



EVOLVING EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR A YOUNG WORKFORCE

Going beyond standard EAPs to offer pet insurance and much more...

by DAN POTTERTON

Every year employees seem to have unique new requests for their employers, from standing desks to nap pods at work. What's next – pet insurance? Actually, yes.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) have been around in different capacities since the early-to-mid-1900s and originally tackled occupational alcoholism. EAPs now give employees access to short-term counseling and referral services to keep workplace populations happy, productive and successful.

Modern workplaces, however, have changed and evolved dramatically

since EAPs first emerged, and employee insurance plans now often fail to cover the full range of employees' needs in a way that meets their preferences. Familiarity with the resources offered by more robust, independent EAPs will help brokers connect employers to providers and keep businesses ahead of the pack, support employees with the best services available and deliver benefits in an appealing, convenient way

AN EVOLVING WORKFORCE

The rise of robust EAPs is due in part

to the presence of younger employees in the workplace. Millennials are hitting their stride and bringing a new energy and approach to work, affecting everything from workspace preferences to communication style. Combined with older employee populations, this multi-generational workforce is changing not only the way employees approach their work, but also the way employers approach insurance and benefit offerings.

With a younger workforce also come changes to EAPs. Baseline counseling services offered by employers' health insurance carriers are no longer

enough. Today's employees are open about asking for assistance and interested in services that will help them achieve their desired work-life balance in ways they find palatable. An independent EAP familiar with the latest trends answers this need by providing childcare, housing search help and even student loan coaching through mobile technology and on-demand delivery. Brokers, too, need to be aware of evolving EAP services and workplace preferences to help companies recruit and retain dedicated, productive young employees.

NEW WAYS TO COUNSEL

EAPs have traditionally offered counseling models that use short-term telephonic assistance or face-to-face sessions to address employees' behavioral needs. With changes in technology and shifting delivery preferences, a top-of-the-line EAP provider will display service solutions that address individual requirements. Want to access services online or provide peer support after a workplace incident? A receptive EAP offers customizable, confidential resources that best meet a customer's needs.

EYE-CATCHING SERVICES

For younger workers, multifaceted programs that appeal to a variety of needs reign supreme. In fact, included in modern, stand-alone EAPs are a wide range of service areas that are more attractive to incoming workers than what is typically offered through employer health insurance plans.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

More and more, young employees are looking to their employers to help balance their jobs with personal lives and recreation, and employers are looking to brokers to provide an EAP that fits the bill.

Recognizing emerging work-life trends such as child and eldercare services, aid with housing searches in trendy neighborhoods, and pet insurance – a relatively new but massively popular fringe benefit offered by thousands of employers – can give brokers the advantage, especially as Millennials and others continue to struggle with student loans, health care access and civil liberties.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Whether it's a walking meeting or lunch break spin class, the younger workforce is always on the go. EAPs with an active finger on the workplace pulse can go further than a standard, insurance-provided EAP in offering services like wellness coaching, on-site health screenings and online health guides that help employees live a more active, health-conscious lifestyle. Delivered through a mobile app? Even better.

Wellness isn't just physical, either. Millennials are, as a whole, more likely to pursue counseling for mental health issues, workplace stress or relationship challenges, leading to an increased use of EAP-provided counseling. Yet, while stigma surrounding mental health or gender issues continues to subside, shifts away from face-to-face counseling emphasize a need to ensure EAP providers offer easily obtainable information resources online.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

College graduates continue entering the workforce with increasing amounts of debt, yet lack the same amount of financial education as those who came before them. EAPs that offer financial planning and consulting services are vital to fostering a dedicated, well-informed workforce for all stages of life.

Current trends show EAPs offering financial services such as budget management, student loan coaching, credit report review and tax-related education—all vital services for a generation that could use a little extra help navigating the world of loan repayments and 401(k)s.

THE INTERNET OF THINGS

Because social media is more ingrained in our lives than ever before, EAPs with a strong digital presence and internet-savviness appeal to a culture of Snaps, likes and shares. Platforms like Facebook even give users the ability to connect directly to providers and relevant information through videos, messaging and "call now" options. Brokers would do well to pay special attention to EAPs that are integrating app and SMS functions into service delivery, as well as those that prioritize positive affirmation in their messaging and communications.

GOOD FOR THE WORKER, GOOD FOR THE BOSS

Employers are constantly looking for ways to recruit top candidates and retain them for extended periods of time—not always easy in today's high-turnover culture. Brokers who offer extensive EAP services with many of the customizable options previously described can help employers find invaluable resources guaranteed to attract new employees (and keep them in-house). An up-to-date EAP benefits the workplace by reducing absenteeism and presenteeism while increasing retention.

NEVER STOP EVOLVING

The Millennial workforce—and very soon, Generation Z—is causing major changes in the world of insurance offerings and EAPs, with more changes still to come as successive generations join the working world and tech innovations advance. It's crucial brokers keep up with EAP and other benefit trends, offering employers the resources they need to stay competitive and recruit the best of the best in a changing marketplace. Young employees are interested in services that will give them the greatest support for both mind and body in ways they're comfortable with, and brokers with a strong EAP product stand the best chance of offering current and future generations the benefits they desire most. ★



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