



Information

Psychologists Services and Employee and Family Assistance Programs¹

EFAPs can help

Employers have become increasingly aware of and sensitive to the broad range of personal and family stresses their workers face. These include mental health issues such as depression or anxiety, adjustment difficulties with major transitions in life such as grief or marital separation, dealing with family strain and discord or coping with the special challenges of their children or elderly parents. The demands placed on individuals can of course impact their capacity to be productive in the workplace and employers know that their effective assistance in these circumstances is highly valued by their employees and supports a work culture of trust and loyalty.

The cornerstones of quality EFAPs: Remember the 4 C's!

Employee and Family Assistance Programs (EFAPS) can be a valuable resource in response to these needs. However, not all EFAPS meet employer and workers needs and expectations. In developing these programs or reviewing their effectiveness responsible employers need to ensure that the professional services they fund are based solidly on the cornerstones of Competence, client Confidentiality, Choice, and Continuity of care for their employees.

Competence

Competence can best be ensured by requiring that the service provider that your employee meets through the EFAP is licensed or registered with a regulated profession with educational, training, and examination requirements, as well as mechanisms to deal with ethical or competence complaints.

Employers need to especially be aware that anybody regardless of training or background can call themselves a “counselor” or “therapist” and that without the requirement that the individual is a member of a regulated profession there is no quality assurance.

¹ This pamphlet was developed by the College of Psychologists of New Brunswick in 2009. Special thanks go to Dr. Gary Fecteau, a Psychologist in private practice in Saint John, N.B. for his contribution to this document.

Client confidentiality

Client confidentiality is a necessity for effective helping relationships and employees need to have confidence, as do employers who sponsor the EFAP, that on referral all information is kept solely by their helping professional and never released to a third party unless by express client consent.

Choice

EFAPs best serve employees needs when they allow individuals the freedom to choose the professionals they will see. Employees who seek assistance often turn to trusted friends, family physicians, clergy and others in their support network for advice on how to best address their problems, and these people often refer them to known and respected professionals in their communities. Without the freedom to choose employees may be frustrated if denied access to the professionals recommended to them and the assistance process undermined.

Continuity of care

Continuity of care depends on access to a sufficient number of sessions to meet the client's needs over time. Most individual counselling and therapy service needs can be met in 8 to 12 sessions or less. Employers need to be aware of the hours of service delivery they are funding and what flexibility there is to extend sessions per individual needs. Of help here is the fact that employee health insurance plans may also provide some coverage for the services of psychologists or other professionals that allows continuity of care if the professionals engaged through the EFAP are so designated by the plan. Access to psychological services through the health insurance increases the flexibility for employees who may need further care, but it does not replace the access to psychological services at the outset.

Why psychologists?

Not all EFAPs utilize psychologists in their programs, although this may be the employee's and employer's expectation. EFAPs that include employee choice and access to psychologists' services are well positioned to effectively meet individual needs following the cornerstones outlined above. Psychologists in our province are legally regulated by the College of Psychologists of New Brunswick who set out educational, training and examination requirements, and have mechanisms to deal with public complaints about any member. Licensing requirements for psychologists include appropriate graduate education at the Masters or Doctoral level, a significant period of supervised practice, and written and oral examinations to help ensure professional competence. Psychologists in New Brunswick are bound by ethical standards for practice following the Canadian Psychological Association Code of Ethics which addresses important issues of the relationship between the client and the psychologist including

confidentiality, informed consent, and practice within areas of competence. Psychologists are trained as scientist-practitioners and are leaders in the research, development, and delivery of evidence-based effective counseling and therapy most suited to the individual's needs. Psychologists are trusted professionals and receive referrals from many sources in our communities including physicians and other health professionals, community agencies, health insurance providers, as well as via word of mouth of trusted friends and colleagues. The availability of choice to have a psychologist provide EFAP counselling services can also help with issues of continuity of care as psychologists are typically included to some extent in health insurance plans which may be able to provide further coverage for services beyond session limits usually imposed by EFAPs.

Frequently asked questions:

Q. How do I know whether my EFAP provides access to Psychologists?

A. It is important to check whether your EFAP actually provides access to psychologists. As mentioned earlier, some EFAPs lead employers and employees to believe that they provide access to psychologists, but in reality there are very few psychologists on their service provider rosters. In some cases, the rosters are composed primarily of unregulated “counselors” or “therapists”. As an employer, you might consider asking your EFAP contact person to provide you with a list of the service provider roster in your area. As an employee, be sure to indicate if you would prefer to see a psychologist when you seek services from the EFAP, and ensure that individual is indeed a licensed psychologist by checking the CPNB website: www.cpnb.ca.

Q. What do I do if my EFAP does not provide access to psychologists?

A. As previously mentioned, there is considerable variability in the extent to which EFAPs provide access to psychologists. Fortunately, some EFAP companies provide excellent access to psychologists! If you are an employer, carefully evaluate which plan provides the best access to such services. It might also be worthwhile to periodically evaluate the quality of services you are receiving from your EFAP (e.g., solicit employee feedback re their experiences). If you are an employee who is concerned that you do not have adequate access to psychologists via your current program, share your feedback with your HR department and/or discuss your concerns with your union representative if appropriate.

Q. Does my EFAP provide treatment for my mental health difficulties, or is it a “screening” service?

A. Again, not all EFAP providers are created equal in terms of whether they provide direct access to mental health treatment services, or whether they merely function as a “screening” service. In the latter case, the employee typically attends one or two sessions during which time the provider assesses their difficulties, and if it is determined that they

require ongoing treatment they are referred to a different service. If referred to another service, the employee is responsible for covering the cost. Mental health treatment services are sometimes covered via health insurance plans. Employees are often disappointed to learn that their EFAP does not provide treatment services as expected. As an employer, you can minimize this disappointment and confusion by clearly explaining to your employees the purpose of your EFAP program with respect to the issue of treatment versus screening. From an employee perspective, check with your HR department about whether your EFAP program is meant to serve a screening versus treatment role. Find out whether your employer provides other types of coverage for treatment services if required, or whether you are responsible to pay out-of-pocket. Remember that all NB residents have access to mental health assessment and treatment services covered by Medicare at their local Community Mental Health Clinic.