

CONFERENCE LOOKS AT MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS OF SCOTLAND'S VETERANS

SAMH, Scotland's leading mental health charity and veterans' charity, Poppyscotland, are hosting a conference today (27 May) at Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh to raise awareness of the mental health problems faced by veterans in Scotland.

Entitled: Uncharted Territory - the Mental Well-being of Scotland's Veterans, the event is the first of its kind and has been sponsored by the Scottish Government. Alex Neil MSP will also use the occasion to launch 'Life Force', a guide for those who come into contact with veterans through their work.

The conference, which will take place in Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh, aims to raise awareness, share expertise and help develop services for veterans and their families throughout Scotland. The organisations involved will highlight the range of complex psychological issues that a number of ex-Servicemen and women face after returning from the Forces. Speakers will also give guidance on the kind of support and mental health care that these veterans require. Two veterans will themselves be addressing the conference and share their own experiences of mental health problems such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

One of these veterans is William Sutherland, who served in the Royal Navy in the Falklands and the Gulf War. He said: "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder has had some cost to me. I had to give up my civilian work on health grounds, my marriage broke up and my other long term relationship also failed. My life changed in 1982 and I, like many others, have had to make tremendous adjustments as a result of my military experience."

Billy Watson, Chief Executive of SAMH said: "SAMH is committed to working with Poppyscotland, the Scottish Government and other veterans' organisations to ensure that Scotland's provision for the mental health care of its veterans is immediately accessible and of the highest possible standard. The mental health of Scotland's veterans must become a national priority."

Jim Panton, Chief Executive of Poppyscotland, explained that recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have made it even more vital to ensure that veterans receive medical treatment that meets their needs.

He said: "A significant number of ex-Service men and women returning from conflict suffer from mental health issues as they struggle to adjust to civilian life, following the challenging experiences that they have encountered. These issues can have a devastating effect on every aspect of their lives and as more and more veterans return from intensive periods of active service the problem is likely to worsen."

"Poppyscotland is delighted to be supporting the excellent efforts of SAMH."

- Ends -

Notes to Editors:

Veterans

Over one million people make up the veterans' community in Scotland (ex-Service person or spouse or dependant of an ex-Serviceman) – that is one in five of the Scottish population

The charity Combat Stress provides support for ex-service personnel suffering from PTSD and other mental health problems. In 2008 they had 428 clients in Scotland. Of that 428 the following information is known:

99% were male

79% were ex-Army

69% were between ages of 30 and 60

38% were divorced or separated

SAMH

The Scottish Veterans Fund recently provided financial support for SAMH to run a pilot service for veterans in Inverclyde. The service provides veterans who have problems with alcohol with direct support in their community.

SAMH is Scotland's leading mental health charity and is dedicated to mental health and well-being for all. As well as campaigning and providing information, SAMH delivers community care services throughout Scotland.

www.samh.org.uk.

Poppyscotland

Poppyscotland supports veterans and their families living in Scotland. Money raised through fundraising activities and events, including the annual Scottish Poppy Appeal, is spent providing direct financial assistance to individuals, funding advice services and providing grants and research for organisations that deliver specialist services to veterans.

www.poppyscotland.org.uk