

Support for Veterans and the Armed Forces Community in Scotland

Scottish Government Debate

3rd December 2019

Introduction

With around a quarter of a million military veterans in Scotland, and almost half of them aged 75 and over, we recognise the contribution of the veteran community and the extra support they need. Working as part of partnership with the Unforgotten Forces consortium, Age Scotland aims to boost the health and wellbeing of veterans in Scotland aged 65 and over.

This community has distinct and succinct needs which should be given special consideration by public bodies and policy makers.

Key Policy Recommendations

- Accessible information for Veterans and their dependents, which is tailored and is easy to access
- Support and maintain institutions which recognise the importance of Veterans such as the Armed forces Covenant, Veteran champions in public boards, Veterans Minister, and Veterans Commissioner, as well as improve co-ordinated cross-sectoral collaborative action for older veterans
- Services for older people, including health and social care, should be more alert to previous military services by older people and be proactive to ensure older veterans enjoy their full entitlements

Key statistics

1 in 10 people

Around 1 in 10 people aged 65 or over in Scotland are veterans or veterans' dependants

Only one day of service

The Scottish and UK governments recognise anyone who has serviced at least one day in the armed forces (including reserves and national service) as a veteran.

Average age of adult ex-service community is 67

The general Scottish population's average age is 49, highlighting the older proportion of the veteran community living Scotland.

Age Scotland, Causewayside House, 160 Causewayside, Edinburgh, EH9 1PR

Tel. 0333 323 2400 Email: policycomms@agescotland.org.uk

Web: www.agescotland.org.uk Facebook: fb.me/agescotland Twitter: [@agescotland](https://twitter.com/agescotland)

Age Scotland is a registered charity (#SC010100), and company limited by guarantee (#153343), in Scotland at the above address.

- Services should aim to tackle loneliness and isolation amongst Veterans, recognising their distinct needs.

Age Scotland's Veteran's Project

We work to raise awareness of the extra help and support veterans are entitled to, and the fact that only one day's paid service in HM Armed Forces as a regular, reserve, national serviceman or in the merchant means someone may be entitled.

We have equipped the Age Scotland freephone helpline to give information and advice tailored specifically to veterans, and published free advice guides for them including 'Housing for Older Veterans in Scotland', 'The Veteran's Guide to Later Life' and 'Combating Sight and Hearing Loss - Advice for older people with a military service background' which was produced in partnership with Action on Hearing Loss and Scottish War Blinded.

Age Scotland's Veterans' Project also provides free training to older people's groups to boost their confidence and capability for working with and supporting older veterans and their families. Helping to reduce loneliness and isolation with older veterans by making community groups a welcoming place for veterans. We also support veterans' community groups to develop opportunities for older veterans to enjoy the benefits of regular physical activity together.

Access to information and advice

Those who provide support and services must recognise that there are additional barriers which older veterans may face to asking for help, for instance armed forces culture promotes self-reliance and strength, which can instil a fear of appearing weak by asking for help. Making contact with a support service can be a big and difficult step, making it essential service providers work seamlessly together so veterans are not discouraged by having to unnecessarily retell their stories multiple times to different agencies.

Age Scotland supports the Armed Forces Covenant and believes it is an important recognition for anyone who has served at least one day in the armed forces (including reserves and national service) as a veteran.

Public positions in support of Veterans

The Scottish Veterans Commissioner works to improve the lives and opportunities of the veteran community in Scotland. This is a position that Age Scotland supports and believes plays an important part in ensuring veterans' needs are listened to, recognising their individual needs aside from the general civilian population. As well as the commission, we believe it is important that the dedicated Ministerial position for Veterans is continued within the Scottish Government.

Veteran champions also have an important role to play in councils by having a dedicated advocate within the council, as well as in other public bodies. This helps to ensure that the needs of the veteran community are at the forefront of public institutions. This initiative should be supported and maintained, and where possible more organisations should have a dedicated Veteran champion.

We would welcome research into these public positions to find out what is working well in order to share best practice in terms of veteran support.

Loneliness and Isolation

Results from the PoppyScotland supplement report of the Royal British Legion survey have found that the one of the major issues reported by veterans is feeling of isolation. This is especially prevalent for those aged 65 and over, with 40,000 veterans reporting problems with isolation.¹

Age Scotland's 'Veterans' project in partnership with our Community Connecting service helps community groups throughout Scotland to become veteran friendly. By helping community groups to adapt to veterans' distinct needs and providing safe spaces for them to socialise, the 'Veterans Warm Welcome' is helping to reduce loneliness and social isolation. The scheme is also a way for older veterans to identify which organisations provide bespoke support, advice and friendships best suited for their needs.

As loneliness and isolation is a prevalent issue amongst older veterans, the Scottish Government's strategy on loneliness and isolation is welcome, as well as the UK Veterans strategy. It is crucial that these are backed by robust action plans in order to achieve their ambitions.

Want to find out more?

As Scotland's national charity supporting people over the age of 50, Age Scotland works to improve older people's lives and promote their rights and interests. We aim to help people love later life, whatever their circumstances. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

Our Policy, Communications and Campaigns team research, analyse and comment on a wide range of public policy issues affecting older people in Scotland.

Our work is guided by the views and needs of older people themselves.

Further information

Contact the Age Scotland Policy, Communications and Campaigns team:

policycomms@agescotland.org.uk

0333 323 2400

Twitter [@agescotland](https://twitter.com/agescotland)

Facebook [/agescotland](https://www.facebook.com/agescotland)

Linkedin [Age-Scotland](https://www.linkedin.com/company/agescotland)

www.agescotland.org.uk

¹ <https://www.poppyscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/PoppyScotland-Household-Survey-Research-2014.pdf>