



SHROPSHIRE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

Report

Meeting Date	9 th July 2026			
Title of report	Healthwatch Shropshire reports: 'Access to Medication in Shropshire' and 'Veterans' Experiences of Accessing Healthcare in Shropshire'			
This report is for (You will have been advised which applies)	Discussion and agreement of recommendations	X	Approval of recommendations (With discussion by exception)	Information only (No recommendations)
Reporting Officer & email	Lynn Cawley – Chief Officer Healthwatch Shropshire lynn.cawley@healthwatchshropshire.co.uk			
Which Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy priorities does this report address? Please tick all that apply	Children & Young People		Joined up working	X
	Mental Health	X	Improving Population Health	X
	Healthy Weight & Physical Activity		Working with and building strong and vibrant communities	X
	Workforce		Reduce inequalities (see below)	X
What inequalities does this report address?	Digital, rural and the experience of veterans			

Report content:

Due to the timing of this meeting, Healthwatch Shropshire (HWS) is bringing two reports to the Board. The first is the 'Access to Medication in Shropshire' Report that was triggered by feedback shared with HWS by Shropshire Councillors regarding ongoing concerns raised by their constituents around timely and efficient access to often lifesaving medication as a result of increasing demands on pharmacy staff, including the impact of 'Pharmacy First' and closure of the Prescription Ordering Direct service by NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin to be replaced by increased use of the NHS App.

The second report is the result of our work with Shropshire Council's Armed Forces Outreach team to enable us to speak to veteran's face to face about their experiences of NHS services and the impact if any, of initiatives like 'Veteran Aware' hospitals and 'Veteran Friendly' GP practices.

1. Executive Summary

Healthwatch Shropshire undertook targeted engagement with veterans across Shropshire during July–August 2025 to understand their experiences of accessing healthcare services. Working alongside the Shropshire Council Armed Forces Outreach team, Healthwatch gathered feedback from 25 veterans attending community outreach sessions across the county. The findings provide an important insight into how effectively local health services are meeting the needs of veterans and fulfilling commitments under the Armed Forces Covenant.

The report highlights that veterans' experiences of healthcare are mixed. While many participants spoke positively about individual staff, local mental health services and the support provided through Armed Forces Outreach, there were recurring concerns about inconsistency, poor communication between services, lack of awareness of entitlements, and over-reliance on veterans having to advocate for themselves.

The strongest theme identified was confusion surrounding identification as a veteran. Many veterans reported they did not understand why they should disclose their veteran status, what practical difference it would make, or whether doing so improved access to services. Some participants stated they had never been asked about military service by healthcare providers, while others reported inconsistent recognition of their veteran status between GP practices and hospitals. Veterans also described frustration with the complexity and inconsistent use of NHS coding systems relating to veteran status, with many questioning whether the coding delivered any meaningful benefit in practice.

A further key finding was the lack of reliable information sharing between healthcare providers. Veterans reported that important information, including veteran status, PTSD diagnoses and service-related conditions, was not always visible across different parts of the NHS. This often resulted in individuals repeatedly having to explain traumatic experiences or advocate for their needs during referrals and treatment pathways. Participants highlighted that such processes can be particularly difficult for those experiencing mental ill-health or crisis.

The report also identified gaps in awareness and understanding of veterans' healthcare entitlements, both among veterans themselves and frontline healthcare professionals. Veterans described receiving inconsistent advice regarding priority treatment, prescription exemptions and access to specialist support services. Those transitioning from military to civilian life reported particular difficulties accessing healthcare during discharge periods, with some describing situations where neither military nor civilian services accepted responsibility for their care.

Healthwatch Shropshire concludes that current systems too often rely on veterans to self-identify and self-advocate. This creates a risk that the most vulnerable individuals — particularly those who are isolated, unwell or experiencing mental health difficulties — are least likely to access the support available to them.

NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Board welcomed the report and formally supported the recommendations. The ICB recognised the need for improved understanding of veterans' healthcare entitlements, more effective identification processes, and stronger implementation of "Veteran Friendly" and "Veteran Aware" standards across local healthcare services.

2. Recommendations

The report makes six key recommendations for local health and care partners:

1. Introduce routine identification of Armed Forces service across GP practices, hospitals and community services.
2. Simplify and standardise the recording of veteran status within NHS systems.
3. Improve communication and information sharing between GP and hospital services.
4. Strengthen staff understanding of veterans' healthcare entitlements and improve public information for veterans.
5. Improve support and continuity of care during transition from military to civilian life.
6. Build on existing good practice locally, particularly specialist outreach and mental health support.

3. Report: links to both reports here:

[HWS Access to Medication in Shropshire](#)

[HWS Veterans' Experiences of Accessing Healthcare](#)

Risk assessment and opportunities appraisal		
Financial implications		
Climate Change Appraisal as applicable		
Where else has the paper been presented?	System Partnership Boards	
	Voluntary Sector	
	Other	
List of Background Papers: as above – <u>HWS Access to Medication in Shropshire</u> <u>HWS Veterans' Experiences of Accessing Healthcare</u>		
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) or your organisational lead e.g., Exec lead or Non-Exec/Clinical Lead -		
Appendices Appendix A. Healthwatch update – presentation		