

Introduction and General Information





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Introduction

Blesma, The Limbless Veterans is a national charity. It serves those who lose limbs or the use of limbs, or one or both eyes in service or as a result of service in Her Majesty's Forces. It also serves ex-Service men and women who lose limbs or eyes after service or the use of limbs through physical trauma. Whilst the majority of its Members are veterans, a number are still serving. The Association also supports dependents of its Members, particularly their widows, widowers or surviving partners. The Association is governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association adopted in June 2016.

A Brief History of Blesma

Blesma was formed in the years following the conclusion of World War One, which saw some 44,000 amputees return home. The conditions faced by these, mainly young, men were poor, and the welfare and pension systems were inadequate. By 1932, the small groups of men who had campaigned for change and improvements in the war pension system had come together, and Blesma was launched as a national charity. In the early days of Blesma, it was the Blesma Branches that provided support to Members. For many years, the Branches thrived and as well as providing practical support, they arranged social events for the Members and their families as well as fundraising events to support their activities. In recent decades, Branches have sadly closed due to falling numbers, and support is now coordinated by the staff at the Association's office in Chadwell Heath and delivered locally by Blesma Support Officers. Where Branches still operate, they continue to provide vital support. Your Blesma Support Officer can put you in contact with the local Branch in your area, if there is one, and more information can be obtained from Blesma Chadwell Heath. The Blesma Mission has remained largely unchanged to this day; that is:

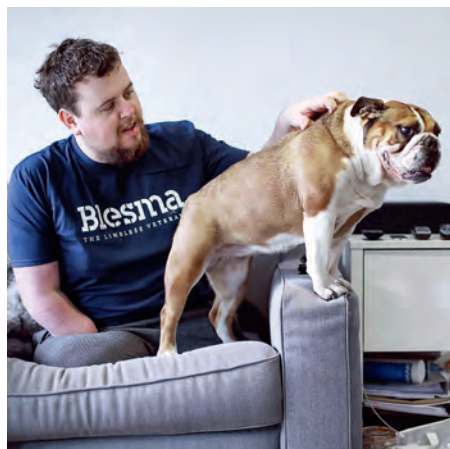
To assist limbless veterans to lead independent and fulfilling lives

Blesma continues to campaign for fair treatment for our wounded, and is widely respected and acknowledged as the expert Service charity for those living with limb loss.

Membership

As an association, our beneficiaries are our Members. Membership categories are:

Ordinary Membership includes those who have lost limbs in service and those who have lost the use of limbs as a result of service. It is also open to those who suffer a permanent loss of speech, hearing, or sight of an eye. Service must have been in any branch of Her Majesty's Forces or Auxiliary Forces.



Associate Membership is open to all ex-Service men and women who lose a limb or sight of an eye other than through service-related causes. In 2016, Members voted to broaden the membership criteria to veterans who suffer loss of use of a limb or limbs through a traumatic incident. It is also open to all men and women of civilian status who lose a limb or sight of an eye as a result of War Service or enemy action. There is no difference in the services offered. All Members have the same access.



Member Services

Services that we offer to all our Members

Our team in Chadwell Heath represents the collective interests of the membership at large. We have a long and proud track record in seeking and achieving improvements in the War Pension, in the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, and in improvements in prosthetic services so that our Members are able to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

Our Blesma Support Officers represent the interests of the Members they support by ensuring local statutory services are delivered, dealing with local authorities on their behalf and, where necessary, liaising with other charities and agencies. Here are just some of the ways in which we help and support our Members:

Peer-to-peer support pre- and post-amputation (Member helping Member)

Members have been supporting Members since the Association was formed. At the heart of the process is the Members' shared experience of traumatic injury or surgery, through recuperation to eventual stability. Such peer-to-peer support, traditionally intuitive and effective, often includes Members visiting new amputees in hospital, with partners where appropriate. This is particularly important when service personnel are injured in conflict and repatriated for treatment and care.

Members aren't trained medical professionals or counsellors, and they don't provide specific

medical or psychological advice. However, if such specialist professional counselling is required, Blesma Support Officers can arrange this.

You can speak to someone who understands what you are going through. On many occasions, they have had similar experiences and can help. In addition to speaking to other amputees, you can talk to our Support Officers who each have a great deal of experience in working with Blesma Members and advising them on living with limb loss or loss of use of limbs.

Listening, Talking and Caring A free counselling service for Blesma Members and their families

What is counselling?

Whatever our circumstances, background or role in life, we all face problems from time to time – whether personal, familial, emotional or practical. Talking about what is worrying us, and sharing our troubles with a sympathetic person, can help us feel better. You can, of course, talk to your Blesma Support Officer, but there may be an occasion when you need to talk to a trained counsellor. If that's the case, you may be interested in this service.

How does it help?

Loneliness

Many of us can feel lonely from time to time. Our family may live a long way away, and old friends may have passed away. Talking about your sense of loss can help you feel better.

Depression

Depression can affect anyone at any time. Counselling can help you overcome depression and give you strategies to cope when you're down.

Bereavement

Coping with the loss of loved ones is never easy. We can help you move beyond a sense of emptiness after losing someone close.

Anxiety

Feeling scared, unsure and nervous are all common. Counselling can help you regain self-confidence and equip you to face your anxieties.

Relationships

Relationships need to be nurtured. Counselling can help you to improve relationships with your partner, colleagues, family and friends.



How does it work?

The Counselling Service receives your application and will then contact you to make arrangements. If you find it hard to travel, the counsellor can visit you in your own home or at a location near to where you live. After you have seen the counsellor for the first time, they will normally offer five additional sessions, usually at regular times each week to suit you.

Who can use this service?

- Any Blesma Member
- Any carer of a Blesma Member
- Any widow, widower or surviving partner of a Blesma Member

How to access counselling

You can apply in two ways

Contact your local Blesma Support Officer and ask them to apply on your behalf. Or you can call 0300 0120 369; your confidential application will be taken over the phone or, if you prefer, you can ask for an application form to be sent to you.

War Pension, Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, Allowances and Welfare Benefits

A range of government benefits is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions, Veterans UK and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. These include benefits for those with ill health or a disability. However, the system is complex and can be difficult to navigate.

Blesma has been offering support and advice to its Members for years, and has developed an unrivalled level of knowledge and understanding. We have a deep understanding of both the War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS), as well as a whole range of other allowances. We offer advice and assistance on applications for entitlements, and aid our Members and surviving partners at War Pension Tribunals and AFCS Hearings.

Whatever the issue, we understand that it can be daunting to deal with a number of different organisations or to be confronted by complicated application forms. We can help you by speaking to these agencies on your behalf and helping you complete any paperwork.



Blesma is a member of the Department for Work and Pensions and its providers' engagement groups. This involvement does not in any way mean that we condone government policy, but we believe by engaging at this level we have the opportunity to get the best possible outcome for our Members and raise awareness of living with limb loss.

Grants to reduce the financial impact of disability and to enhance independence

We offer our Members financial assistance with the additional costs and hardships of disability so that they can remain as mobile and independent as possible. Grant applications are considered on an individual basis – based on your specific needs.

Uniquely, Blesma can also help with grants towards the cost of redecorating your home or maintaining your garden. We do this because we understand that wheelchairs and scooters can easily damage your door frames and skirting boards no matter how careful you are. We also recognise that it can be dangerous to climb a ladder to paint those difficult-to-reach places when you have lost a limb or use of a limb. We also understand that it can be difficult to tend

your flowerbeds and mow your lawns. Our grants can help you with the costs of employing a decorator or gardener to do this work for you.

Blesma does not issue grants for provision of prosthetic limbs as a matter of course as this should be provided by your local NHS service provider in the UK.

Blesma is committed to increasing the number of grants it makes to assist the needs of Members and surviving partners in their own homes. The requests for assistance from Members wishing to live close to family whilst retaining some independence, often in their own homes, has dramatically increased over recent years. This is in line with the national demand for later life care, which now sees residential care occurring much later in life. The Association has also pledged to work more closely than ever before with Service charities that provide residential and convalescent or respite care.

Returning to Work

Blesma believes there is life after amputation and part of this belief includes helping Members return to work or find suitable employment after they have left the military.

Blesma is not a disability employment agency and we do not act as such. However, as the charity that directly supports all Service men and women who lose limbs, the use of limbs, eyes or the sight of an eye in the service of our country, we work closely with other charities and organisations that offer employment opportunities or services.

At Blesma, we believe that employment is about ability. We promote the welfare, rights and opportunities of veterans with disabilities, and are keen advocates of the benefits that Service life can bring to an employer.

Prosthetics information and advice

Blesma can offer advice and support to Members who may have been fitted for prostheses or are awaiting fitting. As well as contact with the Blesma Support Officers regionally, there is a dedicated Blesma Support Officer at Chadwell Heath who focuses on prosthetics matters and who is available to assist if required.

Contact between Members can be facilitated where needed – sometimes just having someone else to talk to can help.

Anyone fitted for prostheses will know that the socket fit is paramount and is often the cause of issues. The world of prosthetics is rapidly developing and here at Blesma we keep up to date with new technologies and research so that we can assist Members in obtaining the best available solution for their needs. We encourage research and development, maintaining close links with the Defence Medical Services, Salford and Strathclyde Universities (as they deliver the prosthetist and orthotist degree programme) and the commercial sector. We also liaise closely with the 35 NHS limb centres in England and the equivalent in the devolved administrations in Wales (three), Scotland (five) and Northern Ireland (one). At Blesma, we understand that you are an individual with individual needs.

As medical capabilities in conflict zones have evolved, survival rates amongst our Service personnel who suffer life-changing injuries on the battlefield have increased. Many of those involved in Improvised Explosive Device (IED) incidents now survive but may be left with terrible injuries, including traumatic amputation – often of multiple limbs. The challenges of prosthetic rehabilitation in these cases have led to numerous innovations in both technology and processes.

Your eyes and ears in a changing world

Blesma is always present, keeping a close eye on what is happening in the world that might have an effect on our Members; whether it is political change, economic pressures or technological advances.

Blesma is represented on many bodies and it is through this representation, and by overt and proactive research and relationships, that we can provide feedback and input where necessary on matters that impact the lives of our Members.

Through our staff in Chadwell Heath, Area Support Officers, contacts and many supporters, we can follow up any issues or concerns that arise, and report appropriately to the right organisation or department.



Working Tirelessly On Your Behalf

With government departments

Blesma has a long history of campaigning. Whilst we will work with the government of the day, we are not afraid to be confrontational should the need arise. We work closely with other military and civilian charities when appropriate since we recognise that together we are stronger.

The first Blesma campaign took place during WWII when it was discovered that those injured at Dunkirk and El Alamein were awarded War Pensions at lower rates than those injured in WWI. A successful campaign was fought and this was just the first of many. Improvements to the War Pension and associated allowances for support and care were sought and fought for throughout the post war years, and we were instrumental in the introduction of the War Pension Mobility Supplement.

The War Pension will be paid for another 50 years at least, and benefits Blesma Members injured in conflict before April 2005 (including Iraq and Afghanistan). The War Pension is under scrutiny by the MoD, and Blesma is therefore 'on watch'. In April 2005, the MoD introduced the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS). Blesma keeps a watchful eye to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, highlighting disparity between the War Pension, AFCS and other benefits, campaigning for parity where applicable.

Blesma makes sure it is as close to the action as possible when it comes to issues that



concern or may affect our Members. We are invited to respond to government consultations and participate in patient representation groups, working groups, and many others to continue to fight for what is right for our Members. In recent years, Blesma has been involved in the shaping of the recommendations by Dr Andrew Murrison MP in his report *A Better Deal for Military Amputees* and the subsequent work by the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We work tirelessly to ensure that those injured in the service of their country are not disadvantaged because of it, while encouraging a broad uplift in services for all based on the experiences and lessons learnt from recent conflicts.

Members living overseas

Blesma Members living overseas have access to wide-ranging support, with some practical and geographical limitations. Access to support is generally through Chadwell Heath where the appropriate member of the team will provide assistance as required. For example, accessing the Activities Programme is possible and we have had many overseas Members take part in a wide range of activities. Support with dealing with Veterans UK regarding healthcare costs and prosthetic provision is another example of how we can assist. If you live overseas or are thinking of moving to another country, stay in touch.

Members' Activities

Staying active and socially engaged after injury is essential to continued health and wellbeing. Our range of activities and courses has something for everyone. Activities range from the cerebral to the adrenaline-fuelled, and are targeted to Members' needs.

As well as a centrally administered programme, we offer support and guidance to help Members organise and fund local initiatives.

In recent years, more emphasis has been given to providing activities that include family members, such as couples' weekends and family glamping trips. The need to provide such activities has come from Member feedback and Blesma-initiated research.



Contact Details

Please insert the relevant Blesma Support Officer and Welfare Rep contact information here

Blesma
THE LIMBLESS VETERANS

www.blesma.org

This is the first in a series of six leaflets about the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association, or Blesma, The Limbless Veterans as it is normally known. The other leaflets in the series are:

- 1 **Introduction and General Information**
- 2 **Amputation Explained**
- 3 **NHS Limb Service and Prosthetic Information**
- 4 **Phantom Limb Pain**
- 5 **Stump Care**
- 6 **Wellbeing**

All these leaflets can be downloaded from www.blesma.org/leaflets

If you prefer, you can receive hard copies by calling **020 8590 1124**
or by emailing chadwellheath@blesma.org

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