

Pilot Assistance Programs

NOTE

This paper supersedes 17POS07, of the same name.

IFALPA remains committed to promoting an *inclusive* pilot assistance program, dedicated to the promotion of health, well-being, and professional performance for all airline pilots. The Support offered by such programs are important not only for the psychological safety of pilots but are increasingly acknowledged as being an important contributor to flight safety

It has been demonstrated that Pilot Assistance Programs are effective for dealing with a wide range of problems experienced by pilots. A holistic approach requires that the full complement of pilot assistance programs addressing medical certification, critical incident response, substance use disorder, training assistance, professional standards, and pilot well-being be implemented to the greatest extent possible, considering the limitations of available resources.

Member Associations (MAs) are strongly encouraged to establish these programs¹. Support and recognition from the regulator and operators is crucial to the success of these programs.

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 integration,
- 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 wellbeing of the pilot, allowing continued functioning as an effective pilot and crew member while enhancing safety.

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.

DELIVERABLES OF A SUCCESSFUL PILOT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM²

Aeromedical

The aeromedical program coordinates aeromedical and medically related activities to support pilots with medical certification 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 Use 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

This program ensures that pilots receive the support and additional training necessary to overcome any training/skill difficulties to satisfactorily complete the training/checking event and return to line operations.

A collaborative program together with their operator should be developed and implemented to assist pilots who are experiencing difficulties in training or line operations. The objective is for all pilots to have access to and support from an experienced peer external to the training instructors/check captains/ airmen if experiencing any training, pilot skill, or CRM difficulties.

Professional Standards

The purpose of this program is to promote and maintain the highest degree of professional conduct among pilots 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.

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

Pilot Wellbeing

The purpose of wellbeing programs is to assist a pilot who is experiencing stressful or distressing circumstances and to help them identify resources and find a way forward towards resolving the circumstances and regaining their resilience.

Personal, societal, or work-related circumstances may trigger stress and distress, negatively impacting the mental health and resilience of a pilot. Regardless of the cause, the impact of such circumstances may affect not only the personal life but also the professional performance of the pilot concerned.

BENCHMARKS OF 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.

Sovereignty

Peer Support Programs (PSPs) should be established according to the unique needs of each pilot community and within the resources available to the specific Member Association (MA). This means that while these programs must adhere to the core principles of pilot-driven support, independence, transparency, and confidentiality, they should also be flexible enough to reflect the distinct cultural, operational, and regulatory environments of the pilot group they serve. Sovereignty in this context ensures that

PSPs are tailored to address the specific challenges and demands of the pilot community, ensuring their effectiveness and relevance.

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 should 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 Program.

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 industry standards as outlined in the IFALPA Pilot Assistance or EPPSI Pilot Peer Support Programs manuals

Program Promotion

Each peer support program should be actively and regularly promoted by the regulator, the operator, and by the 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.