



## **CONFERENCE FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS OF SCOTLAND'S VETERANS**

SAMH, Scotland's leading mental health charity and veterans' charity, Poppyscotland will host a conference sponsored by the Scottish Government on Wednesday 27 May, 2009, entitled: Uncharted Territory: the Mental Well-being of Scotland's veterans. The event, which will be held in Edinburgh, will raise awareness of the mental health of Scotland's veterans, share expertise and help develop services for returning veterans and their families. Conference speakers will include veterans who will share their experiences.

Recently, Lance Corporal Johnson Beharry VC, Britain's most highly decorated soldier, exposed the shocking wait for NHS treatment that veterans with mental health problems can experience in England and Wales. To address this issue and ensure that veterans in Scotland do not encounter such problems in receiving treatment, SAMH and Poppyscotland have pledged to work together to support veterans in Scotland.

Billy Watson, Chief Executive of SAMH said: "SAMH shares Lance Corporal Beharry's concerns and 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."

One of conference's key speakers will be William Sutherland, a Royal Navy veteran who fought in the Falklands conflict in 1982 and the Gulf War in 1991. 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."

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.”

Uncharted Territory: The Mental Well-being of Scotland's Veterans will take place at Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh on Wednesday 27 May 2009.

**Ends.**

**Notes to Editors:**

1. William Sutherland and Billy Watson, SAMH Chief Executive, are available for interview.
2. 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
3. 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
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. For more information visit [www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk).
8. For more information about Poppyscotland visit [www.poppyscotland.org.uk](http://www.poppyscotland.org.uk)

Contact

SAMH

Luiza Burns on 0141 568 7189 or [luiza.burns@samh.org.uk](mailto:luiza.burns@samh.org.uk)

Poppyscotland

Leigh Howieson on 0131 550 1580 or [l.howieson@poppyscotland.org.uk](mailto:l.howieson@poppyscotland.org.uk)

