

What effective mental health support looks like and how to do it?

The EPPSI experience and recommendations

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European Pilot Peer Support Initiative (EPPSI)

- Founded 2016 as a co-operation of pilots, aviation medical doctors and aviation psychologists



- To define and promote best practices in Pilot Peer Support
- Promoting peer support for all safety-sensitive personnel in aviation
- Group combines expertise from professional organizations, peer support program providers and unions
- Not-for-Profit group
- Supporting air operators, EASA, other stakeholders



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Mental Health Support for Pilots

Do we need it?

Human performance factors remain the great risk to safe operations

Individual wellbeing (physical and psychological) significantly impacts human performance

There is a clear link between mental health and safety

Workers experiencing psychological distress are up to 40 per cent more likely to be involved in an accident or other safety-related event (WHO)

Under-reporting of medical and mental issues and health care avoidance for fear of stigma and loss of certification and livelihood (Strand et.al, 2022; Hoffman et.al. 2023)

ICAO: 57 % of pilots, 67 % of flight attendants engage in some form of healthcare avoidance as they fear losing their flying status.

Medical causes for temporary/permanent grounding of pilots (Simons et.al 2017, 2022)

- for all age groups, **psychological/psychiatric conditions** (including problematic use of substances) the cause in 20% of the cases (top three)
- in the 20-40 age group, **psychiatric and psychological conditions the most frequent reason (35%)**





Helicopter pilots

What's up

In operations notably different from most civil aviation fixed wing flying*:

Irregular flying patterns – everyday is different! More variability (and risk)

Flying Solo – many operations are single pilot

Often operating under adverse environmental conditions

Multi-talented – often working with multiple professions onboard (e.g. HEMS, SAR)

Precarious operator business models – high costs, low profit margins = irregular and uncertain employment security

Jack of all trades – in smaller operations pilot, CEO, CFO Safety Officer and refueler often the same person



Potential fatigue and stress factors

* See appendix

Mitigation and Prevention: Peer Support and Effectiveness

Many well-functioning existing peer support programs developed since 1970's

- CIRP, TRiM, Substance abuse programs, Wingman, MayDay, BA PAN, etc.

EASA evaluation of support program implementation

- *EASA survey report (2023)*: 93% of contributing operators use peer support.
Added value: Aeroplane operators positive, Helicopter operators show more reserve.
Crew participating in program very positive; 63% of not participated show trust in the program;
Crew preferences: 28% peer supp., 11% non-peer, 21% would avoid operator/colleagues, 37% says it depends on need
- *ICAO WP501 (2025)*: 93% of large operators report measurable value; 81% of crew report satisfaction with quality of support received

Scientific evidence

- empirical evidence of effectiveness scarce (data hidden in the system) (Melin & Lång);
- which outcome measures to use?
- recommended practices (Hoffman et.al. 2025)
- qualitative research positive about added value (Santilhano et.al. 2019)
- crew participating in programs tend to be pleased (Mulder & de Rooy)

Pilot Peer Support in practice: some interesting facts (1)

Top 5 reasons pilots seek support:

1. Training related
2. Personal relationships (partners/spouses)
3. Health issues: self & personal (incl. certification)
4. Professional concerns (employment & colleagues)
5. Fatigue/rostering

The risk for psychological wellbeing issues is more about how distraction, capacity limits, and fatigue impact safe operations

Source: Centre for Aviation Psychology, 2025 – *in press*

Pilot Peer Support in practice: some interesting facts (2)

- 76% of issues are resolved within peer support framework (no onwards referral required)
- 87% of cases are either moderately or significantly impacting pilots' personal or professional lives
- 90%+ user satisfaction

PSP seems to be important risk mitigation intervention in population who are typically help-seeking avoidant

Source: Centre for Aviation Psychology, 2025 – *in press*

PSP implementation: how to do it

Choose structure

- run by operator or collaboration of operators
- outsourced to third-party provider

Define scope

- flight crew/cabin crew/other safety-sensitive personnel

Independent program management

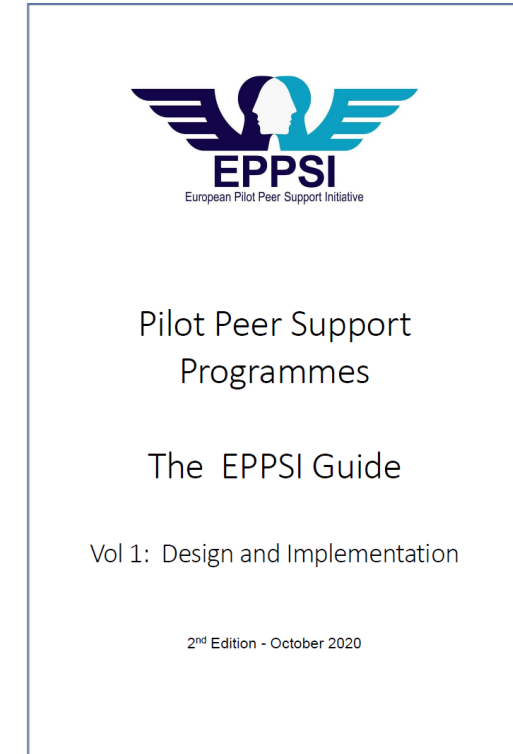
- suitable and active accountable person or team

Confidentiality

- procedures and data protection, documented to detail
- agreement with operator for procedure in cases of serious safety concern

Oversight from body of stakeholders

- key stakeholders
- monitors efficiency and effectiveness of program
- linking program to SMS
 - aggravated and anonymized data only



<https://eppsi.eu/news/eppsi-guide-on-peer-support/>

PSP implementation: how to do it (cont'd.)

Use of trained peers

- good listeners
- familiar with pathways to help
- may consult with MHP below

Mental Health Professional (MHP)

- ensures quality of support given
- supports and trains peers
- coordinates escalation where needed
- may participate in governance

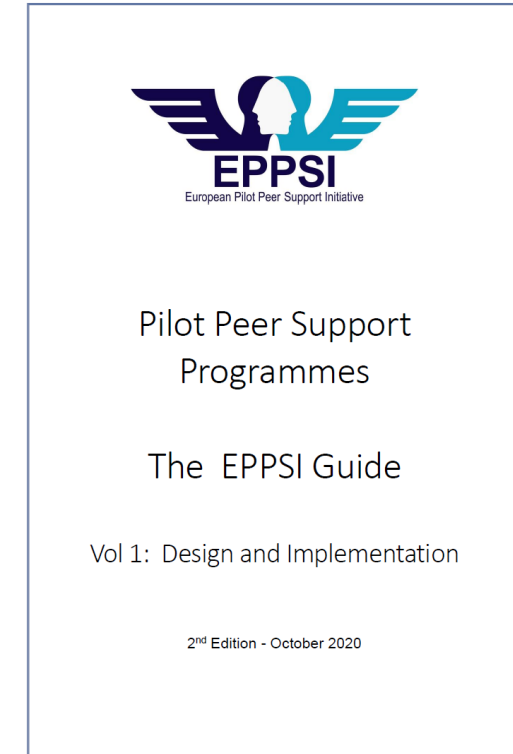
Easily accessible

Promote program among crew

Ensure training of all PSP workers

Educate crew on mental health

Create culture of trust / maintain Just Culture principles



<https://eppsi.eu/news/eppsi-guide-on-peer-support/>

Recommendations to small helicopter AOCs

1. Join network of provider running multi-operator program

Smaller operators joining network programs benefit from economies of scale and safeguards of data

2. Turnkey solution

- membership fee will not be a significant cost
- for every €1 spent €4 is returned via careers saved and less long term absences and unplanned training expense (source: Stiftung Mayday)

3. Operators may adopt provisions for mitigating fears, e.g.:

- a policy on temporary relief from flight duties
- education of personnel destigmatising mental health issues
- limiting the financial consequences of loss of licence



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Who can I turn to?

**Winter, spring, summer or fall
All you've got to do is call
And I'll be there, yes I will**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

ANY QUESTIONS WELCOME



Helicopter and Fixed wing pilots

Shared Experiences:

1. **Living Under Scrutiny** – constantly monitored: training, checks, medical certification, regulation
2. **Relationships under Strain** – how the job comes home (and home comes to the job)
3. **The Invisible Load** – operational strain, sustained performance expectations, rosters, work/life balance, and fatigue struggles
4. **The Challenging Professional World** – remote, disconnected, complex working cultures, rule governed and metric focused (esp wrt to cost)
5. **Crises Beyond the Cockpit** – life events e.g. divorce, bereavements, child and parent care, financial

