

Recap

HIMS Australia began as the HIMS Australia Advisory Group (HAAG) in 2014. At the time there was no specialised peer support program in Australia for pilots. In our region in 2014 HIMS New Zealand and the Cathay Pacific HIMS programmes were operating along with the US HIMS program which has operated for many years.

Those programmes are very structured and over the years in Australia we have come to realise that we need a HIMS Support structure that fits our culture and regulatory framework. This has resulted in several attempts to formalise HIMS structures with airlines without much success.

There is a level of scepticism and mistrust on all sides of this debate so putting in place a trusted structure is challenging.

In Australia, when, and if, a HIMS structure is introduced, participation will be **completely voluntary**. It is worth noting that the Qantas Group are using HIMS like supports for pilots affected by Substance Abuse Misuse (SAM) In most cases the trusted peer is an empathetic and knowledgeable support for the affected pilot.

HIMS Australia's primary mission is to provide peer support for pilots who present with SAM issues which impact the holding of a CASA Medical Certificate. The degree of peer support provided depends on assessment of the pilot, their needs, and in most cases a mandate from CASA in their medical recertification process.

HIMS Australia peer supporters have all received appropriate training. That training has been encouraged and endorsed by CASA.

Expectations and Process

At HIMS Australia, we receive multiple enquiries via different channels; the website, via referral (either medical/friends/partner/airline), via the regulator and often from someone who has previously had a SAM issue.

In the first instance we will triage the information and make suggestions to the affected pilot about how best to proceed. That information is confidential. We may encourage the pilot to self-refer, seek further information, seek further treatment; it all depends on the information presented.

Where possible, assessment of pilot is undertaken by a Fellow of the Australian Chapter of Addiction Medicine specialists (FACHAM) [\[link to come\]](#). The FACHAM will make a comprehensive assessment and generate a report. Due to the complexities of the CASA Avmed regulations, a pilot will generally have their medical withdrawn pending CASA Avmed assessment.

CASA Avmed reviews the FACHAMs report, then when they are ready to re-certify, they will place special conditions on a pilot's medical certificate.

Those special conditions can vary but generally they will include random and non-random testing, regular reports from DAMEs, regular reports from peer supporters and sometimes other information pertaining to a pilot's history [\[link to testing will come\]](#) . Generally, those conditions are reviewed annually. Usually, a pilot's medical will be under audit for up to five years, assuming no further relapse. Generally, the frequency of reporting is decreased over that time.

The major stressor for pilots is the time taken for assessment and the time CASA takes to review the report and produce their "conditions" attached to the medical certificate. Competent peer supporters can assist with minimising this stress by providing information and reassurance.

Pastoral Care

HIMS Australia encourages affected pilots to participate in meetings with similarly affected pilots. The two major options are Birds of a Feather (BOAF) [\[link to come\]](#) and Smart Recovery [\[link to come\]](#). BOAF is like AA for pilots but without the evangelical twelve steps. It's a collegiate group of people with similar issues. Smart Recovery is an evidenced based meeting, more structured. Participation in these types of meetings are totally voluntary and they are not for everyone. However, the majority of pilots who participate indicate a shared sense of purpose which assists in their journey.

Some pilots undertake specific counselling to assist in their recovery, particularly in the early stages of the assessment phase.

Whilst not mandatory, some form of mental health support is encouraged. The regulator is of the view that mental health and peer support gives favourable weight to assessing risk when medical recertification occurs.

Note, BOAF and Smart Recovery are not provided by HIMS Australia. We have an arms-length relationship with both options.

Rumours and Problems

A number of rumours and negative perceptions exist in the industry around the whole SAM space, particularly in relation to CASA and its application (or not) of medical certification. CASA sits under very specific rules in relation to safety. They will only certify/re-certify a pilot's medical certificate when they are comfortable with the safety risk assessment. When there is no support for the pilot other than a DAME, the timelines are considerable. If they

have limited information and observe no support structures, they will be reluctant to re-certify.

Different CASA doctors can have a different approach to SAM issues and they can be inconsistent in the special conditions they attach to medical certificates. In some cases observed, the special conditions have been unworkable. Often the timeline from assessment to recertification can be longer than twelve months which creates significant stress for the affected pilot. This is more acute for pilots outside the airline system with little company and financial support.

Advocacy

HIMS Australia is primarily a peer support organisation, but we have direct links to CASA. We constantly advocate for a consistent approach from the CASA doctors and a reduction in the time taken to evaluate a pilot's medical condition and recertification. Other regulators around the world have pilots back to work within 3 months when those pilots are participants in HIMS style programs. The Lufthansa Antiskid program is an example of such [\[link to come\]](#). We are in the process of creating a CASA Liaison in our structure to advance our position.

What is abundantly clear around the world is that pilots who are supported by a robust and comprehensive support structure achieve better outcomes than those with little or no support.

Expectations

HIMS Australia is currently working with the Qantas Group to offer HIMS to pilots in the group with SAM issues. It is expected that those pilots will achieve recertification significantly quicker than those pilots undertaking the straight DAMP process. Again, the addition of HIMS is voluntary.

When created, a copy of the policy will be available on our website [\[link when published\]](#)

Summary

Peer support is not the only part of the puzzle but is now recognised as a vital component in supporting a pilot to recertification, to restoring their professional competencies, stabilising their family situations, and improving health outcomes.



HIMS Australia is committed to evolving and meeting the challenges that present in the SAM space. We are a pilot-for-pilots support focused group with a broad focus across the aviation industry.

We understand there are some issues we may not have provided information on, so please, feel free to reach out.

HIMS Australia