



Tips for general practitioners: Supporting veteran mental health

As a front line support staff member you play a vital role in supporting the mental health of veterans, and encouraging them to seek help and maintain social connections. This information sheet is designed to provide you with a framework for how to effectively support veteran mental health.

A model for helping veterans

<p>Promote Safety and Trust</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain your role • Give relevant information and do what you say you will do
<p>Allow Choice and Control</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide choices for how to receive information • Establish their preferences before offering advice
<p>Focus on Connections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote social engagement • Build on existing skills and supports
<p>Encourage Hope</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about recovery • Focus on goals

What encourages Veterans to get help?

- When distress or symptoms get worse
- Feeling that their experience is acknowledged, supported, or accepted
- Realising that others share the same difficulties
- Having strong support from family, friends or professionals
- Other people who use their experience to help others

What gets in the way of help-seeking?

- PTSD can make it difficult to talk or write about past events, which means completing assessments can be distressing.
- Mental health problems can impact memory and thinking. When a veteran is frequently questioned about the details of their story, they can feel their credibility is doubted.
- Stress and stigma can make it difficult for a veteran to work through the compensation process. It can lead them to appear chaotic, confrontational, or evasive.
- Talking about a traumatic experience requires supportive people who can listen, take time in assessment, and explain the process.



Veterans and Trauma

The Veteran Experience

A veteran's military experience can have a long-term **impact on their life**: relationships, social networks, core values, ways of coping, career and finances are all affected.

The experience of military service is **unique for each individual**. Understanding a veteran's service experience can help to understand them as a person.

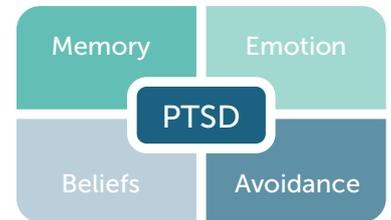
Veterans can experience a wide range of mental health difficulties, just like the general Australian population. **Common problems** include posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, anger, relationship problems, or substance use.

What is Trauma?

An experience that evokes fear, horror, or helplessness is commonly referred to as **traumatic**. Sometimes we call them potentially traumatic experiences, because there are many different ways in which people will respond. Most people will recover from exposure to trauma.

When people have difficulty recovering from trauma, their memories, emotions, beliefs, and behaviours are all affected by PTSD. It takes time to determine whether someone is having difficulty recovering.

For some veterans, positive skills learnt during service, including **self-management**, can become their preferred way to deal with physical and psychological problems. This can be useful in coping with mild conditions, but with more severe symptoms, self-reliance can impact on their ability to ask for help.



A Model For Your Wellbeing?

Supporting people with mental health difficulties can be rewarding, but you need to ensure that you and your organisation set limits on your work in order to support your wellbeing.

If you don't feel equipped to help someone, or you feel that the veteran is asking too much of you, it can lead to feeling burnt out, heightened stress, avoiding work, or cynical thinking.

Make sure you are clear on the **limits of your role** and know how to **explain these to veterans**. Find out who you can refer veterans to, and what support your organisation provides you. Take time to **check-in on yourself** and your colleagues.

For more COVID-19 related resources visit

www.phoenixaustralia.org/covid-19

Adapted with permission from the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Uniformed Services University.

Useful services and resources

Coronavirus Health Information Line
1800 020 080

Department of Health
www.health.gov.au

healthdirect hotline
1800 022 222