

A large, vibrant red poppy flower is the central focus of the cover, set against a background of a field of similar flowers. The flower is in sharp focus, showing its delicate petals and dark center.

NHS Somerset ICB Armed Forces Programme Progress Update

**Rebecca Oliver
Teri Underwood**

November 2025

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Foreward

Over the past year, the Armed Forces Programme within NHS Somerset has continued to grow in both scale and influence. As a result of the ICB's vision, innovation and willingness to do things differently, sometimes challenging the status quo, it is now recognised as one of the most comprehensive and collaborative models of Armed Forces health and wellbeing support anywhere in England. A comment from one of our partners in the VCFSE sector sums up this approach:

“

I think your open style of supporting all organisations to collaborate has made a big impact on how we work, and the reach we can have, so thank you for all you do.

”

*Andy Gallie, Armed Forces Education and Training Lead,
Beacon Counselling.*

This progress has been driven by strong partnership working and a shared commitment to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant: that no member of the Armed Forces community should face disadvantage in accessing healthcare and that special consideration is sometimes appropriate for those who have given the most.

During 2025 we have continued to expand our network through neighbourhood working, strengthening community connections and delivering services closer to home. Achieving Gold Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) status stands as a symbol of this progress – representing not only policy alignment but lived commitment to the values of respect, fairness and service.

The journey has been one of partnership and purpose. Together with Somerset Council, the Somerset Foundation Trust (SFT), Norton Manor camp, RNAS Yeovilton, Primary Care Networks (PCNs), the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector, our local communities and the continuing support and backing of the Executive Board at NHS Somerset ICB, we have endeavoured to make a measurable difference to the lives of those who serve, have previously served and their families.

Through collaborative commissioning and commissioning without cost, NHS Somerset continues to achieve wide-ranging benefits for veterans, serving personnel, reservists and their families. We have delivered real outcomes without additional funding, which has alleviated pressure on the system.

In the coming year, new initiatives such as the Veterans' Strategy, the renewed Armed Forces Covenant, the Female Veterans Forum and Valour will be implemented. In view of the current geopolitical climate and growing concerns over future conflicts, it is clear that we are entering a period of significant change.

Whilst acknowledging the current uncertainties surrounding the restructure and delivery of healthcare nationally, we continue to look ahead with enthusiasm and hope; hope that we can continue to grow a system that listens, is responsive to needs as the demographic changes and delivers for the Armed Forces community across Somerset.

Rebecca Oliver and Teri Underwood

Armed Forces Team

NHS Somerset

Executive summary

2025 has been a year of transformation, recognition and consolidation for the Armed Forces Programme in Somerset. The work described in this update demonstrates how partnership and collaboration continue to deliver real, measurable outcomes, both for the Armed Forces community and for the wider Somerset system.

Highlights from the past year include:

- Achieving 100% RGCP veteran friendly accreditation in Somerset.
- Expansion of the Armed Forces Outreach Service from two pilot locations to ten fully operating sites countywide, delivered monthly, and in one instance weekly.
- The creation of a community orchard at Dunster Castle in partnership with the National Trust; a horticultural project that has supported wellbeing, peer connection and inclusion.
- The successful launch of the Jump Start Project for service children, providing weekly activity sessions, mentoring and 1:1 support.
- Growth of the Armed Forces Link Worker network to four posts, funded through a combined mix of NHS Somerset, charity and external partners.
- Continued collaboration with over 50 organisations through the Strategic Forum and wider partnerships.
- Participation in more than 30 community and engagement events, including Armed Forces Days, VE and VJ 80th commemorations and NHS health campaigns.
- Achieving Highly Commended in the November 2024 HSJ awards.
- National recognition through the Gold ERS Award and representation at NHS England's Armed Forces Patient and Public Voice group.
- Representation of NHS Somerset and the voice of the ICB perspective at the national Armed forces Oversight Group.

- Major digital developments, including a redesigned Armed Forces web platform and new Facebook presence with 200+ followers, supporting accessible, two-way communication, as well as linking Somerset's military bases with our SiDeR digital experts.

These achievements demonstrate NHS Somerset's ability to deliver against national priorities through local partnerships, ensuring that Armed Forces community members are supported by an integrated, compassionate and prevention-focused system.

Context

Somerset's Armed Forces community represents a significant and diverse population, comprising veterans, reservists, serving personnel and their families. It is estimated that approximately 50,000 people in the county identify as part of this community, accounting for nearly one in ten residents.

When the Armed Forces Programme began, Somerset was ranked 30th nationally for GP accreditation. Through sustained engagement and leadership, every one of Somerset's 62 GP practices is now RCGP Veteran Friendly Accredited – making Somerset the first and one of only a handful of ICBs in England to achieve 100% coverage.

“

Huge congratulations to you all, From a veteran team that know just how important this is, we also know just how much work has gone into achieving it. Very sincere thanks from an old soldier.

”

Ian Razzell, Associate Director Primary Care Services, NHS Arden and Greater East Midlands Commissioning Support Unit

Whilst an impressive accomplishment, what has maintained Somerset's success is the appreciation that this is nonetheless a first step. Work has continued through the delivery of a bespoke training package which is offered to practices and delivered by one of the Armed Forces team. Furthermore, building these personal, trusted, local connections has underpinned the Armed Forces team's success in increasing the uptake of health and social care staff receiving their flu jabs through the vaccination programme this year.

This work has been built around the principles of the Integrated Care System (ICS): prevention, integration and equity. By bringing together NHS, local authority and community partners, NHS Somerset ensures that Armed Forces support is not a standalone programme but a fully embedded part of local population health.

The Programme continues to operate in alignment with:

- The Armed Forces Covenant Legislation (2022).
- The NHS Long Term Plan and its three system shifts.
- NHS Somerset's ICS Strategy and the 9 Commitments.

Our approach prioritises collaboration, co-design with the Armed Forces community and commissioning innovation. This ensures the best use of resources, often at little or no cost to the system. It has also attracted investment from other sources, both at a local and regional level.



Service delivery

Expanding the outreach model

Following its successful pilot in 2024, the Armed Forces Outreach Service (AFOS) has expanded significantly. Now operating across ten locations – Bridgwater, Yeovil, Wellington, Chard, Minehead, Wells, Frome, Taunton, Highbridge and Glastonbury – the model provides a local, welcoming environment for anyone connected to the Armed Forces community. The service has achieved measurable reach and impact:

- Over 400 individuals supported through outreach, with an average of 20% year-on-year growth.
- Eight partner agencies regularly attending sessions, including SSAFA, DWP, Heads Up and Village Agents.
- Increased clinical signposting from local GP practices, social prescribers and community mental health teams.



Outreach events combine health promotion with community support. Sessions have included blood pressure and hydration checks, bowel and abdominal aortic aneurysm screening promotion, flu vaccination awareness and support for smoking cessation campaigns.

The model continues to demonstrate collaborative commissioning and commissioning without cost – with some of our venues, refreshments and publicity provided or supplemented by local partners such as West Mendip PCN and Heads Up. This enables NHS Somerset to deliver tangible community outcomes with minimal financial input while maintaining a visible, trusted local presence.

“

It's just a friendly, nice place to be and I've benefitted by going there, just by talking and being with other people ... it's just nice – a nice two hours to spend with like-minded people, all ex-forces, so you know, we talk the same language, we have a laugh.

”

Ray, Wells veteran

Funding partnerships and local investment

Each partnership demonstrates that the Armed Forces Programme is not dependent on large-scale central funding but thrives through community collaboration and shared ownership.

- Wellington Town Council allocated £500 to fund additional wellbeing activities for veterans.
- Thrive Together awarded £15,000 to develop outreach in the Mendip locality, strengthening links across Frome and Glastonbury.



- West Mendip PCN allocated funding to cover the use of St Dunstan's House for outreach (circa £4,000), enabling Thrive Together funding to be used entirely for activity rather than rent.
- Heads Up Wells have allocated £3,000 (half self-raised and half matched by the Big Give) for a variety of events aimed at fostering peer support amongst veterans from differing localities.



- Morland Community Hub have provided £500 to be spent on warm space initiatives for veterans.



Armed Forces hubs and link workers

The two hub sites – ARK@Egwood and Arc (Taunton) – remain the cornerstones of Armed Forces community support. They offer safe spaces for peer interaction, one-to-one advice and therapeutic engagement.

The hubs are supported by four Armed Forces Link Workers (AFLWs), covering the county geographically and providing joined-up, person-centred support. Two and a half posts are funded by NHS Somerset, half a post by the Veterans Foundation and one by Hinkley Point C (HPC).

Their caseloads include complex cases involving mental health, housing, benefits, carer support and social isolation. The AFLWs work closely with the Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS) to provide wraparound care both during hospital admission and following discharge.

This year, joint working between DMWS and the AFLWs has resulted in:

- Faster hospital discharge for veterans requiring community support.
- Direct liaison with GPs, housing providers and voluntary agencies.
- Enhanced use of Op Courage and Op Fortitude pathways for mental health and homelessness.
- A consistent, countywide referral system for the Armed Forces community.
- Prevention of unsafe discharges and involvement of the ICB safeguarding team with individuals lacking capacity to make informed decisions.

These achievements demonstrate NHS Somerset's role as a convener and enabler – using partnership as a delivery mechanism for integrated, person-centred care.



Collaboration

Strategic Forum and partnership conferences



The Somerset Armed Forces Strategic Forum remains an effective cross-sector network. Membership has grown to include over 50 organisations, spanning health, social care, local authority, education, housing, academia, police, serving personnel and the voluntary sector.

Meetings are held quarterly, often with a thematic focus – examples include veterans and mental health, gambling harms and addictions and women in service. Guest speakers regularly contribute, ensuring awareness is kept current and need is directed equally by partners and the NHS.

Meetings are hosted by partner locations to minimise cost.

The Armed Forces Partnership Conferences, delivered jointly with Somerset Council, have become key fixtures in the calendar.

Attendance has more than doubled since their inception, with approximately 150 delegates at the most recent event. Topics have included workforce development, shared funding models, children and young people and integrated commissioning. Speakers from RNAS Yeovilton and Norton Manor Camp contribute by providing an overview of their activities throughout the year, ensuring strong representation from the serving community.



These events exemplify NHS Somerset's leadership role in convening the system – helping partners to share data, avoid duplication and collaborate on service design.

“

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to the fascinating presentations and meeting a range of people from across the system. You are making a real difference to so many! Thank you again to you and all the team – fantastic stuff!

”

*Paul Von der Heyde, Deputy Chair,
NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board*

Collaborative commissioning and shared outcomes

Somerset's model of collaborative commissioning has drawn national attention for its effectiveness. By working through local partners and using shared spaces, the system delivers measurable outcomes or 'commissioning without cost' to NHS Somerset, while strengthening local networks.

Examples include:

- Hosting outreach sessions within PCN and community venues free of charge.
- Local councils providing targeted grants to address veteran isolation.
- The National Trust and Heads Up offering in-kind contributions to horticultural and wellbeing projects.

This model builds social capital and demonstrates the value of integration as investment which is a principle increasingly recognised by NHS England as best practice.

Research and academic collaboration

The programme has deepened collaboration with higher education institutions:

- Exeter University – veterans’ connection and digital mental health projects – IONA app
- Bournemouth University – using AFOS sessions as a platform to explore veterans’ experiences of dementia.
- Participation as a critical friend to the Female Veterans Transformation Project Toolkit.

These relationships not only support evidence-based development but also ensure that Somerset’s local insights inform national learning.



Supporting the community

Community orchard and horticultural wellbeing

One of the most celebrated new initiatives of 2025 has been the National Trust collaboration at Dunster Castle. Members of the Armed Forces community joined forces to clear an overgrown woodland area, creating a new orchard outside the pay gate which will be open for the whole community to enjoy.

This project has combined practical conservation work with wellbeing benefits. Veterans have described the sense of purpose and companionship it brings, while local residents have welcomed the orchard as a shared space for reflection and connection. The project embodies the principles of horticultural therapy ethos – land-based therapy, peer support and community integration.



“

This is better for your mental health than sitting in a room the other side of a desk of somebody, who's never lived through your experiences ... coming out here and doing this, getting back to nature, which is what we all should be doing is getting back to nature, and doing something for other people not just ourselves, that's going to help everybody.

”

Ian, Taunton veteran

Armed Forces Jump Start; empowering service children and families

Launched in partnership with Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP), the Jump Start Project has already demonstrated exceptional success. It has been funded by the Veterans Foundation on the recommendation of the NHS Somerset Armed Forces team. Targeted at service children aged 8–16, it offers weekly sessions combining physical activity, mentoring and emotional wellbeing support.

Commencing in September 2025, the programme has already achieved:

- Regular participation by local service children from Yeovilton and Norton Manor families.
- Improved school attendance and confidence reported by teachers and parents.
- Creation of peer and parental support groups to strengthen family networks.

The project has become a model of collaborative working; uniting health, education, sport and the military community.



Recent national research published by King's College London has demonstrated that children from military families have poorer mental health outcomes than their peers with non-serving parents.

This reflects the findings of our initial engagement report in 2023, which highlighted the importance of commissioning a service for military children. This upstream approach helps prevent potential challenges for service children, reducing both costs and pressure on the system.

Case study

A young person newly arrived in Somerset was struggling to make friends or feel part of the community. They were invited to a group ten-pin bowling trip, where they met another child living on the same road, also from a military family recently relocated.

They bonded quickly over shared experiences of living in areas such as Plymouth and Exmouth and a love of music. They both shared with each other that their dads were both away on courses, albeit very different courses. They were able to identify a peer that had understanding of their circumstances and challenges.

Their mums also connected, finding comfort in shared understanding. This small, relational moment of belonging had ripple effects for both families.

Since then, they have joined several sessions, including golf and trampolining and have become much more confident in group settings.

Impact: Reduced isolation, increased friendship networks and stronger family connections.

Community engagement and commemoration

Throughout 2025, the NHS Somerset Armed Forces team has been visibly represented at over 30 events countywide, including:

- Armed Forces Days in Bridgwater and Taunton.
- VE and VJ 80th anniversary celebrations.
- Civic Remembrance services and parades in Yeovil, Wellington and Bridgwater.
- Presentations to county-wide Armed Forces organisations, including Watchet RBL, Somerton Royal Naval Association and Frome Royal Naval Association.
- Somerset Wood memorial and commemorative services.

These activities strengthen visibility, reinforce trust and remind communities that the NHS stands alongside those who serve.

Through local partnerships, fully funded activities such as veteran breakfasts, outdoor cook-ups, wellbeing walks and festive gatherings have fostered inclusion and belonging, particularly among those experiencing loneliness or isolation.



Organisational development

Leadership, learning and internal culture

NHS Somerset continues to lead by example as both a commissioner and employer. Achieving Gold Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) status this year represents a national milestone; one which acknowledges sustained, long-term commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant.

This recognition is more than symbolic. It reflects a system-wide effort to ensure that Armed Forces awareness is embedded across all HR policies, recruitment processes and workforce development initiatives.



Within NHS Somerset, colleagues who are veterans, reservists or family members are encouraged to identify through the staff network, ensuring visibility and connection. Managers are supported with clear guidance on

deployment, training leave and flexible arrangements for those balancing civilian and service responsibilities.

Training modules hosted on the Electronic Staff Record (ESR) now include an optional Armed Forces Awareness course, which has been completed by an encouraging number of staff since its launch. This helps to embed understanding and confidence across teams – enabling every NHS Somerset colleague to recognise and respond appropriately to the unique needs of the

Armed Forces community. The Armed Forces Team is able to provide expert knowledge, understanding and information for those colleagues requiring additional support, for example the Continuing Health Care team.

The Armed Forces Staff Network continues to grow, providing a space for peer support, advocacy and involvement in community engagement events. Network members regularly represent NHS Somerset at conferences and commemorations, symbolising the organisation's dual role as a healthcare provider and active participant in Armed Forces life.

Recruitment and career development

The Programme's partnership with Step Into Health and the Career Transition Partnership remains central to our employment offer. This year, advice has been provided to over 60 former service personnel on how best to join the NHS in both clinical and non-clinical roles, bringing leadership, discipline and adaptability to our national teams.

Through Step Into Health, potential recruits are offered CV support, mock interviews and application guidance. Partners such as Leonardos continue to support transition through mentorship and volunteering at our hubs, further strengthening links between local industry and the NHS.

Collaboration with DMWS and clinical services

Our close working relationship with the Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS) remains essential in ensuring continuity of care for serving personnel, veterans and families. The joint approach between a hospital-based welfare officer and our AFLWs ensures that no patient leaves hospital without support or signposting to appropriate follow-up care.

This partnership has directly contributed to faster discharge, reduced readmission rates and improved patient satisfaction. Importantly, it also ensures that Armed Forces family members receive emotional and practical support throughout their healthcare journey.

Case study

One veteran recently supported by an Armed Forces Link Worker (AFLW) has had repeated hospital admissions over the past few months, for several reasons related to both physical and mental health condi.

There have been complications around poor communication between his GP surgery and the community nurses who visit daily. As a result, the link worker's home visits have caused her to raise safeguarding concerns around issues such as medications being spread across the house, needles, insulin, a lack of food, inadequate or non-existent heating, self-neglect, unacceptable levels of hygiene and even financial exploitation.

However, with each hospital admission, the DMWS Welfare Officer and the AFLW have been able to review the veteran's care and pathway, leading to improved rehabilitation outcomes both within the hospital and in the community. Multiple agencies have been engaged and are now actively involved in his care and the AFLW has coordinated numerous MDT discussions to ensure all professionals remain informed, aligned on next steps for preventing further admissions and focused on enhancing the veteran's overall welfare.

The model has become a case study in collaborative commissioning, demonstrating how limited resources can be shared across systems to deliver holistic, person-centred care. When the DMWS staff member based at YDH was off for a period of prolonged sick leave, regional DMWS managers contacted us and we worked collaboratively with them to ensure that the service was maintained until the member of staff returned to work.

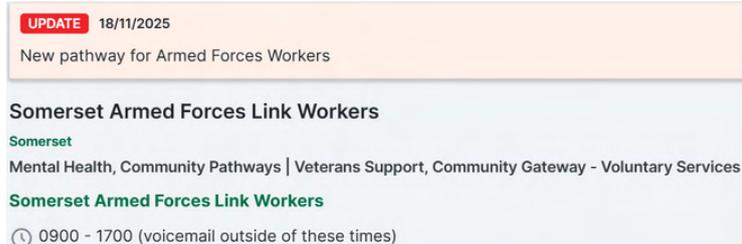
Delivering the three NHS shifts

The NHS Long Term Plan identifies three fundamental 'system shifts' to ensure future sustainability: moving from analogue to digital; from hospital to community; and from treatment to prevention. The Somerset Armed Forces programme demonstrates all three in practice.

From analogue to digital

This year, significant strides have been made in digital accessibility and engagement:

- New NHS Somerset Armed Forces web pages were launched at the end of 2024, providing comprehensive information on services, self-referral routes and health and wellbeing advice.
- The creation of a dedicated Facebook page, with over 200 followers, has enabled real-time interaction with veterans, families and partner organisations. Posts reach hundreds of users monthly and are used to promote outreach events, campaigns and local sources of support. Posts are shared onwards by other groups associated with the military, locally, regionally and nationally.
- Devising safer custody guidance in partnership with Somerset and Avon Police, resulting in immediate referrals and signposting when someone entering or leaving custody identifies themselves as part of the Armed Forces community. This has been so successful in the Somerset part of the force, that the Police have asked us to advise on how they could also integrate these practices into the Avon locality.
- Partnership with SWAST has introduced a digital referral and feedback process, enabling paramedics and ambulance crews to identify and refer Somerset's Armed Forces community members quickly and securely into relevant support. This service went live on 18th November 2025 and has already been used.



UPDATE 18/11/2025
New pathway for Armed Forces Workers

Somerset Armed Forces Link Workers
Somerset
Mental Health, Community Pathways | Veterans Support, Community Gateway - Voluntary Services
Somerset Armed Forces Link Workers
0900 - 1700 (voicemail outside of these times)

These developments have modernised the way information flows between agencies, helping ensure that no member of the Armed Forces community is missed or delayed due to paper-based systems.

We are currently exploring with ICB data and digital teams and those within SFT whether we can improve our data capture of members of the Armed Forces Community. A recent request and deep dive by the data team identified just 18 people from the Armed Forces community accessing health support at hospital in 2025. This figure is grossly misrepresented and we need to do more to accurately capture the data in order to drive more effective delivery of services.

We continue to work with both teams to establish a means of amending the current admission information to ensure that this element is mandatory. National changes around the collection and reporting of Armed Forces data is due for implementation in April 2026 and we are therefore being proactive in ensuring that our data collection is both robust, accurate and reportable.

From hospital to community

The programme's cornerstone principle is accessibility close to home. By expanding the Outreach Service to ten locations, NHS Somerset has brought care and support directly into communities. Rurality, isolation and areas of

deprivation can make accessibility difficult. AFOS venues are chosen with care to reduce these challenges.

Collaboration with partners such as Heads Up, Morland Community Hub, ARK@Egwood and Arc ensures that wellbeing activities, peer support and signposting are available within neighbourhood settings.





This community-led approach demonstrates the value of local connection: individuals receive timely support before health issues escalate, while hospitals and GPs benefit from reduced demand. It also strengthens local resilience, with communities taking ownership of their own wellbeing networks.

Building trusted and honest relationships with members of the Armed Forces community is key. As a cohort, they are notorious for not seeking timely advice or rejecting traditional health promotion/awareness messaging.

From treatment to prevention

Prevention is at the heart of everything we do. The Outreach Service incorporates health promotion into every session, whether it is by covering screening awareness, vaccination, lifestyle advice or providing and directing those in need to mental health support.

The Jump Start Project provides a clear example of early intervention, by supporting the mental and emotional wellbeing of children in Armed Forces families before difficulties become entrenched.

Similarly, projects such as the Dunster Castle community orchard and veteran outdoor wellbeing sessions focus on social connection, physical activity and purpose. These sessions address loneliness, isolation and mild depression through meaningful engagement.

In each of these cases, the Programme is reducing future healthcare demand by investing in connection, activity and belonging today.

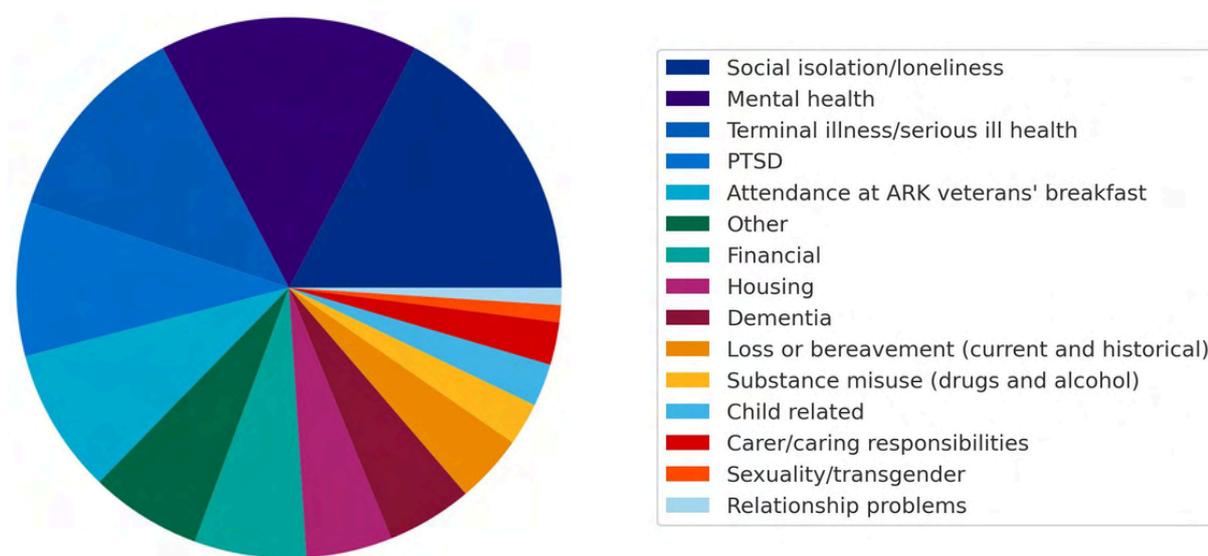
Impact

Quantitative outcomes

The cumulative impact of Somerset’s Armed Forces Programme can be measured in both numbers and lived experience. The table below provides an ‘at a glance’ summary of 2025 progress, while qualitative feedback shows the human stories behind the data.

Area of impact	2024 baseline	2025 progress	Change
GP practices veteran friendly accredited	97%	100%	Full coverage achieved
Outreach locations	2	10	400% increase
Individuals supported (hubs and outreach)	330	396	20% increase
Partner organisations engaged	32	50+	60% increase
Community engagement events	20	30+	+50% increase
External funding leveraged	£0	£18,000+	Commissioning without cost
ERS award status	Silver	Gold	National recognition

Analysis of recent data for those seeking support has highlighted the following trends.



Qualitative impact

- Veterans have reported improved wellbeing, reduced loneliness and renewed purpose through peer support and outdoor projects.
- GP practices have noted faster referral pathways and greater confidence in identifying and coding Armed Forces.
- Families and schools involved in Jump Start are already beginning to describe enhanced emotional resilience and stronger community networks.
- Feedback from serving leaders at Yeovilton and Norton Manor has been overwhelmingly positive, citing improved access to community-based care and increased understanding of NHS pathways. A request last year from the military bases for one front door, has been adapted to provide a 'no wrong door' approach. This has been achieved through collaboration and partnership working – something which is hugely beneficial to the community.

“

I wanted to send a quick message of thanks to you and the team for your help and support over my two years as Base Warrant Officer at RNAS Yeovilton. I think we have developed some incredible links between the station and NHS Somerset which I hope will just get stronger. Thank you again.

”

*Steve Payne, Base Warrant Officer
RNAS Yeovilton*

“

Thank you for your help with Simon. I have raised it as an area of 'good practice' through our ASER reporting system for the team effort, including your role in supporting and liaising with him and the practice to find a suitable outcome.

”

*Surgeon Lt Cdr Robert Strachan, Deputy Principal Medical Officer
HMS Heron*

These outcomes collectively demonstrate the transformation of Somerset's approach from reactive to proactive care, thereby ensuring the Armed Forces community is recognised, included and supported at every level.

Feedback via PALS

The commentator shared that this was his first time at ARK and said that he feels positive about being supported by other veterans.

There is a dedicated space within the woods at ARK where the group gathers around an open fire to cook breakfast, to talk and reflect on their shared experiences, including the psychological impact of war. He disclosed that he lives with PTSD and served under the UN during Pol Pot's regime as part of the Merchant Navy. He also completed tours in Northern Ireland and Afghanistan.

He expressed that, upon leaving the military, there was little to no support available for ex-service personnel, and accessing information or community groups was particularly difficult time.

His wife said that there are challenges in supporting her husband alone. She felt that ARK would provide much-needed support, not only for her husband but for her as well.

Our direction at a glance

The [Armed Forces Plan on a Page](#) sets out our direction for the next phase of development. Our vision remains clear:

To ensure that every member of the Armed Forces community in Somerset can access high-quality, timely and compassionate health and wellbeing support, embedded within local communities and supported by strong, enduring partnerships.

Our priorities for delivery:

- Equitable access – eliminate variation in Armed Forces provision across Somerset, ensuring parity of care for all groups and ensuring that there is no inequity in the provision of healthcare services.
- Integration and collaboration – strengthen cross-sector partnership working and joint commissioning arrangements.
- Prevention and early Intervention – expand wellbeing initiatives that address social isolation, physical inactivity and mental health.
- Voice and visibility – embed lived experience within decision-making, evaluation and service design.

These priorities underpin a single, unified goal: to make Somerset the best county in England for Armed Forces health and wellbeing.

Future priorities

Looking ahead to 2026 and beyond, NHS Somerset will continue to innovate, expand and consolidate. Planned priorities include:

- **Maternity access for serving personnel**
Working with midwifery teams to ensure serving women and partners have seamless access to antenatal, postnatal and perinatal mental health support
- **Men's health and wellbeing event**
Hosting an event at Yeovilton's new Health and Wellbeing Centre to promote men's physical and mental health, in partnership with military medical teams and local charities.
- **Dementia and cognitive health**
Working alongside existing collaborations with SSAFA and the Somerset dementia wellbeing service to develop a countywide service for veterans experiencing memory loss or dementia.
- **Expanding digital access**
Further development of online platforms to provide self-help tools, digital signposting and virtual wellbeing sessions, whilst ensuring that those who are not digitally literate are not excluded.
- **Sustaining collaborative commissioning**
Expanding the model of commissioning without cost via shared venues and funding, maintaining fiscal sustainability whilst increasing reach.
- **Ongoing engagement and representation**
Continued attendance at regional and national forums, ensuring Somerset's voice remains influential in shaping national policy. As well as being valued by the NHS England Armed Forces team, we are also the only ICB represented on the National Armed forces Oversight Group to discuss national challenges and gain local perspectives.
- **Cluster-based delivery**
Submitting a bid to host the south West Valour Hub in collaboration with ARK@Egwood and other partners.

Acknowledgements

The progress described in this report has only been possible through the innovative leadership of the ICB and the dedication and generosity of our partners, colleagues and community members. The Armed Forces team at NHS Somerset extends sincere thanks to all who have contributed their time, expertise and enthusiasm.

In particular, we wish to acknowledge:

- Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP) for leadership of the Jump Start project.
- Thrive Together and Wellington Parish Council for funding community wellbeing activities.
- West Mendip Primary Care Network for providing space at St Dunstan's House.
- Heads Up Wells, Morland Community Hub, and ARK@Egwood for co-delivering outreach and wellbeing sessions.
- The National Trust for collaboration on the Dunster Castle community orchard.
- Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS) for joint working across hospital and community settings.
- Hinkley Point C, Veterans Foundation, and all local funders for their continued financial and moral support.
- Somerset Council for their partnership in delivery and joint hosting of the Armed Forces Partnership Conferences.
- And most importantly, the veterans, serving personnel, reservists and families of Somerset, whose voices and experiences continue to shape and inspire this work.

Conclusion

The Armed Forces Programme in Somerset stands as a model of what can be achieved when systems collaborate around shared purpose.

Through innovation, partnership and compassion, NHS Somerset has delivered a fully integrated, community-rooted approach to Armed Forces health and wellbeing; one that transforms not only outcomes but also relationships between the NHS and those it serves.

As we move into 2026, we do so with renewed ambition: to sustain momentum, share learning nationally and to continue making Somerset a place where every member of the Armed Forces community feels valued, understood and supported.

NHS Somerset – November 2025