TRIPARTITE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS SUPPORT FRAMEWORK FOR PILOTS AND AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

MARCH 2023

Memorandum

Aviation safety is of paramount importance. A critical aspect of aviation safety is the health of pilots and air traffic controllers. Beyond physical health, the mental health and wellness of these aviation personnel is an important focus area to effectively anchor aviation safety in Singapore.

The civil aviation industry went through one of its darkest periods in history during the COVID-19 pandemic years. The impact of this catastrophic event on the mental health of people working in our industry was intense. Our pilots and air traffic controllers were not spared as they continued to maintain Singapore's air connectivity. The issues and circumstances that they had to face while doing so were multi-dimensional and complex.

The pandemic also highlighted the importance of building resilient foundations in our systems and processes, having preparedness plans for contingencies, as well as the virtue of working collectively and collaboratively to achieve good safety outcomes and success in overcoming adversities. While there are individual organisational efforts to provide mental health support for our pilots and air traffic controllers, there is unanimity and immense strength in having the industry, unions and regulator stand side by side with a shared goal to establish and enhance our mental health and wellness support framework.

This memorandum is a significant milestone as it marks the start of the tripartite collaboration to strengthen the mental health and wellness support for our pilots and air traffic controllers. The E.P.I.C Mental Health and Wellness Support Framework

articulates a single vision and establishes our common approach. We agree to work collectively and collaboratively to promote good mental health practices at work, extract synergies in expanding and strengthening mental health support, and create a trusted and safe environment to enable timely intervention and the safe return to duty of affected pilots and air traffic controllers. By standing together in this effort, we continue to accrue trust that underpins the foundation of an effective mental health and wellness support framework.

We are pleased to jointly present our E.P.I.C Mental Health and Wellness Support Framework, and the formation of a tripartite committee to steer our efforts to continually strengthen the mental health and wellness support for our pilots and air traffic controllers.
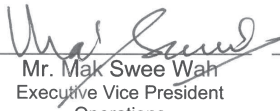
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Mr. Jefry Bin Mohamad
President
Amalgamated Union of Public
Employees

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Capt. Subramaniam R
President
Air Line Pilots Association
Singapore

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Capt. Vivek M. Hiranandani
President
Scoot Staff Union

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Mr. Mak Swee Wah
Executive Vice President
Operations
Singapore Airlines

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Mr. Barathan Pasupathi
Chief Executive Officer
Jetstar Asia Airways

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Mr. Ng Chee Keong
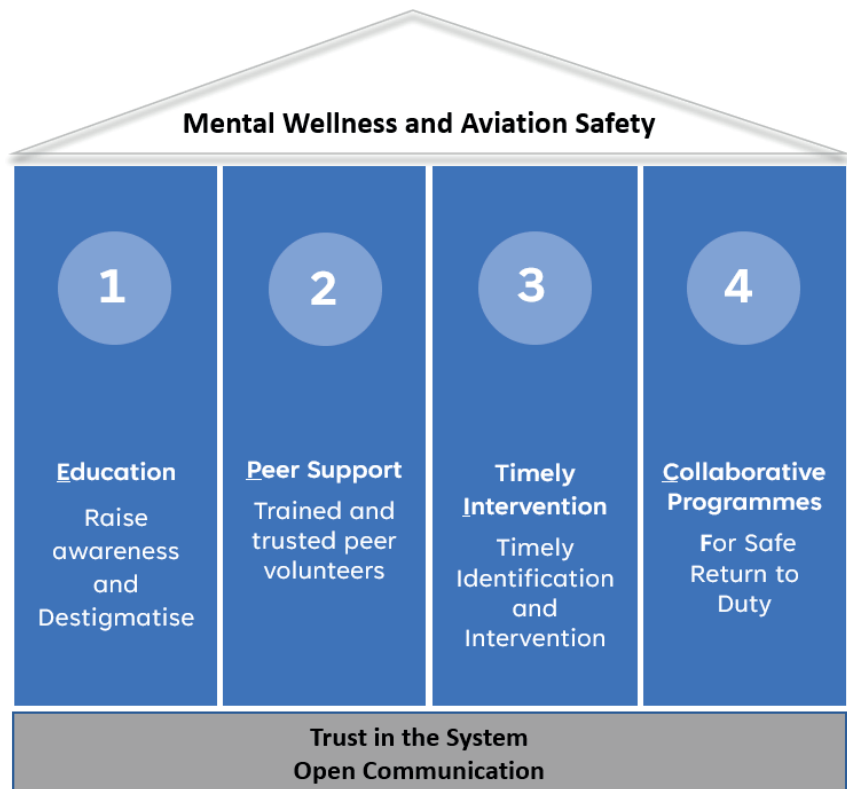Chief Operating Officer
Scoot

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Mr. Han Kok Juan
Director-General of Civil Aviation
Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore

Signed on 24th March 2023

E.P.I.C MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS SUPPORT FRAMEWORK

Our E.P.I.C Mental Health and Wellness Support Framework is a tripartite framework that encapsulates our shared intent and collaborative approach of all stakeholders to uphold a comprehensive and trusted mental health and wellness support structure for our pilots and air traffic controllers. It allows stakeholders to strategise initiatives to strengthen existing efforts in a coordinated and synergistic manner, and leverage expertise to provide customised programmes that are evidence-based and effective for our pilot and air traffic controller communities.

Mental Wellness and Aviation Safety

1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Education	**Peer Support**	**Timely Intervention**	**Collaborative Programmes**
Raise awareness and Destigmatise	Trained and trusted peer volunteers	Timely Identification and Intervention	For Safe Return to Duty

Trust in the System
Open Communication

The paramount objectives of our E.P.I.C Mental Health and Wellness Support Framework are to achieve mental health and wellness of the individual, and the enhancement of aviation safety. These two objectives are closely intertwined and mutually supportive.

These paramount objectives are supported by four key pillars, namely (1) **E**ducation, (2) **P**eer Support, (3) Timely **I**ntervention and (4) **C**ollaborative Programmes, forming the acronym E.P.I.C.

<u>**Education**</u>

It is well-recognised that mental health and wellness issues can be sensitive. They are influenced by sociocultural biases and misinformation, and there is a resultant tendency for those affected to hide their predicament. It is therefore important to raise awareness about mental health and wellness challenges and ensure continued educational efforts to shift the aviation community toward embracing a more empathetic and supportive culture. Greater understanding and acceptance of the realities of mental health issues can overcome stigmatisation and remove barriers to seeking help and receiving timely intervention.

To strengthen this pillar, we will actively promote mental health awareness and education among pilots and air traffic controllers. We will also sustain efforts in our outreach to a wide audience (Care providers, Volunteers, Management, Human Resource and Regulatory personnel) through various channels and platforms (Conferences, Workshops, Talks, Publications) to promote an empathetic and supportive culture, and share success stories to encourage open conversations and build trust.

Peer Support

It is well-recognised that people with similar experiences can better relate to support one another. Peers are best positioned to provide empathy and validation to the individual with authenticity. The peer support system is therefore a vital component in any mental health and wellness support structure. A decline in mental health and wellness may manifest across a wide spectrum of severity. Most affected individuals do not need professional help as they can return to normalcy with the reliable support and help from their peers, friends and buddies. For those who do need professional assistance, a competent peer volunteer can serve as the bridge.

To strengthen this pillar, we will reinforce our peer support networks among the pilot and air traffic controller communities by addressing their needs, including the training of volunteers and leaders to build their competencies in providing peer support.

Timely Intervention

It is well-recognised that early identification and timely intervention for individuals facing mental health challenges is crucial for the individual's personal wellbeing and to allow the individual to maintain or regain the ability to perform aviation tasks safely. Self-awareness and voluntary seeking of help provide the best means for early identification and timely intervention. For a mental health support system to be effective, multiple touchpoints and channels are needed for affected individuals to access help as early as possible. There must also be trust across the system that the medical confidentiality and interests of the affected individuals are not compromised when they seek help and receive the necessary support and assistance.

To strengthen this pillar, we will redouble our efforts to build trust and reinforce linkages within the mental health support system and establish reliable pathways to enhance early identification and timely intervention progressively.

Collaborative Programmes

It is well-recognised that for pilots and air traffic controllers affected by mental health and wellness issues, being able to continue working and contributing is of great importance. The availability of customised, multi-disciplinary and collaborative programmes ensures the best possible outcomes in achieving mental wellness and the safe return to duty for the affected individuals. Such collaborative programmes leverage on the relevant professionals and expertise, employ evidence-based treatment protocols, and set out procedures for the safe return to duty with relevant supervision and continued support by all stakeholders.

To strengthen this pillar, we will continually develop, review and improve our collaborative programmes and return-to-duty protocols for pilots and air traffic controllers, based on input and feedback from all parties and support from relevant experts.

The Foundation

The foundation that underpins the four pillars of our E.P.I.C Mental Health and Wellness Framework is trust and open communication. Having trust in one another and reinforcing open communication are preconditions for the successful development of a supportive environment and empathetic culture, both of which are vital to the success of our E.P.I.C Mental Health and Wellness Framework. The need to strengthen this foundation cannot be overemphasised.

To strengthen this foundation, we will establish open communications with the pilot and air traffic controller communities to strengthen trust. Through this tripartite collaboration, there is strong alignment through our common vision and objectives to guide the actions that all stakeholders will take individually and collectively. Our unwavering commitment remains to support the mental health and wellness of our pilots and air traffic controllers, and to enhance the safety of aviation in Singapore.