



# Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for EAP counselling services



**Counselling services are the most commonly accessed Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) service and can include anything from career counselling and coaching, to clinical treatment for anxiety, depression and stress disorders. While this evaluation framework is focused on EAP counselling services, it could be applied more broadly.**

**Organisations can use this framework to drive quality improvement initiatives and evidence-based decision-making that helps ensure EAP services are fit-for-purpose, responsive, and adaptive to the changing needs of employers, workers, supervisors, and managers.**



## Step 1: Define the focus of the evaluation

Clearly define the intent for the evaluation including:

- Description of the EAP service to be evaluated (e.g. short-term, individual counselling)
- Purpose, objectives and target audience for the service
- Evidence, logic and assumptions around how the service links to desired long-term outcomes
- Service performance to date, including any problems and/or opportunities for improvement.

### **Example: Step 1 in action - defining the evaluation process**

**EAP service:** short-term, individual counselling or coaching services.

**Purpose:** to enhance workplace performance and productivity by addressing worker personal and/or work-related concerns.

**Objective:** to provide confidential psychological support, 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week for workers (and their eligible family members).

**Program logic or underlying assumptions:** workers that access EAP counselling receive expert guidance on how to handle personal and/or work-related concerns and develop better ways to manage and understand these situations (e.g. interpersonal conflict).

**Desired long-term outcomes:** improved emotional, mental and general psychological wellbeing outcomes for individuals, and sustained and measurable positive impact on workplace productivity.



**Tip:** Remember to scale and target evaluation objectives based on agency size, activities and risk profile.



## Step 2: Determine the evaluation approach

Describe the purpose and scope of the evaluation, i.e. what questions are to be answered? Evaluations can assess the impact of the service (e.g. a summative or outcome evaluation) or service improvements (e.g. formative or process evaluation).

Remember there are many reasons to evaluate and many aspects of EAP counselling services that can be evaluated. Typically, evaluations will consider one or more of the following aspects:

- Efficiency – understanding whether the service represents value for money, and is meeting contractual requirements and performance measures
- Effectiveness – examining whether the service is meeting objectives and producing improved, durable, safe and consistent outcomes for workers
- Appropriateness – ensuring alignment with organisational priorities and the needs of workers, including worker needs, and is consistent with evidence-based psychological practice.

The evaluation approach selected will guide the attributes of the EAP counselling service that need to be measured in Step 3.



**Tip:** EAP outcome evaluations typically include research conducted with users before and after treatment as a way to account for the differences between users and non-users.



## Step 3: Understand data sources and availability

Define the data sources and information that will support the evaluation approach. For example, consider existing employee surveys or other standard reporting, as well as data or information that is currently or could be collected by the EAP provider. Remember, successful evaluation depends on high quality and tailored data and/or information (i.e. qualitative and/or quantitative).

### Possible data items include:

#### **User demographic information – workers and eligible family members**

- Age
- Gender
- Geographic location
- Employment status
- Job role
- Length of employment
- Other characteristics (e.g. disability; cultural and linguistic diversity; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people; carers; veterans; victims of domestic violence).

## **Service performance and efficiency information**

- Contractual obligation compliance
- Audit outcomes
- Wait times, response times and issue resolution
- Clinical incidents and/or breaches
- Type of presenting problem(s) (including whether it is new or recurring)
- Average number of counselling sessions and duration
- Number of services delivered including breakdown by type of service (e.g. phone, face-to-face and/or videoconference)
- Utilisation rates or referral rates
- Customer satisfaction ratings (e.g. regarding access to care, the practitioner, services received, the outcome of the intervention, and whether expectations were met)
- Complaints information.

## **Service effectiveness information**

### **Individual-level outcomes:**

- Current mental and physical health status (e.g. Kessler Psychological Distress Scale – K10)
- Life satisfaction ratings (e.g. Workplace Outcomes Suite)
- Job satisfaction and engagement ratings
- Referral rates and success
- Performance and concentration at work (e.g. reduced presenteeism)
- Quality of personal relationships
- User experience
- Ability to manage personal difficulties, stress and interpersonal conflict.

### **Organisational-level outcomes:**

- Unplanned absences (e.g. reduced absenteeism)
- Wellbeing, engagement and productivity
- Return to work (e.g. hours, role and duties)
- Employee retention and turnover rates
- Workers' compensation claims
- Workplace health and safety incidents.



**Tip:** It is important to consider the ethical and legal aspects of the data collection process, including collection, storage and use.

Once selected, defining data items can ensure consistency over time in both measurement and interpretation. Some of the factors to consider when defining data items are outlined below.

**Example: Step 3 in action – defining data items for evaluation**

<b>Measure</b>	Life satisfaction
<b>Definition</b>	Overall satisfaction of the person participating in EAP counselling as measured by the Life Satisfaction item of the <a href="#">Workplace Outcome Suite</a> (“So far, my life seems to be going very well.”)
<b>Purpose</b>	Supports evaluation of whether EAP counselling is effectively meeting its objective to enhance worker wellbeing
<b>Baseline</b>	Prior to an EAP intervention, recent evidence indicates 37% of users would ‘disagree somewhat’ or ‘disagree strongly’
<b>Target</b>	Benchmarking indicates that fewer than 16% of users ‘disagree somewhat’ or ‘disagree strongly’ after utilising EAP counselling
<b>Data Collection</b>	Participant is surveyed before and after use of the EAP counselling service and at a follow-up period (approx. 3 months from the end of service). The data is collated and stored within a secure reporting repository (e.g. a locked database or spreadsheet)
<b>Tool</b>	Online survey
<b>Responsibility</b>	EAP counselling service provider
<b>Quality Control</b>	EAP provider’s clinical quality assurance processes and organisation’s assurance activities.



**Tip:** Targets must be meaningful, reflect the aims and objectives of the individual EAP counselling service and typically relate to current/historical performance or available benchmarks.



### Step 4: Develop and implement reporting tools

Establish and refine the reporting process using the following as a guide:

- Identify frequency of reporting
- Develop regular reporting tools relevant to key audiences (e.g. senior executives, all workers)
- Identify sources that can provide benchmarks for performance
- Implement processes to capture and report on measurement data
- Monitor the data on a regular basis to measure the effectiveness of the program and identify areas for improvement.



**Tip:** These items can be incorporated into the procurement and contracting of an EAP provider.



## Step 5: Ongoing quality assurance and evaluation

Establish regular and ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes, for example, consider the following activities:

- Identify any links between collected data and other workplace program information
- Build in-house evaluation capability and capacity
- Review the evaluation design, methodology and data sources to ensure they continue to meet the organisation's needs.



**Tip:** This evaluation framework can be adapted for use with other services within EAP programs, including:

- Management and leadership training
- Restructure and change management planning and support
- Workshops and programs
- Team coaching
- Consultation and assessment
- Support during critical incidents and significant events.
- Financial wellbeing coaching.

## Other resources

Comcare's [Principles for Better Practice Employee Assistance Programs](#) outlines evidence-informed guidance that aims to ensure EAPs better meet the needs of organisations and their workers.

The [Sample: EAP Evaluation Dashboard](#) demonstrates how the data items described in this resource might be utilised to support evaluation activities.



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