

Extra funding of £400,000 will be provided for the Big White Wall online mental wellbeing service which provides support for UK Service personnel, veterans and their families. The award-winning Big White Wall (BWW) is an online forum specifically for serving personnel, veterans and their families which provides information on mental health issues and is staffed by professional counsellors who can be contacted 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week.

It was launched in 2009 as a pilot scheme and yesterday's extra funding announcement represents a long-term commitment by the government to address the mental wellbeing of the Armed Forces community and ensure a smooth transition into civilian life.

Help for Heroes also supports the service, providing a grant to co-fund the pilot scheme with the Department of Health, and now committing a further £300,000 to the initiative.

The service allows users to chat anonymously to others who may have gone through similar experiences, and in the last nine months has been used by over 2,500 registered users.

Making the extra funding announcement during a visit to the BWW and its joint venture partner the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, in North London yesterday, Health Minister Simon Burns said:

"We understand that many veterans feel a stigma attached to seeking help for mental distress. That is why initiatives like the Big White Wall are so invaluable, allowing veterans and their families to talk to others in an anonymous yet interactive space.

"The Department of Health is proud to announce that the Big White Wall will receive £400,000 over the next three years, allowing more veterans to benefit from the support provided by this wellbeing network and its professional counsellors.

"The success of the pilot scheme has demonstrated that there is a huge appetite amongst the Armed Forces community for issues around their mental wellbeing to be addressed in a secure and confidential environment." Jenny Hyatt

"It is by funding services such as the Big White Wall that are easily accessible and trustworthy that we can create an environment in which members of the Armed Forces community feel understood and can take important steps towards recovery."

Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, Andrew Robathan, added:

"I am delighted this important resource has been given additional funding by the Government and Help for Heroes. Looking after the mental health of our people is a key priority.

"I am particularly pleased that they will be able to continue to benefit from the Big White Wall by discussing the issues they face through this website."

As part of this newly-funded programme, the Armed Forces community will have free unlimited access to BWW's online services, which include the ability to discuss issues - from post-traumatic stress disorder to addictions, disability and injury to anxiety and depression - anonymously in forums with their peers as well as with specially-trained counsellors who can offer immediate support.

With so much stigma incorrectly associated with seeking treatment for mental health disorders, particularly in the military, BWW offers a discreet and confidential platform where help can be sought anonymously, allowing for early intervention in potentially serious psychological conditions.

Jenny Hyatt, Chief Executive Officer and founder of the BWW, said:

"The success of the pilot scheme has demonstrated that there is a huge appetite amongst the Armed Forces community for issues around their mental wellbeing to be addressed in a secure and confidential environment.

"The invaluable funding from the Department of Health and Help for Heroes will enable us to extend the programme and ensure continued help and support is there 24/7 for those who are most in need."

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BWW is the only online wellbeing service that combines social networking principles with a choice of clinically-informed interventions to improve mental health.

Available 24/7, recent developments include the introduction of 'live therapy' which, developed through funding from the NHS National Innovation Centre, offers safe, remote online access to a course of real-time therapy and extends the choice of, and accessibility to, a broad range of psychological therapies. This service will officially launch in June 2012.

Since BWW began in 2009, the service has supported 7,000 people across the country and has been commissioned to support thousands more by a range of healthcare and other organisations.

BWW operates within a governance framework jointly developed with clinicians at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. All 'wall guides' are supervised and trained by clinicians from the Trust.

BWW is a community of people who are experiencing common mental health problems and who are supported to self-manage their own mental health.

The service is already available free to the general public in several areas within the UK, where it is funded by the local NHS. Should anyone wish to join outside those areas they can do so for as little as £2 per week or less, or register their interest in the service and BWW will lobby their local NHS to create free places.