

SAFETY FORUM 2025
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

People in the Centre of Aviation Safety

A holistic and proactive approach to mental health,
well-being, fatigue and workload management

1 The Theme of the 2025 Safety Forum

The theme of the 2025 Safety Forum was “People in the Centre of Aviation Safety,” and the objective was to take a holistic and proactive approach to examining mental health, well-being, fatigue, and workload management as essential factors in maintaining resilience within aviation.

Aviation is an essential social connector and one in which operational complexity is increasing as new challenges emerge alongside growing traffic, technological innovation, and shifting industry demands. Individuals constantly adapting to the pressures of an increasingly complex environment in which traffic is expected to double within the next 20 years are the foundation of resilient and safe operation of the aviation industry.

The growing complexity compels us to ask: How can the aviation industry continue to preserve and enhance the critical role of humans as the key to resilience?

- **Inclusion:** The key to resilience and mental well-being is inclusion. Whilst a cultural shift has already occurred, the industry acknowledges that it needs to do more to embrace diverse characteristics. Inclusion encourages engagement and teamwork, leading to improved work. The industry needs to recognize that it must adapt to a changing workforce, particularly considering newer generations with different expectations around work-life balance, mental health openness, and organisational transparency.
- **Just and fair:** Mental health issues are often hidden because there is a fear that speaking up risks the “punishment” of exclusion and loss of livelihood. This fear drives towards the inverse of what is needed (the risk of presenteeism). The industry should implement “just and fair” cultures that encourage individuals to speak up about mental health, and it must avoid the unconscious bias that can lead to individuals feeling excluded and fearing punishment.
- **Leadership:** Organisational structures can either support or undermine individual resilience. Procedures designed with unrealistic expectations or systems that prioritise efficiency over well-being may gradually erode safety margins, sometimes without being detected, until a critical event occurs (the “boiling frog” syndrome).

Organisations must take a proactive role in safeguarding mental health and well-being by fostering a just and open culture, with psychologically safe spaces that remove the stigma surrounding mental health. Organisations should have credible and ethical mechanisms — driven from the top — that support confidential reporting, peer support programs, and the integration of well-being considerations into safety management systems (SMS).

- **Support:** Develop peer support programs but be cautioned that these are not one-stop shops and should be developed for the “landscape” and culture of the organisation. Whilst there are best practices (from which ideas can be gleaned), one size doesn’t fit all.

- **Destigmatising:** Mental health issues within the aviation ecosystem must be destigmatised. Surveys have determined that a proportion of aviation professionals are at potential risk from a high-risk mental event, but don't seek help despite support being available.

Prevention is better than a cure. Efforts should be made to determine how to destigmatise mental health issues, such as by regarding mental health injuries in the same way that we regard physical injuries and by ensuring financial remuneration while recovery is ongoing. Other strategies include, engaging with aviation insurers as key stakeholders, ensuring access to professional support (and understanding the reasons why it may not be used), and ensuring peer support programs are resourced appropriately to provide enduring support. Remove reasons why mental health support may not be used.

- **Resilience:** Develop resilience in front-line operations and understand the difference between resilient performance and silent endurance, which occurs when individuals continue working under pressure but without adequate capacity to recover or sustain performance over time. This distinction is vital, as the latter often goes unnoticed until a serious incident or accident reveals the underlying strain. In any case, margin should be built in before the actual operations.
- **Learning from outside:** As an industry, we are not alone; other actors face the same threats and challenges. So, embrace awareness and diversity by using best practices and techniques from other industries, to become performant (e.g., sport psychology), and include mental health awareness as part of initial training, using "value-based" objectives, to develop mental resilience.
- **Understand yourself:** As an individual, you can't control everything, so knowing what you can influence, how the brain works, and how it reacts in times of stress helps to develop understanding, ability to control the situation, and an ability to bring yourself back to logical thinking. It has both short term (stress) and but longer term (mental health) benefits. Include self-awareness training as part of continuous development for aviation professionals
- **Mental health identification and risk assessment:** Aeromedical examiners are not there to remove a licence. Developing a means to assess the mental incapacitation risk is a step in the right direction; it helps to enable early detection and should be pursued as a tool to help and to provide transparency, going in the right direction to destigmatise the impact of mental health problems.
- **Develop understanding:** The impact of mental health in an event needs to be better understood: It is important to determine whether a situation involves an occasional issue or a more severe underlying condition. Investigations should systematically include an assessment of potential mental health factors, so that lessons can be identified and translated into protective mechanisms proactively, before critical consequences occur.

2 Conclusion

The Forum's discussions made clear that maintaining safety in aviation's increasingly complex landscape is not merely a matter of technology or compliance — it depends on protecting and enabling the people at the heart of the system.

By placing mental health, well-being, fatigue, and workload management at the forefront, the Forum reinforced that resilience is an active process requiring systemic care, organisational accountability, and continuous learning from normal operations.

As the industry continues to evolve, the ability to maintain sufficient resource margins — both physical and mental — will be a defining factor in aviation's future safety and operational success. Supporting the human element is no longer optional; it is essential to ensuring resilience in a world where complexity will only continue to grow.

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