Guideline for offering inclusive Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)

For Victorian Public Sector Human Resources and Contract Managers

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Overview

This document is intended to be used as a guide by those responsible for engaging EAP providers, including human resource staff, occupational health and safety officers, or contract managers who may sit outside human resources. It provides guidance on setting contract terms and standards for EAP providers to ensure services are disability confident and culturally appropriate for all staff including Aboriginal[[1]](#footnote-1) employees, employees with disability, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI) employees, those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (CALD), older employees, and those residing in regional or remote geographical locations. This guideline does not provide an exhaustive list of the diversity of employee or business needs; hence it may be supplemented with additional department or agency requirements.

Background

As part of a government commitment to employee diversity in *Barring Djinang*: the 2017 – 2022 Victorian Aboriginal Employment Strategy and *Getting to Work: Victorian public sector disability employment action plan 2018-2025*, Victorian public sector departments and agencies have committed to creating inclusive workplaces. This commitment is supported by strengthened diversity data collection processes, more inclusive recruitment processes, as well as training in disability awareness, LGBTI and Aboriginal cultural awareness for managers and staff. Some departments and agencies also offer specialised counselling support for Aboriginal employees, LGBTI employees, those with caring responsibilities or those affected by family violence.

Research and consultation with the Victorian Public Service (VPS) departments and contracted EAP providers undertaken in late 2017 by the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC), indicated that the terms under which EAP services are contracted or offered are not necessarily inclusive or uniformly applied across all diversity groups, or the sector. This guideline aims to provide a consistent set of standards that the Victorian public sector should expect of its contracted providers to fulfil our commitment to providing inclusive EAP support services for all employees.

EAP in the Victorian public sector

An Employee Assistance Program or EAP “can be defined as an employer funded intervention program designed to enhance the emotional, mental and general psychological wellbeing of all employees…[whose] aim is to provide preventive and proactive interventions for the early detection, identification and/or resolution of both work and personal problems that may adversely affect performance and wellbeing.”[[2]](#footnote-2) EAPs can be offered internally by an organisation, externally through a contracted private provider, or as a combination of both. In the Victorian public sector, most departments and agencies provide employee support through a selected external provider, although in some cases internal support is also provided.

In 2016, the Victorian government committed to creating a mentally sound and safe workplace through a *Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter*, including “providing services that support mental health and wellbeing that can be accessed and used by all employees”. In response to this, several departments started to offer additional and specialised EAP support services through establishing phone hotlines for Aboriginal employees staffed by Aboriginal counsellors, an LGBTI specific counselling service, and a family violence counselling service.

The need for offering inclusive EAP services is supported by the results of the 2017 People Matter Survey data which shows that employees with disability, culturally diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and LGBTI employees are twice as likely to report accessing EAP. While the provision of EAP services has become more inclusive, service provision is currently not necessarily consistent across the sector and contract arrangements do not specify consistent standards of service.

Service level standards

Types of support

There are many different types of support that an EAP service can provide including, but not limited to:

* Counselling (whether for work or personal issues)
* General health and wellbeing advice and support
* Mediation and conflict management
* Managing stress in the workplace
* Career guidance, coaching and mentoring
* Trauma and crisis management and support
* Referral service to other providers for long-term tailored support
* Best practice critical incident management and support
* Support for Managers
* Support for family members
* Training on a range of topics relevant to supporting health and wellbeing
* Online resources
* Occupational health and safety advice and support

Apart from traditional models of service delivery such as individual face to face sessions or group seminars, providers are increasingly utilising technology to provide information, advice and support.

Online resources for video calls and online chats are making EAP services more easily accessible to a wider audience. Different modes of service delivery are important for ensuring services are inclusive and cover a large range of support options. In engaging an EAP provider, departments and agencies could consider requesting services including:

* Face to face or telephone counselling, video calls and electronic chat service

24x7x365 hotline

* Manager helpline
* Multicultural and Auslan interpreter service
* Promotional materials which may include brochures, online information, factsheets and tools
* EAP brochures, online information, factsheets and tools
* On-site briefing sessions
* Crisis support
* Critical incident management and support
* Specialised support for Aboriginal people, LGBTQI, family violence etc

Some departments and agencies may have additional requirements, for example individual support and training around health and wellbeing post emergencies or significant events such as fires.

Service standards

Organisations need to consider additional service level standards to ensure all employees can access and receive appropriate support. These include:

* Provider registration with appropriate professional body (see Australian Health Practitioner Registration Authority for a list of professional bodies and service standards[[3]](#footnote-3))
* Service to be accessible to people with disability, allow for adjustments to be made and use inclusive language
* Different modes of service delivery on offer to suit individual needs, utilising multiple forms of technology (e.g. face to face, on-site, phone, video, online, etc.)
* Accredited interpreters to meet needs of employees with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds
* Telephone counselling available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Crisis support 24x7x365 hotline including direct transfer to a suitably qualified consultant

* Cultural competency, disability confidence, experience and capability working with a diverse range of employees including Aboriginal, CALD, LGBTI employees, older employees, those with disability, caring responsibilities, or residing in rural and regional locations as well as employees experiencing family violence
* Counselling available within 3-5 days of the request being made, 1-2 hours for critical incidents
* Attendance at worksite following trauma/critical incidents within 1-3 days and follow up
* Provider referral service to appropriate external services to meet individual/specific needs
* Training and support for managers in dealing with specific issues that arise from different employee groups and organisational contexts
* Quarterly (as a minimum) reporting provided on service trends and issues
* Service transition and communication plans on key areas with milestones and dates
* Invoicing with description of service and compliant with Financial Management Act 1994
* Ongoing evaluation of services and continuous improvement

Reporting

Reporting needs may vary in each organisation, but as a minimum include the following:

* Utilisation rates
* Demographic data (to include age, geographic location, disability, non-English speaking background, Aboriginal, LGBTI, carer)
* Average number of counselling sessions and average duration
* Type of presenting problems
* Interventions and response times
* Number and type of services delivered including breakdown by type of service (phone, face to face, video calls etc.)
* Number, nature and locations of critical incident responses
* Referrals made including self-referral and manager referral breakdown
* Outcome evaluations (customer surveys of satisfaction with the service provided)
* Breakdown of locations where counselling request originated and location of sessions
* Sessions with employee family members or significant others
* Educational sessions and training, including number of type
* Trends emerging from the data
* Conclusions and recommendations

A summary of EAP service principles, standards and reporting requirements is provided in Appendix A.

Appendix A. Summary of principles, standards and reporting requirements for EAP service provision

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| PRINCIPLES | \*SUCCESS FACTOR | COLLECTED  Y/N | CURRENT DATA |
| The EAP impacts positively on individual employee wellbeing. | Employees report positive impact of EAP on wellbeing |  |  |
| The EAP is perceived by employees as a desirable workplace resource. | EAP is considered a benefit by applicants to advertised positions |  |  |
| The EAP may result in reduced turnover. | Reduced turnover |  |  |
| The EAP may result in reduced absenteeism. | Reduced unplanned absenteeism. Absenteeism can be a positive if it is planned and it is proactive addressing an issue? |  |  |
| The EAP may result in higher employee productivity. | Increased productivity |  |  |
| The EAP may result in improved morale. | Increased morale |  |  |
| EAP services provided are appropriate to the needs of people with disabilities, people with injuries that may affect their ability to access services, people requiring mental health support, people of non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal people, women, carers, victims of domestic violence, veterans, people from the LGBTI community, people of any age and from any geographic location within Victoria. | Reduced unplanned absenteeism of employees from each identified diversity group. |  |  |
| EAP services provided are appropriate to the needs of people with disabilities, people with injuries that may affect their ability to access services, people requiring mental health support, people of non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal people, women, carers, victims of domestic violence, veterans, people from the LGBTI community, people of any age and from any geographic location within Victoria. | Increased productivity of employees from each identified diversity group. |  |  |
| EAP services provided are appropriate to the needs of people with disabilities, people with injuries that may affect their ability to access services, people requiring mental health support, people of non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal people, women, carers, victims of domestic violence, veterans, people from the LGBTI community, people of any age and from any geographic location within Victoria. | Increased morale reported by employees from each identified diversity group. |  |  |
| The EAP forms part of the organisation’s response to individuals experiencing psychological and physical stress in the workplace. | Reduction in workcover claims. |  |  |
| The EAP forms part of the organisation’s response to individuals experiencing psychological and physical stress in the workplace. | Reduction in workcover claims of employees from each identified diversity group. |  |  |
| In line with the employer’s legislated duty of care, EAP services provided for our employees are confidential. | Employees report receiving confidential services. |  |  |
| In line with the employer’s legislated duty of care, EAP services provided for our employees are confidential. | Employees from each identified diversity group report receiving confidential services. |  |  |
| In line with the employer’s legislated duty of care, EAP services are provided by experts in the relevant field. | Employees report receiving expert services. |  |  |
| In line with the employer’s legislated duty of care, EAP services are provided by experts in the relevant field. | Employees from each diversity group report receiving expert services. |  |  |
| In line with the employer’s legislated duty of care, confidential EAP services are provided by experts in the relevant field. | Regular reports are provided specifying the issues identified and the EAP services provided. |  |  |
| Consultation and training are available for managers and supervisors, enabling them to better refer employees in need of assistance, thereby improving job performance. | Managers and supervisors report feeling better equipped to appropriately refer employees to the EAP. |  |  |
| Consultation and training are available for managers and supervisors, enabling them to better refer employees in need of assistance, thereby improving job performance. | Managers and supervisors report feeling better equipped to help and manage employees from each identified diversity group after completing training. |  |  |
| Consultation and training are available for managers and supervisors, enabling them to better refer employees in need of assistance, thereby improving job performance. | Employees report an increased confidence in managers and supervisors to better refer employees from each identified diversity group in People Matter Survey. |  |  |
| Consultation and training are available for managers and supervisors, enabling them to better refer employees in need of assistance, thereby improving job performance. | Improved job performance reported |  |  |
| Provision of confidential assistance services to employees with personal issues that affect their performance at work. | Employees report confidence in the confidentiality of services received. |  |  |
| Provision of confidential assistance services to employees with personal issues that affect their performance at work. | Employees report satisfaction with the speed of problem identification services received. |  |  |
| Provision of confidential assistance services to employees with personal issues that affect their performance at work. | Employees report satisfaction with the accuracy of problem identification services received. |  |  |
| Critical incident services are provided. | Critical incident policies and procedures are continually improved |  |  |
| Group and individual critical incident services are provided. | Employees report receiving appropriate and timely critical incident services following a critical incident. |  |  |
| Critical incidents are recorded by departments. | Numbers of critical incidents decrease. |  |  |
| Workcover claims are recorded by departments. | Workcover claims arising from critical incidents decrease. |  |  |

Success Factors are possible measures. Individually, they do not represent cause and effect relationships, but collectively monitoring changes over time may lead to better understanding of factors underpinning employee health and wellbeing.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| STANDARDS | Y/N | EXTERNAL/ INTERNAL | ISSUES/ COMMENTS |
| Core Services |  |  |  |
| Confidential assessment, advice, treatment and referral (if necessary) |  |  |  |
| Professional advice and consultation to managers, supervisors, HR/OH&S on identification and resolution of people management (problem) issues |  |  |  |
| Briefing and education sessions for managers / supervisors and all employees on the nature of the program and how to access the services |  |  |  |
| 24 hour, 365 days a year emergency counselling service |  |  |  |
| Critical incident response services, including coordination advice to leaders and on-site counselling for those affected |  |  |  |
| Reporting to allow for the identification of areas requiring proactive interventions and evaluation of the program by both counsellors and employees using the program |  |  |  |
| Ongoing evaluation of services provided to allow for continuous improvement |  |  |  |
| Guaranteed face-to-face appointments within 3 to 5days for non-emergency counselling / interventions. |  |  |  |
| In emergency situations the person can speak to a provider employee or Counsellor within an hour |  |  |  |
| Advice on ‘early psychological support’ (often referred to as defusing) following workplace trauma / critical incidents within 1-2 hours - this would include an assessment of type of psychological support required and the appropriate timing based on contemporary practices and evidenced-based research |  |  |  |
| Worksite attendance for the provision of psychological support (often referred to as debriefing) following trauma / critical incidents, where indicated upon assessment, within 1-3 days |  |  |  |
| Ease of access to premises for persons with a disability |  |  |  |
| Services free of bias/discrimination, self-interest or restricted because of religious belief |  |  |  |
| Other services |  |  |  |
| Solicitors for legal advice |  |  |  |
| Financial crisis counsellors and budgeting service |  |  |  |
| Psychological assessment |  |  |  |
| Training |  |  |  |
| Conflict resolution |  |  |  |
| Interpreters for CALD groups |  |  |  |
| Program provision for family members of employees |  |  |  |
| Psychiatric services |  |  |  |
| Inpatient drug and alcohol services |  |  |  |
| Specific community support groups |  |  |  |
| Other community resources |  |  |  |
| Administration |  |  |  |
| Do you have an internal EAP coordinator? |  |  |  |
| Do you have a committee overseeing the EAP? |  |  |  |
| Does your program allow self-referral? |  |  |  |
| Reporting |  |  |  |
| Utilisation rates |  |  |  |
| Is access utilised by all represented groupings? |  |  |  |
| Are people able to get appointments within agreed time frames? |  |  |  |
| Do the majority of employees know they have a program and would they use it if they had to? |  |  |  |
| Are employees satisfied with quality of counselling and the outcome of intervention? |  |  |  |
| Are Managers / Supervisors and HR / OH&S personnel referring employees to the EAP? |  |  |  |
| Basic demographic data |  |  |  |
| Average number of counselling sessions |  |  |  |
| Type of presenting problems |  |  |  |
| Interventions |  |  |  |
| Services utilised |  |  |  |
| Outcome evaluations |  |  |  |
| Trends emerging from the data |  |  |  |
| Conclusions and recommendations |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| INTERNAL REPORTING | Employed | Turnover | Absenteeism | Productivity | Morale (People Matter Survey) | Workcover claims | Critical Incidents |
| People with Disability |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| People with injuries |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| CALD |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islanders |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Women |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Carers |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| LGBTI community members |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Victims of domestic violence |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Veterans |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| By Age |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 15 - 24 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 25 - 34 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 35 - 44 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 45 - 54 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 55 - 64 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 65 + |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| By workplace geographic location |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| CBD & Melbourne Metropolitan |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Eastern Metropolitan |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Gippsland |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Hume |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Loddon Mallee |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Grampians |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Barwon South West |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| TOTAL |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

1. For the purposes of this document, the term Aboriginal includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Employee Assistance Professionals Association of Australasia (Inc), <http://www.eapaa.org.au/site/>, viewed 11 June 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See http://www.ahpra.gov.au/National-Boards.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-3)