



# PRINCIPLES FOR Better Practice Employee Assistance Programs



**Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) provide a way for organisations to support positive health and wellbeing outcomes for workers and eligible family members. The following principles provide evidence-informed guidance to help organisations develop an EAP that better meets the needs of employers, workers, supervisors, and managers.**



## **Principle 1: Implement a structured approach to EAP design based on organisational needs**

### **ACTION**

Conduct a needs assessment that explores:

- Organisational factors (e.g. values and mission, types of jobs, operational environment or constraints, workforce size and demographic makeup such as sexual orientation, gender and cultural diversity, number of worksites, work locations including remote workers, and collective bargaining agreements)
- Needs of workers and eligible family members (e.g. age-appropriate, cultural and/or language needs)
- Needs and goals of leadership and/or management teams
- Other policies, challenges or hazards within the organisation.

A process to regularly review and/or update the needs assessment, alongside any clinical innovations, may also support the EAP's evolution alongside the changing needs of the organisation.

### **ACTION**

Develop a written policy at the start of the procurement process and/or in partnership with your EAP provider(s), to clarify the EAP design for managers and workers, including:

- Program intention and goals (e.g. increased worker wellbeing and engagement, reduced absenteeism and presenteeism, early access to psychological support, and trauma support services)
- Each of the services within the EAP including their purpose and function. It is also important to outline key features of the EAP, such as protections to confidentiality and anonymity, how or when exemptions to these principles apply, and how concerns are raised and resolved
- EAP service expectations for workers and the organisation (e.g. limits and boundaries, arrangements for emergencies or clinical incidents, and how information will be used, stored and accessed)
- Roles and responsibilities for key stakeholders (e.g. contract managers, senior management, supervisors and workers) and how the organisation and EAP provider will work together
- Clinical governance and continuous improvement plans.

## BENEFITS

- Ensures the EAP model and delivery method aligns with the unique requirements and characteristics of the organisation
- Enhances program success by limiting duplication with other worker support programs
- Provides clarity for workers, the EAP provider and the organisation as to what the program will deliver.



**Tip:** EAPs can be a work health and safety control for the management of psychosocial hazards and risks in the workplace. Consider any obligation to consult with workers and/or duty holders about the introduction and operationalisation of the EAP. Engagement with your Health and Safety representatives can also be important to ensuring the EAP is fit for purpose.



## Principle 2: Offer an inclusive and accessible service delivery model

### ACTION

Consider the following factors to inform and improve EAP service delivery:

- Ensure access to the EAP is simple and clear for workers and eligible family members (e.g. voluntary, and formal or informal referral mechanisms)
- Identify the needs of the organisation (e.g. confidentiality requirements) and its workforce (e.g. in-house, remote and shift workers, and those working across different time zones).
- Understand user preferences and provide appropriate options (e.g. the gender or experience of an EAP professional)
- Design comprehensive referral procedures for services within and/or beyond the EAP, and related operating protocols (e.g. referral for workers presenting symptoms not appropriate to an EAP, or follow-up services if people continue to require support after accessing the EAP)
- Offer a range of service delivery modes (e.g. over the phone, face-to-face, video conference and/or other digital services), with consideration for technology trends, worker preferences, security requirements, and a clear description of the circumstances, should one type be preferred over another (e.g. when telephone counselling is considered a substitute and/or supplement to in-person counselling)
- Distribute information or other educational material using multiple mediums and technologies (e.g. newsletters, website, mobile app and/or self-assessment tools) to support prevention, promotion and other strategies to address issues impacting workers and their families
- Address accessibility needs, including for people with disabilities (e.g. hearing impairments or mobility issues), culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and those who work in dispersed and/or remote locations.

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## BENEFITS

- Facilitates easy access to support services
- Supports earlier and voluntary help-seeking among workers
- Supports positive health and wellbeing outcomes for workers.



## Principle 3: Define standards for competent and qualified EAP personnel

### ACTION

Specify relevant and adequate credentials, training and experience for EAP personnel to support worker wellbeing, workplace safety and job performance, including:

- Relevant tertiary qualifications, appropriate accreditation and registration with professional bodies, sufficient clinical experience, supervision arrangements, and workplace-specific experience.
  - Experience and capability to support a diverse range of workers, such as:
    - Children and older people
    - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
    - Culturally and linguistically diverse people
    - People with a disability
    - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people
    - People with caring responsibilities
    - People from specific (e.g. high-risk) occupations
    - People in rural and regional locations
    - People experiencing domestic or family violence.
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### BENEFITS

- Provision of skilled and experienced EAP personnel to support workers and eligible family members, and the organisation
- Aligns the EAP's skills and experience with worker and/or organisational needs
- Builds confidence that EAP personnel can be relied upon to support workers' mental health and wellbeing, job performance, workplace safety, and organisational productivity.



**Tip:** Organisations can also consider developing training for EAP personnel to build their capability to work within a specific organisational context or occupational cohorts (e.g. seafarers, public sector, emergency services, construction, financial services).



## Principle 4: Continuous awareness-raising of EAP services

### ACTION

Work with your EAP provider to develop a tailored marketing plan to promote the service using any one or combination of the following tactics:

- Encourage use of the service across all levels of the organisation (e.g. senior leaders, supervisors, managers, workers and their eligible family members)
- Host educational events discussing what the EAP is and isn't designed for (e.g. through lived experience story-telling)
- Make EAP information available to workers and eligible family members as part of the organisation's onboarding process
- Encourage 'word of mouth' (e.g. leaders talking about their experience of using EAP services)
- Update workers and eligible family members about new EAP initiatives and services
- Target relevant services to specific cohorts within the organisation (e.g. roles with greater exposure to occupational hazards)
- Communicate the breadth of additional services provided through the EAP (e.g. mediation, facilitation, training, debriefing, coaching, mentoring and/or redundancy support)
- Design initiatives to actively reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking (e.g. rebranding or reframing EAP in the context of organisational health and wellbeing)
- Provide training to supervisors and other workers on identifying when a worker may benefit from an EAP referral.

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### BENEFITS

- Influences the success of program implementation
- Increases program visibility and uptake
- Drives worker education and engagement.



**Tip:** Consider engaging with workers around the language and promotion of service offerings to ensure relevance and maximise uptake (e.g. alternative names for "EAP").



## Principle 5: Identify key metrics in support of EAP quality and performance

### ACTION

Establish performance and process indicators to support continuous improvement, ongoing monitoring and evaluation, and recognise trends and opportunities, such as:

- Compliance with contractual reporting requirements, including timeliness, accuracy, and quality of content. Reports might include:
    - Annual strategic review
    - Monthly and quarterly reporting
    - Trend analysis
    - Issue management reports.
  - Monitoring key performance indicators and/or targets, including:
    - Proportion of time that counselling services are available
    - Number of cases that use a full session allowance
    - Response times, wait times, and time between initial contact and first appointment.
  - Contract management requirements, including:
    - Attendance at account management meetings
    - Complaints resolution outcomes
    - Response to actions or recommendations requested by the contract manager.
  - Utilisation rates of EAP services across workers, leaders, and eligible family members (e.g. counselling, manager advice, training, and events) and for the overall organisation (e.g. critical incident management and strategic consultation)
  - Indicators of service quality (e.g. satisfaction ratings of the EAP professionals and/or the process of accessing and utilising the EAP)
  - Referrals to other services for cases not suited to the particular EAP service offering
  - Legislative, policy, clinical, financial and contractual compliance
  - Feedback from key stakeholders such as the contract manager or senior executives.
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### BENEFITS

- Identifies trends, workplace issues and opportunities for continuous service improvement
- Recognises emerging or systemic themes and trends (e.g. areas of the business that might need additional support)
- Highlights over or under-utilisation of service (e.g. specific teams or demographic profiles).



## **Principle 6: Adopt clear and valid methods to understand the direct effect of EAP services on worker and organisational performance**

### **ACTION**

Assess the effects that EAP services have on individual workers and the organisation through regular evaluation activities that examine some of the following potential outcomes:

#### **Individual**

- Improved clinical outcomes and symptom relief (e.g. anxiety, depression or stress)
- Improved overall physical and mental health, wellbeing, quality of life and functioning.

#### **Organisational and workplace**

- Improved retention (e.g. turnover rates)
- Improved workplace functioning and productivity (e.g. job performance, absenteeism, presenteeism or morale)
- Improved employee engagement and overall wellbeing.

#### **Return on investment**

- Reduced organisational claims costs for health care, disability and/or workers' compensation
- Improved individual and organisational productivity based on increased worker engagement
- Cost savings from improvements in workplace safety, reduction in critical incidents and improved worker engagement/morale.

EAPs can assist evaluation activities by providing data and other information, while maintaining the confidentiality of those who have used their services. However, organisations may wish to consider whether it is more appropriate to engage a third-party to conduct evaluations. Please note, it is important that only clinically-valid and safe measures of individual outcomes are used.

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### **BENEFITS**

- Enhances understanding of the effects of EAP services on wellbeing and performance
- Informs future program planning, education and promotional activities
- Provides robust reporting for the Board or Senior Executives that may support their duty to exercise due diligence in ensuring the organisation is meeting its work health and safety obligations.



**Tip:** While an EAP can contribute to each of these outcomes, it is important not to overestimate its contribution. A well-designed evaluation plan can help to avoid this potential issue.



**Tip:** These principles are also broadly relevant to services within EAP programs, including:

- Management and leadership training
- Restructure and change management planning and support
- Workshops and programs
- Team coaching
- Consultation and assessment
- Support during critical incidents and significant events
- Financial wellbeing coaching.

## Other resources

Comcare's [Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for EAP Counselling Services](#) provides guidance to support evaluation activities that help ensure EAP counselling services are fit-for-purpose, represent value for money, and are responsive and adaptive to an organisation's changing needs.

The [Employee Assistance Professionals Association of Australasia \(EAPAA\) Service Standards and Code of Ethics](#) describe what organisations can expect of EAP providers, including service delivery and monitoring.



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