



## Debunking marketing myths about Employee Assistance Programs in Australia and New Zealand:

A data-driven profile of  
EAPAA member providers

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This report is intended for business leaders in Australia and New Zealand who are interested in supporting the mental health and wellbeing needs of employees within their organisations. Offering an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) benefit is considered best practice in working toward this goal.

In late 2023, a survey of 19 provider members of the **Employee Assistance Professionals Association of Australasia EAPAA** found that over 13,300 employers in Australia and New Zealand offered an EAP benefit to a combined total of 9.3+ million employees.

## The rise of imposter EAPs

Troubling changes in this market recently have been caused by the entry of companies who sell **digital apps** and online platform approaches to provide counselling and other kinds of mental health support services. Their impact on the market has been noted in several recent reports.

The Australian Government Productivity Commission's 2020 **Mental Health Inquiry Report** has a chapter devoted to mentally healthy work places and trends in the EAP sector. The Australian Psychological Society also published a **paper** on trends in the EAP sector in 2022 and in 2023, the Australian Government published their report describing **Principles for Better Practice Employee Assistance Programs**.

American researcher Dr Mark Attridge coined the term **Imposter EAPs** to describe businesses attempting to replace established EAPs with technology-based products that lack the core components of a full-service employee assistance provider. They over-emphasise the use of **digital-only resources** while downplaying the significant client interest in using counselling provided by human professionals. Imposter EAPs use **marketing** materials that mischaracterize the purpose of EAPs, the ways they are used, how often they are used and their effectiveness after use. Such businesses present fictionalized versions of 'traditional' EAPs that simply do not exist, with the hope of trying to attract new customers and lure others away from established full-service EAPs.

The marketing myths and limited-service offerings of new disruptor companies deserve to be exposed and refuted with data and research evidence. Consequently we have collected business data outlined in this report on key operational and delivery issues from almost all the leading EAP vendors in the region, in 2021 and again in 2023.

**This report can serve as a resource for employers to fact check the marketing claims of companies seeking to partner with them in support of employee mental health initiatives.**





## Debunking myths about EAP services

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### **MYTH | Techno-EAPs have dramatically higher “use rates” than traditional EAPs**

Websites and marketing messages from newer technology based service providers claim to have dramatically higher use rates than traditional EAPs. Examples include:

- *Company X will “see 10x more usage than EAP”;*
- *Company Y “will be used by 50% of your team, that’s 10x more employees than an EAP” or*
- *Company Z has “20x uptake vs traditional EAPs”*

**FACT: This statement is not true.**

Here’s how they come up with such unrealistic rates.

#### **The padding tactic:**

The most common approach is to include users of services other than individual counselling provided by licensed mental health professionals into the total claimed use by techno-EAPs programs - eg a reported 40% use rate is 8 times the likely 5% use rate specifically for actual counselling. Techno-EAPs are comparing apples and oranges (or more accurately comparing apples to the entire fruit bowl). A 40% use rate for the program is created by adding up mental health support service cases (likely at about the same 3% to 10% range reported by other EAPs for human counselling). The remaining 30%+ of the reported techno-EAP rate adds in services such as online prevention selfcare services; chatbot texting; self-guided ‘treatment’ computer programs; peer support; online support groups; nursing advice call support; occupational safety case management and so on.

#### **The techno tease tactic:**

Imposter EAPs also claim high use rates by including in their total user count employees who just try out their digital services - by responding to an email, signing up, creating an online profile, taking a risk screener online, etc. **More important though**, is how many employees who try online programs actually continue with digital tools, in the way they are designed to be used. Just having an online tool or app for mental health available does not mean that large numbers of employees will actually use these enough to yield clinically meaningful outcomes. One research review [study](#) found only 17% of

2,705 users fully completed self-directed mental health online programs. Thus, employer purchasers should ask techno providers about their hidden drop-out cases.

Clearly, some alternative providers of employee mental health services are padding their total user count with users of multiple kinds of non-clinical, non-human provided services that other EAPs don’t count, as the EAP clinical case rate is limited to use of actual licensed counsellors for clinical support. A fair comparison is when the program use rate is defined the same way for each provider being compared.

### **MYTH | Digital-only services are all employees need**

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**FACT: This statement is not true.** Another limitation of techno-EAPs is that little to no workplace-related support services are offered. Crisis event response, manager consultations, employee training and other specialty services provided onsite at the customer’s **workplace** are important parts of services provided by full-service EAPs. Employers should be asking *where is the workplace?* in imposter EAPs’ program use profile data.

In 2021, EAPAA released a [white paper](#) that expanded the scope of the program utilisation rate to include both the standard counselling referral case use rate and the total employee users of the many other kinds of workplace services delivered by the EAP to the same work organisation. This combined use rate is called the **Engagement Rate**. The 2021 Survey asked EAP vendors to report the number of participants or users of 10 kinds of workplace services during a one year period across all of their employer customers. Valid responses were obtained from 13 different EAP vendors who covered a total of over 5 million employees. The counselling-only case referral average rate was 5.73%. This indicates that for every 100 employees with access to the EAP benefit, about 5 people had used the EAP for only the clinical counselling part of the service. The workplace services average use rate was an additional 6.70% of employees. The combined EAP Engagement Rate was 12.73% for a one-year period.



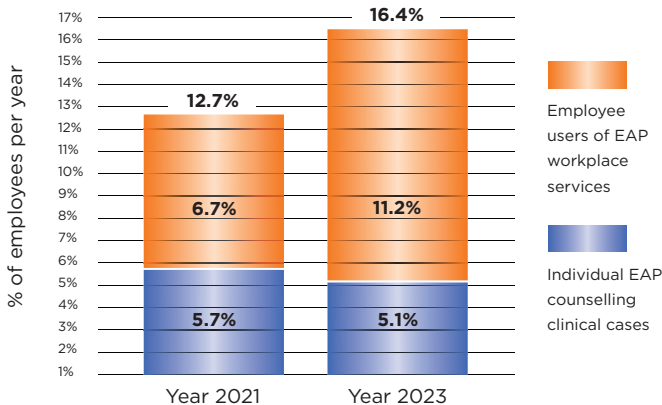


## Debunking myths about EAP services

EAPAA replicated these findings from 2021 in a second survey of our members in 2023. The survey again asked vendors to report the total users of 10 kinds of workplace services for the past year across all employer customers. Valid responses were obtained from 10 different EAP vendors who employed a combined 6.6 million people. The counselling-only case referral rate average was 5.14%. The workplace services average use rate was 11.22% and combined engagement rate for counselling and workplace support service users was 16.36%. The total number of EAP users was close to 1.1 million at these ten EAPs in 2023.

### Results of 2021 and 2023 Surveys of EAPAA Members for Combined Engagement Rate of Annual Utilisation

Utilisation engagement rate for full service EAPs



The workplace services rate was based on over 742,000 total users participating in a wide range of specialty assistance. With over 210,000 users, critical incident response support provided after a crisis event to employees at the worksite was the most used workplace EAP service.

Training and workshops provided to employees were the second most common organizational support with over 200,000 employee users. Manager coaching was the third most popular workplace service with over 100,000 employee users. Mediation and conflict management support had over 100,000 users. Mental health risk assessments and related interventions were used by over 83,000 employees. A range of other workplace services were also used by over 43,000 employees. The use of digital tools and computerized (non-human) programs

on smart phones, apps, and EAP websites was not included in this utilisation.

When including both counselling cases and users of workplace-based services, a 13% to 16% level of program engagement rate is what business leaders should expect from a full-service EAP in Australia and New Zealand. Note that users of the EAP's website, phone apps and other self-care digital tools were not included in this use rate. If the full market for EAPs in this region is around 10 million employees with access to an EAP benefit, this data suggests that approximately 1.6 million employees per year use their EAP for individual counselling and other workplace support services.

### MYTH | EAP counsellors are not health professionals

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**FACT: This statement is not true.** Certain EAP alternative companies talk about how their nursing or medical staff are accredited by health agencies while staff at EAPs are not. This is a false comparison because there is no government agency that provides legal oversight and accreditation specifically for EAP programs in Australia and New Zealand. Individual clinical providers who work for EAPs as full-time staff or as part-time affiliate counsellors are required by their respective clinical licensing boards in psychology or social work to maintain all credentials needed to provide clinical treatment to clients.

The 2023 EAPAA Survey found that 91% of the clinical staff at EAPs are licensed as clinical providers in an appropriate field (psychology, social work, healthcare). Some EAP staff provide coaching, work / life, financial or legal support - services that don't require clinical licensure. Some EAP counsellors even have additional clinical certifications in clinical treatment specialties like substance abuse, trauma and the provision of psychological first aid. The survey also found 100% of clinical staff have a graduate degree level of education, with 90% having a master's degree (MA) and 10% a doctoral degree (PhD).



## Debunking myths about EAP services

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### MYTH | EAP counselling services are not effective

**FACT: This statement is not true.** Data from EAPs in Australia and New Zealand provides the results from client self-report surveys conducted after use. From the EAPAA 2021 Survey, on average across all EAP providers, 87% of clients had their issue effectively resolved. More recent results from the EAPAA 2023 Survey indicated that on average 84% of clients resolved their issue.

In addition, scholarly reviews of several decades of EAP counselling research from *Australia, United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Taiwan* and *globally*, all confirm that generally positive results are typically obtained for most cases when measuring clinical and work kinds of outcomes longitudinally at before and after EAP use. There are also peer-review research examples from EAPs in the *US, Canada* and *Malaysia* that featured a quasi-experimental research study design. Each of these studies found superior longitudinal improvement results for the users of EAP counselling when tested against other workers who were matched on background and clinical risk factors but who did not use the EAP. EAP counselling is effective because services are provided by properly educated, licensed and trained mental health professionals.

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### MYTH | EAP counselling is only for employees with mental health or work-related issues

**FACT: This statement is not true.** The 2023 EAPAA Survey yielded data on the primary problem types for over 240,000 counselling cases at 10 EAPs. The results revealed that mental health issues were the reason for use in 22% of all cases and 4% of cases sought help for alcohol or drug problems. Thus, behavioural health issues were not the most characteristic reason why employees used EAP counselling. Another 33% of cases used the EAP for work related help, 21% had personal stress or general life issues; 13% of cases had marriage, relationship or family problems, and 7% had 'other' issues. Other *global use data* also shows a range of reasons for counselling use.

### MYTH | EAP counselling is only for employees with 'crisis' level problems

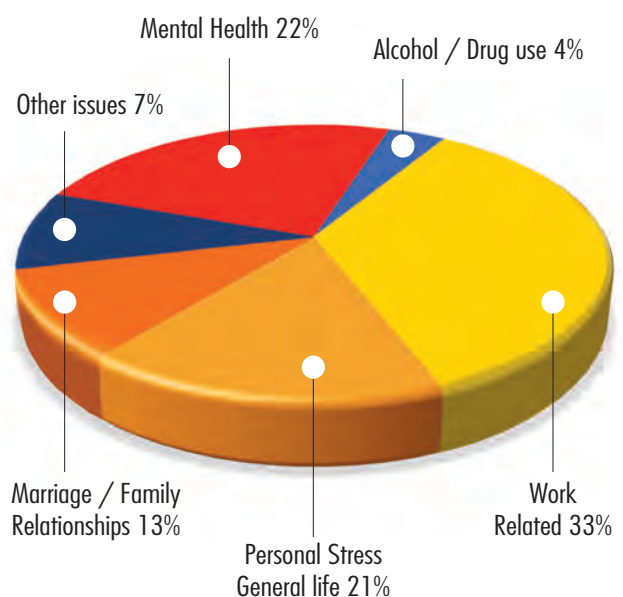
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**FACT: This statement is not true.** The 2023 EAPAA Survey found that for over 352,000 counselling cases with data on the assessed severity level, only 6% of these cases were at a crisis level of severity when first contacting the service. Thus, 94% of EAP cases were at a non-emergency level of clinical severity.

### MYTH | EAPs are not available after regular business hours

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**FACT: This statement is not true.** Some EAP alternative companies tout having a technology platform that is always online 24 / 7. The implication is that other EAPs are not open for business as much. The 2023 EAPAA Survey found that the EAP service was open during regular business hours Monday to Friday for 100% of potential users, open on weeknights Monday to Friday after regular business hours for 99.9% of potential users and the EAP was also open on Saturday and Sunday for 98.7% of users. In addition, 96.1% of potential users could get a response for a clinical crisis event at any time 24 / 7 if needed.





## Debunking myths about EAP services

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### MYTH | EAP use is not available to family members

**FACT: This statement is mostly false** and misrepresents how EAP services are defined in contracts. The option of making the EAP benefit available to family members of the employee is not set by the EAP, rather it is determined by the employer purchaser of the benefit. The 2023 EAPAA Survey found 84% of all covered employees could have their immediate family members use the EAP. The survey also found that only 9% of actual users of EAP counselling in the year 2023 were family members while the vast majority - 91% - were employees.

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### MYTH | EAP counselling is only available in-person and not using remote access online

**FACT: This statement is not true.**

Again the 2023 EAPAA Survey found that:

- 100% of all potential users could access the EAP remotely using online secure video
- 100% of all potential users could access the EAP by telephone
- 100% of all potential users could access the EAP in-person and face-face with their counsellor at a local private office
- 98% of all potential users could access the EAP in-person at their worksite (if private office space was arranged by employer)
- 70% of all potential users could access the EAP remotely using email or texts.

The evidence shows that in addition to the in-person office settings, EAPs can also be accessed using a variety of modern technology options emphasised by the Imposter EAPs (who may not offer in-person and onsite service delivery options).

### MYTH | EAP has long wait times to get counselling

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**FACT: This statement is mostly false** as it depends on whether counselling is done remotely using technology or in-person. The 2023 EAPAA Survey found that the average wait time to get a first session of counselling using a remote technology access option was only 1.3 days after the first request for assistance. The average wait time to use the first session of counselling provided at in-person office settings was longer, though, at 4.5 days after the request. Given that most full-service EAPs offer both access options, the wait time is decided by the delivery modality preferred by the client.

### MYTH | Use of EAP counselling sessions is limited

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**FACT: This statement is mostly true**, but it is dictated by how EAP services are contracted. The number of sessions of professional counselling allowed per case per issue is not set by the EAP, rather it is determined by the employer purchaser of the EAP benefit and reflects how much the employer wants to invest financially in the benefit. The 2023 EAPAA Survey found that according to 12 different providers, 5.2 clinical sessions were allowed per case per issue on average in their customer contracts. Other EAPAA Survey data for the industry for year 2023 found that the average number of EAP counselling sessions used per case per issue was 2.8. Thus, the average case does not reach the maximum limit of allowed sessions defined by their employer. EAPs offer brief counselling and referral to other treatment provider options for the few cases that have greater clinically severity and complexity.





## Debunking myths about EAP services

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### **MYTH | EAP services should be purchased by employers with a fixed annual pricing contract**

**FACT: The truth of this statement depends on** what the purchaser wants. Most EAPs offer different **pricing models** and let the customer choose which model best fits their business needs. The 2023 EAPAA Survey found that 100% of EAPs offered a **Fee for Services** option with a variable fee contract. This option was taken up by an average of 54% of all customers. A further option is a **Fixed Fee** contract, which was also offered by 74% of EAPs and taken up by 45% of all customers. Finally, another 21% of EAPs offered **Customized Options** for their contracts. However, this facility was used by less than 1% of customers across all EAPs.

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### **MYTH | EAPs are not promoted enough**

**FACT: This statement has some truth to it** but the issue is more complicated. The 2023 EAPAA Survey found that many activities may be used to promote the service and to ensure that employees and managers are aware of its existence and use.

#### **Means of promoting the service:**

- 100% of EAPs reported they can provide training on EAP benefits to employees onsite at workplaces.
- 100% of EAPs hold meetings with managers, human resources staff and employee benefits staff to inform employees about EAP.
- 100% of EAPs can also hold meetings with workplace leadership teams about EAP.
- 93% of EAPs provide webinar presentations on EAP-related topics.
- 93% of EAPs participate in health fairs and workplace wellness events
- 86% of EAPs use wall posters and other printed promotional materials displayed at the workplace to promote EAP services
- 43% of EAPs have meetings with other benefit program staff about the EAP
- 21% of EAPs mail printed materials regarding the EAP to the homes of employees.

Engaging in ongoing promotional activity is however the joint responsibility of the EAP vendor and the **employer**.

### **MYTH | EAPs lack useful reporting for customers**

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**FACT: This statement is not true for the most part.** The 2023 EAPAA Survey found that a variety of customer reporting and data analytic options are being provided by most EAPs. 100% of EAPs can provide both quarterly and annual reports about the use of the program to their employer customers. In addition, 69% of EAPs can provide use report updates on a monthly basis. Also, 85% of these EAPs have dedicated account staff who can meet with customers via technology or onsite to present the utilisation reports and answer questions. The level of detail and specific information on reports, however, does vary considerably between different EAP vendors.

### **MYTH | EAPs lack data analytic services for customers**

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**FACT: This statement is not true for the most part.** The 2023 EAPAA Survey found that 77% of EAPs can provide customized ad-hoc analysis of user profiles and service use patterns (different time periods, comparing work locations, etc.) and that 77% of EAPs can create special reports of their use data across customers to find insights and to identify trends. Only about one-third of these EAPs (31%), however, provide customers direct online access to their use data history to allow them to conduct their own analyses.

### **MYTH | Business customers of traditional EAPs are not satisfied and are looking for alternatives**

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**FACT: This statement is not true for the most part.** EAP vendors were asked **What is the overall satisfaction rate of your customers (employer organisations)?** On average, 88% of customers were satisfied with the 2021 EAPAA Survey. The 2023 EAPAA Survey had an average result of 92% customer satisfaction with the program. Consequently 9 out of every 10 employers of full-service EAPs are satisfied with the program they purchased from the members of EAPAA.



## The continued success of full-service EAPs

This report shares industry facts about employee assistance programs in Australia and New Zealand. The evidence from EAP operational data shows that, contrary to the marketing myths, full-service EAPs are successful in supporting both the worker and the workplace through a variety of worksite based, in-person and digital access options.

Real EAPs provide services delivered by licensed professionals - human counsellors, consultants, coaches, trainers - who respect the complexity and confidentiality of clients. We hope reading this report provides insights that can help employers to distinguish **real EAPs from imposter EAPs**.

## What is an Employee Assistance Program?

According to EAPAA, an employee assistance program is a work-based intervention program designed to enhance the emotional, mental and general psychological wellbeing of all employees and includes services for immediate family members. The aim is to provide preventative 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 problems and issues may include but are not limited to, relationships, health, trauma, substance abuse, gambling and other addictions, financial problems, depression, anxiety disorders, psychiatric disorders, communication problems, legal issues and coping with change.

### Core activities of EAPs include:

1. Expert consultation and training in the identification and resolution of job-performance issues related to employee mental health and personal concerns.
2. Confidential counselling with timely problem-assessment, diagnosis, treatment or referral to an appropriate community resource.
3. Formation of internal and external linkages between the workplace and community resources not available within the scope of the EAP.

**The Employee Assistance Professional Association of Australasia (EAPAA)** is the peak body representing provider and user members that supply Employee Assistance Programs in the workplace in Australia and New Zealand.

In co-operation with employees and management, EAPAA members' primary objective is to provide the most effective employee assistance services to individuals and their families suffering from personal or work-related problems, which negatively affect their work and wellbeing. EAPAA has been active for 32 years and has 85 members in 2024 including EAP provider companies, corporate and government partners and individuals.

This special report from EAPAA is based on data collected from surveys of the membership. The 2021-Q2 sample had 14 different EAP external vendor providers. Conducted by CoreData the 2023-Q2 sample had 16 EAP providers. The 2023-Q4 sample had 19 EAP providers and was conducted by Attridge Consulting.

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