

Pilot Assistance Programs

IFALPA is committed to promoting an *inclusive* pilot assistance program, dedicated to the promotion of health, well-being, and professional performance for all airline pilots.

It has been demonstrated that Pilot Assistance Programs are effective for dealing with a wide range of problems experienced by pilots. Member Associations (MAs) are strongly encouraged to establish these programs¹ to assist their own members. Support from the regulator and operators are crucial to the success of these programs. Regulators and operators have been supporting such programs for over 40 years with many success stories. A holistic approach requires that the full complement of pilot assistance programs addressing medical licensure, critical incident response, substance abuse, training assistance, professional standards, and pilot well-being be implemented to the greatest extent possible, considering the limitations of available resources.

Pilot Assistance Programs provide peer support to fellow pilots, offering referral to professional resources when appropriate, while upholding strict confidentiality.

Pilot Assistance Programs help support pilots to address:

- Aviation-related medical issues,
- Emotional responses to accidents and incidents,
- Drug/alcohol intervention and rehabilitation for job reintegration,
- Training and pilot knowledge/skill difficulties,
- Professional conduct issues with the company and within the flight deck operations, and
- Problems and stresses in their personal lives impacting professional performance.

Addressing these issues supports the overall long-term well-being of the pilot, allowing continued functioning as an effective pilot and crew member while enhancing safety.

DELIVERABLES OF A SUCCESSFUL PILOT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM²

Aeromedical

The Aeromedical program coordinates aeromedical and medically related activities to support pilots with medical licensing issues.

1. National customs and laws may affect how a Pilot Assistance Program is implemented. Member Associations are encouraged to coordinate all programs with their operator and regulator.

2. The type and makeup of individual pilot assistance program deliverables will depend on the needs of individual member associations and amount of volunteers available. Member associations may need to combine, delete, or structure the suggested deliverables to address diverse national or societal issues.

Critical Incident Response Program (CIRP)

The Critical Incident Response Program ensures assistance and support is available to the pilot in the event of an accident or serious incident. The program should provide guidance and data on critical incident stress management issues.

Substance Abuse and Dependence Program

The Association coordinates efforts to implement and maintain peer intervention and treatment programs. Such efforts may include educating peer volunteers, airline representatives, and medical professionals responsible for working with airline pilots suffering the effects of chemical dependency, with the goal of getting such pilots medically re-certified and returned to the line as soon as possible.

Pilot Training Assistance

The Association coordinates efforts with their operator to develop and implement mutual agreeable programs to assist pilots who are experiencing difficulties in training or line operations. The objective is for all pilots-in-training to have access to and support from an experienced peer outside the normal group of training instructors/check airman if experiencing any training, pilot skill, or CRM difficulties. This program ensures that pilots receive the support and additional training necessary to overcome any training/skill difficulties in order to satisfactorily complete the training/checking event and return to line operations.

Professional Standards

The Association actively supports the highest standards of professional conduct among its members. The purpose of this program is to promote and maintain the highest degree of professional conduct among pilots in order to enhance the margin of safety in daily operations. This program addresses problems of a professional or ethical nature involving pilots, as well as helps resolve pilot conduct that could affect flight deck safety and/or professionalism. A successful program allows peers to resolve conflicts that may occur between two pilots or between a pilot and a member of another employee group that may affect flight deck safety.

Pilot Well-being

The Association holistically supports the pilot during distressing circumstances (be they professional, personal or societal in nature) and stresses in their personal lives which may impact professional performance. The issue(s) may or may not be caused by or result in a critical incident, substance addiction, aeromedical issues, etc. However, the impact of the situation or circumstances may affect the individual personally and professionally (e.g. relationship issues, violence, bereavement).

BENCHMARKS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM

Pilot Driven: Although these programs may involve multiple stakeholders and be multi-participant, they are offered and run *by pilots, for pilots* with the goal that no harm is done to those they seek to support.

Independence and Autonomy: Pilot peer support programs act as an independent, autonomous “port-of-call/ safe haven” dedicated to providing peer support to pilots.

Transparency: Pilot peer support programs need to operate with trust and integrity and deliver clear protocols.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality requires that personal information shared stays within the program regardless of its form or source. All information collected can only be used to provide support to pilots. It is understood that there are limits to confidentiality when safety could be compromised and there needs to be clear protocols for escalation of such cases.

Organizational

Pilot Assistance Program Steering Committee: A steering group/board/executive committee will co-ordinate and oversee the application of the program's objectives, scope and principles, including the implementation of policy and procedures governing operations, referral processes, training, education, resources, and evaluation.

Peer Support Volunteers: Peer support volunteers (PSV) are selected based on their emotional maturity and ability to work with people based on standards set by the Steering committee. Peer support volunteers should possess the attributes of empathy, thoughtfulness, understanding, compassion, and insight, and have strengths in self-regulation and self-awareness.

Peer Support Program Mental Health Professional/Physician: A pilot peer support program mental health professional/physician must be well versed on the unique attributes of a pilot's medical certificate and be currently licensed as a mental health professional/physician. They must be trained in and have a comprehensive insight into the purpose and functioning of the Pilot Assistance Programme.

Operational

Protocols: Define and maintain established protocols to include confidentiality agreements, peer support volunteer scope and limitations, and escalation procedures for cases where safety of flight or harm is a risk.

Contact Call Initiation and Follow-up: A simple, easy, and single point of contact should be established for any member to contact the Pilot Assistance Program. Contact with an individual seeking or needing assistance may occur through several means, including self-initiated, company-initiated, peer/family initiated, or long term absence. All PSV interactions are required to be followed-up to completion. Follow-up should be categorized as *Continuing, Referred and Ongoing, or Completed*.

Training: All pilot peer support program personnel and volunteers should be trained in accordance with IFALPA-accepted training standards appropriate to each program.

Program Promotion: Each peer support program should be actively and regularly promoted by the regulator, the operator and by union/pilot association.

Website: A website should be developed to provide resources for all peer support programs and volunteers, including educational tools for peers and the pilot community it seeks to serve.

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