



Charting a Common Course for Peer Support in Aviation

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During a peer support training session, a group of aviation personnel, all of whom serve as peer support volunteers, were presented with a scenario involving a colleague in distress. When asked how they would respond, their instinctive answer was to immediately set aside their operational duties to attend to the colleague.

The response was well-intentioned and reflected the genuine care and solidarity that make peer support valuable. But it also highlighted an important point: peer support is most effective when care is matched with role clarity and sound judgement. Peer supporters are not first responders, counsellors, or crisis managers. Their role is to serve as a trusted point of contact, to be able to assess and

recognise when a situation may exceed the scope of peer support, and to help connect the individual with the appropriate support pathway when needed. Without this clarity, even well-meaning actions may blur responsibilities, delay escalation, or result in support that is not suited to the situation. Clear role boundaries do not diminish the value of peer support. They help ensure that support is offered in a way that is timely, appropriate and sustainable.

Turning Good Intentions into Effective Support

This training anecdote, shared at a Tripartite Mental Health and Wellness Committee (MHWC)¹ meeting, reflected a need that had become increasingly important as peer support

programmes matured across the aviation sector: the need for a clear and common framework that gives volunteers, organisations and the wider sector a shared understanding of the role. Without this, well-intentioned volunteers may inadvertently act in ways that may not best serve the person in need, or be placed in a role they are not equipped to fill.

In response, the MHWC, comprising subject matter experts from CAAS, airlines and unions, developed a white paper that establishes a shared definition and scope for peer support programmes. Released on 18 June 2026, the paper serves as a foundational reference for aviation organisations, unions, programme administrators, peer support volunteers and aviation personnel across the sector. It sets out what peer support is, what it is not, and how peer support volunteers should act when boundaries or escalation issues arise.

Strengthening Peer Support Across the Sector

Peer support has grown into a valued and trusted part of Singapore's civil aviation mental health support landscape. As programmes have expanded, the sector has recognised the

importance of ensuring that this growth is supported by a shared and well-grounded understanding of the role.

A common definition gives volunteers clarity and confidence in their role, helps organisations design and communicate their programmes consistently and reinforces peer support as a distinct and vital component within the broader mental health support ecosystem.

The Value of Shared Experience

At its core, the white paper defines peer support in the aviation context as non-clinical and non-directive assistance provided by aviation personnel, drawing on their own lived experience in the profession, to colleagues facing personal or work-related difficulties. Peer support volunteers offer empathetic listening, emotional encouragement and a safe, non-judgemental space. They function as companions rather than experts, helping individuals recognise their own strengths and connect with appropriate resources when needed, ultimately fostering the personal agency and self-determination that underpin long-term wellbeing.



¹The Tripartite MHWC was established under the Tripartite Mental Health and Wellness Support Framework, an initiative involving the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore, airlines, and unions to strengthen mental health and wellness support for pilots and air traffic controllers in Singapore.



In practice, this might be as simple as a peer supporter reaching out to a colleague who has been through a difficult operational incident, checking in over coffee and simply being present without offering advice. This unhurried and non-judgemental presence, grounded in a shared understanding of the profession, is exactly what makes peer support unique, accessible and human. A peer supporter brings an authentic understanding of what it means to navigate the demands, operating pressures and work culture in aviation. That authenticity is the peer supporter’s particular power to build trust and reduce the sense of isolation that can often accompany personal or professional difficulty.

The white paper also draws a clear and important distinction between peer support and para-counselling. While both involve supporting individuals and share an obligation to escalate safety concerns, para-counselling involves formal counselling skills, structured techniques and often professional supervision. Peer support, by contrast, is grounded in mutual understanding and focuses on emotional support, validation and appropriate signposting. Keeping these roles clearly delineated helps ensure that each form of support can contribute appropriately and

effectively, and that individuals receive the help best suited to their needs.

For programme administrators and volunteers alike, this distinction is not just academic; it shapes how training is designed, how boundaries are communicated and how volunteers understand the limits of their role.

Escalation as Good Practice

Alongside its definition of peer support, the white paper also sheds helpful light on the topic of escalation – not as a failure of peer support, but as one of its most essential functions. Peer support volunteers are expected to recognise when a situation exceeds the scope of their role and to act promptly, guided by principles of timeliness, proportionality and transparency.

The paper outlines four escalation pathways that programmes should define in advance. Advisory escalation provides guidance and support to the volunteer. Signposting escalation connects individuals to professional or community resources. Safety escalation applies where there is immediate risk to self or others, and safeguarding escalation addresses legal or statutory obligations.

Importantly, the paper also cautions against premature or excessive escalation, which may undermine individual autonomy or deter help-seeking. The goal is sound, considered judgement, not reflexive referrals.

Returning to the aviation personnel in that training room, this is what peer support training seeks to instil. The appropriate response is not necessarily to just rush over, but to check the colleague’s whereabouts and whether someone is with them, and then to assess whether there are red flags that require immediate escalation. Where such red flags exist, the peer supporter triggers the appropriate pathway. In both cases, whether escalation is triggered or not, the peer supporter assures the colleague that support remains available if needed, before proceeding with their operational duties. These may be small steps, but they capture the spirit of good escalation: timely, proportionate and centred on the autonomy and wellbeing of the person in need.

Built Together, for Everyone

For aviation organisations, the white paper provides a practical reference to guide programme design, volunteer training, communications about roles, and governance. Aligning training content with the non-clinical nature of peer support and ensuring that escalation pathways are documented and communicated to all volunteers are among the key steps organisations can take to strengthen their programmes.

For peer support volunteers, the paper offers both clarity and reassurance. Well-defined boundaries are not a constraint on the value of peer support. Instead, they are what allow volunteers to engage with confidence, sustainability and integrity.

For the sector as a whole, the white paper reinforces that peer support is a vital and irreplaceable layer within the broader mental health support ecosystem – one that includes education, timely intervention and collaborative return-to-duty programmes, all underpinned by trust and open communication.

The MHCW’s white paper is the product of strong tripartite collaboration, bringing together subject matter expertise from aviation psychologists, union leaders and peer support programme leaders within the pilot and air traffic controller communities. The shared position, developed through candid discussions and careful deliberation, reflects both the strength of the tripartite model and the sector’s collective commitment to supporting the mental health and wellness of those who keep Singapore’s skies safe.

As peer support programmes continue to mature across Singapore’s aviation community, a shared language and a clear framework will help ensure that these programmes continue to deliver on their promise.

The [white paper](#) is available as a reference for aviation organisations, programme administrators, peer support volunteers and aviation personnel across the Singapore civil aviation sector.

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