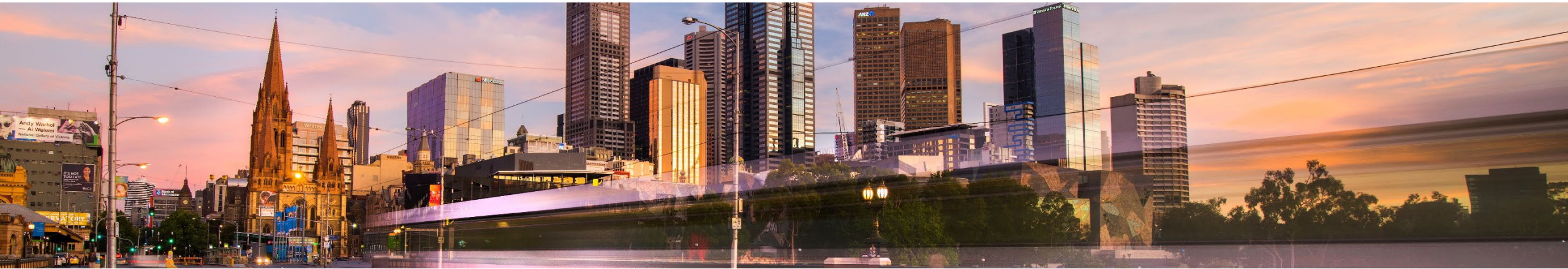


# EAP Industry Stakeholder report



Findings from consultations with Industry Stakeholders  
about the EAP industry

A subsidiary of:

# Contents

<b>03</b>	Key summary of findings
<b>07</b>	Detailed findings
<b>31</b>	Conclusions

# Key summary of findings



# Summary of findings

The context of workplace wellbeing has changed over recent years with increased prioritisation and focus among industry stakeholders, organisations and employees, as well as an increased knowledge and range of initiatives to encourage mentally healthy workplaces. While industry stakeholders reflected positively on the EAP industry, they identified several current challenges that are present within the EAP industry, notably:

- **Financial pressures:** 'Tight margins' and rising costs of service delivery.
- **Recruitment:** Challenges hiring suitable staff.
- **Competition:** Growing number of stakeholders involved in the workplace wellbeing sector.
- **Quality control:** Inconsistency in the quality of EAP services, with a lack of regulation.

The EAP industry has adapted and broadened their service offering in response to contextual factors and the changing needs and expectations of organisations and employees. While traditionally EAP services focused on individual counselling and crisis response, organisations can now select more enhanced offerings, including organisational consulting and training for managers and employees. Stakeholders identified that some EAP providers have broadened their scope to deliver more services that work in the prevention and promotion space to encourage mentally healthy workplaces.

# Summary of findings continued

According to industry stakeholders, EAPs are well-established and valuable services within the workplace wellbeing sector yet industry stakeholders identified that more needs to be done to ensure that these services are well utilised and delivered at a high standard.

In regard to service delivery, the main challenges identified by stakeholders were predominantly in relation to the procurement, utilisation and monitoring and evaluation stages. We have summarised the future directions in relation to the stages of the EAP process:

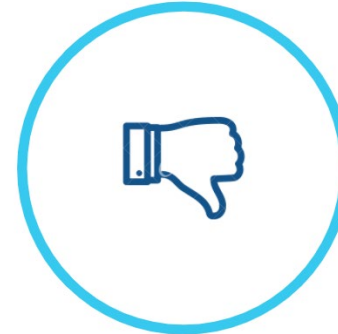
- **Procurement stage:** Organisations should be educated and supported to conduct needs-led procurement to ensure appropriate, suitable and effective EAP services, rather than standardised or 'off-the-shelf' offerings.
- **Utilisation stage:** Improved awareness and understanding of EAP purpose and support available among employees.
- **Monitoring, evaluation and reporting:** Improved monitoring, evaluation and reporting at the organisational and industry level to ensure services are appropriate, utilised and effective. Improved information sharing would also support organisations to use information and data more broadly to support workplace wellbeing.

In response to these challenges, industry stakeholders reflected on several opportunities for improvement and future directions to ensure that EAPs were delivering relevant, high-quality and customer-centric services that best address the needs and expectations of employers and employees in the years to come.

# Stakeholder perceptions of the EAP industry

## Strengths

- Responsiveness
- Well-established
- Well-informed
- Accessibility



## Weaknesses

- Tokenistic
- Quality control
- Workforce challenges
- Strategic direction

## Opportunities

- Raise awareness
- Information for organisations
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Evolution of service offering



## Threats

- Industry pressures
- Competition
- Reputation
- Perception as standalone offering

*Decorative image*

# Detailed findings



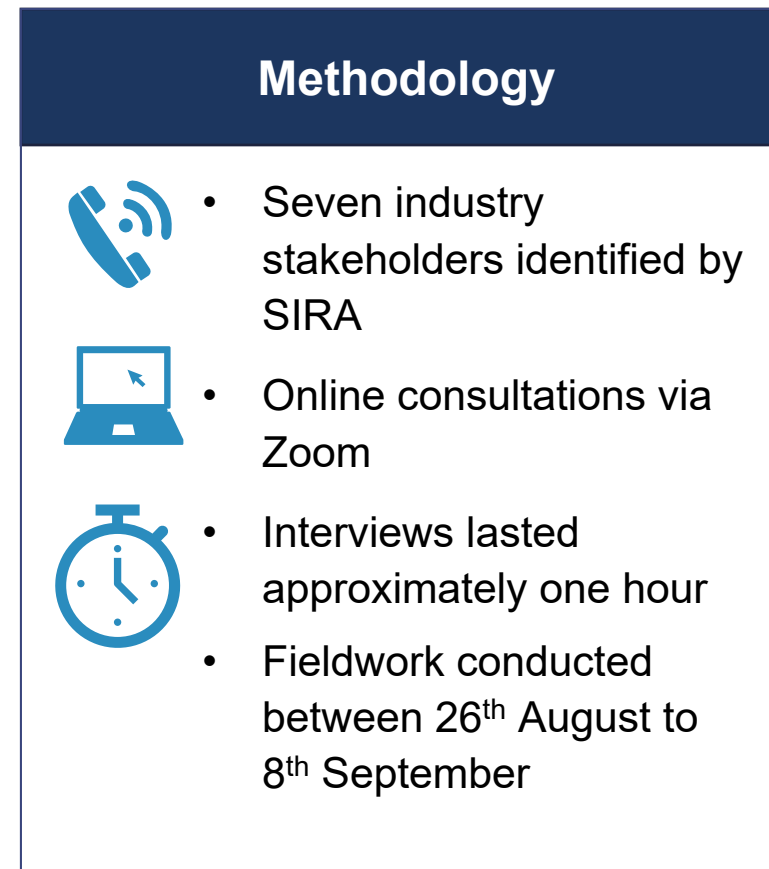
# Introduction

State Insurance Regulatory Authority (SIRA) has asked the Social Research Centre (SRC) to conduct online interviews with industry stakeholders and employees to better understand the employee assistance program (EAP) industry in NSW.

The purpose for the research is gain insights and generate discussion and action amongst EAP stakeholders, including but not limited to:

- Creating awareness to better support EAP arrangements for employees
- Enabling best practice methodologies and guidance materials
- Mobilise conversations and community groups to enhance the delivery of EAP services across NSW
- Understanding how to integrate EAP services and data into organisational safety systems

This report provides high-level findings from the industry stakeholder consultations.



*Diagram 1: summary of methodology*



# Context of the EAP industry



There are several stakeholders within the EAP industry including a peak body, large providers and smaller boutique providers that target specific locations or audiences. One stakeholder noted that there had been consolidation in the market among EAP providers.



While the research focuses on the NSW context, the majority of stakeholders stated that there was limited variation between states as most common EAP providers have a national reach. One stakeholder held the view that the only difference in NSW was that organisations tended to be more forward thinking and innovative. Another stakeholder noted that it was more important to consider intra-state differences, notably how to appropriately service different demographics and organisation types in various locations within NSW.



The COVID-19 pandemic and current lockdowns in NSW were seen to contribute to higher level of need at an organisational and employee level. Alongside increased utilisation, stakeholders noted there was a need for EAP providers to adapt ways of working and deliver virtual services. Stakeholders described examples of more mature organisations using EAP services to better support employees' mental and physical wellbeing during this time, for example, training and support for resilience, self-care strategies and wellbeing moments.



Stakeholders noted that there had been an expansion of services and organisations targeting the broader workplace mental health space which has led to more competition and, in some case, confusion regarding what actions organisations should undertake.

# Fit within the mental health eco-system



Historically, the EAP industry had fit a gap in service provision in relation to workplace mental health and were now well-established in this sector. However, there was consensus among stakeholders that EAP services were just 'one piece of the puzzle' of supporting mentally healthy workplaces.



According to stakeholders, EAP services provided short-term, solution focused and responsive support. One stakeholder noted that EAPs were focused on early intervention and management of illness space, as well as crisis intervention. Yet there was some evidence that this has been evolving over time.



Stakeholders described an increased focus on workplace wellbeing over the recent years, with improved knowledge and take-up of wellbeing initiatives and, in some cases, development of organisational wellbeing strategies. Some stakeholders felt that there had been more consideration among organisations regarding their approach to the role of EAPs in recent times.



*I think employers are thinking about what are the mental health supports that they're providing to their staff and therefore how do EAPs fit into that picture. It's not the only thing that you could provide for your staff and so they're starting to think a little bit more about what are those services, what is it that the EAP industry offers versus say potentially other support services and what does that kind of holistic picture look like for their staff.*

*(Stakeholder quote)*

# Trends of the EAP industry



There has been an expansion of the EAP service offering in response to the changing context of the EAP industry, as well as changes to organisational needs and expectations. This has included a broader range of services that reach beyond individual employees to provide organisational consulting and manager support and training (discussed further under service offering).



There has also been a transition to a multi-channel offering, with greater online delivery of services and, in some cases, live chat functions and apps. One stakeholder commented that the transition to online support had reduced barriers to accessing support for some employees, notably younger males. However, one stakeholder reported challenges related to creating rapport and therapeutic alliance when services were delivered online with concerns that this would impact the quality of the service.

“

*They're expanding their service offering which used to be one on one type counselling work, now can be group or management or strategic or it can be managerial advice or it could be personalised individual help. They've expanded their footprint in the market so to speak and I think that's a good thing because it then provides a bit more value to the organisation. (Stakeholder quote)*

”


“

*EAP is an evolving industry as it always is. It's evolving because organisations have a much more focused attention around mental health and wellbeing in the workplace and they see EAP as part of the construct of supporting employees in that sort of model. (Stakeholder quote)*

”


# Current challenges in the EAP industry

## Financial pressures




Stakeholders identified that EAP providers had more recently experienced 'tight margins' and 'pressure to do more for less' given the increased competition in the industry. Some stakeholders noted the rising costs of delivering services, including salaries of suitable staff. This was a key challenge given that EAPs are commercial entities, and is linked to the inconsistency in the quality of service delivery.

## Recruitment and resourcing of staff




Stakeholders noted challenges in relation to hiring suitable staff. One stakeholder noted that the resourcing of staff was particularly challenging in remote areas. There was a perception among a few stakeholders that there was a trend to hire less experienced and/or qualified staff due to cost and workforce issues. This was viewed as problematic given the knowledge and experience required for the role.

## Competition



There has been a greater focus and growing number of stakeholders involved in the workplace wellbeing sector. One stakeholder felt that there was increased replication of existing initiatives and greater advertisement of government funded services. Another stakeholder noted concern that the transition to online format would allow international EAP providers to deliver services that may not meet Australian standards.

## Quality control



A few stakeholders noted that there was inconsistency in the quality of EAP services, with a lack of regulation. With trends towards more online service delivery and hiring a more diverse workload (i.e. not registered psychologists and social workers), several stakeholders noted greater concerns about quality.

*“I think that some of the larger providers have just more capacity to offer more, but I think that the real kind of inconsistency piece is that depending on who picks up the phone you’re probably going to get a completely different experience which is a bit of an issue in the mental health sector generally. It’s depending on who you get, who you can find an appointment with, your experience of care might be really different. I think that’s a challenge because when you look at it there’s actually very little quality control that happens in this space.” (Stakeholder quote)*

# Procurement process

The procurement process varies between organisations, yet this tended to be an open or closed tender process. Stakeholders noted that the offerings tended to be ‘fixed fee’ (i.e. organisations pay a fixed amount for the service) or ‘fee for service’ (i.e. price depends on the services used). A few stakeholders commented that this tended to be related to the organisations budget and/or the services selected (i.e. crisis interventions tended to be fee for service’.

Stakeholders identified a range of challenges related to the procurement process:

- **Price sensitive:** Organisations tended to be price rather than quality-sensitive; they had limited budget to spend on EAPs and therefore decision-making tended to be informed by price.
- **Understanding of needs:** Many organisations have limited knowledge of what they need in an EAP service, which inhibits the process from being needs-led.
- **Staff involved:** A few stakeholders noted that the success of the procurement process was dependent on organisational staff involved in process and their knowledge related to workplace wellbeing. They noted that including a broad range of perspectives from multiple teams was beneficial.
- **Understanding of options:** A range of EAP offerings are available to organisations, yet stakeholders noted that many had limited understanding of the options and instead select ‘off the shelf’ or standardised offerings.
- **Infrequent tendering:** Stakeholders recalled resistance among some organisations to re-tender due to long process. In some cases, stakeholders recalled how organisations remained with less satisfactory EAP providers for years.

“  
*My sense is that there’s a couple of off the shelf offerings of very uneducated workplaces but the sky’s the limit for the larger organisations who know what they want. (Stakeholder quote)*  
”

*“They’re making decisions based on a number in a spreadsheet as opposed to who might actually provide the best quality of service. It’s often price sensitive, not quality sensitive. So EAP in that self-referred market is a commoditised service. So, if you don’t have the best price, it’s very hard for procurement to justify. Why would they spend an extra \$50,000 on this program in this one when we can get the same product cheap here. It’s not the same product, it’s just in your spreadsheet it looks the same. So, it is hard to differentiate often without really having a relationship with that organisation being able to showcase because often it comes down to that spreadsheet and what numbers on the spreadsheet. It’s a frustration.” (Stakeholder quote)*

# Reasons organisations engage EAPs

Stakeholders noted that it had been expected of organisations of a certain size to have an EAP service. Stakeholders described a range of reasons that organisations engaged EAP providers, which related to on the level maturity of the organisation.

It is important to note that majority of medium to large organisations have historically had EAP services, so decisions tended to relate to maintaining engagement or suitability of EAP providers.



Diagram 2: level of organisational engagement with EAPs



# Service offerings

Stakeholders identified that EAP service offering has expanded over time:

- **Core offering:** Includes individual counselling available 24/7 to employees and family members, as well as crisis response.
- **Enhanced offering:** Broader range of employee support, as well as training for managers and employees.
- **Holistic offering:** More comprehensive and tailored training and organisational advisory and development to support mentally healthy workplaces. Legal, financial, nutritional support services were also available.

Despite the broad range of offering, a few stakeholders held the view that the majority of organisations selected the core offering due to limited awareness of options and budget restrictions.

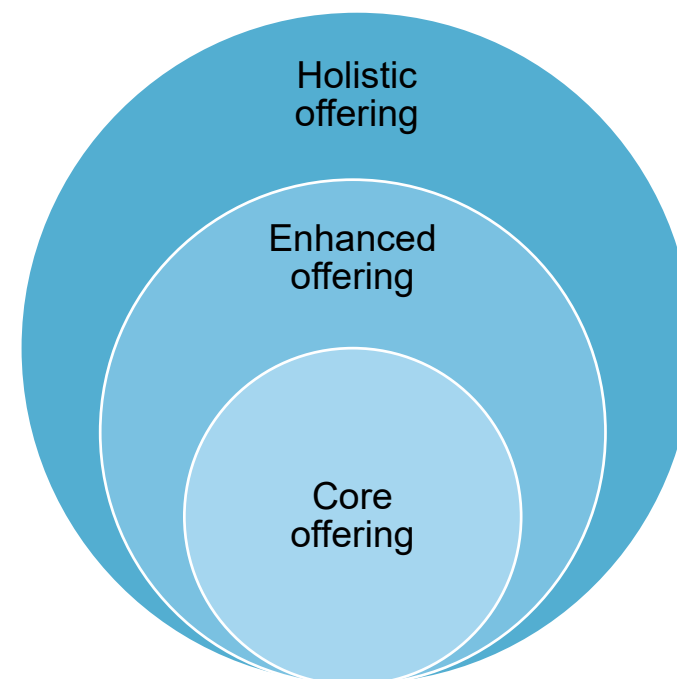


Diagram 3: types of EAP service offerings

“

*You'll find that all the sort of bigger players will offer more holistic self-referred service type as well which allows more employees to tap into the service not just those that really don't know how they're going to get out of bed in the morning. So, it's taking that construct of EAP being for mental health which it actually is an increasing need for, but it also has this other wing to it which is... that more lifestyle related practical support built into the core program.*

*(Stakeholder quote)*

”

# Service delivery approach

While most EAP services have traditionally been focused on the respond stage of mental health support, stakeholders identified that some EAP providers have begun working beyond this stage to provide more proactive and tailored services focused on:

- **Prevention:** Organisations that are actively trying to reduce or mitigate psychological risk. Prevention tends to be part of organisational wellbeing strategy to address staff turnover or workplace cultural issues. This could include psychosocial risk assessment tools, risk registers etc.
- **Promotion:** Promotion of a mentally healthy workplace through proactive strategies. One key example was supporting organisations to consider appropriate job design for wellbeing.



*Diagram 4: service delivery approach*

In contrast, other stakeholders felt this was a gap in the current EAP service offering. Although these stakeholders noted that there was an opportunity for EAPs to deliver more proactive and preventative support, they acknowledged the workforce issues and requirement to have clinical and organisational psychologists' perspectives to conduct this effectively.

# Awareness and promotion



There was consensus that more needs to be done to improve awareness and understanding of EAPs among employees. This related to improved information and internal communication about the purpose and scope of the EAP offering. Stakeholders also identified the importance of reinforcing the confidential nature of EAPs to ensure employees trusted the service.



While a few stakeholders felt that stigma to accessing mental health support had improved over time, other stakeholders noted that stigma was still apparent in many workplaces. According to these stakeholders, stigma still prevented employees from accessing EAPs with the perception that these services were 'embarrassing' or solely for those with mental illness. In some organisations, employees may associate EAPs with disciplinary action or a decline in work performance which have negative connotations and prevents employees for accessing EAPs for alternate reasons.



The manner that EAPs were framed within organisations was perceived to be fundamental to improve understanding and uptake. Stakeholders noted the need for EAPs to be framed as an opportunity get support, grow and improve wellbeing. As such, some stakeholders felt organisations should encourage dialogue about accessing EAPs and share positive examples. This would boost the reputation of EAPs and reduce the stigma to accessing support.



*People think EAP is "Oh no that's something for people with problems, like that's not something for me" so there's some things to be done to overcome some of those stigmas. Also there's some perceptions that EAPs aren't very helpful sometimes.*

*(Stakeholder quote)*



# Integration within organisations

According to stakeholders, the level of adoption, engagement and integration with the EAP was depended on the maturity level of the organisation.

Stakeholders referred to continuum of maturity as the organisation's willingness and capability to put strategic direction and actions in place to ensure mentally healthy workplaces.



*We call those organisations more partnering type of organisations where they will really engage for more full services and allow us into that conversation about what are your people issues, what are you trying to achieve and then trying to plug our program in to complement the other things that need doing as well.... it's very embedded. (Stakeholder quote)*



Diagram 5: level of integration of EAP services in organisations

# Utilisation

According to the stakeholders, the average industry utilisation rate was between 3-4%, with large variation between organisations.

Stakeholders attributed low utilisation to:

- Low awareness or promotion of EAPs within organisations
- Lack of understanding (i.e. misunderstanding that EAPs are not confidential)
- Stigma (e.g. self-stigma or workplace culture that discourages help-seeking)

In contrast, high utilisation was related to:

- Organisation or industry specific needs (i.e. high exposure to trauma)
- Low stigma (i.e. workplace culture that encourages help-seeking)
- Maturity of organisation (i.e. EAP service integrated into workplace wellbeing strategy)

The core service offering of individual counselling was reported to be the most commonly used services, with a few stakeholders who felt training was also commonly used.



*There's a huge breadth of what's covered by an EAP provider but EAP in its own right is known for the self-referred counselling service, and certainly for that type of service there is a growing demand as there's more mental health issues in society, that part of the service does grow and utilisation has certainly increased over time. I think the stigma around accessing services has really helped with that increased utilisation, but also EAPs where they traditionally own worked with sort of personal or work-related issues have also spread their wings a little bit within that self-referred modality to offer things around nutrition and sleep and career and finances and legal. (Stakeholder quote)*

*“(EAPs can) also has a number of proactive elements that engage with an organisation to support the organisation and managers in the moment of what they might be needing as well. So, they generally have a lot of content that’s available as a promotive senses and they provide proactive strategies as well to reach out to people who might need support or do training programs or do wellbeing checks or whatever it might be.” (Stakeholder quote)*

# Best practice

Four main themes were identified when stakeholders described best practice:

- **Responsive:** A key component of best practices identified by stakeholders, was the requirement of EAPs to be responsive and provide timely support.
- **Needs-led:** Stakeholders identified that best practice was customer-centric at the individual and organisational level, with services that were tailored and targeted to the needs of each employee and employer.
- **Clinical quality of care:** High-quality care with the appropriate evidence-based therapies or interventions delivered by qualified staff was perceived to be integral to best practice EAP services.
- **Compassionate:** Best practice included compassionate support to employees at the EAP provider and clinician level.

One stakeholder stated that best practice is dependent on outcomes that EAP providers are intending to achieve. For example, short-term supportive counselling requires a different model than supporting employees with mental health diagnoses.

“

*(Best practice is) responsive, understanding, compassionate. I think best practice for us in this particular industry is about responsiveness and about being able to meet the needs of complex clients in a way that makes them realise that we're putting them first and just giving that perception of care all the time, it's really, really important. (Stakeholder quote)*

”

“

*If they're just aiming to provide quick supportive counselling, then that's a really different model to if they want to be embedded and part of mentally healthy workplace strategy which again is different to providing a really effective crisis response. I think that the elements of best practice really do depend on the outcomes that EAP providers are aiming to give. Again if they're actually trying to help people with mental disorders then a completely different model of best practice and care as well. (Stakeholder quote)*

”

# Perceived effectiveness

Overall, EAP services were perceived to be an effective short-term intervention to address the high level of need for mental health support among employees. Industry stakeholders described EAPs as an important component of ensuring mentally healthy workplaces.

“

*The advantages and the benefits are huge. There's been various studies around the investment for that and looking at the average cost of an Employee Assistance Program versus the payoff when you look at all of those factors. There's good evidence to demonstrate that it's a good thing to invest in for your organisation. (Stakeholder quote)*

”

However, there were some differing views among stakeholders in relation to the extent and scope of effectiveness. One stakeholder noted that EAPs were predominantly effective for short-term outcomes and reducing stigma at an organisation level, however, they noted that there was scope for them to adapt service offering to provide more effective support.

“

*The more that we learn around what actually works within the workplace, the more we're realising that EAP's (are) kind of like mental health first aid training. It's good for awareness and reducing stigma but the evidence isn't sort of indicating that it's the panacea. The evidence is indicating that you can only get so much out of an EAP service. I think as the EAP industry are probably well aware and workplaces are starting to become more aware, they're going to have to evolve and I think that's a good thing. (Stakeholder quote)*

”



# Perceived effectiveness.

Stakeholders also identified several considerations related to effectiveness of EAPs:

- **Scope:** Most stakeholders' perception of effectiveness was dependent on the scope of the EAP offering. Although there is evidence to show that the core offering of EAPs is effective (i.e. short-term intervention via counselling), there is limited evidence to demonstrate effectiveness of broader service offering (i.e. training and organizational advisory).
- **Quality:** A few stakeholders also acknowledged that there could be variability in the quality of services delivered, which impacted perceptions of effectiveness.
- **Maturity:** A few stakeholders held the view that effectiveness was related to the maturity of the organization and the extent to which they integrated the EAP within the organization and other wellbeing initiatives.
- **Measurement:** There is no consistent approach to the measurement of effectiveness among EAP providers or organisations which makes the assessment of effectiveness difficult (discussed further in outcome measurement). One stakeholder noted that organisations required greater measurement of return on investment and value for money to consider effectiveness.

While stakeholders considered EAPs to be beneficial, most felt more could be done to improve their effectiveness and ensure they continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of employees and organisations.

*“I am confident that I have seen enough research that says, particularly those counselling services, can be effective. They can drive things like individual engagement, you can drive positive psychological benefit, those sorts of things exist in the evidence base. Referring back before like there are still some gaps in that though so I’m not clear on the effectiveness of programs in their entirety. I’m not clear on effectiveness of some of the individual services. I think on the whole my gut says that they’re beneficial but I think there’s more work to do to be sure of that, and to make sure that they can be the best and that they can help people at the right time.” (Stakeholder quote)*

# Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

The variation in monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes was linked to both the EAP provider and the level of maturity of the organisation. Across all stakeholders, there was minimal standards for reporting by providers in relation to these processes, and this was dependent on their capacity, capabilities and resources. Stakeholders noted that greater prioritisation of monitoring, evaluation and reporting would allow for improved understanding and focus on outcomes which in turn, encourage best practice. Stakeholders identified a range of improvements to these processes (e.g. greater opportunities for reporting).

“ Each provider member will do it slightly different. So you will find a range. At a minimum you'd expect satisfaction surveys to use post service which look at effectiveness rates, look at satisfaction rates and look at overall experience, so there's one metric there. A lot of organisations will do pre and post as well so they'll be looking at first session versus last session. (Stakeholder quote) ”

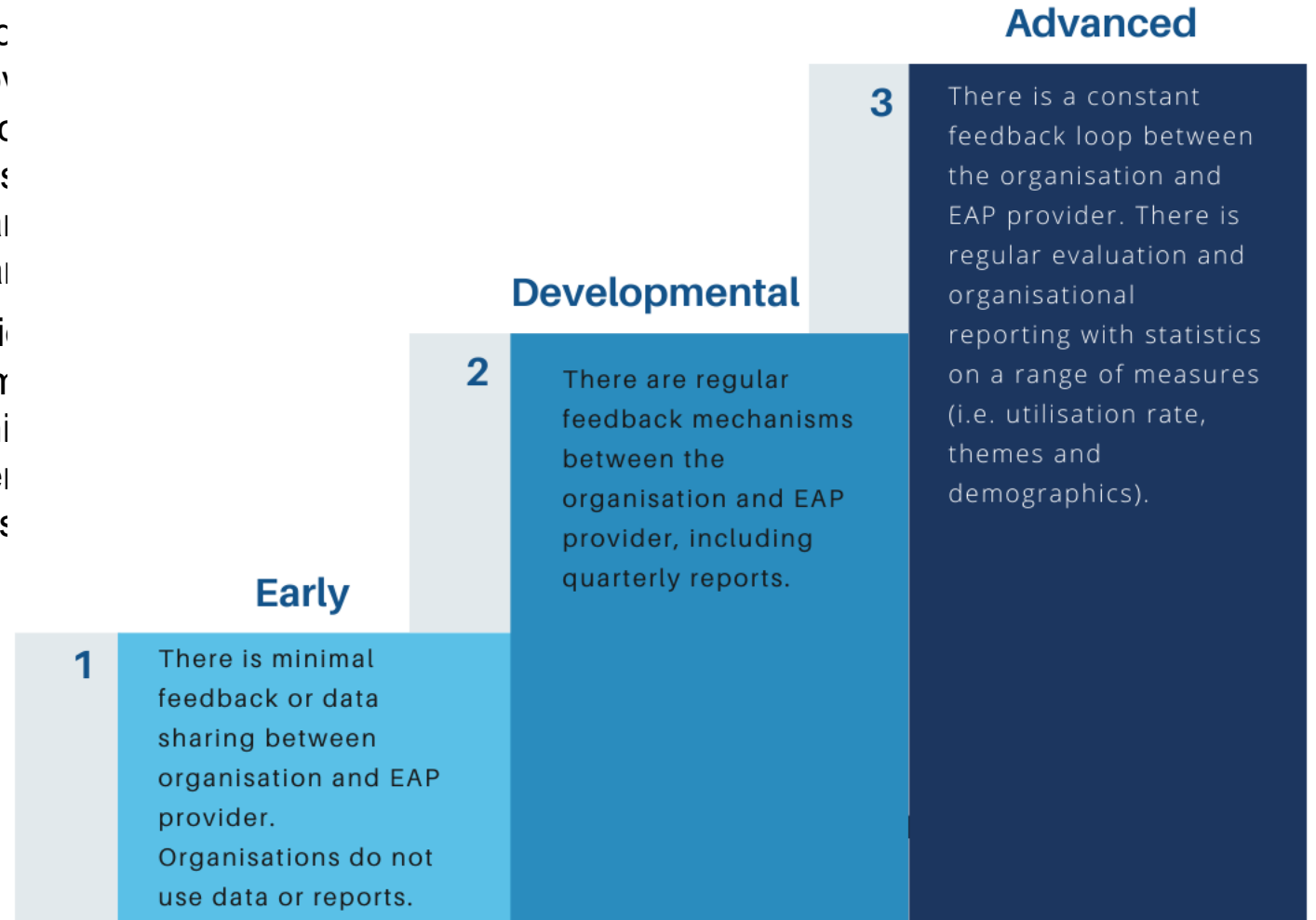


Diagram 6: Extent of monitoring, evaluation and reporting by EAP providers

# Outcome measurement

Stakeholders reported variation in the approaches to measure outcomes, with this dependent on the EAP provider and/or organisational preferences. Stakeholders described what outcomes were commonly and less commonly measured, as well as possible future directions for the EAP industry.

## Common measures

- Utilisation rate: Most common measure used by EAP providers and organisations
- Satisfaction rate: Commonly captured by feedback surveys

## Occasional measures

- Clinical outcomes
- Pre and post about level of functioning (i.e., self reported mood and work at the first and last session)
- Absenteeism and presenteeism
- Workplace outcomes (i.e., sick leave, staff turnover)

## Future directions

- Engagement rate: One stakeholder is in the process of developing an engagement metric that would capture broader components of EAP offering
- Workplace outcomes suite: A free industry-wide tool to measure absenteeism, presenteeism and effectiveness

# Resources to support best practice

## Common measures

The Productivity Commission (2020) identified gaps in resources in relation to employer guidance for EAP services, as well as minimum standards for EAP services and how these are evaluated. Since then, there has been greater focus on developing resources, guidance and tools to support best practice in the EAP industry.

Tools have included:

- EAPAA providers standards
- Principles for best practice
- Monitoring and evaluation\*

## Need for additional resources

While there are some existing resources, stakeholders identified requirement for more comprehensive information on:

- Procurement process
- Needs assessment
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Digital standards and cyber security

However, a few stakeholders were noted to be working on improving information available.

\*Comcare. (2021). Providing better practice Employer Assistance Program services

Comcare. (2021). Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for EAP counselling services [www.srcentre.com.au](http://www.srcentre.com.au)

Employee Assistance Professional Association of Australasia (2019). EAPAA Service Standards

*“I don’t think anyone really knows where to find information on what EAP services provide. I think those bigger businesses who have been doing it for a while are quite familiar with it. There’s a whole other bunch of industries and small to medium size workplaces who wouldn’t have a clue. They wouldn’t even be aware that they can negotiate an individual contract with a local psychologist. I think there’s information that is really needed that the EAP discipline can probably start to produce for themselves.”*  
(Stakeholder quote)

# Conclusion



# Strengths and weaknesses of the EAP industry

## Strengths

- **Responsiveness:** A key strength identified by stakeholders was the responsiveness of EAP services, which offer timely support to address workplace and employee issues.
- **Accessibility:** Stakeholders noted that a key strength was the accessibility of EAP services as they offer support at no cost to employees. Many stakeholders valued that EAPs removed common barriers to help seeking.
- **Well-established:** Stakeholders acknowledged that EAPs are established with existing infrastructure, workforce, systems, as well as resources to respond in a timely manner to address organisational and employee needs.
- **Well-informed:** Stakeholders reported that EAPs had strong knowledge related to workplace issues and employee wellbeing, as well as about understanding of evidence-based interventions.

## Weaknesses

- **Tokenistic:** According to stakeholders, some employees may view EAP services as tokenistic rather than a meaningful resource to support mentally healthy workplaces. This was related to the perception to some organisations had EAPs to 'tick-a-box'.
- **Quality control:** As highlighted by the Productivity Commission (2020), there was a lack of industry standards and guidance to support consistent and high-quality service delivery. Since then, several resources have been released, yet stakeholders identified the need for greater effort to address inconsistency of care.
- **Workforce challenges:** Recruitment and resourcing of staff was noted as a key challenge, with some stakeholders concerned about the trend towards hiring less experienced and/or unqualified staff. This was seen as a key weakness given the need for suitable and experienced staff to appropriately address a range of workplace and employee issues.
- **Strategic direction:** A few stakeholders discussed the need for greater strategic direction within the EAP industry if they are to continue to adapt to the changing context of workplace mental wellbeing.



# Opportunities and threats of the EAP industry

## Opportunities

- **Improved awareness:** Stakeholders noted that more work needed to be done at an organisational level to promote the service and improve understanding of the supports offered by EAPs.
- **Information for organisations:** Despite the recent publication of some guidance, stakeholders noted that there remain gaps in the information available to organisations, with further information to support organisations to best commission, utilise and monitor their EAP services required.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Stakeholders noted that further work is required to ensure this is consistent, systematic and undertaken regularly at an organisational and EAP provider level. One stakeholder suggested that there should be performance measures for EAPs, while another noted that more could be done to support organisations to conduct value for money or return on investment assessments.
- **Service offering:** Stakeholders stated that the service offering will need to continue to evolve to address changes within the sector as well as organisation and employee needs (discussed further in the next slide).

## Threats

- **Industry pressures:** High demand for service and customer expectations on very short turnaround times and restricted budgets was a key threat.
- **Standalone solution:** A few stakeholders reported concern that some organisations may view EAPs as standalone solution, rather than one service to support mentally healthy workplaces. Another stakeholder reported concern that organisations could use EAPs as a 'band aid' solution rather than addressing root causes of issues (e.g., bullying or management issues).
- **Competition:** As noted earlier, there has been an increase in stakeholders involved in the workplace wellbeing sector which has led to greater competition for EAP providers. As such, it was seen as vital that more is done to improve awareness and understanding of EAPs, as well as ensure services are utilised and delivered to a high standard.
- **Reputation:** A few stakeholders reported reputational concern due to the inconsistency in quality of EAP services and misconceptions about EAPs among employees.

# Future directions

Historically, the EAP industry addressed a gap in the mental health ecosystem through the provision of mental health support to employees. In present time, EAPs are a well-established and valuable offering to many organisations and employees, with the service offering adapted over time to better address the needs and expectations of organisations and employees. However, stakeholders stated that the EAP industry will need to continue to evolve as the workplace wellbeing sector progresses. Given this, stakeholders discussed potential future directions for the EAP industry:

- **Needs-based approach:** Many stakeholders held the view that offerings could be more tailored to needs of organisations.
- **Holistic approach:** All stakeholders emphasised an opportunity for a more holistic service offering, with greater focus on prevention and promotion.
- **Partnership approach:** A few stakeholders noted the potential for greater partnership working with organisations, including a more consultative and advisory role.

As discussed throughout the report, stakeholders provided several examples of EAP providers delivering more holistic services that expanded beyond the respond stage. As such, there is evidence to suggest that EAP industry is progressing in these directions envisioned by the industry stakeholders. However, stakeholders noted that the more mature organisations more commonly procured holistic, tailored, needs-driven EAP services, which were viewed as more effective overall. Instead of limiting more advanced EAP services to mature organisations, most stakeholders explained that more could be done to educate and support organisations at the procurement stage to better commission EAP services that were targeted and tailored to their organisational and employee needs.

*“I think it’s really just that you just need to be making sure that the service that you’re offering is relevant to the people that you’re offering it to and that it’s kind of going to work for what they need. I think there is something in that being like the underlying principle and the same is true of all psychological treatments. It would be unethical to offer something to somebody if you didn’t think it was going to help them, so it really is about making sure that you know what people need and you’re able to meet that with your service. I kind of feel like that’s probably at the heart of it.” (Stakeholder quote)*