

CONFERENCE PI&CPC COMMITTEE
ATTACHMENT TO TOPICS #004/20 & #021/20

The following questions were raised as a result of this floor action from Conference PI&CPC Committee 2020.

Conference 2020- Floor Action

The PI&CPC Committee request permission to take action on topics #004/2020 and #021/2020, both topics are ostensibly to investigate and enable a “Chat Now” function on our website, www.aa.org.au.

The PI & CPC Committee have met with UK AA and investigated their Chat Now function on the website www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk. From its conception, the UK initiative took 6 months to become a reality - their current Chat Now Coordinator indicated we could cut this to 2-3 months with their assistance.

The UK Chat Now is administered by an independent committee and reports to conference. Initially through the establishment of a sub-committee from within the current PI&CPC Committee we could form a roster of members willing and able to serve as Chat operators. Currently many AA members are working from home, working less hours or unemployed. Full training to become a chat operator is a mere 6 hours through several sessions.

We believe that time is of the essence for such an initiative. The latest figures for visits to www.aa.org.au indicate traffic is higher than ever whilst many are locked down, physically vulnerable, geographically disadvantaged or are simply more comfortable with communicating via instant messaging and surfing the internet than by phone. This is the future communication trend.

At a cost of US\$99 (approx. AU\$140) per month, we believe this is a cost-effective method when considering the phenomenal results from 4 years of operation in the UK- 56,000 individual chats, with an average response time of 6 seconds.

Advisory Action #34/2020

Conference resolved that the Conference PI&CPC Committee investigate a Chat Now function on our website and provide a report to be sent as an attachment with topics submitted in 2020 which were deferred to Conference 2021.

Voting: For-21, Against-4, Abstentions-4. Carried.

The questions raised at Conference 2020 were forwarded to the current UK ChatNow Coordinator and the following responses provided.

1. Are there any types of Government/Criminal/Working with Children checks your operators must undergo before volunteering to operate the online Chat?

- A) No, there are no checks required, the same as our telephone responders, they are not required in Great Britain
2. Have there been any additional costs, over and above the monthly fee you pay, involved in operating the Chat function?
- A) No, only the monthly fee and any costs that the AA GB website incurs
3. Do you have a standard Duty of Care policy which would become operative in the case of someone threatening to end their life or do some type of personal harm or intend to harm somebody else?
- A) We have protocols in place which were decided at our Annual Conference some years ago regarding telephone responders. Decided at Conference 2004, Committee 6 Question 2. I served on that committee the year it was decided
<https://aagb.silverink.ie/download/1/Library/Documents/Conference%20Reports%20and%20Background/Conference%202004/Conf%202004%20Final%20Report.pdf>
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Additionally, the following pages represent the current UK flyer for volunteers, ChatNow Job Description, Guidelines and a step-by-step description of actual service experiences and how to deal with them. These have been adapted to, where possible, reflect the Australian website and various service entities and outside agencies mentioned.

YIS,

2021 Conference PI&CPC Committee.

Looking for new AA service?

Chat Now

online response service
is looking for new members



*“Modem-to-modem or
face-to-face,
A.A.s speak the language
of the heart
in all its power and simplicity”*

Full job description and application forms
can be found here:

www.aa.org.au/TBA
Menu/TBA/TBA/TBA



Interested?

Email us: example@TBA.com.au

Do you have ...?

- ... 2 years continuous sobriety?
- ... a good knowledge of the 12 steps and 12 traditions?
- ... access to a laptop or desktop computer?
- ... a couple of hours a week free?

Purpose of role:

The main purpose of the Chat Now Help Desk is to answer live, real time queries from the still suffering alcoholic and provide them with information about AA and the 12 Step Program.

Requirements:

2 years continuous sobriety is recommended as well as a good understanding of the AA Program and AA Traditions, 12 Stepping and the AA 12 step service structure and the Chat Now Responder Guidelines.

Applications will need to be endorsed by their Area or Region.

The Chat now service uses a live chat box to respond to any enquiries, so working knowledge of and ability to operate a computer and access the internet is expected. Good communication skills, spelling and grammar are also important

Responsibilities:

The Chat Now response service operates with members covering shifts. The duration of shifts is flexible, up to two hours at any one time, organised on a weekly Rota. During the time on shift it is important that members can respond immediately.

Sponsorship and Support:

During sponsorship into this service position, the Responder will be shown how to use the Pure Chat online dashboard and coached in effective ways to respond to enquiries received. Training will be conducted using a training page.

It will be seen that clear and simple replies that address the issues raised by the enquirer are the most effective. There are editable 'canned' replies available for the more common enquiries. Guidance will be given on how best to respond to challenging situations and emergencies.

As with all 12 Step work, we always need to show empathy towards the still suffering alcoholic.

It should be fully understood that any text, once posted on Chat Now, is reproducible and the reputation of AA depends on our fully upholding the AA Traditions.

The Chat Now Service works as a team with all members supporting each other and sharing experience. To aid this, there will be a Zoom Chat room for all Chat Now responders who wish to participate.

For further information please email example@TBA.com.au

PI&CPC Sub-Committee *Last Updated 02-Apr-2021*



Chat Now Guideline

Last updated by PI&CPC 2021

Overview of ChatNow

General:

The Chat Now Response Service (CNRS) falls under the Conference PI&CPC ChatNow Sub-Committee. The sub-committee has ultimate responsibility for the activities of CNRS. The CNRS Administrator's role is dependent upon the approval of the appointment of candidates to the PI&CPC sub- committee. The CNRS Administrators will therefore have been nominated and elected to the sub- committee before taking over responsibility for the administration of CNRS. It is recommended that there be rotation of the Admin role within the CNRS Service Structure.

What is it? How does it work? What are the requirements?

- It is an instant response service to enquiries that come in from the AA website
- Responders pickup the enquiries via Pure Chat
- 2 years continuous sobriety
- Computer literacy
- Good understanding of 12 steps and traditions
- Ability to reply quickly, i.e. start response within 20 seconds
- Able to commit to a weekly shift of one to two hours

As Electronic Communications are now such an important part of our service to the still suffering alcoholic, it must always be borne in mind that the written word could stay in the cyber-domain for as long as the caller chooses to keep it. **This also means that the possibility of our responses finding their way into the public domain (either via social media or the press) is a very real possibility. So we have more need than ever before to be vigilant in our replies.**

Responders are AA members who have 2 years continuous sobriety and have a competent level of computer knowledge and good communication and grammar skills

All applicants are endorsed by either their respective Area, GSR, Region or the sub-committee.

Members of the Chat Now Responder Team answer live Chat requests that are received via the Chat Now window on the AA website.

What we do:

The purpose of the Chat Now function on the AA Website is to provide an instant response service to enquiries that come in from the AA website.

This will initially involve offering the newcomer the National Helpline number and/or a local Helpline number and may include reassurance by explaining how it works, i.e. that they will speak to a recovered alcoholic who will understand, advise and help. If they so wished, the callers details could be passed to a local recovered alcoholic on a first-name confidential basis. Using the caller's name within your replies adds a personal touch. Remember the 1300 number is NOT 24 hrs in all areas.

Should someone say that they cannot get through on the 1300 number, ask where they are calling from. We can then check the availability of that local helpline number.

Whether the offer is accepted or refused, then the AA meeting is then mentioned. We offer meeting details should the suffering alcoholic be ready to get themselves to a meeting.

While we aim to steer a suffering alcoholic towards the Helpline or to meetings, we acknowledge that by its very nature, Chat Now will be an appealing channel of enquiry to suffering alcoholics or others who have questions about what is on offer in AA before being ready to make personal contact.

We should recognise that a caller may be more comfortable with online contact and our experience shows that there are often cases where a suffering alcoholic will respond well to some identification and clarification of what AA has to offer before being gently steered towards the Helpline or meetings. In this respect, the responder will use their own judgement as to whether the conversation is moving towards a practical solution or not.

Our job is to actively 'listen' and understand exactly what is being said and/or asked for by the chat visitor and provide them with as much information as possible in a professional, courteous and helpful way.

We do not:

- Give medical advice. Nor do we comment on health matters, either explicitly or implied. For example, depression is often associated with alcoholism....
- Tell the Chat Visitor what to do or say – we only ever make suggestions
- Use scare tactics under any circumstances
- Undermine the Chat Visitor in any way
- Engage in arguments
- Show offence, even if you're feeling angry, upset or insulted
- Treat the Chat Visitor harshly or sternly
- React to angry or discourteous messages by responding in a similar fashion
- Include direct links to web sites other than our own to avoid any inference of affiliation.
- We may send links to GSB of Aus and overseas General Service Offices and these can be found on our website: www.aa.org.au/contact
- E-mail addresses or telephone numbers may however be used in our replies.
- Sponsor from here!
- Use AA jargons and slogans that may confuse the Chat Visitor
- **Pass on any contact or personal details for Responders, Admin or any other AA Member**
- Comment on how groups are run

Responders should

- Look carefully through the incoming message and identify any specific vulnerabilities that may need addressing for example, cannot get to a meeting
- Try to answer any questions asked relating to AA
- Give the 1300 number letting the enquirer know that it may not be 24 hrs in all areas.
- Where the area has been provided by the caller, offer Local helpline and times manned
- Be understanding, compassionate and tolerant in all instances
- Remember that your messages, once sent, are in the public domain for as long as the chat visitor chooses, may be copied, and it could open to any form of public exhibit just as the visitor may wish to publicise it
- Always be mindful of the responsibilities we assume as responders when dealing with those asking for help. If we try to ensure that we act with integrity and in accordance with our Traditions, we will not go far wrong.

In sections below, (CR) indicated that there is a Canned Response available, which can be used or adapted to aid quick responses.

Suffering Alcoholics

1. Give them a Helpline number to ring so they can get a 12-Step call
2. Provide them with information about meetings so they could go straight there if they wish. Indicate the meeting finder pane at the top of the page, or post a link to the AA meeting finder (CR). If the caller gives a locality, then meeting information can be copied from the meeting finder and posted into the chat response
3. Share our experience, strength and hope where appropriate
4. Offer links to relevant AA Newcomers literature (CR)
5. *Note that if any information is given, the visitor should be advised to copy the information before the Chat is ended. (CR)*

Current Members

We also receive enquiries from AA members e.g. wanting meeting details. Again, offer meeting information as above.

General 'sharing'

We are not here to 12th Step, but to try to get suffering alcoholics to the 12th Step. Some sharing of our experience with the visitor can provide identification to help them make the decision to try AA. However, sharing on subjects outside AA is a No No. Experience shows that being able to listen and identify helps the enquirer decide what they wish to do.

Friends and Family

Many enquiries come from friends or family members with an alcoholic in their lives. These visitors

should be thoughtfully and tactfully directed to Al-Anon (CR). We can also provide AA telephone and meeting details and a link to newcomers literature which they can pass onto the alcoholic in their life should they wish to. *Note: Al-Ateen is part of Al-Anon and is for children aged 12 and 17*

Al-Anon Family Groups Australia: www.al-anon.org.au | 1300 ALANON (1300 252 666)

Other Agencies

AA co-operates with these and has no affiliation to them. We have a “special relationship” with AI- Anon, cemented by both our World Service Conferences as well as the recovery of hundreds of thousands of families. With everyone else, advise that the enquirer uses a search engine to find details as required. We simply pass on the requested information with courtesy and without comment. Please don't recommend other agencies – it only leads to the complication later of... “But AA **told** me!”

Professionals

Calls from social services, the medical community, legal authorities, colleges and public information sources can be given a link to the Professionals page of the AA-Australia Website: www.aa.org.au/professionals and offered contact details for GSO:

Alcoholics Anonymous Australia
Tel. 0466 319 786 (Office hours only)
Email: gso@aa.org.au | Website: www.aa.org.au

Media

Any contact from the media should be immediately directed to GSO as above.

Callers with other conditions or issues

Medical Problems

With respect to any medical problems, we suggest that enquirers contact their GP or NHS Direct

AA has no opinion on outside issues. This saves lives. Sometimes callers or their family or carers give us details of medical symptoms with which we are tempted to identify – and to share back our experiences of GPs, alcoholic wards and the like. We cannot give advice and sometimes our sharing of our own medical experiences can be mistaken for the giving of advice.

What about DTs, shakes and bad hangovers, drying-out, treatment facilities, medical problems?

As above

Routine for being on duty

1. Logon to purechat at the appropriate time
2. Click on available for chats button
3. If you are unavailable for even a short time, making coffee or some such, mark yourself as Unavailable, until you return
4. Responders should aim to answer chats within 10 seconds and no longer than 20 secs.

Chats going unanswered for longer periods is not good for the service

5. Read the enquiry carefully to ensure that you reply to the question asked
6. If you are nearing the end of your shift, you can switch your status to unavailable without interrupting open live chats.
7. Similarly, if you have more than one chat open and have as much as you can manage for the moment, switch status to unavailable while you deal with the current live chats.
8. It is recommended that at three active chats, responders on duty should switch to “unavailable” as to give the current visitors the proper care and attention.
9. Anyone is free to give Ad Hoc cover. Please note the protocol listed under Ad Hoc Shifts
10. New responders will be shadowed for the purpose of mentoring and support.
11. Transcripts of chats may be reviewed to facilitate on-going support and guidance.

Ending a session

When finishing a session it is essential to ensure that

- 1) all chats are closed, including those between responders
- 2) Switch your status to Unavailable
- 3) log off Pure Chat

If we miss any of these steps then we get missed chats on pure chat when there is no one covering

Ad Hoc Shifts

Anyone is free to give ad hoc cover. In the case where a Responder is on their rostered shift, the following etiquette should always be observed:

1. Responders switching to available whilst another responder is on a rostered shift should be discouraged unless agreed between both parties
2. Do not send operator Chat requests whilst the active responder is on a live chat.
3. If you are not the rostered responder, please allow the rostered responder time to pick up incoming chat requests, at least 20 seconds, including second or third chat requests unless otherwise agreed
4. It is recommended that at three active chats, responders on duty should switch to "unavailable" as to give the current visitors the proper care and attention.

Useful Information

Always give 1300 number for suffering alcoholics. If they tell you their location, then give a local helpline number if possible.

While on Pure Chat there is a facility for responders to chat privately.

All responders can see who is logged in at that moment. - note you will also see who has closed browser without logging off!

When getting information, let the visitor know- i.e. "Give me a moment..." If the caller has got what they need, don't chase them

Don't forget to remind to enquirer to copy and paste or note down the info given. (CR)

Give them time to do this at the end of chat, i.e. let them close the chat.

Remember we can receive enquiries from abroad also. The 1300 number is not suitable for them.

12–13 14 Steps to Chat Now

1. Greet everyone warmly by name and ask how we can help them.
2. Offer 1300 22 22 22 and local one, if they are willing to give their area.
3. Do not use text abbreviations or AA jargon, as enquirer may not understand.
4. No links to anything outside AA Australia.
5. Callers who threaten suicide should be offered Lifeline (CR:LifeLine) or 000 repeatedly.
6. 'We are not medically qualified' CR for anything medically related, no matter how trivial.
7. Go unavailable if you have maximum of three active chats, less if you feel more comfortable doing one or two. Write "3 on, 2 on, 1 on" in the main chat Skype room to alert free responders that the CN line is unavailable.
8. If you have a difficult chat, please contact one of the admin/trainers. If appropriate, ask them to monitor or, in extreme cases, to join the chat (informing the chatter of this first).
9. Do not respond to bad language or abuse. Try to remain calm and serene.
10. During your shift please have following things open: Pure Chat, Zoom, Telephone A-Z, and the AA Australia website. This saves time and frustration – especially with more than one chat on.
11. Refer any Professional or Literature Order enquiries to GSO (CR: GSO)
12. Never start a private operator chat with a responder who is currently on a chat.
13. Never initiate a chat with a site visitor, even if you have been previously chatting and have been disconnected.
14. Always remember Rule #62. (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Tradition 4 page 149)