



L-R: Dr Matt Kiernan, Professor Dianne Ford and Jaye Connolly-LaBelle.

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UK veterans to benefit from new service

A new smartphone app is being developed to help UK veterans find the services they need; whether that's health services, jobs or housing.

The app is being developed by a partnership with Northumbria University, Newcastle's Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research and international software company RippleNami, Inc. following a £0.5m grant by the Ministry of Defence.

The first of its kind in the UK, the app will provide a comprehensive

interactive map of all veteran services across the UK.

The UK has nearly three million veterans. The app will provide them the locations of hospitals, substance abuse clinics and how to access education, financial assistance, employment assistance, housing and shelters.

The app is currently being used and promoted by frontline NHS staff before being offered widely to former UK service men and women. It is easy to use and has been created by international cloud-based software provider RippleNami. It will be also be used by frontline staff in local authorities, housing providers and charities as well as by veterans themselves and their families. A 24-hour helpline for those who can't or don't want to use the app is also available.

As well as providing veterans with a much needed interactive map of all veteran services the app will help those providing services ensure they are the services they want and need. The app will collect intelligence about the types of services veterans are searching for and using.

Dr Matt Kiernan, Associate Professor of Mental Health and Veteran Studies at Northumbria University and a former Lieutenant Commander in the Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service, said: "The app takes a radically different approach to the way we provide information about help to veterans and inform providers of the services what they need. It is based on insightful research and hard data. It is available 24-hours-a-day and offers the 2.3 million UK veterans of all ages and circumstances a single and stigma-free way to access much needed services and community support.

"Our veterans face many different problems; mental health, depression, anxiety, alcohol and substance abuse, PTSD, housing, employment, or simply how to adjust to civilian life when they leave the forces. Help is currently available but with more than 3,000 charitable bodies and all the NHS Trusts providing different types of help it is uncoordinated, unfocused and can seem utterly bewildering. At the same time there is no national database of veterans, so understanding where veterans are, what they need and how to reach them has been virtually impossible. This new app will seek to address this by stripping down the sources of help to an easily accessible one-stop-shop. There can also be a stigma attached to asking for help and our previous research has shown that it takes on average 18 years for veterans with substance misuse to seek help, by which time their needs are very complex,

but streamlining the system and making it more easily and privately available in this way can make a huge difference.

“Using RippleNami’s app, for example, means users can type in whatever they are looking for and from that single source be directed to whatever help they need. A geographical mapping system within the app will also help us build a far better picture of where the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach veterans are.”

“RippleNami is committed to connecting unconnected veterans with critical services they deserve and need to thrive. We are honoured to be working in partnership with Northumbria University to deliver this service,” said Jaye Connolly-LaBelle, RippleNami President and Chief Executive Officer. “To further this effort, we have opened an office in Newcastle, England to continue our mission of improving the world through social good.”

The funding for the project has been provided by the Ministry of Defence’s Covenant Grants team.

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