

# New framework to help prevent suicide among military veterans and serving personnel

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A new report, led by academics from The Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research at Northumbria, identifies that suicide

among serving military personnel and military veterans—many of whom were known to services and recipients of care—could be reduced if those that were known to be vulnerable had access to the right help and assistance, at the right time, with the right intervention, and the right level of care and support.

The findings come from the report "One is too Many: A Conceptual Framework for Safety Planning within Service Delivery for Veterans and their Families," a project from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust's "One Is Too Many" program, which awarded grants to projects that aim to reduce [suicide](#) risks within vulnerable veterans in a coordinated and targeted way.

As well as in-depth interviews with serving military and veteran's families bereaved by suicide, contributors to the new research included representatives from the health and social care sector, statutory agencies, third sector organizations, politicians, retired military personnel, funding agencies, and other critical stakeholders. This method of co-production identified three main aspects that would improve care provision for serving military personnel and veterans.

These were a person-centered care approach, the need for a designated individual within the service provider to act as a single point of contact for the veteran and their family, and a centralized care service that would provide holistic support for the veteran and their family.

As part of their findings, the research team has produced an integrated toolkit for the government, the NHS, and military charities. The aim of this toolkit is to assist them in identifying gaps in care delivery and helping them build safer environments in which veterans and their families can be cared for. Researchers carried out in-depth interviews with [military families](#) across the UK who had been bereaved by suicide, capturing the detailed stories of families who have tragically lost their

loved ones.

Multiple families repeated similar stories of being excluded and disconnected from support systems. This leads to further re-traumatization and a compound effect in grief and mourning the loss of loved ones. According to the report's lead author and Director of The Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research, Professor Matthew Kiernan, this needs to change.

"These interviews identified critical problems with care delivery in the families' stories," he said. "Families strongly felt that they were not being heard, understood, valued, cared for, nor sufficiently empowered to be any part of care provision in terms of preventing the loss of their loved one."

"Many of them witnessed first-hand the slow decline of their loved one's well-being—and felt helpless and powerless in preventing what they saw as an inevitable outcome. Families' experiences were that of passive care, often disjointed, uncoordinated, with frequent deficits in understanding and expected levels of compassion and active engagement."

"As we move forward, it is imperative that vital lessons are learned here, and it is essential that families play a key role in their loved ones' care provision."

Researchers acknowledged the pressurized conditions that health service workers are under, with the study identifying significant evidence of compassion fatigue—a complex consequence of the impact of helping others who have experienced stress or trauma.

This is why the team at Northumbria has produced a toolkit as a self-assessment tool that will support the NHS, military charities, and wider

government departments in creating a safe environment that is focused on training and education, improving services, strengthening resources, enhancing protective factors, and challenging stigma with both the serving military/ veterans and their families at the center of care and intervention.

Dr. Paul Watson, Assistant Director of the Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research, said, "Clearly, there is insufficient understanding within the existing care provision around the journey towards suicide, and what systems and procedures need to be in place to identify, understand, and prevent death by suicide in this important population and beyond."

"Promoting better levels of education and training is essential moving forward."

The stigma of negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes is also harmful within the military and veterans' population, often creating barriers to seeking help and resulting in potentially devastating effects. Enhancing better military/veteran-focused mental health awareness, which directly challenges the stigma of death by suicide, is essential, and the dual focus of client-centeredness and family inclusivity is imperative, according to the report.

An Office for Veterans' Affairs spokesperson said, "Every veteran suicide is a tragedy. We welcome this research by Northumbria University and will review it as part of our continued work to ensure veterans across the UK can access the right support."

**More information:** Report: [covenantfund.org.uk/wp-content ... udy-Final-Report.pdf](https://covenantfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/udy-Final-Report.pdf)

Provided by Northumbria University

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