

Employee Assistance Programs

Document Number PD2016_045

Publication date 17-Oct-2016

Functional Sub group Personnel/Workforce - Conditions of employment
Personnel/Workforce - Occupational Health & Safety

Summary This Policy Directive outlines standards for employee assistance programs (EAPs) to ensure staff members have access to professional employee assistance services.

Replaces Doc. No. Employee Assistance Programs: NSW Health Policy and Standards [PD2011_040]

Author Branch Workplace Relations

Branch contact Workplace Relations 02 9391 9372

Applies to Local Health Districts, Board Governed Statutory Health Corporations, Chief Executive Governed Statutory Health Corporations, Specialty Network Governed Statutory Health Corporations, Affiliated Health Organisations, Public Health System Support Division, NSW Ambulance Service, Ministry of Health, Public Hospitals

Audience Administration

Distributed to Public Health System, NSW Ambulance Service, Ministry of Health

Review date 17-Oct-2021

Policy Manual Not applicable

File No. 16/3867

Status Active

Director-General

This Policy Directive may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time. Compliance with this directive is **mandatory** for NSW Health and is a condition of subsidy for public health organisations.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

PURPOSE

NSW Health is committed to the health and wellbeing of its staff, and demonstrates this commitment by establishing and maintaining confidential Employee Assistance Programs.

NSW Health recognises that an EAP provides early intervention strategies for staff in order to assist them to identify and resolve professional, personal, health or work-related issues.

This Policy Directive outlines the standards for Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) to ensure that staff members have access to professional employee assistance services.

MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS

All NSW Health agencies must, in consultation with staff and their representatives, provide an EAP that includes:

- Access for all staff to voluntary, confidential and professional EAP counselling and referral services delivered to individuals within a reasonable timeframe
- Services appropriate to the needs of people with disabilities, people with injuries that may affect their ability to access services, people of non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal people and women
- Information, advice and support available for supervisors and managers on the effective management of organisational and individual issues affecting staff, for example change management issues, team functioning, interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution.

IMPLEMENTATION

Chief Executives are required to:

- Ensure that an EAP is available and its availability is communicated to all managers and staff.

Human Resources Managers are required to:

- Promote and support the EAP to managers and staff
- Undertake regular data collection and non-identifiable statistical reports, consistent with the integrity and independence of the EAP service and client confidentiality
- Notify the EAP of any critical incidents that may affect an increased number of staff who may be likely to access the service
- Manage the EAP contract with the provider, including monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the program and providers to ensure operational effectiveness and continuous improvement.

Managers are required to:

- Make sure staff are aware of the EAP program and how they can access it
- Make sure staff are encouraged to access the EAP
- Make sure that any information relating to a staff member attending the EAP is kept confidential
- Manage difficult situations in the workplace professionally and, as soon as possible, making sure that appropriate debriefing and support is provided to staff affected by an adverse and / or unexpected event
- Support staff through difficult situations in the workplace.

Staff members are required to:

- Manage their own wellbeing and recognise the need for assistance
- Attend the EAP when an appointment has been made and if circumstances change, advise the EAP as soon as possible of their inability to attend
- Advise their manager and seek approval if they are leaving the workplace during core hours to attend EAP appointments
- Apply for relevant leave for absences to attend appointments with the EAP.

REVISION HISTORY

Version	Approved by	Amendment notes
September 2016 (PD2016_045)	Deputy Secretary Governance, Workforce and Corporate	Simplified policy; removed explicit reference to different models of Employee Assistance Programs and rescinded PD2011_040
June 2011 (PD2011_040)	Director General, NSW Health	Revised policy that sets out roles and responsibilities and standards for the establishment and continuous improvement of Employee Assistance Programs.
March 2005 (PD2005_568)	Director General, NSW Health	Revised policy that includes best practice resources for the establishment and continuous improvement of Employee Assistance Programs
January 2005 (PD2005_174)	Director General, NSW Health	New Policy

ATTACHMENTS

1. Employee Assistance Programs: Procedures.

Employee Assistance Programs



Issue date: October-2016

PD2016_045

CONTENTS

1	BACKGROUND	1
1.1	About this document.....	1
1.2	Benefits of EAP	1
2	STANDARD FEATURES OF AN EAP	1
2.1	Access to counselling.....	1
2.2	EAP and injury management.....	2
2.3	Incident management and the EAP	2
2.4	Management support	2
2.5	EAP provision in rural areas	2
2.6	Confidentiality.....	3
2.6.1	Exemptions from confidentiality provisions.....	3
2.7	EAP records	3
2.8	Reporting	4
2.9	Evaluation and continuous improvement	4
3	ACCESSING THE EAP	4

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 About this document

These procedures have been developed to assist NSW Health organisations to provide an EAP that is appropriate to the organisation and its staff

The EAP is a service that provides staff with confidential and professional counselling and related services to assist them in resolving issues that may be work related or of a personal nature.

All staff can access the EAP service free of charge.

1.2 Benefits of EAP

The aim of having an effective EAP is to provide preventive and proactive interventions for the early detection, identification and / or resolution of both work and personal problems that may adversely affect performance and wellbeing.

These issues may include, but are not limited to, personal and workplace relationships, health, trauma, substance abuse, gambling and other addictions, financial problems, depression and anxiety disorders, mental health issues, communication problems, legal issues and coping with change.

The psychological wellbeing of employees has a significant impact on productivity, quality of work and interactions in the workplace. Provision of an EAP also tangibly demonstrates the organisation's commitment to staff and boosts its profile as an employer of choice.

2 STANDARD FEATURES OF AN EAP

2.1 Access to counselling

EAP should be flexible and aim to provide the following:

- To make an EAP counsellor available within a reasonable period of time (eg.no longer than five working days) of a request for a counselling appointment and sooner in urgent situations (e.g.no later than 48 hours or 24 hours for telephone counselling)
- To provide services appropriate to the needs of:
 - People with disabilities
 - People with injuries that may affect their ability to access services
 - People of non-English speaking backgrounds
 - Aboriginal people
 - Women.

The approved hours of access to counselling delivered by EAP providers should be determined by the agency, in consultation with staff and their representatives, and will

reflect the needs of the workplace (e.g. shift work). Access to counselling services during work time is a key component of EAP, and should be available where practicable.

Staff with problems that are affecting their work should be encouraged to seek assistance from the EAP.

An EAP counsellor should be able to assist staff in discussing concerns and planning an appropriate course of action.

Where long-term or specialised counselling is required outside of the provider's expertise, EAP counsellors will refer staff to appropriate agencies and services in the community, including referrals to culturally-specific support services (e.g. Aboriginal Medical Services) where considered appropriate.

2.2 EAP and injury management

EAP provides valuable support to a work health and safety system. However, they do not take the place of prevention strategies, nor should they become a de facto occupational psychological injury management system. Dealing with an ongoing work related issue only through the EAP may not be in the best interests of the staff member.

Injured staff may choose to utilise an EAP for extra personal support, in addition to the services provided as part of their injury management plan.

EAP should assist the employer to provide a workplace that is physically and psychologically safe.

NSW Health policy for *Injury Management and Return to Work* provides more information on the injury management process.

2.3 Incident management and the EAP

Agencies should consider the role of the EAP when developing incident management plans. EAP providers can be engaged to provide appropriate types of immediate support to staff after an incident occurs and the necessary follow-up over the period following the incident while maintaining the voluntary nature of the EAP.

2.4 Management support

Managers / supervisors are responsible for identifying and acting upon problems that affect work performance in their work area. This includes providing support to staff who may be experiencing work-related concerns or personal problems that affect workplace performance or conduct.

Many EAP providers include services to support managers / supervisors by provision of confidential coaching and advice. This is particularly relevant when dealing with difficult staff challenges, and may assist in identifying and resolving people management issues before they emerge or escalate.

EAP provision in rural areas

When selecting a model for an EAP in rural and remote areas, the following may also be considered:

- A full-time EAP manager who coordinates both internal counselling and external referrals. Greater sensitivity to client confidentiality and appropriate referral is required within small communities
- Provision of a toll-free telephone counselling / crisis line
- Out of hours services.

2.5 Confidentiality

Use of an EAP is voluntary and confidential. Job security and promotional opportunities are not to be jeopardised by participation.

Where an external provider is engaged, consideration should be given to the allocation of a file reference or activity code (for billing purposes) to the staff member attending counselling.

All information relating to the content of the counselling provided to staff by the EAP provider is to be kept strictly confidential. Written authority of the staff member is to be obtained before any details of counselling is provided to any other party (except as outlined below in paragraph 2.6.1).

Personal information collected and used in the provision of EAP services is protected by the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002*, and the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*.

Staff seeking EAP assistance should be provided with information that explains how their personal information is managed and how they may access their information.

The NSW Health *Privacy Manual for Health Information* provides further guidance on privacy and confidentiality issues.

2.5.1 Exemptions from confidentiality provisions

EAP providers are permitted to inform the agency of activities which constitute a serious and imminent threat to the life, health or safety of the individual or another person, or a serious threat to public health or public safety. If for example, a staff member is not able to undertake his/her current work safely, the agency should be notified that close support and/or work alterations may be necessary. There may also be other lawful requirements to use or disclose the information.

If, for whatever reason, any EAP records are relevant to a court case, a party to the case can seek a court order (such as a subpoena) to obtain copies of those records. A court order would usually override the staff member's right to privacy and confidentiality. This should be conveyed to staff using EAP services.

2.6 EAP records

EAP providers are to establish and maintain appropriate professional, and strictly confidential, records. This includes keeping all client records in an accurate, orderly, complete and secure manner.

EAP providers are required to keep notes / files in a secure manner which is considered a fundamental part of appropriate client management.

EAP providers are to retain and dispose of EAP files in accordance with relevant records management requirements.

EAP clients may request access to their personal information under the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act*. The EAP service provider should obtain appropriate proof of identity before releasing or providing access to client information. Records of any access requests should be maintained on the client's file.

Clients do not own their own files. Where appropriate, they can have access to the file or may request copies of files from the provider.

2.7 Reporting

It is important that the independence and integrity of the EAP be maintained. EAP providers should, while preserving the confidentiality of EAP clients, provide regular statistical reports as agreed with the agency and include, for example:

- Utilisation rates
- Referral source
- Total number of counselling sessions conducted
- Basic demographic data
- Response time between referral and assessment of a client
- Type of presenting issues
- Interventions
- Services utilised and outcome evaluations
- Recommendations for actions to management
- Follow-up evaluation of general client satisfaction
- Other types of services provided to the organisation (training, advice to managers, etc).

2.8 Evaluation and continuous improvement

It is good practice to review and evaluate the effectiveness of EAP. A review process should be formulated and may involve the establishment of an EAP advisory committee, or involving appropriate managers or coordinators of EAPs to review the data.

A review process can contribute to the development of strategies to address major issues in the workplace and improve the performance and wellbeing of staff. Elements to be considered when evaluating the cost effectiveness of an EAP may include levels of grievances prior to and after the provision of the service.

3 ACCESSING THE EAP

When accessing the EAP:

- There is no requirement for the staff member to give details of the reason for attendance only that they are attending
- For an initial appointment, the staff member should be considered to be on duty, providing that the approval for the absence has been obtained from the manager
- All subsequent appointments should be made under existing leave provisions or in the staff member's own time
- Employees must notify their manager and seek approval if they are leaving the workplace during core hours.