

# Selecting and Strengthening Employee Assistance Programs: A Purchaser's Guide

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The EASNA publication, *Selecting and Strengthening Employee Assistance Programs: A Purchaser's Guide*, provides education, guidelines, data and inside information on employee assistance programs (EAPs). It is intended for purchasers and funders of EAPs; for human resources, finance, occupational health, labor/management, human capital, and other leadership staff of companies and organizations that work with EAPs; for brokers and other sellers of EAP services; and for all those within the employee assistance, workplace wellness and health promotion communities.

Key points from the 62 page *Guide* include the following:

- What are EAPs? EAPs are employer- or group-supported programs designed to alleviate workplace issues due to mental health, substance abuse, personal and workplace issues. The goal of these programs is to have a positive effect on employee productivity and organizational performance. They are sometimes called employee and family assistance programs (EFAPs) or member assistance programs (MAPs).
- The business case for why organizations purchase EAPs is well-supported by many research studies documenting the prevalence and consequences of mental health and addictions disorders that affect employees and their family members, the general success of mental health and EAP treatments in addressing these issues, and the simple fact that so many organizations already offer EAP services and more do so each year.
- Many investigations have demonstrated that EAPs have a positive impact on organizational resources, staff time, worker absence, presenteeism (employee productivity), and employee benefit costs in general. The typical level of financial return on investment (ROI) is \$3.00 or more in return for each \$1.00 invested in the EAP.
- In selecting an EAP, there are several different management models of EAPs to consider: Internal, External and Blended Models. Delivery of EAP services may be from resources that are staffed from within the organization (internal EAP programs), or by EAP services purchased from EAP providers outside of the organization (external EAP programs), or by a blending of the two types. These choices are defined by their scope and breadth of services they offer, the degree of integration and onsite contact of the EAP with the workplace, the kinds of counseling modalities used to provide EAP clinical services, and their ability to support the workplace for critical incidents and other difficult situations. EAPs that are embedded into other insurance offerings are also becoming available. These kinds of "Free EAPs" are bare-bones versions of the external model that tend to offer only minimal levels of immediate access to counseling or crisis event response services.
- A comprehensive EAP not only offers personal and immediate support to individual employees with mental health or workplace problems, but also provides consultation to management and leadership on a wide range of workplace issues impacting employee, organizational, and management health and performance. The range of EAP services includes consultation to management on behavioral aspects of the workplace; behavioral risk management; educational information on emotional, work-life, and workplace issues; assessment, support, short term counseling, referral, and follow-up for employee and/or family member issues; support for preventive health and wellness

presentations; awareness training and critical incident interventions; and website and online kinds of assessments and information.

- How often the EAP is used for various kinds of individual and organizational services can be an indirect measure of value of the program. How utilization is counted varies slightly between different EAP providers. Without industry standards for defining utilization reports, it is important for the purchaser to request that the EAP produce use reports that measure separate counts of the different major kinds of EAP services, including clinical cases (those who use EAP counseling services), participants who use all of the EAP's services (trainings, education, counseling, worksite events, website use, etc.), and use of organizational activities (critical incidents, management consultations, organizational wellness and security committees, and related worksite support activities).
- Whatever kind of model is selected, the impact of the program will be determined largely by the success of the initial implementation and ongoing promotion of the EAP and its multiple services and resources. EAPs that work closely with the organization and other related programs often are able to increase the awareness of their services and thus can deliver high usage of the program.
- There are also opportunities to strengthen an EAP after it is implemented. Based on research in the field, the *EAP Business Value Model* describes three major ways that EAP's can provide value to organizations: Workplace Performance Value includes cost savings from improvements in employee productivity, absence and other human capital areas after employees use the EAP; Benefit Cost Value includes cost savings from reduced claims costs in health care, disability and other employee benefits after high-risk individuals use the EAP and are referred or co-managed with other programs, and Organizational Value cost savings from safety and risk management, critical incidents, management consultations, and improved organizational development.
- EAPs yielding the most business value are those that include all three conceptual areas from the value model. This level of value is achieved when the EAP is set up so that it is able to share operational data and larger organizational goals and objectives with other programs, such as work-life, disease management, disability management and return to work, workers' compensation, wellness and preventive services, occupational health, human capital, absence management, and organizational development. Ideally, the EAP is encouraged to have a more proactive and strategic role within the organization as well as a reactive role in responding to individual and workplace problems.
- EAPs differ greatly in their integration with and support of the workplace. When purchasing an EAP, make sure to identify the level of workplace support, the degree of program integration, and the range of services that will yield the most benefit to the organization, management, and employees.
- In the Appendices, the *Guide* offers a brief history of EAPs, identifies many EAP resources (recent reports and supportive organizations), questions from a sample request for proposal (RFP) for EAP, questions from a sample external audit of an EAP provider, and a large glossary of terms.

**About EASNA.** The Employee Assistance Society of North America is an international association whose members consist primarily of individuals, organizations, employers, and students in Canada and the United States interested in advancing knowledge, research, and best practices toward achieving healthy and productive workplaces, with a specific focus on workplace behavioral health. EASNA provides a forum for continuous educational and networking opportunities that promote professional development. We share topical news and information that affect the health and performance of individuals and organizations and encourage and promote the sharing of employee assistance and behavioral worksite wellness best practices and technologies. We are committed to encouraging high standards of quality and professionalism through a unique accreditation program, research efforts, educational events, online training and resources, the annual EASNA Institute (which is generally held in May at sites in Canada or the US on alternating years), and valuable publications for the industry -- like this *Purchaser's Guide*.