

FOCUSING ON THE JOB

EAPs AND KEEPING BRITAIN WORKING



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Foreword

The health of working-age people — and mental health in particular — has never been under sharper policy focus. Sickness absence is at a record high, with stress a leading cause of long term absence. Poor mental health has reached crisis levels among young people, and many employees are leaving work on health grounds well before retirement. Against this backdrop, it has become even more important for employers to support staff throughout their careers, and the rapid growth of the EAP sector underlines their critical role in doing so.

It is striking that concerns about personal relationships and families feature so prominently among reasons for contacting EAPs — a reminder that people bring their whole selves to work. Employers and employees alike benefit when there is a safe space to ‘park’ their anxieties and access expert help.

The sector does, however, face inevitable challenges in meeting rising demand for counselling, particularly as a stretched, post-pandemic NHS struggles to achieve parity in its treatment of mental and physical health. This creates additional pressure on employers, many of whom feel they are being asked to take responsibility for problems they did not create.

A forthcoming government review, led by Sir Charlie Mayfield, is examining how to keep more people in work for longer, with a strong emphasis on reducing health-related job loss. Early findings point to the importance of employers taking a more active role in prevention, early support and helping staff back into work after absence. For EAP providers and employers alike, this signals growing recognition that workplace-based provision is not just a ‘nice to have’ but an essential part of improving the health of the working population.

— **Sally Wilson**
Head of Wellbeing Research
Institute for Employment Studies

Introduction

The Get Britain Working and Keep Britain Working initiatives have fixed the spotlight onto the relationship between work and health.

In spite of the rewards — both financial and personal — staying in work appears to have become more difficult and maybe even less attractive. One in five of all people of working age in the UK now report having a work-limiting health condition: up by two million since 2019. Around 2.8 million people of working age are said to be off work with a long-term illness; and in 2023, 53% of these cases involved mental health issues — a 40% increase from 2019.

There are important jobs to be done. We need to make workplaces healthy, supportive places to be, so more people can stay in work, so they are less likely to become unwell, and find it easier to return when they are. Because while workplaces have become better and better at making quality products, at providing the best services, they don't make for healthier or happier people.

Employee Assistance Programmes have played an increasingly critical role over the past decade as more employees have looked for support for their mental health, to help them deal with the kinds of issues — with their relationships at home and at work — that impact on their ability to work. As this latest survey of market trends shows, EAPs have become a pillar of organisational health in the UK. EAP services are now an option for more than half of UK employees and demand keeps on rising.

The role of EAPs is still under-estimated. What would the picture of mental health in the workforce be like without the 24/7 professional advice provided, and the immediate access to counselling, if those hundreds of thousands of enquiries and counselling sessions had to be provided solely by the NHS?

With the UK's challenges in mind, it's vital that we, as EAP providers, get the offering right. The findings in this report confirm the impression that EAPs have changed in significant ways in the past five years. The market has grown, and a major part of that growth has come from the expansion of EAP services: how the EAP has become a 'one-stop shop' wellbeing solution, a provider of online GP services, financial wellbeing sessions, advice and campaigns around neurodiversity and menopause. At the same time, rises in EAP usage levels are being celebrated as an indication of positive awareness and engagement.

On the one hand, it's a tribute to the impact of EAPs. Employers trust the professionalism of their EAP provider. But the shift in attitudes has had a serious effect on the ability of EAPs to focus on their core strengths, the quality of clinical services and delivering the best clinical outcomes. EAPs were set up to have a positive effect on the mental health of the workforce, for employers and employees, and not as a profit-making scheme.

Our aim should be to reduce usage levels of EAPs and move away from the use of EAPs as an emergency service. That means working with employers to identify and address particular wellbeing issues; being clear about what makes for 'good work' and a healthy workplace both physically and psychologically; looking at job design and workplace cultures; and how that environment can keep people in work and attract others back from long-term absence.

Through collaboration with employers and focusing on their essential mission, EAPs can play a central role in reversing trends in economic inactivity in the population.

— **Karl Bennett**
chair, EAPA UK (Employee Assistance Professionals Association), www.eapa.org.uk

Five key findings

1

The UK EAP market is valued at more than £194 million — up from £118 million in 2023.

2

EAPs supported more than 186,000 employers in the UK in the past year (compared with 105,000 in 2023) and were available to 18.675 million employees. That means more than half of all UK employees have access to an EAP.

3

623,750 employees contacted EAP providers in last year. A growing reason for contact is among parents concerned about the mental health of their children.

4

Employees using EAPs are increasingly expecting to access professional counselling. An estimated 1,115,500 counselling sessions were delivered to employees in the past year. 91% of people contacting an EAP were referred for counselling (up from 68% in 2023). EAP providers, on average, deliver five sessions per employee case.

5

EAPs have become ‘wellbeing providers’. Almost half have added more than five additional wellbeing services to their EAP offering in the past five years. And more than half are now using non-human clinical interventions.

The data

The findings are based on submissions of data from 13 of the UK's largest EAP providers, providing an indicative picture of trends in terms of usage.

Data was provided by UK members of EAPA UK between March and August 2025. The information relates to the previous 12 months of company activities in 2024.

The figure for the number of organisations that providers work with includes membership bodies and benevolent funds as well as employers, and EAP schemes delivered indirectly to employers via a third party.

The number of employees able to access an EAP means the total number of employees, not solely full-time employees, and includes EAP schemes delivered indirectly to employers via a third party. It does not include the access provided to family members via EAPs; or students whose university has an EAP; or policy holders of insurance schemes where an EAP is included as part of the insurance cover.

The number of people who have contacted the EAP only includes those accessing specific core EAP services by telephone or online — not web hits or use of apps.

Data on people offered counselling refers to the total number of individual counselling 'cases' opened in the period, both 'single-session' and 'multiple session', including online counselling and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy cases delivered online.

The number for counselling sessions delivered includes all those delivered within EAP contracts, and all modalities (in-person, telephone, video, online CBT).

'Red flag' cases are those identified by the EAP professional handling an enquiry as involving an employee at risk of committing suicide.

EAP revenues is the total figure for all EAP schemes sold; it excludes all non-core EAP activity and insurance schemes provided to employers where an EAP is an 'add-on' feature. It does include EAP schemes delivered indirectly to employers via a third party.

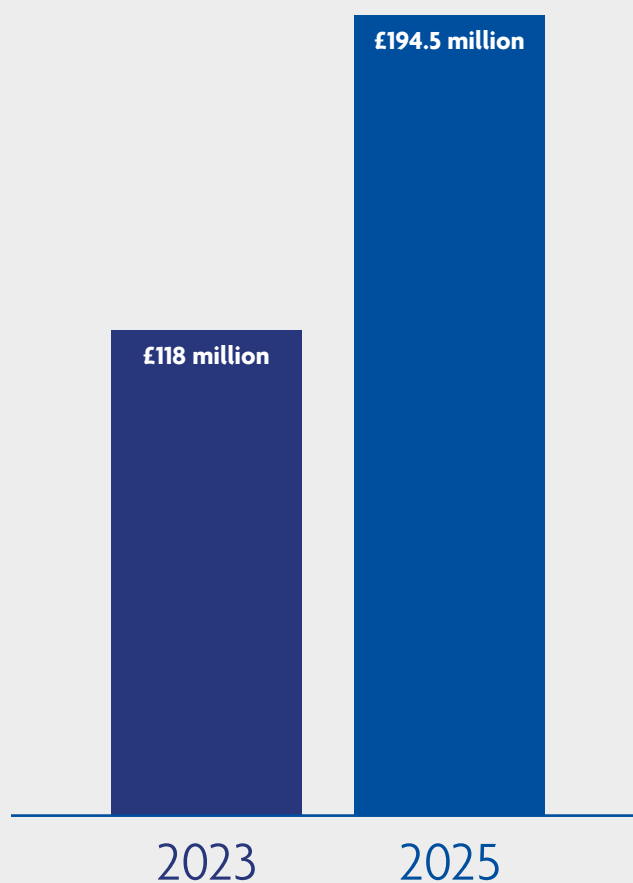
Analysis and comment

Growth

The UK EAP market continues to expand, and quickly. The sector is valued at more than £194 million, up from £118 million in 2023. A key driver has been the commitment to employee wellbeing and a recognition at board level of its fundamental role in organisational performance. This has meant specific allocation of budgets by boards for broader EAP services — not just clinical services but additional add-on services to support wellbeing such as online GPs and advice on finances, neurodiversity, menopause etc.

A quarter of providers have a revenue from their EAP services of between £3 and £5 million, another quarter of between £5 and £7.5 million.

EAP market value in the UK

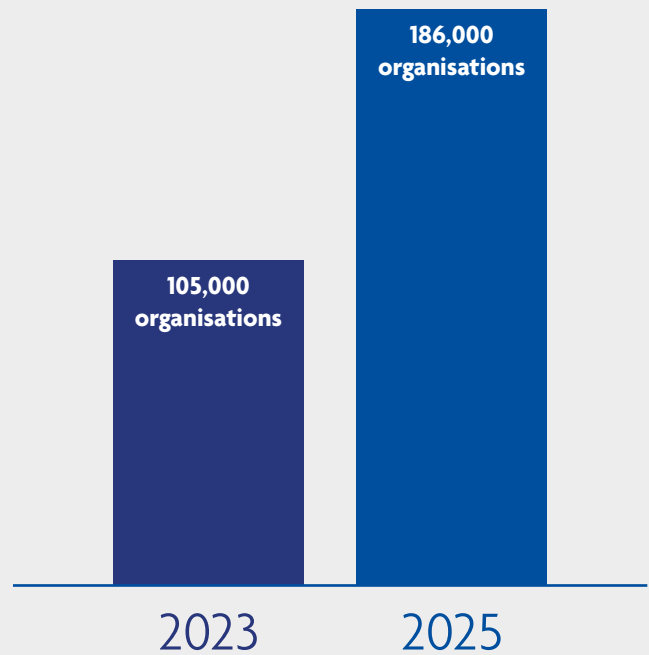


More than 186,000 employers in the UK offer an EAP (compared with 105,000 in 2023).

The past two years have seen a growing number of medium-sized and smaller employers adopting EAPs. The rise has also been caused by the combination of the fall-out from the Covid-19 pandemic and growing levels of awareness of mental health and the impact of long-term sickness absence. More organisations are also now adopting EAPs as a standalone service rather than as part of their health insurance package.

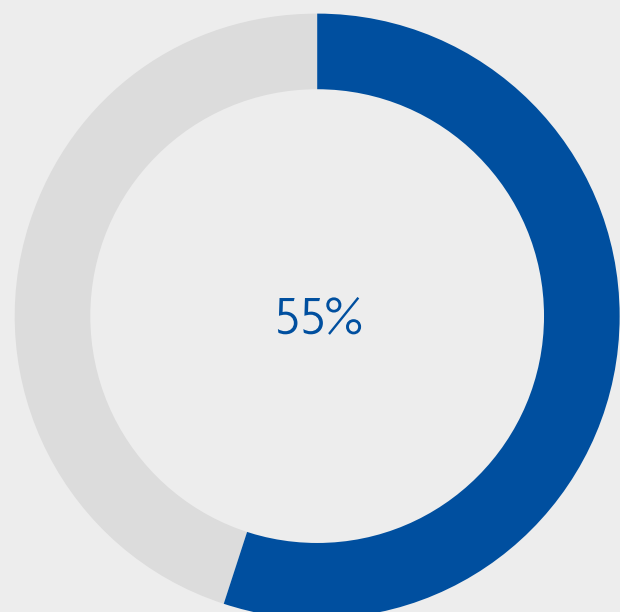
62%, the majority of EAP providers, have between 250 and 2,000 clients. Supporting public sector employers is a specialism for around a third of providers (where public sector clients make up more than half of their business).

Employers offering an EAP service



According to the estimated figures, the majority of UK employees now have access to an EAP (18.675 million members of the working population of 34.13 million). A quarter of EAP providers are supporting between 500,000 and 1 million employees, and another quarter between 200 and 500,000 employees.

The proportion of UK employees with access to an EAP



Changing causes for concern

An estimated 623,000 employees contacted EAP providers in the last year (translating to a usage figure of 3.34% in terms of the total number of employees with access).

The most common, specific reasons for contacting EAPs are:

1. Relationships at home
2. Relationships at work
3. Concern about the mental health of children
4. Finances
5. Physical health

Anxiety among working parents is a growing issue. A report by Deloitte in 2024 (*Mental health and employers: the case for investment*) suggested 46% of working parents were concerned about their children's mental health — and that those worries were costing employers £8 billion each year through parents taking time off work, reducing their working hours and leaving jobs.

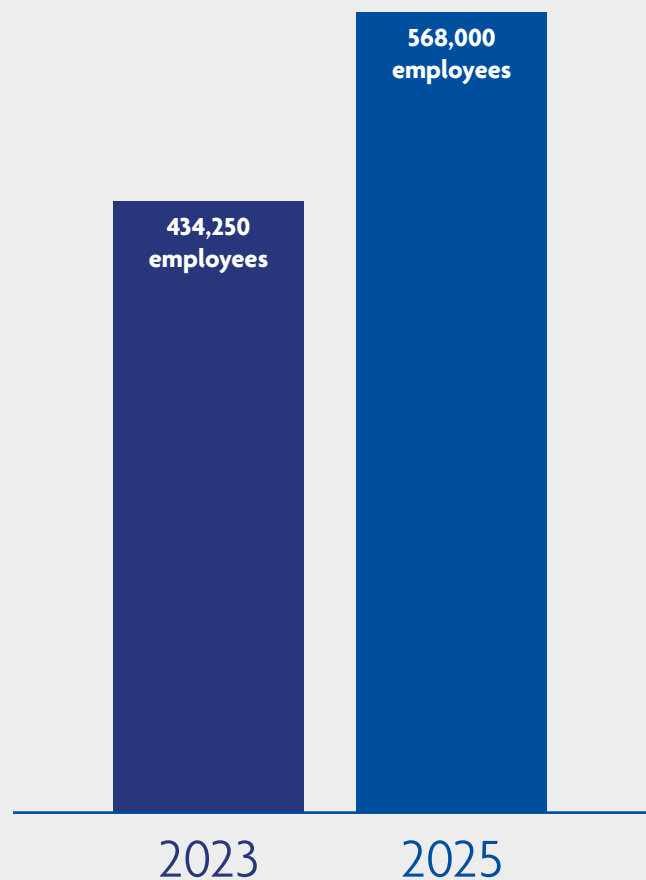
Issues with addiction to alcohol and gambling (the original focus of why EAP services were set up) are now one of the lowest ranked reasons for contact.

Counselling continues to be offered in unrestricted ways by EAP providers. 568,000 employees were offered counselling in the last year.

In one year, more than one million counselling sessions were provided to employees. On average, each employee received five sessions of counselling. 23% of EAP providers delivered between 50,000 and 100,000 counselling sessions, and 23% between 20,000 and 50,000.

EAP counsellors continue to be faced with 'red flag' cases involving an imminent threat to life: more than 1% of cases came with a red flag, equating to more than 6,400 crisis situations in the last year. 15% of EAP providers reported red flag levels of over 3%.

Number of employees offered counselling in past year



Changing services

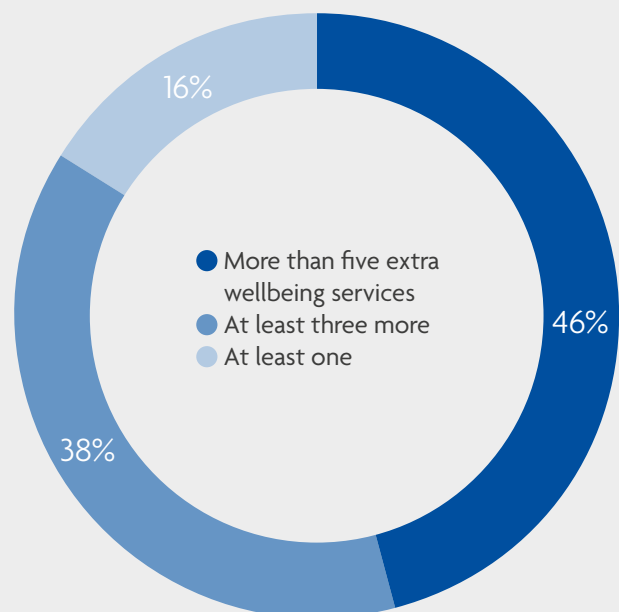
EAPs have become wellbeing service providers, extending the traditional core offering to include online GP access, financial wellbeing support, physiotherapy, diet and nutrition and tailored advice in areas such as neurodiversity and menopause.

Attitudes to the adoption of non-human clinical interventions (based on AI and digital systems) have split the sector. More than half of providers are using some level of non-human clinical interventions — but overall, the approach is cautious. For the great majority of EAP providers, the rise of AI has yet to have had any effect on access to human clinical interventions and services (15% admit to a “limited effect”).

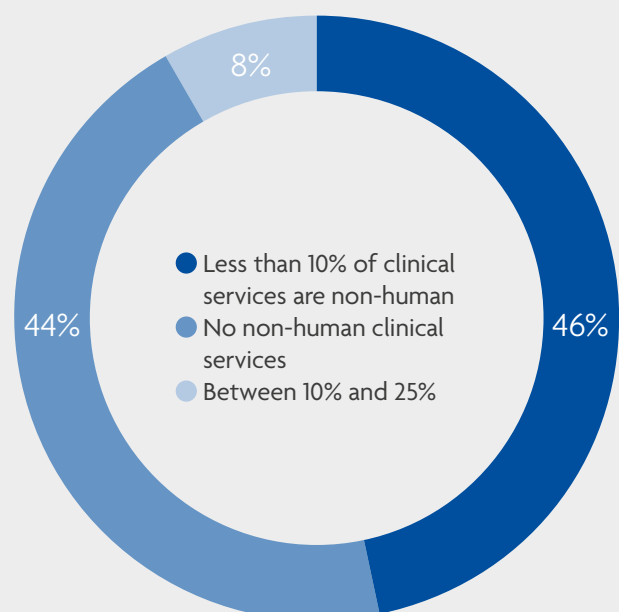
Growing awareness and demand for psychological counselling in society generally has meant challenges in recruitment and retention of counsellor resources. Almost half of providers have found it more difficult to recruit associate/affiliate counsellors. The main causes appear to be: expectations of higher salaries; a greater focus on private practice; and more opportunities to offer counselling services to clients via online providers.

2024 included negative press stories around EAPs, access to counselling and confidentiality. Among EAP providers, 38% believed there had been a limited impact on the confidence of clients and customers using services; 8% a significant impact (and 54% no impact at all).

EAPs adding wellbeing services



EAPs adopting non-human clinical interventions





The most recent NHS England figures suggest one in five children aged 8 to 16 now have a mental health disorder, up from one in eight in 2017. This significant rise may be a factor in why many parents use EAPs to discuss their children's mental health alongside their own.

Deloitte's 2024 report, *Mental health and employers: the case for for employers to invest in supporting working parents and a mentally healthy workplace*, identified parents' concerns for their children as a major issue, as well as the potential for impact on work performance and retention. Time constraints, feelings of guilt, navigating financial pressures and setting boundaries between work and family life all contribute to feelings of a lack of control. Almost half of the working parents taking part in the survey said they were concerned about the state of their children's mental health, and half said this had impacted on their work performance. One in 100 working parents who had left their job said it was due entirely to the mental wellbeing of a child, wanting to find a role closer to home or looking for more flexible work routines.

There is clearly an important and growing issue here that employers and society as a whole needs to address. More parents are using EAPs because they are struggling to find support anywhere else, and we also found that only 26% of parents felt the support provided by their employer was adequate for themselves and their children.

In general, employers need to ensure they are listening, that they understand the needs of parents and the challenges they are facing. They also need to pay more attention to the specifics of work practices and pressures, flexible hours and work location; and consideration for what practical support would be most useful for parents in their role, how they can make the most of the time they do have to spend with their children.

— **Elizabeth Hampson**
Partner at Deloitte
(leading on health policy and health innovation strategy)



The surge in numbers of young people dealing with mental illness is being talked about as an epidemic. So it's no surprise this trend is being reflected in the enquiries to EAPs.

We are hearing more stories of how parents are taking time off work so they can support children, because otherwise there's no support out there to help. For all the mounting pressures on children that have come with social media and other media — the images and standards of who they should be, what they should look like — it's the environment at home that sets the context for how those pressures are dealt with.

There are some essential pillars to good mental health: the need to feel safe, to feel like we belong, and to feel in control. When parents aren't feeling those things — because of so many uncertainties in their lives, some of them the result of what's happening at work — then young people pick up on that. They sense the insecurity. And at the same time they're faced with so many choices, too many choices, and the nagging demands of social media to be the same, do the same as others.

It can be hard to understand why we're so on edge. Surely times were far harder in other times, like during the Second World War and the nights of bombing raids. But the important difference was that the fear and anxiety had an obvious cause, the fear was something shared. Now everything is so much more fragmented. The way we live, our ideas and identities. Fears and our problems are just ours alone and they might not even have a clear or particular source.

What can employers do? The tax restrictions involved mean organisations can't use EAPs to support family members directly — which is frustrating for the EAP advisors and counsellors who want to help. But employers can help build resilience among parents themselves, who then pass on those feelings of stability and control. With any support offered by employers, it has to be empowering for parents, that doesn't focus on what parents are doing wrong, like 'parenting classes'. Programmes have to be focused on building resilience and self-belief.

Therapies in themselves can't fix people (and approaches like CBT and talking therapies aren't always the best fit for children anyway). The problems are still going to keep coming, requiring another fix. Instead we have to give people the tools to deal with things as they come along, helping us to understand how we can be in control of how we respond to situations, of what we think and feel. If we learn to attach the right emotion to a situation then we can deal with anything.

— **Alison Knowles**

storyteller and therapist at Subconquest Cognitive Therapy
(and author of the Ollie and his Superpowers series)



The UK is facing a sharp rise in economic inactivity, largely driven by long-term sickness. Recent government analysis shows that economic inactivity is increasing ten times faster than the growth of the working-age population, with 2.8 million people currently out of work due to ill health. This trend presents serious risks to productivity, public finances, and social cohesion. In response, the Government's Get Britain Working initiative aims to reverse this trajectory by increasing employment, reforming support systems, and integrating health and skills services.

However, the scale of the challenge is considerable. Many employers lack the tools, training, and cultural readiness to support staff with complex health needs. Frontline managers, in particular, report barriers such as unsupportive workplace cultures, limited flexibility, and restricted access to occupational health resources. While the initiative includes promising interventions, its success will depend on structural reform and sustained collaboration between government, employers, and health providers.

EAPs are increasingly recognised as a vital part of the solution. The 2025 EAPA report values the sector at £194 million, reflecting growing demand and the expansion of EAPs into broader wellbeing services, including support for mental health, financial stress, neurodiversity, and menopause. The report figures highlight the growing role of EAPs in early intervention and crisis prevention, particularly in response to rising mental health-related absences. Crucially, EAPs help fill gaps left by overstretched NHS and public services, aligning closely with the Government's goals of reducing long-term sickness absence and re-engaging economically inactive individuals. However, for EAPs to fully support Get Britain Working, they must be embedded within broader workforce strategies. This includes training managers to use EAPs effectively, embedding wellbeing into organisational culture, and ensuring equitable access across sectors. Without this, EAPs risk being underutilised or seen as peripheral rather than a strategic part of workforce planning.

— **Dr Adrian Wright**
Director of iROWE and Associate Dean at UCLan
(University of Central Lancashire)



The UK is facing several interlinked challenges around long-term sickness and economic inactivity. Rising levels of multi-condition ill health are making it harder for people return to work and coupled with economic inactivity, continues to reduce workforce participation. The current welfare system may inadvertently discourage re-entry into employment, and support services for the long-term sick remain limited. Discrepancies in official statistics can hinder effective policy responses, and regional disparities mean deprived areas face a “double burden” of poor health and low employment. Additionally, the work capability assessment system faces ongoing criticism for being flawed and unfair.

EAPs play a supportive and complementary role in the context of the UK Government's Get Britain Working initiative, which aimed to reduce unemployment and increase labour market participation. While not formally part of the initiative, EAPs contribute by addressing personal and professional challenges that can prevent individuals from entering or remaining in work. By offering confidential support services — including mental health counselling, financial advice, and legal guidance — EAPs help employees manage issues that might otherwise lead to absence, reduced productivity, or job loss.

For individuals returning to work after periods of illness, unemployment, or caring responsibilities, EAPs provide emotional and practical support to facilitate a smoother transition. This aligns with the initiative's broader goals of improving job retention and integrating harder-to-reach groups into the workforce. EAPs also reduce pressure on public services by intervening early and preventing the escalation of health or social issues. They may also assist employers in managing workforce challenges such as absenteeism, performance issues, and return-to-work plans.

Overall, EAPs may enhance workplace resilience and wellbeing, supporting the overarching aims of Get Britain Working by helping individuals sustain employment and contributing to a more productive and inclusive labour market.

— **Holly Blake**

Professor of Behavioural Medicine at the University of Nottingham
(and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society)

About us

EAPA UK — the Employee Assistance Professionals Association — is a not-for-profit organisation that represents the interests of individuals and organisations concerned with employee assistance, psychological health and wellbeing in the UK.

Members include external and internal EAP providers, purchasers, counsellors, consultants and trainers working in the field of employee health and wellbeing.

Our mission is to promote the highest standards of practice and the continuing development of employee assistance programmes (EAPs) in the UK and the Association exists to:

- Support and promote the EAP industry in the UK.
- Promote the development of the employee assistance profession.
- Develop, maintain and apply standards of practice, guidelines and a code of ethics to members.

UK EAPA was established in 1998 and works beyond the EAPA global standards that are adapted local to the UK market; this makes the UK EAPA Standards of Professional Practice the only credible set of standards to which EAP providers operate.



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EAPA UK