

## **Veterans MH Information System**

### **Roy Brown, Director of Governance Support, Cobseo**

- There has been a growing recognition of the need to improve the beneficiary journey for veterans seeking mental health services and, in particular, the linking of relevant data held by the principal statutory and third sector service providers.
- Cobseo and the Contact Group convened a Working Group comprising these stakeholders in autumn 2019 to consider the feasibility of a more holistic approach; and our recommendations were supported by the Office of Veterans Affairs, who agreed to fund a Scoping Study – technically termed the Discovery and Tender phase – for the development of a Veterans Mental Health Information System.
- The Scoping Study will address the IT development work needed to achieve the aspirations set out in the Working Group report, including the development of a project specification that potential suppliers will draw upon to develop their costed proposals.
- The key deliverables identified by the Working Group are:
  - Veterans seeking access to mental health services should only be required to relate their history once.
  - The silo approach, which often applies when veterans need to access multiple service providers, should be replaced by a process for effective data sharing covering both statutory and third sector providers.
  - The envisaged System should provide an immediate overview of the veteran's dealings (if any) with mental health providers and welfare systems.
  - Approved System users will have pre-determined editing rights, and confidential data will be limited to overviews where necessary.
  - The issue of patient/client consent and GDPR will be resolved by the requirement for the veteran to initiate (and be able to subsequently access) their own data. This may take the form of an App that feeds the total data held, and is in turn updated by the System over time.
  - It is critical that the new system links existing systems and avoids wholesale replacement of local networks. It should also be embedded in existing local information networks, and not become a little used parallel data universe.

- While the initial focus is on mental health, it is envisaged that the System can evolve at a later stage to incorporate other clinical conditions and physical health issues.
- Finally, and most importantly, the interests of the veteran must be kept at the heart of this project as it proceeds.
- The principles that will underpin the Scoping Study reflect the Working Group's perspective on what should be achievable, and while our Consultant will address technical feasibility, we also need to test our recommendations against other stakeholder perspectives. In particular:
  - Will veterans recognise the merits of such an Information System, and consent for their patient history to be shared in this way?
  - The System will provide the ability for veterans to be able to opt in and out. Are there any other measures that can help to promote veteran buy-in?
  - Is the ability of veterans to access their data a showstopper?
  - Can we overcome the GDPR challenges to provide the necessary data  
Contact & NIVSO online military mental health conference, 16 March 2021  
- Part 1
  - Are there additional constraints to overcome regarding data sharing between government departments and the third sector? Is data sharing across devolved administrations an additional complexity?
  - Will front-line service providers, such as GPs, welcome, and make use of this capability? Would the provision of a link within the existing in-house data systems be sufficiently user friendly?
  - What have we forgotten?
- We look forward to your feedback on how we make the most of this important opportunity to improve our support to the Armed Forces Community.