



Employee Emotional Health:

Its Relationship with a
Thriving Business



Promoting and **supporting**
employees' mental health isn't simply
good for business, it's a **necessity**
to achieving a productive, healthy,
engaged and loyal team.

Mental **Wellness** and Mental **Health** Care

What does it mean to be healthy?

We can go to the doctor and measure our blood pressure, weight and cholesterol. When we don't feel physically well, we can take medication or have doctors perform surgeries. Our society places a high value on physical well-being, so we don't hesitate to seek help for aches, pains and illnesses.

But what about our mental health? What do we do when feelings of stress, anxiety or depression interfere with our ability to live healthy and productive lives? Where do we go? Can we even talk about it? While our society has embraced preventive and therapeutic treatments for physical illness, we still struggle to seek help for mental illness. The challenge is twofold: Addressing mental health is often stigmatized and navigating mental health care services is challenging.

Unfortunately, there's a misconception that mental illness means a person has a major psychological disease like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. But did you know the most common mental health issue in the United States is anxiety? Anxiety affects 40 million adults, or 18 percent of the adult population and is very treatable, like many other mental health concerns commonly faced by adults. However, the stigma associated with mental health care and the confusion of how to access help can be a major barrier.

If businesses want to break down these barriers in the workplace, a good place to start is through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). With a focus on identifying and assisting employees with personal problems that may be standing in the way of realizing their fullest potential, EAPs can be a valuable resource for employers and employees alike.

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What Is an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

An employee assistance program (EAP) is a work-based benefit to help employees resolve personal problems that may be adversely affecting their professional and personal lives. Traditionally, EAPs addressed issues like alcohol or substance use disorders; however, most now cover a broad range of areas such as child or elder care, relationship challenges, financial or legal problems, wellness matters and traumatic events like workplace violence and natural disasters.

Free, confidential services are at the heart of EAP. Many EAP services either directly or indirectly address mental health with the provision of short-term, solution-focused services to help employees better manage common life stressors such as anxiety, depression, substance use, grief and loss, or other common issues. In addition, EAP may also provide training and/or consultation to managers and supervisors on organizational concerns.

Typically, employees make an initial contact with their EAP provider via phone and often are offered counseling sessions either face-to-face or via phone or web-based platforms. EAP services are usually made available to all employees as well as the employee's spouse, children and non-marital partner living in the same household as the employee.

Employers offer EAP at no cost to employees, either with a stand-alone EAP vendor or an EAP that's bundled with other employee benefits such as medical, life or disability. The cost to employers is dependent on several factors, including the number of sessions employees may access, delivery methods for services and on-site services such as trainings and critical incident responses.

As society is moving toward greater awareness and acceptance of mental health care, the demand for services such as EAP continues to increase. Navigating the myriad of EAP choices that best fit an organization's needs can be confusing at times, but gaining a clearer understanding of the value of EAP can help employers make an informed decision when selecting an EAP provider.

However, while EAP services have been around for decades, it's still one of the more misunderstood health care and employee benefits services.

Mental Health and COVID-19



When COVID-19 swept across our country, we were hit with a myriad of confusing and, at times, troubling requirements for the safety of ourselves and our communities. COVID-19 changed the way we do many of our routine tasks - work, school, shopping, worship and socializing. The uncertainty of our “new normal” often intensified feelings of anxiety, stress and depression. We were grieving the loss of our old way of life and even the deaths of family and friends. Employers were consumed with transitioning to a new way of working while trying to maintain organizations’ financial stability. But what about the emotional well-being of the employees? How were employers going to support the mental health needs of their teams in the middle of a pandemic?

Even in these unprecedented times, EAPs provided the stability and support people urgently needed. The BayCare EAP team was ready with a broad network of providers connected to HIPAA-compliant platforms for virtual counseling sessions. Our clinical educators facilitated webinars to EAP partner organizations to offer coping skills for the isolation and uncertainty so many were feeling. Oftentimes these webinars provided a platform for employees to “see” their colleagues and talk about how they were working through life’s challenges. They offered homeschooling tips, complimented DIY haircuts, showed off their pets and shared recipes. They were there for each other. And the EAP was there for them.

It was in these moments when people found the true value of EAP. It’s a resource to help you navigate life’s challenges. We made so many changes to our normal way of life, so connecting online became part of the change. Before COVID-19, only a handful of employees engaged in virtual counseling visits. But since March 2020, approximately 40 percent of BayCare’s EAP counseling sessions were conducted virtually.

While it’s likely many employees will go back to face-to-face counseling sessions once the option is more readily available, the virtual counseling option could very well become part of our permanent “new normal” after COVID-19.



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EAP: Misunderstood and Misused

By Employers

EAP services, like mental health care in general, are often misunderstood and therefore misused. Benefits costs continue to rise, so employers may be hesitant to invest additional funds into a service that could be viewed as a luxury, duplication of an existing service or not of benefit to the bottom line. But in a fast-paced world with ever increasing personal and professional demands, now is the time to take a proactive approach to employees' emotional well-being.

In the past, EAP was thought to be a tool to manage negative behaviors or situations – substance use disorders, traumatic incidents or significant insubordination. This punitive and reactionary use of EAP was a barrier to individuals seeking a positive approach to attending to their mental health needs. By not understanding the value of EAP as a resource for preventive care similar to medical or dental insurance, employers aren't likely to promote the services. Many organizations may have an EAP that's rarely used because of the stigma of accessing mental health services or basic lack of awareness of the program.

In addition to the misconception of EAP serving as a disciplinary tool, employers often don't understand how EAP benefits go well beyond crisis support. Accessing EAP benefits typically begins with a call to a helpline which is answered 24/7 by mental health professionals. While this is certainly a beneficial feature, it can easily be misunderstood as simply being a crisis hotline. When asked when you should call EAP, employees may answer, "You call EAP when your boss makes you or when you're thinking of suicide." But EAP professionals want employees to reach out before their emotional well-being deteriorates to the point where they're contemplating suicide. Yes, EAP can assist in times of crisis but, like any other health care service, preventive care is the preferred path.

The lack of understanding and awareness of how EAP works is often directly related to the cost of the program. Many organizations choose to utilize EAP products that are packaged with other employee benefits, such as medical, life and disability insurance. The cost of those EAPs are embedded in the cost of other products or offered for a few pennies per employee. While these may be cost-effective options, they may not meet the specific needs of an organization's culture or the nature of the work performed. These "free" EAPs have gained popularity but unfortunately are highly underutilized, as employees and even the employers don't know about the program.



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Employers who aren't regularly engaged with their EAP may only call on the EAP when faced with a crisis, and this is a troubling time to learn that a free or low-cost EAP isn't a good fit for the organization. A large EAP affiliated with an out-of-state insurance carrier may not have a personal connection with the therapists in their network who provide the on-site services in times of crisis, or will they likely know the culture of the organization and the community. These services are typically also outside the scope of contracted deliverables for a free or low-cost EAP product, so the organization will likely incur significant expenses for the crisis response.

Free and low-cost EAPs don't help employers take a proactive approach to addressing specific stressors among the workforce. Because many of these EAPs don't provide employers with utilization reports, employers can't detect patterns within the employee population regarding anxiety, substance use disorders, family and relationship challenges, or legal and financial concerns. Without this data, employers may not understand their employees' needs.

By Employees

If human resources and employee benefits professionals don't understand the benefits of EAP services, it's no surprise that employees aren't accessing EAP in times of need. But even if employees do know EAP services are available, they still may be hesitant to reach out.

Concern about confidentiality is one of the biggest barriers for employees. Many employees question if their EAP use is truly private. Is the EAP going to tell my supervisor I'm seeing a therapist? Will my anxiety be noted in my personnel file? Will I be passed over for a promotion because I called EAP? Unfortunately, some employees are reluctant to use their EAP benefits and miss out on an improved quality of life because they don't think EAP services are confidential, in addition to the stigma associated with reaching out for help.

Privacy fears and lack of information can be another hurdle employees need to overcome to connect with EAP. If the program isn't well known in the organization, employees won't know how to access the services. In some cases, employees may believe they need to contact Human Resources or a supervisor to request an EAP referral. Still others think they must be on the company's medical insurance plan to use the EAP. And if the EAP is part of the medical coverage, employees may worry their EAP records will be reported along with all other medical claims. Large health care providers are more likely to recommend that EAP clients access their mental health benefits instead of EAP, which increases the cost of the employer's health care plan while keeping the EAP at its free or low-cost rates.

Confidentiality is at the heart of EAP, and employees who utilize EAP services voluntarily are assured of that right. However, in some instances an employer may mandate EAP services for an employee in cases of positive drug test results or employee behavioral problems that have a negative impact on the work environment. But even in those situations, the EAP provider won't disclose clinical or personal information to the employer. With a signed release, the EAP will only notify the employer that the referred employee completed their mandated counseling.



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Value of EAP to Employers and Employees



Who Is BayCare?

BayCare is a leading not-for-profit health care system in West Central Florida. With 15 hospitals and hundreds of other locations, BayCare is also one of the largest private employers in the area with nearly 29,000 team members (employees). BayCare Behavioral Health is the largest full-service, community-based health care system in Tampa Bay, offering services in Pinellas, Hillsborough, Polk, Pasco and Hernando counties. We provide a full range of comprehensive services for mental health and addiction issues tailored to meet the needs of children, adults and families.

How EAP Helps Organizations

Mental health matters – at home, at work and in the community. Although it's a personal issue, the effects of an individual's mental health and well-being can be far-reaching. Research from the Center for Prevention and Health Services estimates that the workplace costs of mental illness and substance use disorders range from \$79 to \$105 billion each year. But a modest investment in EAP can result in a positive financial return for the organization.

When employees face stressful challenges outside of work, they bring that stress to work. Even if they show up every day, they may not be engaged in their work. A study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found investment in EAP led to a 33 percent reduction in sick leave usage, a 65 percent reduction in work-related accidents and a 50 percent decrease in grievances. By taking advantage of EAP services to make positive changes in their emotional well-being, the employer also benefits through increased productivity. EAP can help employers realize additional direct cost savings by reducing medical, disability and workers' compensation claims, and even indirect business cost losses related to poor work performance.

It's not just the bottom line that benefits from investing in employees' emotional well-being. Organizations invest a great deal of resources in recruiting and hiring the best people, so providing access to a robust program of mental health services helps leaders take care of their teams both individually and collectively. EAP services may also include workshops and professional development trainings to help strengthen teams and work through communication challenges.

For employers looking for a more hands-on EAP product, a program offered as a stand-alone service is far more beneficial than the free or low-cost EAPs included with other insurance coverage. Furthermore, EAPs based in the same region as the organization are much more familiar with the community resources and can provide more personalized service and faster response in times of crisis. Stand-alone EAPs want employers to promote the EAP services and are active partners in that endeavor.

The International Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) endorses the Workplace Outcome Suite (WOS) as an EAP best practice for measuring and evaluating work-related outcomes of EAP services. In the 2018 WOS report, more than 24,000 EAP cases were analyzed in an international study of the impact of EAP on five outcomes.

EAP Impact

Employees were surveyed before engaging in EAP services and about three months after receiving services. Key findings include:

Work **absenteeism**
decreased by

27%



Work **presenteeism**
was reduced by

26%



Life **satisfaction**
increased by

23%



Workplace **distress**
decreased by

14%

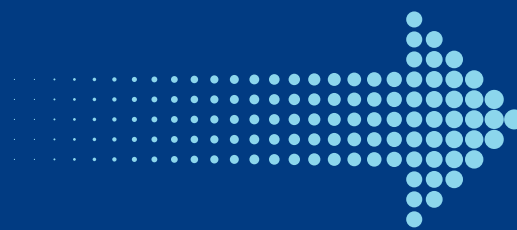


Work **engagement**
increased by

8%



The WOS study found that the amount of lost productive time over a three-month period of employee distress was reduced by 39 hours as a result of EAP utilization, primarily from reducing the amount of unproductive time on the job.



This translates to a

\$3.37

return on investment
for every

\$1.00

invested in EAP.

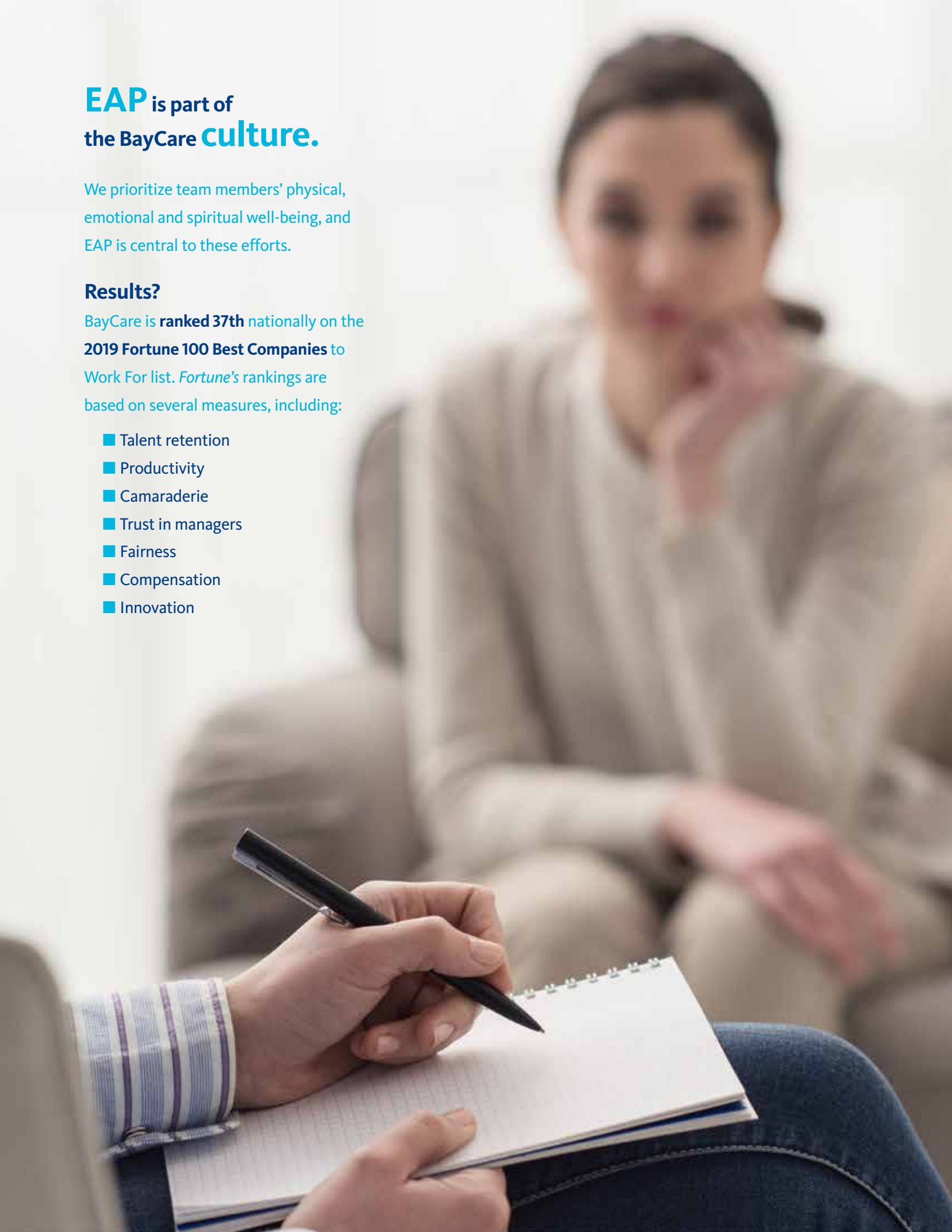
EAP is part of the BayCare culture.

We prioritize team members' physical, emotional and spiritual well-being, and EAP is central to these efforts.

Results?

BayCare is ranked 37th nationally on the 2019 Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For list. *Fortune's* rankings are based on several measures, including:

- Talent retention
- Productivity
- Camaraderie
- Trust in managers
- Fairness
- Compensation
- Innovation



How Is BayCare EAP Different?

BayCare began its EAP services in 1992 by taking care of those who we're most close to – our own team members. Today, nearly 29,000 BayCare team members and their dependents are supported by the BayCare EAP, and we take pride in serving our fellow health care professionals. In addition, nearly 70 businesses, non-profit organizations, municipalities, colleges, faith communities and independent private schools throughout Florida are currently utilizing BayCare's suite of assistance programs. BayCare was the first free-standing EAP provider in Florida to receive national and international accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) and has maintained this prestigious recognition since 2002.

The BayCare EAP model is based on nationally accepted standards for short-term, solution-focused counseling to help better manage challenges which may otherwise have a negative impact on employees' abilities to realize their fullest potential. Our philosophy is to deliver an EAP service that provides employees with the tools necessary to build resilience in a fast paced, dynamic society. Employees can build the resilience necessary to meet unexpected challenges, stay engaged in their work environment, and achieve an overall positive productive and personal experience in their work endeavors.

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**EAP Works
If It's Used.**

4.5 – 6.5%

National average
EAP utilization

14% BayCare team
member
EAP utilization

We don't want a company to pay for a service they may never need, so we'll take the **time** to get to **know** the company, its **culture**, its **goals** and its **challenges** before providing an EAP proposal.



Employees who call the BayCare EAP

are not only connected with an experienced mental health professional, they're talking to someone who lives and works in their same communities.

We have a professional and personal interest in doing our best to ensure our EAP clients receive the highest quality of care.

BayCare EAP team members are experienced in dealing with crisis situations, both through in-person and telephone communication in BayCare offices, as well as at work/school sites, and have been specifically trained in critical incident response models and management. This training and experience encompasses incidents ranging from threats of harm to self or others, to counseling employees and students to deal with grief, to working with victims of natural disasters. We employ the Employee Assistance Professional Association's recent suggested approach to dealing with victims of traumatic events. This approach includes extensive consultation with the organization's leadership from the site of the event and subsequent tailoring of post-incident services to meet the specific needs of those affected by the trauma.

For organizations seeking a more hands-on approach to supporting employees' emotional well-being, a local EAP provider can be an effective partner. As the largest community-based provider of behavioral health care in Tampa Bay, BayCare supports employers with a local EAP option tailored to meet each organization's needs and staffed by local mental health professionals who live and work in the communities they serve.

As a local EAP provider, we know our providers, the treatment facilities and the local resources. Your EAP provider should be able to assist you with the specific needs of your company and have regular contact with you. It should be able to provide trainings, management consultation and critical incident debriefings and assist with management referrals and drug testing policies. It should provide yearly utilization reports and assist you in promoting and increasing, rather than avoiding, utilization of the program. And these are precisely the things the BayCare team provides to its partner organizations.

And since each organization is unique, so are our EAP services. We tailor the deliverables to meet those needs. Some companies may need more on-site workshops and trainings while another organization may need more on-site critical incident responses.

We don't want a company to pay for a service they may never need, so we'll take the time to get to know the company, its culture, its goals and its challenges before providing an EAP proposal.

While some of the value-added services like the number of workshops or number of employees served may vary, each and every EAP partner organization will have access to the same level of professional care. Employees who call the BayCare EAP are not only connected with an experienced mental health professional, they're talking to someone who lives and works in their same communities. We have a professional and personal interest in doing our best to ensure our EAP clients receive the highest quality of care. An employee who calls our EAP may also be the electrician, police officer, nurse or bank teller who cares for us and our families. Our EAP team has a personal and professional familiarity with the school systems, government and social services agencies, and health care services beyond the reach of the EAP.

We want to keep doing what we do best – serve our local communities with firsthand knowledge and a passion for doing what's right.

Since the key to engaging employees in EAP services is regular and personal interaction, a local EAP is better positioned to engage with the organizations it serves. Unlike national EAPs, when a company requests a workshop, training, management consultation or on-site critical incident response, BayCare will send a member of our EAP team to the company – not a provider in their database who may have never had contact with the company. The leadership of the companies we serve have the personal cell phone numbers of EAP leadership and can call on them at any time for support. On several occasions, a company has needed on-site services following a traumatic incident and they're relieved that a familiar face is now in their offices providing support in a stressful situation. Most employees may never call the EAP helpline, but it's our hope that they'll participate in an on-site workshop or training conducted by a member of our team. When they can personally meet an EAP professional, it can demystify mental health care and help break those barriers to care.



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When an employee calls our EAP helpline, we'll give them the name of local, licensed clinicians in our network. Our providers are more than names in a database. We know our providers, we visit their offices, we have regular conversations and we share knowledge with one another. We have high standards for our providers, but we also support their professional development by holding intensive trainings just for the therapists in our network.

We go this extra mile because we want to give our EAP clients the best match when they call us. Since we know our providers well, we'll give employees the names of three or four therapists who are a good match for the client. Many of the large, national EAPs will email an employee a list of 20 or more local therapists. Imagine the stress of identifying the right provider from a large list when you're already feeling overwhelmed with life's challenges.

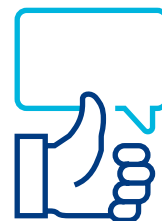
What sets EAP services apart from most other health care services is the philosophy that EAP is here to empower the individual to utilize the resources that best fit their needs. EAP is there to help the employee identify those resources and chart a personalized course to get them to their end destination of emotional well-being.

Empower Your Employees

As the importance of mental health is more recognized in society and the stigma associated with mental illness is starting to decrease, bringing that spirit of acceptance into the workplace can be part of a holistic approach to employee health. Embracing EAP as a resource to empower employees to take a proactive approach to their emotional well-being benefits not only the individual but the organization.

As the scope of EAP continues to expand and employees' needs go beyond counseling services, there's a unique advantage in talking with someone who lives, works, studies, worships and plays in the same area. BayCare EAP doesn't strive to be everything for every business everywhere in the United States.

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**We want to partner with you to empower
your employees. Contact us at
EAP@BayCare.org
to discuss a customized solution for
your business.**



[BayCare.org/EAP](https://www.baycare.org/EAP)

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