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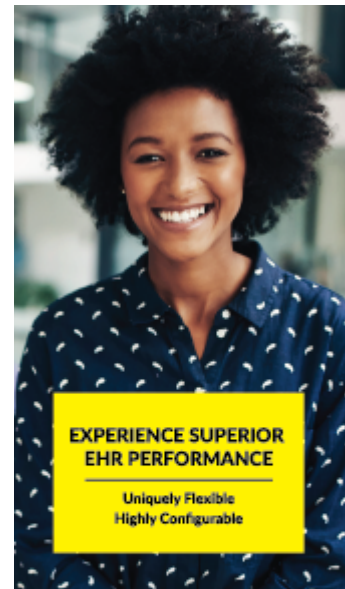
Shifting EAP Field, Shifting Opportunities

January 18, 2021 | Monica E. Oss



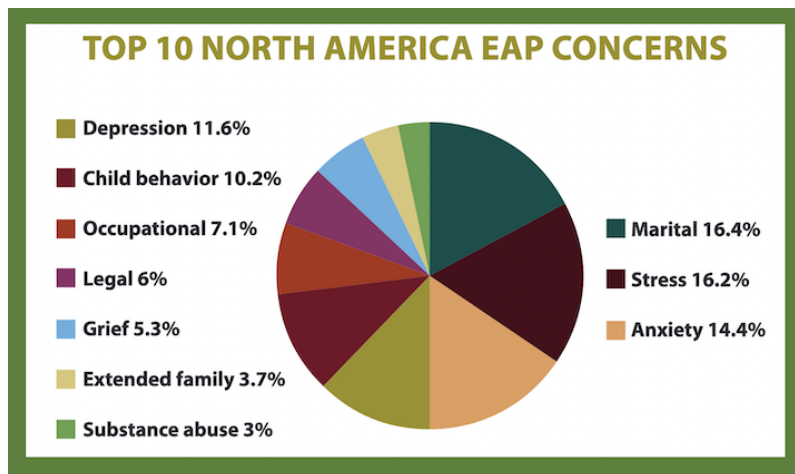
Employer demand for the issues traditionally addressed by employee assistance programs (EAPs) is growing. The prevalence of mental health and addictive disorders has risen over the past year. But other issues that affect workplace productivity—child care and elder care, legal and financial issues, workplace violence, and conflict resolution—are also increasing in importance.

The percentage of the employees with access to an EAP has grown over time. In 2019, 91% of companies polled by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) said their organizations offered an EAP, up from 79% in 2015. A little over half (54%) of civilian workers are enrolled in an EAP. That number ranges widely based on worker compensation and size of employers. EAP enrollments are 35% for workers in the lowest compensation ranges, 72% for those in the highest quadrant, 27% for employees in organizations with fewer than 50 employees, and 85% for organizations with 500+ employees (see [Employer-Provided Quality-Of-Life Benefits, March 2016](#)).



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The EAP field has its roots in improving workplace performance—“programs that prevent, intervene in, and resolve obstacles to employee health, potential, engagement, and performance,” according to the Business

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Group on Health. However, the package of services purchased by employers as an EAP has changed over the past decade and the term “employee assistance” has lost some of its meaning. By 2008, employers associated EAPs more with employee counseling and less with workplace performance improvement. This was reflected in the market. By 2015, 20% of health plans offered EAP services—typically assessments and short-term counseling. Health plans offer these services as part of their health insurance coverage, or charge a nominal extra fee.

And there has been another development in the past decade—the direct-to-employee services offered in an EAP are increasingly digital. There are many EAP “replacement programs” that employers are purchasing for specific talent optimization functions—online and onsite behavioral health counseling services, wellness programs, stress management programs, employee concierge services, prepaid legal services, health benefit concierge services, etc.

For example Starbucks selected Lyra Health to provide 20 free mental health sessions a year with a therapist or coach to its employees as part of its EAP (see [Starbucks Selects Lyra To Provide Mental Health Services For Its Employees](#)). The coffee giant is also offering a training program called Starbucks Mental Health Fundamentals (inspired by the Mental Health First Aid program), a workplace training program that includes four 30-minute modules on effective listening, providing encouragement and reassurance, providing resources and information, and the importance of self-care ([Starbucks Expands Mental Health Benefits With First Aid Program](#)).

Temple Health University System is partnering with Accolade, its employee benefits provider, to offer digital mental health services to its health care workers through Ginger, an online therapy platform (see [Accolade Partners With Ginger To Launch Employer Health & Benefits Solution That Integrates Employee Mental & Physical Health Care](#)). The SEIU 775 Benefits Group signed up with Ginger to provide on-demand, 24/7, unlimited emotional and mental health support to its home health workers (see [Ginger.io Partners With SEIU 775 Benefits Group To Provide Emotional & Mental Health Support For Over 50,000 Home Care Aides In Washington State](#)).

With the proliferation of digital options, will EAP services remain an opportunity for traditional specialty provider organizations? For the answer, I turned to my friend Dale A. Masi, Ph.D., CEAP, Chief Executive Officer of Masi Research Consultants, Inc., and Professor Emeritus, University of Maryland. She noted that there are really two dimensions to EAPs. The first is the one-on-one counseling and “outpatient mental health services” provided directly to

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employees. But the often overlooked “core technology” of EAPs is the employer counseling—the workplace programs and group education to address key concerns and the work with supervisors and managers to help them recognize and manage issues among the workforce. Dr. Masi spoke to our team at *OPEN MINDS* about three specific opportunities in the EAP arena for provider organization executives despite the competition from the new digital therapy platforms.



Dale Masi, CEO, Masi Research Consultants & Professor Emeritus, University of Maryland

First is the significant and growing need to address addictions and the impact of addiction disorders in the workplace. This is a problem on the increase—and an opportunity for specialty provider organizations to leverage their expertise. The current digital platforms don't have expertise in this area and “EAPs are not adequately addressing it,” according to Dr. Masi.

A second opportunity is the need for employer solutions—training for supervisors and managers to identify and triage individual employee problems in the workplace. Managers need advice on when and how to intervene with productivity and supervision problems that have their roots in behavioral disorders, addressing child care and elder care issues, the effects of stress, and financial management issues. And Dr. Masi cautioned that the digital divide can result in liability for discrimination on the part of employers if EAP services continue to be delivered only virtually. High-quality in-person and onsite services supporting supervisors and managers will be increasingly important to organizational success.

Lastly, Dr. Masi suggested an area for diversification that hadn't occurred to me—international services. More than ever, U.S. companies have employees located in other countries. Providing virtual support services for those employees—and their managers—is another area of need and of opportunity. For provider organization management teams looking for diversification, the changing needs of employers—and creating solutions for those needs—may be an interesting option.

To get a better sense of the current EAP market, management teams may want to check out the proposals of organizations that are being successful in the space. You can find these proposals in the *OPEN MINDS* Industry Library:

To survey market scope and assess your capabilities to provide EAP services, check out some of the recent

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contracts awarded by state and county governments in our [Government Winning Proposals & Contracts Library](#):

- [Deer Oaks EAP Services: Proposal For Employee Assistance Program Administration To Bernalillo County, New Mexico, 2018](#)
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- [The Counseling Team International: Proposal For For Employee Counseling Services To San Diego, California, 2020](#)
- [Wheeler Clinic, Inc.: Proposal For Employment Assistance Program Services To Connecticut General Assembly, 2019](#)

Looking at current Requests For Proposals (RFPs) is also helpful. There are two public sector EAP service contracts that are currently open for bidding—see [New York Seeks Medical Claims Manager, Pharmacy Benefit Manager, and Employee Assistance Program Manager Services](#) and [Tennessee Seeks Employee Assistance Program and Behavioral Health Organization Services](#). (Note: Elite-level and premium-level subscribers can sign up for our [daily OPEN MINDS RFP Alert emails](#).)

And, for more on the changing EAP market, don't miss these resources in the *OPEN MINDS* Industry Library:

- [Blue Cross NC Selects Carrot Inc. & Virta Health For Digital Chronic Disease Management](#)
- [Dialogue Technologies Acquires Canadian Employee Assistance Program Company, Optima Global Health](#)
- [Delaware Awards State Employee Assistance Program Services Contract To ComPsych Corporation](#)
- [Pittsburgh Business Group On Health Adopts MAP Health Management New Peer Support Service Line For Behavioral Health Conditions](#)
- [Regence Health Plans Offer Members Virtual Mental Health Resources Through myStrength At No Cost](#)
- [Talkspace Launches Digital EAP To Remove Systematic Barriers To Well-Being Services](#)
- [Empathia Adds Learn To Live's Digital Cognitive Behavioral Therapy-Based Programs To Its EAP Service Offering](#)
- [The History Of Employee Assistance Programs In The United States](#)
- [Blue Cross Blue Shield Of Massachusetts To Offer Online Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Service](#)
- [MAP & First Sun EAP Announce Partnership To Improve Access To Peer Support Services For Addiction](#)

And for more, join us on February 10 for [How To Develop A New Service Line: An OPEN MINDS Seminar On Building A Diversification Strategy & Conducting A Feasibility Analysis](#). *OPEN MINDS* Senior Associates Joe Naughton-Travers and Kelvin McCord will share a structured approach to select, assess, design, and develop new service lines for your organization.



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