

# NSC RESEARCH SNAPSHOT:

## EAPs & the Pandemic

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are work-provided programs to help employees with issues affecting them in and out of the workplace, such as mental health, substance use, family health, parenting, relationships and more. Employers may purchase different types of EAP plans offering a variety of services, reporting functions, trainings, communications, and/or education. EAPs have emerged as one way employers responded to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on employees. To understand the scope of EAP offerings and use, the NSC Impairment Practice surveyed NSC members and the NSC SAFER initiative surveyed nonmember employers and employees. Here's what NSC found:

### Most employers offer an EAP, especially to address mental health and substance use issues exacerbated by the pandemic:

- ◆ 3/4 of members offered an EAP
- ◆ 23% of members expanded or began offering EAPs in response to the pandemic's impacts on substance use
- ◆ 18% of members expanded or began offering EAPs in response to the pandemic's impacts on mental health

Nonmember organizations and their employees surveyed by SAFER, the NSC COVID-19 workplace safety research initiative, found similar results:

- ◆ 54% of employees surveyed by SAFER said their workplace offered an EAP
- ◆ Of organizations surveyed that offer EAPs, 45% said they had made changes to their EAP during the pandemic:
  - 7% of employers implemented an EAP for the first time during the pandemic
  - 31% of employers expanded EAP offerings during the pandemic
  - 16% of employers expanded EAP coverage during the pandemic

SAFER survey respondents made changes to their EAPs for the following reasons:

- 60% because of an increase in employees requesting EAP services
- 53% because of an increase in mental health or impairment-related absences, incidents or injuries
- 47% of respondents increased EAPs because of supervisor concerns about mental health or substance use among direct reports

## Survey Background

Impairment Practice's NSC Member Survey: 154 respondents

SAFER Initiative's Employer Survey: 375 respondents

SAFER Initiative's Worker Survey: 1,018 respondents

"We increased promotion of our EAP, offered group webinars on mental health, dealing with stress, etc., promoted the importance of self-care and offered suggested behaviors and ways to seek help if needed"  
—NSC member

"The organization has increased access to EAP program through remote options. We have worked with our EAP provider to increase the frequency of talks and presentation on stress management regularly focusing on adapting to change."  
—NSC member

**47%**  
of respondents increased EAPs because of supervisor concerns about mental health or substance use among direct reports

## However, employers don't really know how EAPs are being used:

- ◆ More than 75% of members do not receive any usage reports from their EAP
- ◆ 58% of members were unsure if EAP usage for substance use changed during the pandemic
- ◆ 48% of members were unsure if EAP usage for mental health changed during the pandemic
- ◆ 42% of members did not know what EAP services their employees were commonly using

42%

of members did not know what EAP services their employees were commonly using

## Employees may not know about EAPs or how to access them:

- ◆ Only 31% of members said they shared information about their EAP with employees more than they did pre-pandemic
- ◆ 8% of members said they promoted their EAP less than they did pre-pandemic
- ◆ Meanwhile, just 18% of SAFER respondents said they had ever used EAP benefits in their current or previous job
- ◆ 66% said they had never used EAP benefits in their current or previous job
- ◆ 16% said they didn't know what an EAP was or its purpose
- ◆ 20% of SAFER respondents didn't know if an EAP was offered at their workplace

"EAP services were encouraged everyday as we had a number of employees that were having difficulties with loneliness, depression, isolation."  
–NSC member

### Of the SAFER survey employee respondents whose current workplace offered an EAP:

- Only 10% were extremely familiar with it
- 11% were not at all familiar with it
- 36% were only slightly familiar with it
- 27% were moderately familiar with it

## What employers can do:

1. Purchase regular reports (monthly or quarterly) on EAP usage – some EAPs require organizations purchase reports at the time of EAP plan purchase vs. having the ability to receive ad hoc reports later on
  - ◆ Understanding the reasons employees use EAPs might help your organization better respond to your employees' unique needs and enable your workplace to create targeted supports to prevent impairment-related incidents, injuries and near-misses
2. Engage employees in assessing their mental health and wellbeing, and identify workplace services and supports that would help them
  - ◆ Consider using comprehensive employee evaluation tools to measure wellbeing such as [Commonly Well's Resiliency Capital Index](#) or [NIOSH's WellBQ survey](#)
  - ◆ Create recovery-friendly workplaces
3. Create a [psychologically safe](#) workplace culture that fully supports employees addressing their mental health and wellbeing, including by using their EAP
4. Explore other resources:
  - ◆ [EAP toolkit from SAMHSA](#)
  - ◆ [SAFER at work](#)
  - ◆ [Opioids at Work Toolkit](#)
  - ◆ [Total Worker Health](#)
  - ◆ [Employee Mental Health Resources](#)
  - ◆ [Ending Addiction Stigma](#)