

EAPs, EFAPs, and Psychosocial Hazards

Exploring the practice of external employee support systems

AMTA and Psychosocial Hazards

Alberta Motor Transport Association (AMTA) is working to draw attention to the problem of workplace psychosocial hazards in the trucking industry. We have published a [guide on addressing psychosocial hazards](#) meant to provide best practices small- and medium-sized carriers can put into place. This bulletin presents one of the best practices from the guide: EAPs and EFAPs for employees.



Overview

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and Employee and Family Assistance Programs (EFAPs) can help workers cope with stress. These programs provide an organisation with additional options to address psychosocial hazards.

In general, EAPs are offered by employers to their employees and provide short-term counselling services to help workers navigate personal difficulties that are negatively impacting their job performance [1]. EFAPs are like EAPs but also specifically offer services that extend to members of the worker's family.

EAPs provide people with counselling services related to their personal and work lives. A worker may be able to call or otherwise contact their EAP provider to discuss concerns they have with, for example, drug and alcohol use or financial pressures. The counselling services offered through an EAP are in addition to other health benefits an employer may offer.

EAPs are common throughout workplaces in North America, and there is evidence they can provide a positive return on investment by reducing costs related to low work productivity [2]. As a result, they provide additional tools for small- and medium-sized carriers to address psychosocial hazards.

Benefits

An EAP is relatively simple and easy to set up for workers, and they are a low-cost addition to a benefits package. The company looking for an EAP service does not have to employ their own counsellors or provide a system to track appointments; the EAP service provider does all of this, and the employer only must provide awareness to workers about the EAP and how they can use it.

An EAP provides professional services to help workers cope with multiple stressors. This means the carrier does not have to find appropriate counsellors for the worker; instead, the EAP sets up an interview with the worker to determine who is best able to help them with their specific concerns.

Psychosocial hazards are complex and include stressors workers may be facing in their personal and family lives [3]. Worker family members may also be able to contact the EAP or EFAP provider to access the counselling services.

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Challenges

An EAP is not a single solution for workplace psychosocial hazards. While valuable, they will not be effective if workers do not perceive them as valuable [4]. Workers typically are the ones that need to take the initiative to call the EAP provider so, for them to take advantage of the services offered, the EAP must seem attractive enough to make the call worthwhile. Employers who offer an EAP need to do a good job marketing the benefit to their workers. Workers may also have fears about confidentiality; if a workplace is suffering from low trust, an EAP or other employer-provided counselling services may be met with skepticism and low use.

EAPs are often used more reactively than they are proactively. This is ironic because EAPs provide proactive tools and training for people to improve their coping strategies for a variety of life's stressors. However, if EAP services are sought after a stressful event, the program is being used reactively. If an employer implements an EAP, they should take the time needed to train their staff on how to access the EAP and encourage its use before a negative situation becomes a crisis.

Finally, exercise caution in how much reliance is placed on an EAP. For example, if an EAP is used as a cure-all for psychosocial hazards in an organisation and workers are directed to the EAP for all concerns related to psychological safety, the employer will have failed to address any psychosocial hazards in their operations. Also, since loneliness and isolation are hazardous to mental health [5], workers could experience isolation if they interpret being sent to the EAP as a sign that their employer doesn't care about them.

More Help

Carriers can contact a variety of EAP and EFAP providers to learn more about this best practice. Existing benefits providers may be able to offer additional information, and a simple internet search will reveal multiple EAP/EFAP options available for small- and medium-sized carriers.

Need Help? Contact AMTA

AMTA can provide carriers with guidance on the information presented in this bulletin. If you have any questions, please contact AMTA and our experienced staff will be happy to help. For your safety and compliance questions, please email Workplace Support Services (WSS) directly at wss@amta.ca. For more updates like this on a variety of topics related to the trucking industry, please [sign up for our eNews](#).

References

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