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## **EMERGING BEST PRACTICES IN PILOT PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

*MEILLEURES PRATIQUES ÉMERGENTES DANS LES PROGRAMMES PILOTES DE SOUTIEN PAR LES PAIRS*

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Introduction: Following the Germanwings tragedy, aviation advisory bodies including the EASA Germanwings Task Force and the FAA Pilot Fitness Aviation Rulemaking Committee made recommendations for air carriers and pilot groups to establish pilot peer support programs (PPSP's). Program goals are to remove barriers to pilots seeking assistance with mental health stressors, increase awareness of resources available to pilots, to reduce the stigma of seeking help and to improve aviation safety.

Background: Several longstanding PPSP's and newly created PPSP's have adopted a variety of strategies to assist pilots with many "routine" psychological stressors as an initial response. This reduces fears and stigma of seeking help from mental health professionals, employer resources or involving regulators in psychological fitness evaluations. Well-established PPSP's increased the number of peer support volunteers (PSV's) available, augmented awareness marketing efforts, and improved vetting and training of volunteers.

Newly established programs emulated previously successful PPSP's and added elements to improve pilot access and mental health oversight. Because of variations in company and pilot union resources, collective bargaining agreements, national health and insurance systems, regulatory requirements, privacy and notification laws, airline medical department involvement and other factors, there is no single best PPSP model for a particular airline or country. PPSP data collection is challenging.

Summary: Best practices include comprehensive initial and recurrent PSV training. This training includes listening skills, mental health awareness, suicide evaluation, resources available to pilots, scope limits and referral thresholds, women's issues, safety of flight/fit for duty assessments and confidentiality limits. 24/7 PSV availability for telephone or online contact is essential. Vetting and disenrollment protocols for PSVs are needed. Support of the employer, union and regulator without direct involvement is critical. Triage and referral mechanisms for complex or urgent situations should be well established. Successful PPSP's require continuous effectiveness analyses. Extension to general aviation and ATC is desirable for safety.