

Conference 2025 Service Handbook DRAFT

Chapter 1 : Public Information

Public Information is the Third Legacy of Service in action. Along with Recovery and Unity, we have inherited this legacy from the co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous. One of the co-founders, Bill W, has this to say:

“To reach more alcoholics, understanding of AA and public goodwill toward AA must go on growing everywhere. We need to be on still better terms with medicine, religions, employers, government, courts, prisons, mental hospitals and all enterprises in the alcoholism field.”

Concept XI – Twelve Concepts for World Service

AA needs effective communication with the general public and professional communities involved with the alcoholic.

1. Introduction

Public Information (PI) in AA means carrying the message of recovery to the still suffering alcoholic by informing the general public about the AA programme. We do this by getting in touch with professionals and any organisation which is in a position to pass on knowledge of what AA can do for the still suffering alcoholic.

Our first aim of this chapter is to suggest ways in which members can carry out PI work.

Those undertaking PI work for the first time, at group, intergroup or at regional level, should be encouraged to read this Handbook.

It is important to remember that the Traditions of AA should be observed. We should remain anonymous at the level of press, radio and TV on a personal basis, but that does not mean that we cannot identify ourselves fully when dealing with professionals. We are not secret; those doing PI service work need to be accessible by name and address to those with whom we wish to conduct our business.

Our second aim is to tell the public through as many organisations as possible what AA is, how it works, and where contact can be made. We should make clear that it has worked for us. An important element of this is a willingness to spread the message by making contact with appropriate professionals and services.

Sponsorship into service and working with other PIs at committee level provides experience for this type of service.

2. What is PI?

PI work is also referred to as 'Carrying the message to the general public'.

Experience has shown that intergroups and regions are the bodies that can most usefully discuss PI matters, and from which one or more PI committees can be formed.

Groups are encouraged to undertake local PI working with their intergroup where possible. PI is a co-operative venture. Communication across intergroup is essential, and the sharing of service experience is commonplace. Positive steps should be taken to keep the health, prison, probation/courts and the criminal justice service in Scotland, and all other liaison officers informed of PI developments.

The service structure of AA encourages the appointment of a Regional PI Officer. To help co-ordinate events, information and skills.

3. The PI Committee

For many years local Public Information Committees (PICs) have been the way the message has been carried to the professional community and, in many places, this is still the case. A PIC at intergroup may be formed of elected members from the Fellowship, and chaired by the intergroup PI liaison officer.

In deciding what activities the PIC initiates in relation to other service disciplines, the following extract may be useful:

“In keeping with our Traditions of placing principles before personalities, who or what committee carries the AA message is not important as long as our message is carried to the still suffering alcoholic.” (reference TBI)

Another thought to keep in mind is, 'easy does it'. Once you get started with the formation of a committee, it is a good idea to take it easy at first until you are sure just what the needs are, and how many people you have available to get the job done. For some committees the first task is to inform AA members about co-operating with professionals, sometimes to correct misconceptions about whether AAs should be taking the initiative in going out to non-AA members. A few newly formed PICs have reported resistance from members who fear they will be doing 'promotion' by letting professionals know about AA. Whether or not misconceptions exist, it is always a good idea to make sure there are members available and eager to start before setting up ambitious projects.

4. Communication

Communication within AA about PI work is important for ongoing initiatives. Some PICs:

- share with one another via region or by exchanging minutes of their meetings
- share activities and ideas with the General Service Office (GSO) for possible inclusion in AA Service News and other relevant communication channels
- are visible to other AAs through regular attendance and participation at group and other AA business meetings
- share service experience, encouraging sponsorship into service
- let the Online Response Service and intergroups know whom to approach when there is a need for a PI contact

Often, the AA programme works when an active alcoholic wants help, and an AA is on hand to give that help. Professional services such as doctors, alcoholism agencies, treatment facilities, employers, or even a relative may be crucial to getting that alcoholic into recovery because of the message that had been carried to them.

5. Working within the Traditions

The role of a doctor or a member of the clergy in relation to an alcoholic is far different from the AA custom of sharing experience. Professionals necessarily work on different assumptions from ours. It is helpful to non-alcoholics – and vital to our health as a Fellowship – that others understand our assumptions.

Our guiding principles as a Fellowship are contained in the Twelve Traditions. The responsibility for preserving our Traditions rests with AA's and with us alone. In order to preserve them, we must understand them. We cannot expect non-AA members to comprehend and observe the Traditions unless we are well informed about them ourselves.

Thoughtful reading of AA literature, such as 'Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions' and the pamphlets, 'AA Tradition – How it Developed', and, 'An Introduction to our 12 Traditions', is recommended for anyone who works with non-AA members. In addition, the first few pages of, 'How AA Members Co-operate with Professionals', point out some ways all the Traditions are relevant for PI and which Traditions that apply most directly.

Let us take a look at a few Traditions that on the face of it seem unrelated to PI work. The First Tradition points out that personal recovery depends on unity – something we can all keep in mind when, for example, new members cause controversy within the group. The Second Tradition reminds us that a loving God as expressed in the group conscience is our ultimate authority and is a help when we are tempted to impose the 'right' way of working the programme to seemingly unwilling newcomers. The Third Tradition reminds us that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking, and that we cannot judge whether another alcoholic has a desire to stop

drinking. And the Fifth Tradition brings us back to the primary purpose of any AA group – to carry the message.

The Traditions most directly connected with PI are Six (co-operation without affiliation), Seven (self-support), Eight (AAs should always remain non- professional), Ten (no opinion on outside issues), Eleven and Twelve (anonymity).

Tradition Six: “An AA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.”

Many alcoholism programmes run by external agencies co-operate closely with AA and their representatives speak glowingly of the 12 Step programme. To what extent should AA members participate in the programmes of these agencies?

Experience has given us a simple guiding principle: we do co-operate, but **we do not affiliate**. We want to work with other alcoholic organisations, but not be merged with them in the public mind. We should be careful to make it clear that AA is available as a resource for other agencies, but public linking of the AA name can give the impression of affiliation. To avoid this, we should always be careful to make it clear that we are always available purely through co-operation and not affiliation.

Tradition Seven: “Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.”

As active alcoholics, many of us were always looking for a handout, and part of personal recovery lies in making ourselves responsible human beings. The same principle applies to the Fellowship, and much of the respect of AA accorded by non-AA members results from this Tradition. Handsome gifts may have strings attached. Our effectiveness as a Fellowship and our usefulness to other organisations that call on us is greatly enhanced by the fact that we are free to do what we do best – share a programme of recovery with no outside obligations.

Tradition Eight “Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers.”

This Tradition asks AA members to stick to what they know best, personal recovery and Twelfth Step work, not to become authorities on the whole field of alcoholism and recovery. We share only our individual recovery programme, but we are not professionals. We have no official definition of alcoholism. Although we are the victims of the illness, we have no profound knowledge of either its cause or ‘cure’. We should also never comment on the practices of other alcohol treatment agencies just because they vary from our own beliefs.

Most AAs have had the experience of explaining to a cynical newcomer: ‘No, I don’t get paid for talking to you. I do it because it helps me stay sober.’ Just as professionals can

reach people AA might never encounter, we can get through to active alcoholics in a unique way that a professional may not be able to offer.

Tradition Ten: “Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.”

Here again, a Tradition reminds us to do what we know best and not be diverted from our primary purpose. By staying away from public controversy, we strengthen AA’s unity within and its reputation in the public eye.

Tradition Eleven: “Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.”

Tradition Twelve: “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”

The anonymity Traditions remind us that our responsibility is to make the AA way of life look attractive to alcoholic and non-alcoholic alike. They alert us, too, to the dangers of pushing AA on professionals rather than providing information for others to use in the most appropriate way. The assurance of anonymity for the newcomer is also crucial, and a professional who refers an alcoholic to AA appreciates being given that assurance.

We find it helpful to emphasise that our anonymity Traditions mean we are a Fellowship of peers, and that we learn to help others without expecting credit or reward.

This subject has already been touched upon in the introduction to this document. It is worth repeating, however, that there is an important distinction between person-to-person anonymity and anonymity at the media level. It is strongly suggested that the book, ‘Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions’, is read by all those who seek to understand this and of course, the other Traditions.

When a PIC finds itself in trouble, it is usually because its members do not fully understand the Traditions and thus, cannot adequately explain them to non-AA members.

The Traditions are our Traditions and the responsibility for preserving them is ours. Many PICs place fundamental importance on informing their working members about these Traditions – what they are and why they came into being. Only with this groundwork can PICs effectively communicate AA principles to the general public and to representatives of the media. We cannot expect others to understand and observe the Traditions if we are too poorly informed of them ourselves. Sadly, we have also found that lack of information can lead to intolerance. For example, if an AA member’s anonymity is broken at the media level, it is often quite simply the result of a misunderstanding. Members who jump to the conclusion that the media (or an inefficient PIC) is at fault, and who write indignant letters or make hasty phone calls, would do well to think twice.

A courteous note explaining the Traditions, either to the member involved or to the media, is helpful; a snap judgement is not. The same principle applies when other Traditions are broken by AA members or non-AA members. Love and tolerance is the AA way.

6. Contacting professionals

A very important part of PI work is contacting professionals for example to:

- establish formal contact between the organisation and AA
- ask for an appointment with a representative of the organisation
- provide speakers to give talks about AA and share their experience
- provide literature

When carrying out PI work, ideally, two members should present. Sponsors may wish to invite sponsees, as this will provide a valuable learning experience. On some occasions it may be convenient to play an AA Conference approved video.

Members can provide AA published literature at a talk, and it is suggested that a telephone number should be provided for attendees to contact AA following the meeting.

Most people at a meeting of non-AA members want to know what AA is and what it does, rather than hear a drinking story. Speakers may wish to draw upon the AA Preamble and Twelve Traditions and also provide a short history of AA. PowerPoint slides may also be used. Some presentations and templates are available on the AAGB website.

It is important that members of AA remember that they are guests and co-operate fully.

We should all bear in mind the statement of PI adopted by the Fellowship in 1956:

“In all public relations, AA’s sole objective is to help the still suffering alcoholic. Always mindful of the importance of personal anonymity, we believe this can be done by making known to him, and those who may be interested in his problems, our own experience as individuals and as a Fellowship in learning to live without alcohol. We believe that our experience should be made available freely to all who express sincere interest. We further believe that all efforts in this field should always reflect our gratitude for the gift of sobriety and our awareness that many outside of AA are equally concerned with the serious problem of alcoholism.”

What your committee decides to do will be dictated by your own needs and experience. The suggestions here are just that – suggestions. It is hoped they will spark your thinking and give you leads on new ways to approach professional people where you are.

7. Personal identification

Conference 1998 decided “In today’s society there is an ever-increasing requirement for protecting the identity of members of the Fellowship.”

When working with outside agencies for PI work, the host may require individual personal identification, such as a letter from intergroup or region, passport, ID card, driving licence or letter of invitation. It is important that members of Alcoholics Anonymous remember that they are guests and co-operate fully.

Notification of the arrangements made for visits or talks including, where appropriate, the sponsoring PI Officer, should provide the names of members attending to the host organisation.

It is important that Alcoholics Anonymous does not become invisible – some loss of anonymity is inherent in PI work.

8. Ways to proceed

The following are some of the ways AA members in your area can tell others about AA, and to keep the friends of AA working with us.

8.1. Public Information meeting for non-AA persons

A public information meeting can do a lot to strengthen relationships with non-alcoholic friends and help make new friends. Such meetings can be set up by the PI committee and sometimes groups hold public meetings (to celebrate the group anniversary, for example). Many groups regularly invite to their open meetings: doctors, ministers, police officers, employers, public service workers and others who deal with active alcoholics.

Many such meetings benefit from being in the day time, as most professionals find this more convenient in their schedule. It is a good idea to send invitations well in advance to professionals before a meeting is planned. Send invitations to friends of AA and to all who are interested in the problem, such as, doctors, judges, alcoholism agencies, clergy/spiritual leaders, HR directors, social workers and the media.

8.2. A suggested meeting format

Short introduction by AA Chair who should try to cover the following:

- welcoming remarks: AA’s willingness to help whenever it can
- anonymity: A request that all present respect the anonymity of AA members present
- what AA is and is not
- AA is not a religious programme but a spiritual way of life

- AA is inclusive regardless of age, gender, personal circumstances or ethnicity
- AA is available 24/7 and is free at the point of entry
- ways of contacting AA
- AA's Tradition of self-support

As many non-AA members have helped us, a non-AA guest speaker may be invited to discuss AA from their point of view and experience. An AA may speak briefly about their drinking experience, the AA programme and especially their recovery. Some time could be provided for questions from visiting professionals. There could be concluding remarks from the Chair, thanking all those present, reminding them of how AA can help and where it can be found, and asking those attending to encourage other professionals they know to come to future open or public meetings.

It is not always necessary to include non-AA speakers but experience shows that many PICs have had larger attendance and support from other professionals when a non-AA speaks well of our Fellowship.

Many PICs use the 'public meeting' as an introduction to professionals and other interested parties. Professionals attending such meetings could then be contacted by members offering literature, telephone service numbers and lists of local meetings, as well as giving further talks about how AA can co-operate.

8.3. AA Speakers at non-AA meetings

Talks to outside groups are perhaps the most widely used and are a popular method of PI. Detailed suggestions on this means of communication will be found in the pamphlet, 'Speaking at non-AA Meetings'. The pamphlet, 'AA at a Glance', is often used as a give-away item when members speak to non-AA member's groups.

8.4. Participation in non-AA member's events

In observance of Tradition Six (co-operation but not affiliation) many PICs participate in events sponsored by non-AA organisations.

PI liaison officers are often asked to participate in Health Fairs or voluntary organisation open-days, sponsored by local colleges, public health organisations etc. Members of the local PIC frequently staff an AA booth to provide any information requested. Some health and social care providers along with intergroups and regions organise Alcohol Awareness days which provide other opportunities for AA to co-operate.

Display units and literature for use in these events can be obtained from GSO. Experience shows that by attending such events, the message is not only carried to those visiting but also to other voluntary or professional organisations attending the sponsored event. This sometimes creates follow up actions for the PIC.

8.5. A Public Information workshop for members of the Fellowship

Many PICs have found that holding workshops to look at local needs and opportunities, the service structure and the Traditions are a great way of exploring ideas and settling on methods to carry the message.

Here is an example:

An all-day workshop was planned. It was opened with the Serenity Prayer, followed by a reading of the short form of the Twelve Concepts. The Fifth Tradition was also read and related to the First Concept. The Tradition says that each group has but one primary purpose – to carry the message; the ultimate responsibility and authority belong to the groups. A brief presentation on PI was given. The bulk of the day was devoted to discussion. Breakout groups were organised to discuss specific topics with a secretary appointed to take notes and report back.

Discussion topics were assigned to each breakout group. Suggested topics could include:

- what is the best way to form a PIC?
- how do we form a working plan for the committee?
- what is the best way to reach and engage with professionals?
- how can we sponsor members of the Fellowship into service?
- how can we support doctors, clergy, and police?
- how can we bridge the gap between professionals and AA?
- what types of presentations are appropriate for professionals?
- what is AA's attitude towards professionals?

Each breakout group then presented a summary of their discussion to the full workshop.

8.6. A public information newsletter

One PIC chair started a PI newsletter, sharing news of what was going on in the area, urging members to get involved and to help find others who wanted to participate. One newsletter suggested the use of literature as a training tool for new committee members and as handouts to professionals where appropriate. The chair included lists of literature appropriate for these purposes, and offered to work with local committees. The use of Conference approved literature for all PI work was recommended.

The newsletter was circulated to all Group Service Representatives, suggesting that attendance at intergroup and participation in PIC meetings would be a great way to get involved in carrying the message.

9. Suggested professional contacts and helping organisations

Some suggested organisations that you can provide information and help to are:

- Alcohol Treatment Units, NHS Alcohol Support, community-based alcohol services
- Agencies involved with delivering work related assessments to health benefit claimants
- Age UK
- Approved Premises
- Carers e.g. Carers UK
- Chambers of Commerce
- Charities
- Citizens Advice – a source of a wide range of organisations
- Civil Service – www.gov.uk, follow ‘contact’ links
- Deafness – e.g. Deafness Support Network. (The Big Book is available in BSL on DVD)
- Dentists
- Ethnic Community Groups
- GPs – also Practice Nurses and Practice Managers within the surgery
- Health and Safety organisations
- Health Service e.g. District Nurses, Community Psychiatric Nurses, Health Visitors, Nursing Tutors, Health Education Services, to name a few
- Hospitals e.g. Accident and Emergency, Medical and Surgical wards, substance misuse
- Homeless hostels
- Housing Aid and Advice Centres
- Housing Department of Local Authority
- JobCentre Plus – e.g. Personal Advisors, Employment Engagement Team, Disability Employment Advisor, all of whom may welcome greater awareness
- Libraries – may be willing to display posters, literature, videos etc.
- Magistrates – The Clerk to the Court can be very helpful e.g. by displaying posters and passing on literature to the magistrates
- Mediation services – divorce and separation specialists
- Pharmacies
- Police e.g. Police Community Support Officers, Community Liaison Officers and Domestic Violence Units
- Probation Services – besides dealing with offenders, they can provide help and support with severe family problems. May also use the chit system
- Public Health and Health Planning departments
- Rotary Club
- Samaritans
- Schools and colleges
- Spiritual leaders
- Trades Unions
- Vision support (Literature is available in Braille and spoken word Big Book on CD. There is also a soundtrack on the Big Book BSL DVD)
- Welfare Rights
- Youth and community services

Regular contact with organisations is important as staff may change frequently. Check the local press to ensure that the AA telephone number and website details are listed in the Helpline Services. Make posters and contact cards available to doctors' surgeries, pharmacies, police stations, Citizens Advice, churches etc. Also make available AA contact details to charities and other organisations.

10. Suggested Literature at events

Please find following some suggested literature that may be appropriate for distribution at events (available from GSO)

- An Introduction to our 12 Traditions
- Speaking at non-AA Meetings
- A Message for Professionals
- How AA Members Co-operate with Professionals
- A Member's Eye View of Alcoholics Anonymous
- Problems other than Alcoholism
- Understanding Anonymity
- Is AA for you?
- A Brief Guide to AA
- The AA Member, Medication and other Drugs
- The God Word

(Revised 2024)