Veterans’ Care
Fact Sheet

Coping with deployment experiences
Participation in a war or a peacekeeping operation will be a special experience for virtually all service personnel. Those experiences will sometimes leave a lasting impression and play an important role in later life. The vast majority of veterans look back positively on their deployment. They view that period as an enrichment of their lives, personally and professionally.

The transition to ordinary life in the Netherlands after having returned from a deployment can sometimes be a major undertaking, all the more so if threatening and/or traumatic situations arose during the deployment. People, i.e. veterans too, deal differently with stressful and traumatic situations. People who are inclined towards introspection or who respond with powerful emotions often find it difficult to find a new equilibrium. This is usually easier for people who set new goals for themselves and concentrate on the future. Specific previous experiences and a person’s background, as well as personal circumstances after deployment, social support and personal characteristics also play a part.

Symptoms and problems
A small percentage of service personnel are physically injured during a mission, e.g. as a result of combat operations or accidents, and consequently receive care and after-care through the Ministry of Defence. Some serious injuries result in lasting impairments and even invalidity. A small percentage of veterans develop psychological symptoms after deployment which could be connected with their deployment experiences. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) involves a combination of reliving an experience, avoidance, negative cognitions and feelings and heightened arousal.

The number of veterans with PTSD differs from mission to mission and, according to research, ranges from two per cent to eight per cent. This is related to the nature, intensity and duration of the threatening or life-threatening situations during deployment. Other problems such as depression, addiction problems or general anxiety disorders often arise alongside and in combination with PTSD.

We also know from research that a number of veterans develop physical symptoms that are difficult to explain after some deployments. Those symptoms include fatigue, concentration and memory problems, digestive disorders and muscle or joint pain. They are known as Somatically Unexplained Physical Complaints. The terms Physically Unexplained Symptoms (PUS), Post-Deployment Syndrome (PDS) and Medically Unexplained Physical Symptoms (MUPS) are also used.

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A relatively sizeable group, estimated to amount to about twenty per cent of deployed service personnel, temporarily have some difficulty in re-adjusting to life in the Netherlands when they return. Many veterans miss the camaraderie they have experienced during deployment. Some miss the intensity of life during deployment and look for ways of making life exciting. For a small group, this results in derailments in terms of behaviour. The precise figures are not available.

**Care and after-care**

It is mainly veterans with serious and/or long-term coping problems or other health complaints who benefit from professional help. Symptoms or problems can often be eliminated with the help provided. Sometimes, however, complete elimination is not possible. In such cases, learning how to deal with symptoms or problems, finding a new balance, reinforcing personal skills and improving quality of life are alternative objectives of the help provided. Various methods of treatment, counselling and advice are available here. Choosing an approach tailored to the needs of the person concerned is an important factor.

Veterans in active service can rely on the care services provided by the Ministry of Defence. Retired veterans can contact the *Veteranenloket* [Veterans’ Office] of Veterans’ Institutes (*VI*). This office is the first point of contact for veterans, their relations and other people with direct involvement, such as referrers and practitioners. The Veterans’ Office is there for veterans’ questions to do with health and welfare; it provides information and acts as intermediary for referrals for counselling, psychological help and material help for veterans.

**Veterans’ Office**

Some veterans experiencing symptoms do not seek help, or do so only very late in the day. One reason for this is that they do not always know exactly who to turn to with their various problems or questions. The Veterans’ Institute, alongside various partners, set up the Veterans’ Office as the first port of call for care to introduce clarity and make assistance more accessible. It has one contact telephone number (088-3340000) and one email address (info@veteranenloket.nl). Veterans and their relations can contact it with all their requests for help and problems related to deployment.

GPs and institutions coming into contact with veterans with problems or requests for help can also use the Veterans’ Office to obtain information. This could also include requests for material assistance, e.g. in the area of income schemes, benefits and pensions, including military and invalidity pensions, debt counselling and the provision of benefits in kind, including medical benefits.

Once the Veterans’ Office has received a request for help, the assistance and counselling process begins. The Veterans’ Office has a team of care coordinators to deal with those requests. This team works closely with civilian and military experts from the *Landelijk Zorgsysteem voor Veteranenzorg* (*LZV*) [National Care System for Veterans] and the *Algemeen Burgerlijk Pensioenfonds* (*ABP*) [General Pension Fund for Public Employees].

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The National Care System for Veterans is a partnership in which, alongside the Vi, the following eight civilian and three military care institutions participate:

- The Ministry of Defence’s Spiritual Counselling Services;
- The Ministry of Defence’s Welfare Service Centre;
- Military Mental Healthcare Association;
- Stichting de Basis [de Basis\(^1\) Foundation] (social work);
- Reinier van Arkel, South Netherlands Psychological Trauma Centre;
- Noord-Drenthe Mental Healthcare Association;
- Stichting Centrum ‘45 [Centrum ‘45 Foundation] (complex psychological trauma symptoms);
- The Sinai Centrum (psychological trauma symptoms);
- Victas (care for addicts);
- Forensisch Instituut De Waag (cross-border, criminal behaviour combined with psychological problems and/or problematic substance abuse);
- Veteranen Intensieve Behandel Unit [Veterans’ Intensive Treatment Unit] (VIBU: complex trauma-related disorders).

The General Pension Fund for Public Employees, on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, provides casualties of war or military service with material services such as benefits, invalidity pensions and benefits in kind.

**Other agencies**

To help veterans who might need care to access it, or to point them in the right direction, the Veterans’ Platform is presently working on setting up a nationwide network of certified helpers providing baseline support (veterans’ helpers).

The *Raad voor civiel-militair Zorg en Onderzoek (RZO)* [Civil-Military Care and Research Council] has been monitoring the quality of veterans’ care since 2007. It also promotes collaboration between the care partners and gives advice on scientific research into deployment-related conditions.

**Family members**

The deployment itself, but also the period thereafter, can be stressful for those on the home front. The serviceman or servicewoman, and also the partner might have changed after a return from deployment. Veterans and partners sometimes find it difficult to restore equilibrium within the family and the relationship. Adjustment has been shown to be more difficult where the veteran relates little about his experiences. That is why veterans’ care is also aimed at parents, partners and children. Those on the home front are often the first to notice any changes in the veteran’s behaviour after a deployment has ended and are usually the first to experience the resultant problems. They are therefore frequently a driving force in enlisting professional help.

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\(^1\) Translator’s note: De Basis is a provider of care services following trauma, supplying services to personnel of the army, fire brigade, ambulance, police force and public transport.

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Further information
This fact sheet provides general information. You will find more detailed information about the Vi’s activities in the area of care, appreciation, knowledge and research at www.veteraneninstituut.nl and www.veteranenloket.nl. You may also contact us by telephone (088-334 00 50) or by email (info@veteraneninstituut.nl).

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