop and expand our fundraising and communications activity** to raise awareness and reach new audiences so that every veteran knows how Combat Stress can help.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- Better knowledge within the sector of how to work with and treat veterans through the provision of specialist training internally and externally through **our new learning and development platform**.
- **Keynote speaker opportunities at events** including King's College London's Veterans Mental Health Conference, The Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre Conference, The UK Psychological Trauma Conference and European Society of Traumatic Stress Studies Conference.
- **Utilise research findings to inform and develop clinical treatment** at Combat Stress, across the sector and internationally.
- **Meet our ambitious fundraising targets** to enable us to deliver new services and treatment to support those who turn to us.
- Ensure that **every veteran in the UK knows that lasting recovery starts at Combat Stress**.

OUR STRATEGIC AIMS

AIM 4: OUR PEOPLE

Our people help us deliver the best service and treatment to veterans – from staff to volunteers to generous donors and enthusiastic fundraisers. We want them to feel valued and involved in making a difference to the lives of veterans and their families.

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

- We will further **improve our learning and development programme**, ensuring all staff have opportunities to learn and grow.
- We are working with the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion (ENEI) on the development and implementation of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) plan to **embed training across the organisation**, to continue to nurture and strengthen our inclusive environment at Combat Stress, which also ensures we can continue to deliver the best service for all.
- We will **engage with underrepresented groups** such as female veterans, ethnic minorities and LGBTI+.
- We will continue to deliver against our engagement strategy; providing a thoughtful and personal supporter journey that **inspires and engages new and loyal donors** by clearly sharing the impact of their financial gifts and volunteer time.
- Develop co-production through our National Veterans' Voice (NVV), Open Forum and Local Veterans' Voice Groups to **ensure veterans have a clear and respected voice** within the charity.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- Continuous **professional development for all staff** through our in-house training platform and also specific clinical treatment training modules to further benefit the veterans we treat.
- We will **recruit more staff from diverse backgrounds** and achieve relevant recognition in the area of EDI.
- We will develop and implement a comprehensive veteran engagement strategy to **target underrepresented groups**.
- Despite the challenging economic environment, we will meet funding requirements that enable the essential continuation and important **investment in key mental health services for veterans**.
- **We'll raise awareness amongst the generous public, companies and funders** of the needs of veterans living with complex mental health problems as a result of their military service and ensure that, like veterans, they know that lasting recovery starts with Combat Stress.
- **A strong regional volunteer presence in each hub**, a well utilised NVV and an Open Forum that is attended by a wide cross-section of the veteran community regardless of their previous involvement or experiences with Combat Stress.
- We will achieve **'Gold Defence Employer' status**. This is the highest award any organisation can achieve to demonstrate their commitment to the Armed Forces Community as a Forces-friendly employer.

“

I'm forever thankful to Combat Stress' supporters as without their donations to fund the charity's work I don't think I would be here. That's how bad it got. I certainly wouldn't have my family around me.

Combat Stress saved me. I'll always have PTSD but now I manage it – it doesn't manage me.”

Army veteran Simon served for 14 years, including in the first Gulf War. Struggling with his mental health in the years that followed – and having no idea about PTSD – it was only when his family said 'get help or get out', that a doctor recommended he contact us.

“

I'd say to any other veterans who are experiencing mental health issues, you must call Combat Stress.

“The hardest step is making that phone call – it's not plain sailing and saying 'I think I've got an issue' is when the real work begins.”

CONTACT US

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**COMBAT
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FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

combatstress.org.uk



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