

## **Impressions on the Value of the CEAP:**

### **Measures of Opinion from Current Certified Employee Assistance Professionals**

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Since 1986, the Employee Assistance Certification Commission (EACC) has been responsible for the development and maintenance of the only recognized credential for advanced practice in employee assistance. The Certified Employee Assistance Professional (CEAP) credential assures consumers and employers that they are receiving services from a knowledgeable professional with a specific expertise in employee assistance practice (White & Sharar, 2003). Since its inception, the CEAP has grown from a primarily United States-based credential to an internationally recognized certification, with versions of the CEAP exam now available in languages besides English (EAPA, 2015). As of September, 2015 there are over 2,000 CEAPS throughout North America and overseas. The international expansion of the CEAP now includes the Caribbean, Europe and Asia.

Currently, individuals seeking to qualify for the CEAP must verify 1000 hours of supervised practice as a practitioner of EAP services and pass a comprehensive examination which spans the administrative, clinical, and organizational dimensions of EA practice. The development of the exam and practice requirements are overseen by the Employee Assistance Certification Commission (EACC), whose membership is comprised of 13 appointed thought-leaders across the international EAP field. The EACC is also responsible for adjudicating and enforcing the comprehensive ethical standards for advanced EAP practice (EACC, 2015). Each Commissioner serves for a three- year term; both authors are third-year EACC members.

Across the United States, the vast majority of EAP practitioners serving as EAP affiliates for large vendors lack certification, although the rate varies greatly across organizations. This shortage of CEAPs in EA-focused work roles may indicate that many providers of EAP service do not have the verified qualifications necessary for expert practice. In a study of large EAP providers in 2010, only 6% of those employed by EAP vendors held the certification (Taranowski & Mathieu, 2013). Sharar (2008) indicated there may be a dearth of knowledge about workplace-based EAP practice among affiliates, who perceive EAP referrals as no different from other psychotherapy clients.

In 2015, the EACC voted to begin collecting data to assess the viewpoints of current CEAPS about their certification. The goals of the survey items were both to assess satisfaction with the credential and to seek input in shaping the future direction of the CEAP.

#### **Method**

In 2015, a planning subcommittee within the EACC, with extensive experience in Employee Assistance practice and administration, began coordinating the project. The brief survey consisted of 12 multiple choice and open-ended questions inquiring about select demographic factors, reasons for obtaining and maintaining certification, and solicited suggestions for making the credential more useful for the holders. The survey was distributed electronically via e-mail using the Survey Monkey platform in July, 2015 and again in August of 2015. The survey was sent to the 2089 CEAPs noted as currently active within EAPA's records. The survey remained open for 3 weeks.

## Impressions on the Value of the CEAP

### Results

Exactly 832 CEAPs completed the survey for a response rate of twenty-seven percent. Ninety-three percent of the respondents were from the United States. The remainder were from various non-U.S. regions including Canada (1.4%) and Asia (1.5%).

The survey first asked CEAPs for some basic information about their practice roles.

<b>What is your primary role?</b>	
EA counseling/consulting with employees	38%
EA program management/administration	22%
Other	14%
Network (affiliate) clinician	11%
EA employer services (e.g. management training/consulting)	9%
Peer assistance	2%
EA account management	2%
EA sales/marketing	1%

About half of the respondents indicated they provided direct services to employees, while less than ¼ focused on EA administration. The category “Other” was open-ended and elicited responses such as “in private practice,” “retired,” “no longer working in the EAP field,” employment in human resources and managed care roles, among others.

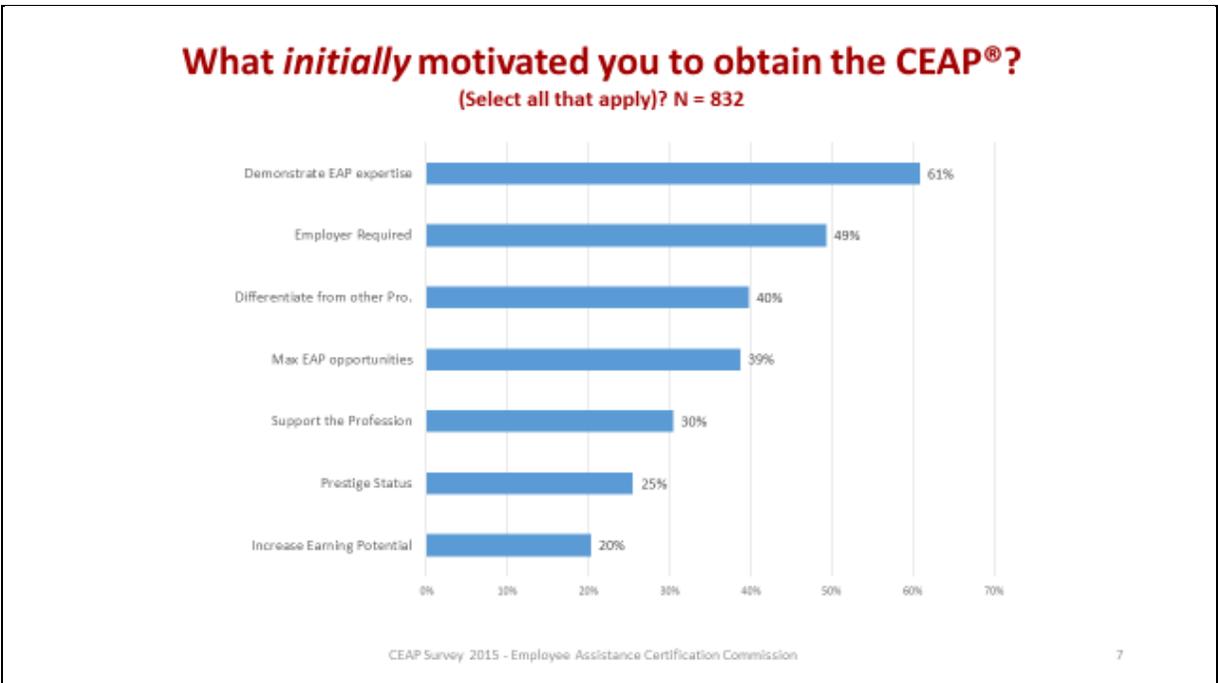
The survey then asked CEAPs how long they had held the credential:

<b>Duration as a CEAP</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>
Zero to 5 years	16%	131
6 years to 10 years	16%	135
11 to 15 years	21%	175
16 or more years	47%	387

More than two-thirds of the respondents had been a CEAP over ten years, with almost half of the individuals surveyed reporting they have held the credential over fifteen years.

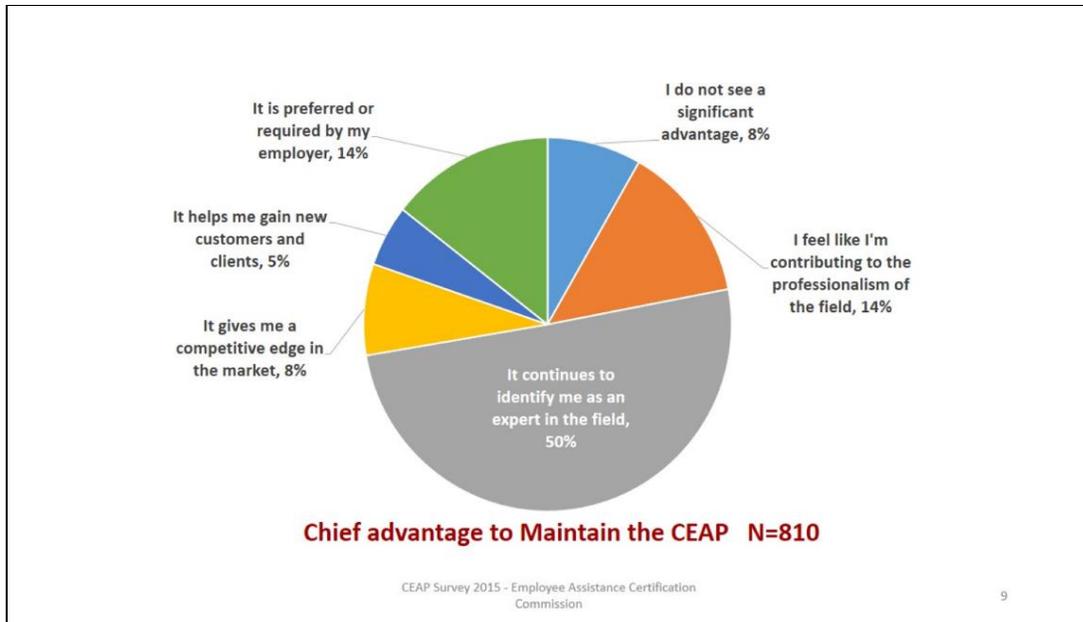
The survey also inquired as to whether current CEAPs believed the credential represented a “mastery of unique skills related to EAP practice,” as separate and distinct from the skill set of other mental health providers. Two-thirds of the respondents indicated strong agreement with this item, while the remaining third surveyed only slightly agreed that the CEAP, in fact, represented a mastery of distinct skills.

## Impressions on the Value of the CEAP



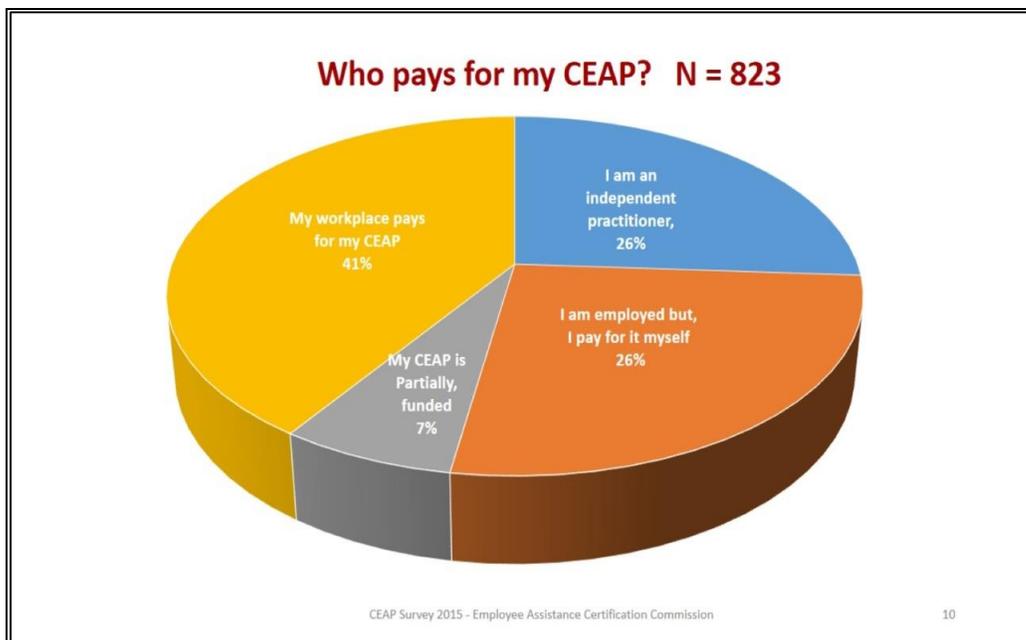
An item inquired into the respondents' initial motivations to seek certification. A majority of those surveyed (over 60%) indicated that "demonstrating EAP expertise" was the strongest motivator. Only 20% indicated that increased earning potential was their primary motivation. Other factors identified by at least twenty-five percent of CEAPs included: differentiating themselves from other professionals, supporting the EA field and gaining additional prestige. Almost fifty percent of the respondents indicated the CEAP was required by their employer. Close to 40% believed having a CEAP would increase their opportunities for future EAP work. Other initial motivators to initially earn the CEAP included: a desire to become a substance abuse professional (SAP); to be seen a leader in the EAP field; and to gain international recognition as an EAP provider.

## Impressions on the Value of the CEAP



The survey sought respondents' opinions about the advantages of maintaining their certification. One half believed the chief advantage was to identify themselves as an expert in the EAP field. Less than fifteen percent indicated that the CEAP had enhanced their income opportunities.

When asked about renewals, ninety-three percent of the respondents stated that they were planning on maintaining their certification in 2016. Of the seven percent not planning to renew, one quarter were retiring. About a tenth of those not planning to renew believed the credential was "too expensive."



## Impressions on the Value of the CEAP

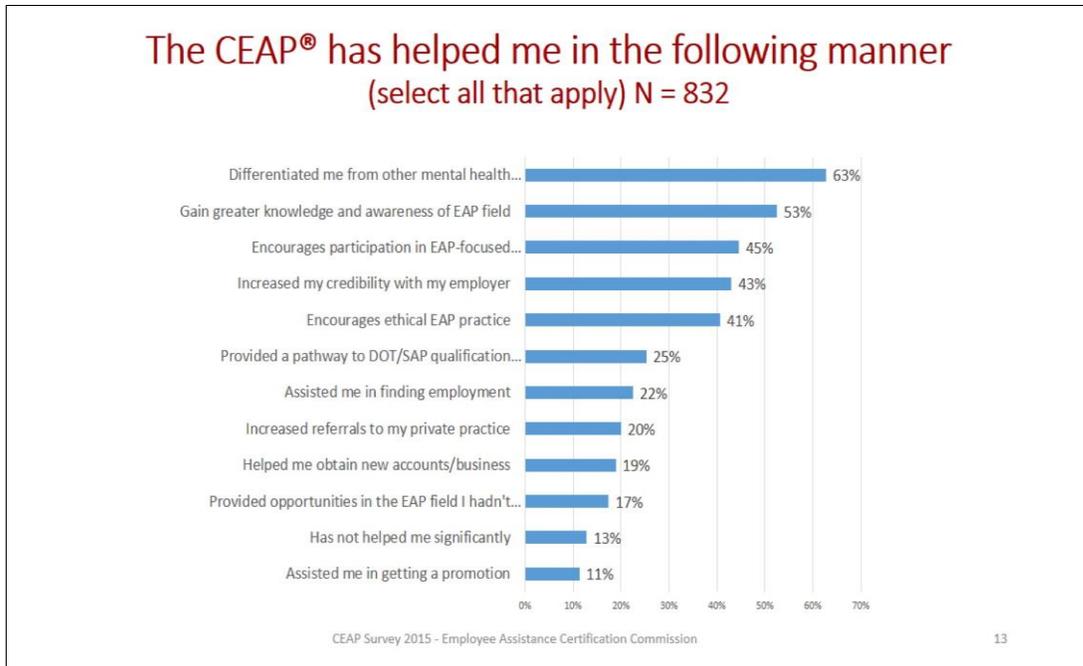
Forty percent of the respondents indicated that their employer paid the fees associated with certification. Another ten percent indicated that their employee paid a portion of the fees.

A host of organizations supported the cost of the CEAP. Many employers were mentioned. Although not an exhaustive list, the names of organizations with multiple respondents reporting the provision of credentialing funds appear on the list below.

Magellan
First Sun
New York State EAP
Unity Point Health
All Points EAP
Anthem
AT&T
Burlington Northern Santa Fe
Ceridian
Concern EAP
Empathia
Metro North Railroad
Partners Healthcare
United Airlines

The survey inquired how the certification has helped the respondent in their current work role. Multiple choices were allowed; thus the figures add up to more than 100%.

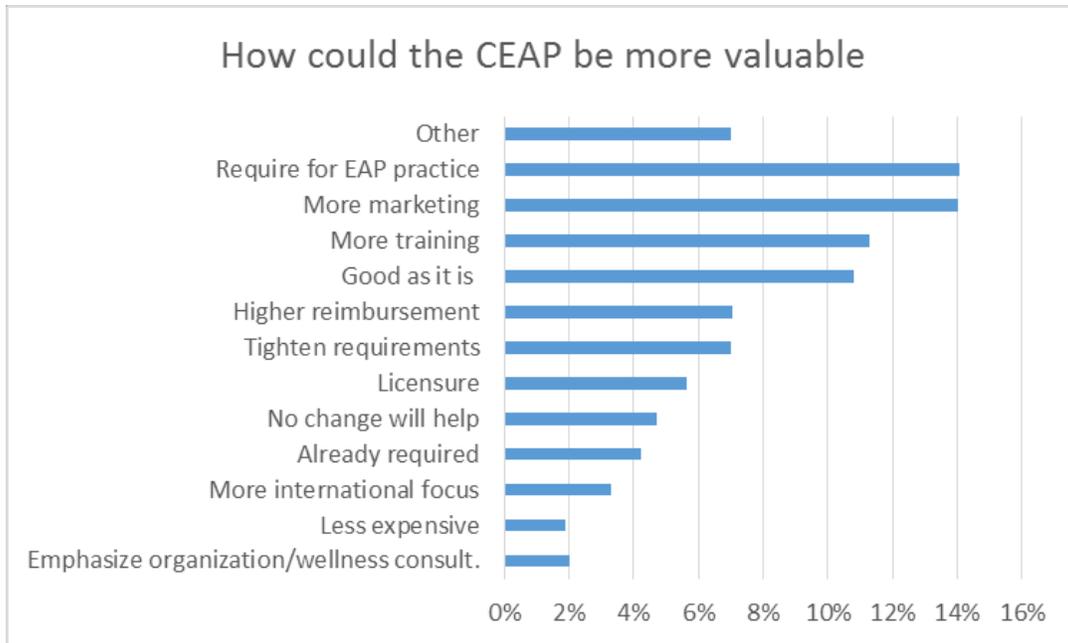
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Almost two-thirds of respondents believed that the CEAP is helpful in “differentiating” them from other mental health professionals. Over fifty percent of respondents indicated that qualifying for the CEAP had increased their knowledge of employee assistance. Approximately twenty percent believed the CEAP was useful in several of the following ways: finding new EAP employment, increasing referrals to their private practice, and in gaining new EAP accounts. A smaller number of respondents (13%) believed that the CEAP had not helped them significantly.

The survey also asked how the credential could be improved.

## Impressions on the Value of the CEAP



This item was open-ended and answers were classified by theme. Fourteen percent of the respondents suggested that requiring the CEAP for EA practice would enhance its value. Another twelve percent suggested that “marketing” of the CEAP credential by EAPA and the EACC would enhance the certification’s profile. Eleven percent believed that more training opportunities should be offered for CEAPS. Just over ten percent of respondents suggested the CEAP was “good as-is.” Five percent believed that the future of the CEAP and the EA profession itself were facing significant obstacles due to the viability of employee assistance as a specialized field of knowledge. Consequently, they suggested that no improvement of the credential was possible. Comments listed under “other” included a variety of opinions each offered by less than one percent of the respondents and included: greater labor emphasis, changes to the CEAP exam, and many other observations.

### Discussion

The CEAP is the only international credential which certifies the holder’s advanced knowledge of EAP practice. Individuals holding the CEAP have been leaders in the field of employee assistance for the last twenty-nine years. This 2015 EACC survey was the first systematic attempt to solicit input from holders of the credential.

Forty-seven percent of survey respondents were among the CEAPS with the longest tenure of certification, more than 16 years. The high response rate by more seasoned CEAPS may reflect a general aging of the CEAP population, as well as a greater investment in issues surrounding the credential and subsequently an increased interest in responding to a survey. EACC records do indeed indicate a decrease in the number of new CEAPS over the last several years. When asked about renewal, ninety-three percent of those certified stated that they will be renewing, but of those not choosing to renew, a sizable portion were planning on retiring or had already left the profession. These numbers reveal- if the credential is to maintain its relevance- a need to engage younger EA professionals. Without a new generation of leaders, the integrity of the EAP-related body of knowledge may be comprised or even lost.

## Impressions on the Value of the CEAP

The respondents to this survey were primarily involved in clinical/casework rather than administrative/macro work in EA field. This suggests a mismatch between the CEAP exam content and practice relevance of the credential, as the test is designed to balance the clinical, administrative and organizational domains of EA practice.

Overall, the data suggests that CEAPs place higher value on intangibles related to professional distinction rather than on the potential financial incentives of holding the credential. Although some CEAPs have indicated a monetary advantage from holding the credential, the knowledge and prestige factors appear to be the strongest motivators of initially earning and of maintaining certification. The greater call for marketing of the credential may be related to the perception that more visibility could lead to higher incomes and more job opportunities for CEAPs.

This data suggests that many CEAPs see the need for changes to the credential, but lack a unified opinion as to what adjustments might be the most relevant. Many respondents called for EAPA and the Commission to more aggressively market the credential and even to engage in advocacy as to limit the practice of employee assistance to those holding the CEAP. Many CEAPs called for more educational opportunities as a way to improve certification, consistent with knowledge-seeking as one of the primary motivators in their initial pursuit of the credential.

The data indicates that many EAP organizations believe in the value of the credential, as half of employers contributed some funds for CEAPs to keep the credential active. It remains unknown if the financial support for the credential is specific to the CEAP, or is rather a standard allotment for any relevant practice credential. Nevertheless, the wide range of organizations reported as providing funds for the CEAP suggests that many EAP professionals receive financial support in acquiring and maintaining certification.

Continuing to educate work organizations and employers of EA practitioners on the value of EA services and the CEAP seems to be a logical step to enhance the future of the credential. Failure to support certification and the requirements it represents may have an adverse effect on the integrity of EAP field. The CEAP represents the only ethically informed and knowledge-based standard for EAP practice across the globe.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The survey was administered electronically to the entire population of current CEAPs. We are unable to verify if a representative cross-section of CEAPs chose to respond. The opinions solicited did not include former CEAPs nor EA professionals practicing without the credential.

Future inquiries will request more detailed information regarding the actual professional practice of CEAPs and their perceptions of future knowledge relevant to EAP practice. The next iterations of the EACC survey aim to inquire about income levels of the respondents and CEAP perceptions of the entire employee assistance field, above and beyond issues related to the credential itself.

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