

# Mental Health Requirements for Active Pilots

## NOTE

*This paper supersedes 15POS21 – Mental Health Assessment in Routine Medical Examination.*

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health issues have increased within the general population, drawing attention to their significance in aviation. Australia presented a working paper (A41-WP/256) on Medical Certification and Mental Illness at ICAO's 41st assembly in 2023. Additionally, a large European study, MeSafe, was published in 2024, along with the FAA's Aviation Rulemaking Committee's (ARC) Recommendations on Mental Health and Aviation Medical Clearances.

This Position Paper is intended to guide IFALPA's recommendations to update ICAO Annexes on personnel licensing and guiding discussions within ICAO's Medical Provision Study Group and Mental Health Working Group. Member Associations may also use this paper when discussing mental health requirements in routine medical examinations with their Medical Authorities.

While IFALPA published a Briefing Leaflet on Mental Health in 2023, it did not address mental health requirements in medical examinations. The MeSafe study highlighted that routine mental health questionnaires are not effective as screening tools in medical examinations and have not been validated for use in aviation. The most effective approach remains a trustful and supportive discussion between the applicant and the aeromedical examiner (AME).

IFALPA believes that extensive psychological or psychiatric evaluations, or the routine use of screening questionnaires during pilot aeromedical assessments, are neither productive nor cost-effective. These methods may create a false sense of safety.

However, if there is substantial evidence necessitating further psychological or psychiatric testing, safeguards must be in place to protect pilots from false positives or improper conclusions. Psychological or psychiatric assessments should be conducted by an unbiased, accredited mental health professional, ideally familiar with the aviation environment. The professional should be selected in collaboration with the pilot from an agreed-upon pool of experts. A second evaluation should only be conducted if the pilot disagrees with the initial assessment.

All results must remain confidential and should not be the sole basis for refusal, revocation, or non-renewal of a license or medical certificate.

Given the absence of a “quick” method for assessing a pilot’s mental health during aeromedical assessments, IFALPA advocates for an open and honest relationship between the pilot and the AME. To foster dialogue, no record of the conversation(s) should be kept, other than a note indicating that mental health and behavioral topics were discussed.

This approach encourages frank discussions, with the expectation that formal action will rarely be required. The primary aim is to identify behavioral patterns or mental aspects that can be addressed before they impact medical fitness, with a focus on common, treatable mental health conditions and life stressors.

#### NOTE

In many cases, pilots can receive peer support or therapy while maintaining a regular schedule.

The ultimate goal is to encourage pilots to adopt a healthier lifestyle, improving their chances of maintaining good mental health throughout their careers.

When mental health diagnostic criteria are met, the AME should focus on the impact of the symptom on flight safety rather than solely on the diagnosis. In many cases, it may be possible and safe for pilots to continue flying with necessary limitations. The MeSafe study provides risk matrices to assist AMEs in assessing these cases.

Any report submitted to the authorities should be concise and focused on relevant findings that directly impact flight safety. The report should include a summary of the pilot's mental health status, noting any symptoms, their potential impact on flight safety, and any recommended limitations or follow-up actions. Importantly, the report should maintain the confidentiality of the details discussed during the examination and should not disclose any unnecessary personal information. The emphasis should be on objective findings and their implications for the pilot's ability to safely perform their duties.

Training for AMEs on mental health assessment is crucial. AMEs require education on common mental health conditions, pilot stressors, interview techniques, risk assessment, and pilot support programs.