

Is the Employee Assistance Program for You?

It's fair to say that people have shown a lot of resilience over the last few years: a major pandemic has created a lot of change, and while the residual effects have eased somewhat, the pandemic has left a lot of mental and physical overwhelm. No matter how well you deal with these changes, it's only fair you might need some extra help from time to time.

Your overall level of happiness and satisfaction plays a big role in how you feel at work. In one way, COVID has put added pressure on companies to expand good workplace habits – such as remote and flexible work arrangements – which can be used to help create a better work-life balance. But if you're feeling unmotivated or burned out from work, or personal issues are impeding on your daily life, it can be difficult to find support – let alone ask for help. That's where the Employee Assistance Program (or EAP) comes in.

WHAT IS AN EAP?

More employers are implementing workplace assistance programs to better support their employees. EAPs provide confidential counselling to employees experiencing challenges with work or personal issues. EAP support is provided by qualified and experienced counsellors with a range of expertise across all mental health issues. Your EAP can also provide critical incident support,

referrals and follow-up check-ins for employees.

As well as supporting critical and immediate mental health needs, EAPs can be used as proactive and preventative interventions to address issues such as financial stress, physical and nutritional concerns, relationship troubles and ways to cope with change.

WHY EAP?

Not everyone has access to outside help in the form of counselling or mental health support, so access to an independent EAP can be a good start – especially if you're having difficulties and unsure of what action to take. The benefit of the EAP is that anyone can use it at any time, without the need to speak with HR, a manager, or health professional.

What you can expect from your EAP:

- Converge EAP is free and confidential, with no identifying information passed back to your employer
- Counselling support can be done via face to face, telehealth, live chat or phone, with sessions you can access each year
- Converge EAP offers 24/hour phone support if you're in immediate need of support.

If you're struggling to decide whether EAP is for you, it's important to remember that no problem is too small – especially if your happiness, health and wellbeing is affected. Your EAP can help address your concerns before they get worse.

You can access your EAP **here** or call our friendly team on **1300 687 327**. You can also access your EAP through the Converge International **app**.

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HOW EMPLOYERS CAN PROMOTE EAP

When employees are taken care of through their EAP, this can help their health, morale, motivation and productivity, which can lead to better outcomes for absenteeism, presenteeism and employee engagement. A study by the Federal Occupational Health (FOH) found a significant improvement in employee happiness in companies with an EAP program, including a 62% reduction in absenteeism (source: <https://www.hcamag.com/au/specialisation/benefits/are-employee-assistance-programs-worth-it/323799>)

While more companies are utilising EAPs, the take-up of these programs by employees remains low, with the usage rate in certain industries as low as 5% (source: <https://www.hcamag.com/au/specialisation/workplace-health-and-safety/low-eap-usage-rate-is-damaging-the-industry/140941>). There is still a great deal of stigma attached to seeking help, and this issue along with concerns over confidentiality and lack of awareness about EAPs can stop employees from reaching out.

There are many ways to encourage employees to use EAP:

Promote your EAP: Some employees may be unaware they have access to an EAP, therefore it helps to be proactive in reminding employees of the benefits as well as information on how to access it through emails, webinars and newsletters.

Emphasise the importance of confidentiality: Employees might be uncomfortable sharing personal information, even with a third party. Unresolved personal and workplace issues can lead to lasting negative effects for employees and companies alike, so employees should be made aware of what information is private.

Confront stigma around mental health: While mental is only one aspect of EAPs, mental health stigma in the workplace is a significant barrier to EAP participation, and many employees fear judgement. Transparency around mental health in the workplace can help demystify what an EAP does and how it can be used for many different issues, such as grief, financial stress and burnout.

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