

# Support for Older LGBT+ Veterans in Scotland



# Foreword

Having taken up post as the third Scottish Veterans Commissioner earlier this year, I am pleased to have this opportunity to write the forward to this important publication. Despite having witnessed the distressing effects of the homosexuality ban on former service colleagues, as my predecessor said when he was asked to write the forward to a previous guide, I now also find it “hard to imagine that during my career in the Armed Forces, service personnel were forced to resign or were dishonourably discharged, solely because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.”

It is encouraging to see how much progress has been made in recent years, and today all three services welcome diversity and actively recruit from the LGBT+ community. The ongoing collaboration between Age Scotland and Fighting With Pride is a reflection of that continuing progress and will do much to foster a more open and inclusive culture across the Armed Forces and Veterans community. I have been hugely impressed by the collaborative work of Unforgotten Forces and this guide is a great example of what can be achieved when organisations work together.

I very much hope this excellent publication helps those older LGBT+ veterans, who have had to endure so much discrimination, reconnect with Armed Forces support services. Please use this guide to help you find the services that are right for you, and don't miss out on the support and advice you so rightly deserve. Finally, I would ask you to tell any other veterans you know about the guide so that it reaches as many of you as possible.



Susie Hamilton  
Scottish Veterans Commissioner



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# Introduction and background

Today's Armed Forces welcome diversity and actively recruit members of the LGBT+ community. Their belief is that society is best served by a military that reflects its diversity. Discrimination, pressuring LGBT+ personnel to 'come out', and 'outing' them without consent are all forbidden. However, this has not always been the case.

From 1955 until 2000, the UK Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence enforced a ban on LGBT+ service. Thousands of service personnel received a dishonourable discharge or were forced to resign because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Private 'homosexual acts' between two men over the age of 21 were decriminalised by the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. However, there were exemptions for the Armed Forces. As a result, gay male forces personnel were charged with sexual offences, and sent to military or civilian prison, for a crime that did not exist for the public.

Although being lesbian was not illegal, the ban was applied to any individuals outed, accused, or rumoured to be members of the LGBT+ community, including heterosexual personnel accused of being gay.

Dismissal from service was normally immediate and permanent. Personnel lost not just their career but in many cases their financial security, dignity, pension, family relationships and friendships. Many still feel distress, shame and anger today, often not thinking of themselves as veterans, and being reluctant to access the veterans' services they are entitled to use.

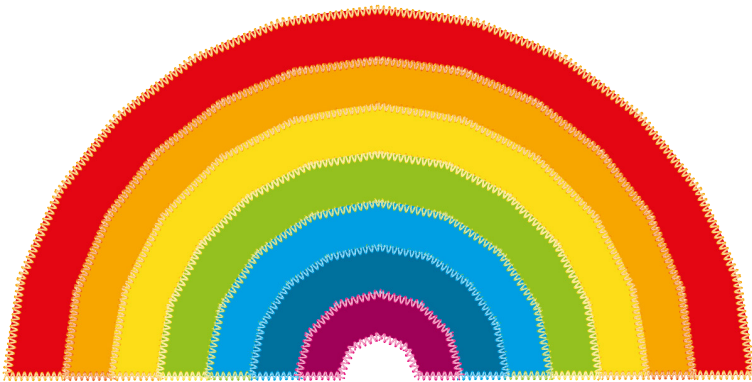
However, this is changing. **Fighting With Pride**, the LGBT+ military charity, is leading work with governments, mental health services, charities and organisations to provide support and reparation to LGBT+ veterans, many of whom are isolated from the military community and support services. See page 8 for more information about the work of the charity.



**Unforgotten Forces** is a consortium of Armed Forces and civilian charities working together to deliver high quality and joined-up support that boosts the health and wellbeing of veterans in Scotland age 60 and older, led and coordinated by Age Scotland. All Unforgotten Forces partners welcome older LGBT+ veterans and are committed to providing support services that are respectful and responsive to their needs.

If you are an LGBT+ former member of the Armed Forces, and have not accessed veterans' services before, this guide outlines some of the support that is available to you. It aims to reinforce the message that the Armed Forces community welcomes LGBT+ members and wishes to provide them with the support and services they deserve as a veteran.

The language used by LGBT+ people to describe their experiences and identities is varied and changes over time. We are committed to reflecting this diversity but recognise that terms used in this guide may vary in their usage or become outdated.





## **A veteran's story: Simon**

**In 1983, whilst serving abroad with the Army, 20-year-old Simon was accused by a colleague of being gay. He was arrested, investigated, and interrogated by the Special Investigations Branch.**

“Finally, the interrogation finished, my confession was read back to me and I was ordered to sign. I was charged with the offence of ‘gross indecency’. My CO spoke in disgust about how I had brought disgrace to the regiment and the sight of me made him sick. He ordered me out of his presence, and I was sent for Court Martial.”

“I was treated like a highly infectious disease, relieved of all military duties and placed in quarantine, in a disused part of the barracks. All my friends and work colleagues were questioned by the Special Investigations Branch and this resulted in mass paranoia. Friends disowned me and avoided contact, in fear of the finger of suspicion being aimed at them. I was isolated, abandoned and on my own.”

“At Court Martial I was sent to prison for 6 months, and given a criminal record, for being gay! It would impact my life for ever. I was awarded ‘discharge with disgrace from the army’, the most severe sentence imposed on a soldier, and it was written in red pen in my discharge papers, my Red Book. Being dishonourably discharged was usually for assault, theft, murder, or desertion. A discharge with disgrace was extremely rare and would have far reaching consequences in my future, making it incredibly difficult to get a job.”



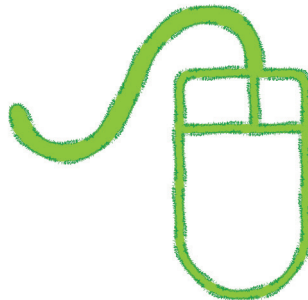
# Help to get online

Armed Forces veterans live all over the UK and the world, so many of the organisations that serve them operate online to reach as many people as possible.

The internet can be useful in many ways, from accessing services and keeping in touch with friends and family to doing your shopping and banking. If you are new to using the internet, or don't feel very confident using it, it can seem confusing, but there is support available.

**i** **Abilitynet** can help older people to get connected, use online services and deal with technical issues. You can call their helpline on **0800 048 7642**, visit their website at **<https://abilitynet.org.uk>** or email them at **[enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk)**.

To find out about computer classes in your area, call the **Age Scotland** helpline on **0800 12 44 222** and we will be happy to look up what is available.



# Medal return, pardons and disregards

## Medal return

Before January 2000, LGBT+ personnel subjected to disciplinary action and dismissal from the military often had their medals taken from them and were denied the opportunity to earn or recover medals through continued service.

On 16th February 2021, the UK Government and the Ministry of Defence announced a new **Return of Medals Policy** for LGBT+ veterans who had their medals removed because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The policy allows former Armed Forces personnel dismissed solely because of their sexual orientation or gender identity to apply to have their medals restored. The families of deceased LGBT+ veterans can also apply to have their medals returned.

**i** To make an application, the Ministry of Defence medal form and further details can be found at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-for-medals](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-for-medals).

Completed forms should be sent to the Ministry of Defence Medal Office at:

Room G36  
Innsworth House  
Imjin Barracks  
GL3 1HW







## Pardons and disregards

In Scotland, the **Historical Sexual Offences (Pardons and Disregards) (Scotland) Act 2018** pardons all men who were convicted of a same-sex sexual activity that is now legal. You do not need to apply for this pardon; it is automatic.

Before you can apply for your medals to be restored, you will also need to have this conviction ‘disregarded’, and will need to provide evidence of the disregard. The disregard does not happen automatically; you must apply for it.

**i** For full information and to apply for a disregard, visit **[www.gov.scot/publications/remove-historical-conviction-for-sexual-activity-between-men](http://www.gov.scot/publications/remove-historical-conviction-for-sexual-activity-between-men)**.

If you are not online, you can write to the **Scottish Government’s Criminal Law and Practice team** for a paper application form, at:

Area GW.14  
St Andrews House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

An independent review has been set up to examine the impact of the historic ban on homosexuality in the Armed Forces, which will make recommendations to the UK Government about how to address the impact it has had on veterans. The review is expected to be completed in May 2023.

**i** For more information about the review, see **[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/lgbt-veterans-independent-review/about](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/lgbt-veterans-independent-review/about)**.

# Support for LGBT+ veterans, serving personnel and families

## Fighting With Pride: The LGBT+ Military Charity

Founded in January 2020, Fighting With Pride is a military charity supporting the health and wellbeing of LGBT+ Veterans, service personnel and their families.

In particular, Fighting With Pride is supporting those most impacted by the ban on LGBT+ personnel serving in the Armed Forces prior to January 2000 and helping reconnect these Veterans with the military family and support services.

It has developed partnerships with NHS England, the Royal British Legion, SSAFA and Stonewall, and is working with many Armed Forces charities, organisations and NHS mental health trusts in Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

Fighting With Pride is also working with the UK and devolved governments to provide support and reparations, and is conducting research on the impacts of the ban in partnership with the Veterans and Military Families Research Hub at Northumbria University.

**i** For more information, advice, or to keep up-to-date with the latest Fighting With Pride news, visit their website **[www.fightingwithpride.org.uk](http://www.fightingwithpride.org.uk)**, their Facebook page **[www.facebook.com/fightingwithpride](https://www.facebook.com/fightingwithpride)** or contact them by email at **[info@fightingwithpride.org.uk](mailto:info@fightingwithpride.org.uk)**.



## Royal British Legion

Recognising that LGBT+ personnel often did not have a positive experience within the military, the Royal British Legion created its first LGBT+ and Allies branch in 2018. It aims to recognise the contribution of LGBT+ people who have served in the military and encourage them to seek the support they need.

Both the Royal British Legion and its sister organisation Legion Scotland provide advice and support to their members on a wide range of topics, including money, pensions and benefits, care, independent living, employment and social support.

The LGBT+ and Allies branch is open to serving and former members of the Armed Forces, and civilians, across the UK.

**i** For more information or to become a member, visit their website **[www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)**, or contact them on **0808 802 8080**. You can also find them on Facebook at **[www.facebook.com/LGBTQrbl](https://www.facebook.com/LGBTQrbl)**.

# Mental health and wellbeing support

One in four people experience mental ill-health at some point in their lives. If you are worried about your mental health, or feel that you are struggling to cope, speak to your GP. They can help you to understand what is happening to you, discuss treatment options and lifestyle changes that might help, make specialist referrals if needed and arrange follow-up appointments to see how you are getting on.

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis and feel that you are in immediate danger, for example because you have injured yourself seriously or have taken an overdose, call the emergency 999 number.

If you already receive help with mental ill-health, and you need to speak to someone urgently, you may have been given a crisis line number to call. If not, or you can't get through to them, contact NHS 24 on 111.

There are several organisations that provide mental health and wellbeing support and advice, some of whom specialise in helping veterans with mental health conditions.



## 24/7 support organisations

The following organisations can provide mental health and wellbeing support 24 hours per day.

**Veterans Gateway** is a single point of contact for veterans and their families. Whatever issue you need help with, they can put you in touch with the organisations best placed to give the advice and support you need. For more information, visit their website **[www.veteransgateway.org.uk](http://www.veteransgateway.org.uk)**, contact them by telephone on **0808 802 1212** or text them on **81212**. They also have a mobile app, available for Android phones from the Google Play store and Apple phones from the App Store.

**Combat Stress** provides 24-hour confidential advice and peer support for veterans with mental health conditions, their families and carers. Call their helpline on **0800 138 1619**.

If you are going through a tough time, **Samaritans** can help you to explore your options, understand your problems better or just be there to listen. They are available 24 hours a day, every day. Contact them on **116 123** or visit their website **[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)**.

## Other mental health and wellbeing support organisations

In Ayrshire and Arran, Tayside, Lothian, Borders, Fife and Lanarkshire, **Veterans First Point** can support veterans with mental health and well-being. Call **0131 221 7090**, email **v1p.scotland@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk** or visit **www.veteransfirstpoint.org.uk** to find out more.

**Togetherall** is an online mental health and wellbeing service offering information, advice and self-help tools. All veterans and their family members can sign up to Togetherall for free at **<http://togetherall.com>**.

**Breathing Space** can support you if you are feeling overwhelmed and need to speak to someone immediately. You can talk about what's on your mind or ask about helpful resources in your area. The service is available from 6pm to 2am on weekdays and 6pm to 6am at weekends, on **0800 83 85 87**.

**Veterans Assist Scotland** connects veterans and their families to organisations and services across Scotland. They have detailed online information on many topics including physical and mental health and wellbeing, care, money, housing and employment. Visit their website at **www.veterans-assist.org**.



# Your health rights

You are entitled to ‘priority’ treatment for health problems caused or made worse by your military service. This means you should be given priority on NHS waiting lists unless there is an emergency case or a case that demands higher clinical priority.

If you think you may be eligible for priority treatment, tell your GP or hospital that the mental or physical condition relates to your time in the Armed Forces. Ask that your veteran status is recorded on your medical records (this is optional, not obligatory). You don’t need to be receiving a War Pension or Guaranteed Income Payment, as long as the health professional treating you agrees the condition is likely to be the result of your service.

Healthcare services have a duty to provide care that is fair and equal. If you’ve been treated unfairly by a health service because of your sexual orientation or gender identity, you can make a complaint.

If you have difficulty accessing priority healthcare or feel you have been treated unfairly by a healthcare service and want to make a complaint, you can get help from the **Patient Advice and Support Service (PASS)** on **0800 917 2127**.

# Service LGBT networks

The Service LGBT Networks represent the LGBT community in the Armed Forces. They provide policy and inclusion advice, as well as confidential advice and support to individuals on a range of issues, including coming out, health, bullying and harassment, housing, relationships and families. They organise social functions, conferences and networking events, and participate in several regional Pride marches.

Visit the **Army LGBT Network** Facebook page at  
**[www.facebook.com/ArmyLgbt](https://www.facebook.com/ArmyLgbt)**.

Visit the **RAF LGBT Freedom Network** on Facebook at  
**[www.facebook.com/raflgbtforum](https://www.facebook.com/raflgbtforum)** and on Twitter **@RAF\_LGBT**.

Visit the **Royal Navy Compass Network** on Facebook at  
**[www.facebook.com/RNCompass](https://www.facebook.com/RNCompass)** and on Twitter **@RNCompass**.



# Support for the LGBT+ community

**Stonewall Scotland** exists to let all lesbian, gay, bi and trans people know they're not alone. It empowers and supports individuals to make change happen and achieve their full potential, helps institutions and organisations embed an inclusive and accepting culture, works with communities to change hearts and minds, and campaigns and lobbies government to change laws that do not ensure equality for LGBT people, or laws that do not go far enough. Information and support for LGBT communities and their allies is available from Stonewall's Information Service on **0800 050 2020** or on their website, **[www.stonewallscotland.org.uk](http://www.stonewallscotland.org.uk)**.

**LGBT Health and Wellbeing** provide a helpline that can give emotional support and practical information to victims of LGBT hate crime. You can also report hate crime to them if you do not want to contact the police directly. Call them on **0300 123 2523**, Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 12pm and 9pm or chat to them online on their website, **[www.lgbthealth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk)**.

**Galop's LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline** provides practical and emotional support for LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse. Contact them on **0800 999 5428**. The helpline operates from 10am to 5pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays, and 10am to 8pm on Wednesdays and Thursdays. For more information, see their website **[www.galop.org.uk](http://www.galop.org.uk)**.

# Social and community groups

The **Age Scotland helpline** can tell you about local groups and services that offer health, sport and physical activities, and more.

Some of these are tailored to Armed Forces veterans, giving you the opportunity to enjoy regular camaraderie with others from the ex-service community, regardless of for how long, or how long ago, you served.

For more information, call our helpline to speak to one of our friendly advisers on **0800 12 44 222**, or email us at **[info@agescotland.org.uk](mailto:info@agescotland.org.uk)**.

## Age Scotland information guides

Age Scotland has a large number of information guides, available both on paper and online. Some of them are specific to veterans of the Armed Forces, or to the LGBT+ community.

**i** To order any of our guides free of charge,  
call our helpline on **0800 12 44 222**, or visit  
**[www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/information-advice](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/information-advice)**.



## March 2023 Edition

The Age Scotland Helpline can provide information and advice, relevant leaflets or details of organisations that could help you. If there is anything you need to know that is not covered in this guide, call **Age Scotland's helpline** on **0800 12 44 222**. This booklet is intended as a guide only and is not a full and definitive statement of the law. We are grateful to Fighting With Pride for their support in developing this guide.



**Age Scotland and the  
Age Scotland Veterans' Project**

0333 323 2400  
veteransproject@agescotland.org.uk  
www.agescotland.org.uk/veterans

**Age Scotland helpline**  
0800 12 44 222

**/UnforgottenForces** 

**@UFForces** 

**/agescotland** 

**FIGHTING WITH PRIDE**

**The LGBT+ Military Charity**

info@fightingwithpride.org.uk  
www.fightingwithpride.org.uk

 **/fightingwithpride**

 **@fightingwpride**

 **/fightingwithpride**



We are grateful to the  
Scottish Government for  
part-funding this publication

