60th CONFERENCE OF
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ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONS

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AGENDA ITEM 3: AVIATION SAFETY

ENHANCING SAFETY AND PERFORMANCE USING PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS (PSP) FOR AVIATION LICENCE HOLDERS

(Presented by Australia)

INFORMATION PAPER

SUMMARY

Peer support programs (PSPs) have been in place in the aviation sector as a wellbeing measure for many years and have been accepted by aviation licence holders as an important and valuable part of their operational environment. The success of PSPs in supporting aviation licence holders' wellbeing is now being recognised as similarly valuable for supporting and improving their performance, and by extension, the safety of aviation operations and systems. To formally capture the benefits of PSPs across the industry, the PSPs must be developed and implemented in a standardised manner.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aviation licence holders with access to peer support are more likely to have better mental wellbeing, and less likely to experience mental illness leading to aviation medical certificate impacts. Accordingly, PSPs are being implemented by the aviation industry as an element of safety and performance measurement. Aviation medical authorities are also recognising the role of PSPs in aeromedical risk assessment for medical certification. For the PSPs' role to be effectively integrated in the safety management system, the structure and function of the PSP must be evidence-based, valid, and reliable.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Aviation workers have been supporting each other in their working environment informal since the inception of the industry. The aviation model of training, skill development, and career progression is also based on effective interprofessional collaboration and mentoring. Those mentoring interactions extend to include informal support though the application of non-technical skills for managing the human issues that impact performance. This is the fundamental definition of a "peer" – a person who works alongside you, understands your lived and worked experience, and can help you navigate your challenges within that setting using a shared perspective. In doing so, the supported person is better able to apply themselves cognitively and behaviourally in their aviation role, resulting in better and safer performance.

2.2 The informal and organic development of the peer role can be limiting in terms of scope and access across industry. Relying on this informality means the benefits of peers in wellbeing, performance, and safety will not be available to many aviation participants for decades, if ever. Identifying the core knowledge and skills of peers, and the processes used by peers that bring benefit to workers and to the system, will allow the delivery of specific peer training to more workers at scale, making peers more available within the industry.

2.3 Many organisations are now delivering peer training and including peer support within their wellbeing and performance processes as a Peer Support Program. While most of these are informed by experience from other sectors, including healthcare and emergency services, the content of the training and the programs remain heterogeneous and inconsistent between aviation organisations. This inconsistency means that the role of the peer within the safety system cannot be relied upon at a system-wide or whole-of-industry level. What one agency calls a "peer" may not provide the same level of support, oversight or quality as another agency, and may in fact not be safe or effective at all.

2.4 To overcome these inconsistencies and provide the opportunity for peers within PSPs to be formally integrated in the safety management system, the Australian aviation safety regulator, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), has been collaborating with other National Aviation Authorities (NAAs) and stakeholder organisations to develop recommendations regarding PSPs for aviation licence holders. The recommendations are that PSPs have the following core elements:

2.4.1 **Processes for peer selection, training, currency, supervision and mentoring.** Well-managed selection to ensure that the selected peer is suitably qualified and appropriately motivated to be a provider of peer support, and has the cognitive and emotional capacity to navigate the issues being experienced by their co-worker. Standardised training and currency enabling the peer worker to provide the most appropriate support within a defined scope, without overstepping the boundaries of their skills and putting themselves and their colleague at risk of adverse outcomes. Supervision and mentoring for the peer support worker, to provide a resource for their own wellbeing while they support others, and an avenue for quality assurance and safety oversight that is expected for the conduct of any aviation safety and performance activity.

2.4.2   **Procedures for engagement with and reporting to the medical certification authority.** Aviation licence holders and their peers may elect to use wellbeing and performance information gathered through the PSP process to support decisions regarding fitness for medical certification. The process of informed consent to share such information, the nature of the information, its collection and handling, and the way it is used, must all be carefully managed between the PSP and the NAA. Standardisation of these processes will provide for consistency and transparency across operational environments and between NAAs.

2.4.3   **Quality assurance and safety oversight for peers and the PSP.** Data used for decisions on medical certification for aviation licence holders, and the safety decisions that are made using that data, must be reviewed for its effectiveness. The quality assurance cycle is a critical element of a safe system, allowing the elements detailed above to be further refined and developed as the systems and processes mature. A standardised quality process for PSPs is consistent with the expectations of a global aviation safety and performance management approach.

3.   ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE

3.1   The Conference is invited to note the information contained in this Paper.

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