

## **PREAMBLE for Target Level of EAP Counseling Use Rate**

### EAP Counseling Use - Contextual Factors

The counseling services from an EAP typically are available 24/7, as needed, to provide assessment and brief counseling from licensed clinicians for employees (or their immediate family members) to support an emotional, personal life, or work-related issue. This counseling is provided at no cost to the employee user.

In general, in more normal times, how many people each year should use the EAP benefit for counseling?

To answer this question, it is important to consider several factors:

- 1) The risk profile of all covered employees. As with other health conditions (e.g., asthma, diabetes, cancer), not every employee is clinically relevant to use the counseling services provided by an employee assistance program - even though the EAP benefit is usually made available to all employees (and usually also to immediate family members if also covered).
- 2) The typical EAP counseling case. Most users of counseling from employee assistance programs do not have a serious mental illness or psychiatric condition. Instead, they tend to be in reasonably good health but something happens in their personal or work life that is distressing enough to seek out professional support. There is also a much smaller part of the EAP caseload, however, that do have more serious behavioral health conditions (including alcohol or other addictions) who can benefit from referrals from the EAP to more specialized treatment providers. Thus, the typical EAP case is of moderate clinical symptom severity but experiencing an acute episode of distress.
- 3) The use of other relevant services. Research indicates that in a typical year, about 1 in every 4 adults are at risk for a behavioral health condition. Typically, about half of this at-risk subgroup has a more serious psychiatric or substance use issue. Some of this group may be getting pharmacological or talk-therapy treatments from providers in their insurance benefits, from private pay counselors, or from local community resources.
- 4) The workplace context and stigma. The level of company-wide promotion and training on the availability and purpose of the EAP is related to program use. How much the EAP is integrated into other allied benefits also can increase program use. Research also finds that about half of those at-risk for behavioral health issues do not get any professional care. This is believed to be out of fear of social stigma or anticipated adverse consequences for their career if someone at work found out about getting mental health treatment. Workplace culture also varies by each employer in how much mental health issues are openly discussed and if employees believe the EAP is truly confidential, which in turn affects how much the EAP is used (or not used).

Each of these contextual factors can influence how much the EAP is used each year for counseling.

**DEFINITION - EAP Case Rate.** The EAP case rate is a percentage reflecting the total number of clinical cases served over the course of a full year (including employees and spouses/family) divided into the total number of covered employees (those with access to potentially use the EAP benefit). The result is a percentage that reflects the number of clinical cases out of every 100 covered employees. This rate includes live counseling provided through all access channels (in-person, telephone, online video). This clinical use rate *excludes* all other use of the EAP and does not take into account the use of work/life, training, manager consultations, prevention or educational services, visits to the EAP website, crisis event response, and so on.

Table 1A. *Pandemic Impact on Use of EAP Services – Counseling Case Annual Utilization Rate & Average Number of Counseling Sessions Used (all data available)*

	EAP Vendors & Hybrid Programs & Employers	EAP Internal Staff Programs	All
Sample size <i>n</i>	64-73	47-63	111-136
<b>Utilization Trends: <i>Counseling Clinical Case Rate</i></b>			
Target (use rate <i>should be</i> in a normal year, if well-funded and regularly promoted to employees and managers)	11.5% (n=73)	11.3% (n=50)	11.4%
What was the actual level of utilization experienced with your EAP (this rate includes live counseling provided through all access channels (in-person, telephone, online video):			
Before pandemic in 2019	7.2% (n=66)	7.6% (n=59)	7.4%
During pandemic in 2020	10.0% (n=64)	10.0% (n=47)	10.0%
<b>Utilization Trends: <i>Counseling Sessions Per Case</i></b>			
It is also of interest to examine the typical level of clinical severity. This can be represented in the total number of clinical sessions or visits between the client and the counselor needed to resolve the issue. What was the typical number of sessions used PER CASE with your EAP:			
Before pandemic	3.13 (n=83)	3.05 (n=63)	3.09
During pandemic	5.15 (n=66)	5.66 (n=47)	5.40

*Note:* Groups similar for all items. The group of individual clinicians and specialists was excluded from this analysis as not relevant experience.

Table 1B. *Pandemic Impact on Use of EAP Services – Counseling Case Annual Utilization Rate & Average Number of Counseling Sessions Used (no missing data all items)*

	EAP Vendors & Hybrid Programs & Employers	EAP Internal Staff Programs	All
Sample size <i>n</i>	57	37	94
<b>Utilization Trends: <i>Counseling Clinical Case Rate</i></b>			
Target (use rate <i>should be</i> in a normal year, if well-funded and regularly promoted to employees and managers)	12.1%	11.2%	11.7%
What was the actual level of utilization experienced with your EAP (this rate includes live counseling provided through all access channels (in-person, telephone, online video):			
Before pandemic in 2019	7.5%	7.3%	7.4%
During pandemic in 2020	9.6%	8.9%	9.4%
Statistical test result	During pandemic > before		
<b>Utilization Trends: <i>Counseling Sessions Per Case</i></b>			
It is also of interest to examine the typical level of clinical severity. This can be represented in the total number of clinical sessions or visits between the client and the counselor needed to resolve the issue. What was the typical number of sessions used PER CASE with your EAP:			
Before pandemic	3.86	4.02	3.94
During pandemic	5.15	5.66	5.40
Statistical test result	During pandemic > before		

*Note:* Groups similar for all items. The group of individual clinicians and specialists was excluded from this analysis as not relevant experience.

Table 2. *Pandemic Impact on Use of EAP Services - Counseling*

Compared to the year before the COVID-19 pandemic, how has the utilization level changed for mental health counseling services at your organization in each of the following access channels?  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>More use than before pandemic</b></li> <li>2. Similar use</li> <li>3. Less use than before the pandemic</li> <li>4. Don't know</li> <li>5. Not applicable / not provided</li> </ol>	EAP Vendors & Hybrid Programs & Employers	EAP Internal Staff Programs	All
Sample size <i>n</i>	107	77	184
Utilization Trends: Live Counselor	% more use		
Live counseling virtual on Internet (video)	89%	91%	90%
Live counseling telephone (calls)	75%	74%	75%
Live counseling virtual on Internet (written exchanges; emails, texts, online chat)	63%	64%	63%
Live counseling in-person (face to face)	14%	13%	14%
Utilization Trends: Machines	% more use		
Mental health educational or self-care resources on websites or smartphone Apps	64%	64%	64%
Machine "self-care" tools on smartphone Apps (topic specific)	36%	35%	36%
Mental health risk screening survey tools on websites or smartphone Apps	34%	43%	38%
Machine "counseling" programs on Internet (ex. iCBT with multiple sessions)	18%	14%	16%

*Note:* Groups similar for all items. The group of individual clinicians and specialists was excluded from this analysis as not relevant experience.

Table 3. *Pandemic Impact on Use of EAP Services - Wellness & Work/Life and Workplace & Organizational*

Compared to the year before the COVID-19 pandemic, how has the utilization level changed for mental health counseling services at your organization in each of the following access channels?	EAP Vendors & Hybrid Programs & Employers	EAP Internal Staff Programs	All
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>More use than before pandemic</b></li> <li>2. Similar use</li> <li>3. Less use than before the pandemic</li> <li>4. Don't know</li> <li>5. Not applicable / not provided</li> </ol>			
	% more use		
Utilization Trends: <b>Wellness &amp; Work/Life</b>	101	75	176
Wellness-related services (ex: diet, exercise, sleep, stress)	56%	64%	60%
Financial consultation resources (ex., money, debt)	51%	40%	46%
Work/Life resources for childcare	46%	45%	46%
Work/Life resources for eldercare	33%	28%	31%
Legal consultation resources (ex., lawsuits, divorce, custody)	36%	23%	30%
Utilization Trends: <b>Workplace &amp; Organizational</b>	97	73	170
Consultation with Human Resources and company leadership on workplace mental health issues	58%	59%	58%
Group level training on WMH topics for employees	54%	66%	59%
Consultations with managers on employee specific or work team issues	55%	53%	54%
Group level training on WMH topics for managers	49%	56%	52%
Crisis response to critical incidents (ex., natural disaster, violence, accidents, suicide)	52%	41%	47%

*Note:* Groups similar for all items. The group of individual clinicians and specialists was excluded from this analysis as not relevant experience.

Table 4. *General Trends in Workplace Mental Health and EAP*

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements about these trends. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Agree strongly</b></li> <li>• <b>Agree somewhat</b></li> <li>• Neutral</li> <li>• Disagree somewhat</li> <li>• Disagree strongly</li> </ul>	Groups			All
	EAP Vendors & Hybrid Programs & Employers	EAP Internal Staff Programs	Individual Clinicians & Specialists	
Sample size <i>n</i>	115-117	86-88	138-146	339-351
General Trends	% agree			
Employees are more open now to talking about mental health issues in general than before the pandemic.	95%	89%	84%	89%
Employers now place greater importance on supporting employee mental health than before the pandemic.	<b>96%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>74%</b>	84%
After the pandemic, there will be a resurgence of interest from employers in the workplace focused kinds of specialty services provided by full-service EAPs (ex., trainings, management consultations, crisis response, psychological safety risk management).	86%	87%	71%	80%
Employers now have a greater appreciation of their EAP than before the pandemic.	83%	78%	71%	77%
Employers should be paying more for their EAP services if there is higher than normal utilization because of the pandemic.	69%	66%	64%	66%

*Note:* Groups similar for all items; **groups significantly different if bold**

Table 5. *General Trends in Technology Aspects of Workplace Mental Health and EAP*

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements about these trends. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Agree strongly</b></li> <li>• <b>Agree somewhat</b></li> <li>• Neutral</li> <li>• Disagree somewhat</li> <li>• Disagree strongly</li> </ul>	Groups			All
	EAP Vendors & Hybrid Programs & Employers	EAP Internal Staff Programs	Individual Clinicians (EAP Network Affiliates)	
Sample size <i>n</i>	115-117	86-88	138-146	339-351
	% agree			
<b>Technology</b>				
Interest in using technology-based mental health resources will continue after the pandemic.	91%	91%	93%	92%
EAPs and technology-based providers should collaborate more to integrate their respective services to improve prevention, risk identification, and clinical treatment support.	86%	89%	87%	87%
As long as it involves a licensed professional, live counseling provided remotely via technology is just as clinically effective as when it is provided face-to-face in an office.	77%	69%	71%	72%
Given the high drop-out rates, non-human machine-based online support tools are perhaps suited more for conducting risk assessments than for providing clinical treatment.	52%	50%	56%	53%
Having 24/7 Internet access to counselors makes waiting a few days to get an appointment with an in-person EAP counselor less acceptable now.	54%	42%	45%	48%
Traditional providers of in-person counseling are at serious risk of being replaced by machine-based self-guided resources on the Internet and smartphone Apps.	23%	22%	20%	21%
When used properly, non-human machine-based online support tools are just as clinically effective as live counseling.	<b>9%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>24%</b>	17%

*Note:* Groups similar for all items; **groups significantly different if bold**