
EAPs: Effectiveness and Return on Investment

How Effective are Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)?

EAPs typically measure effectiveness based on user satisfaction with services. Most find it to be very high. For example, one national study used an independent firm and random sampling techniques to conduct follow-up interviews of over 1,300 cases and found that 95% of EAP users reported being satisfied with the service.

Dozens of applied research studies show that EAP services can produce positive changes in individuals, which translate to improvements in worker absenteeism, productivity and turnover, and savings in medical, disability and workers' compensation claims.

What's the Return on Investment (ROI) for EAPs?

Purchasing EAP services usually involves justifying the cost of the service to those in charge of the organization's bottom line, financially. So does EAP provide a positive return on investment (ROI)?

The Cost of EAP. For perspective, the fees charged for EAPs in the last decade have mostly been in the range of \$12 to \$40 per worker per year and have remained fairly stable during this period despite large increases in other areas of employee health care benefits spending by employers. A recent survey of employers found that US employers paid an average total health benefit of \$7,983 per worker. When compared to this cost, the cost for EAP represents less than one third of one percent of the total health care benefit spent by most organizations. EAPs are one of the smallest and most cost-effective areas of all worker benefits costs.

The ROI for EAP. Most researchers and industry experts now believe that enough high quality evidence exists to "make the business case" for providing greater access to mental health services in general and workplace-based services in particular. This conclusion is specifically supported for EAPs by a host of case studies that show the positive effects of EAP services on absenteeism, productivity, health care costs and disability. Large businesses owing positive EAP results include Abbot Laboratories, AOL, Campbell Soup, Chevron, Detroit Edison, Dupont, McDonnell Douglas and the US Postal Service.

The typical analysis produces an ROI of between \$3 and \$10 for every \$1 invested in an EAP program. Today, EAPs are found in almost all large organizations, about three-fourths of mid-sized employers and about half of small businesses. The EAP of Outcomes, Inc. focuses on serving community organizations.

An EAP Outcomes Case Study

The EAP for the Federal Occupational Health program supports federal agencies in the US. In 2004 it published a 3-year study of EAP outcomes based on almost 60,000 clients. The study looked at the extent of EAP client performance at work as well as overall health and functioning. The results showed that the number of employees who reported having "quite a bit" of difficulty performing at work was reduced from 15% to 5% of all EAP cases. There was also significant reduction in absenteeism and tardiness. The clients' perception of their own health status also increased significantly after using the EAP, even though the EAP did not directly address physical health issues. This study provides evidence for the positive impact of EAPs on worker productivity, absence and overall health.