Employee assistance program guideline

**Acknowledgement**

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We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia’s first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the lands and waters on which we rely. We pay respect to Elders past and present of the lands where we conduct our work and recognise their ongoing contributions as the first educators on the land now known as Victoria.

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1. Overview

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a free, short term, and strictly confidential counselling service available for VCAA employees to elevate and assist with overall well-being and job satisfaction by providing accessible resources and support to address personal and workplace challenges. The EAP offers counseling services over the phone, video, and in-person to assist employees in navigating their concerns. The VCAA recognises that personal issues can affect an employee's well-being and performance. The EAP aims to empower employees to perform at their best by serving as a valuable resource for tackling a variety of issues, contributing to sustained overall wellness.

The EAP also plays a crucial role in cultivating a healthier workplace environment. By aiding employees in managing stress and addressing personal and work-related challenges, the program actively contributes to an atmosphere that supports well-being. Through its provisions, the EAP becomes an integral part of enhancing job performance and fostering a positive work experience for employees.

This policy applies to all employees within the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). For the purposes of this policy, the term 'employees' encompasses VCAA employees of the direct workforce, as well as any individuals or groups undertaking an activity for or on behalf of the VCAA, including:

* all employees (fixed term, casual, sessional) employed under Ministerial Order No. 1451 – Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority employees (Employment Conditions, Salaries, Allowances, Selection and Conduct) Order 2023 (referred to as "The MO")
* Board members

1. Objectives

The objectives of this guideline are to:

* promote the overall well-being of employees, including their mental, emotional, and physical health
* provide confidential and accessible mental health support, including counselling and therapy services
* promote healthy lifestyle choices and provide resources for physical fitness, nutrition, and general wellness
* extend EAP benefits to family members of employees
* assist employees in achieving a healthy work-life balance to reduce burnout and improve job satisfaction.
  1. Benefits

The benefits include:

* improved mental health and well-being of employees
* reduction in absenteeism and presenteeism
* enhanced workplace productivity and morale
* lowered stress levels and better work-life balance
* support for employees facing personal and work-related challenges
* reduced stigma surrounding mental health issues in the workplace.

1. Principles
   1. Confidentiality

Confidentiality helps to encourage employees to seek assistance without fear of their personal issues becoming known to their employers. Employees need to trust that their interactions with EAP professionals are confidential.

* 1. Accessibility

Accessibility includes providing many ways to access services, such as through telephone, video, or in-person counseling. Accessibility ensures that employees can use the program when they need it, regardless of their location or circumstances.

* 1. Professionalism and quality of care

EAP providers are licensed and qualified professionals, and the services offered are evidence-based and effective in addressing employees' needs, providing support and guidance.

* 1. Prevention and intervention

EAP is designed to provide both preventive and intervention services. Prevention involves promoting overall employee well-being and mental health through educational resources and wellness programs. Intervention focuses on addressing specific personal or workplace challenges and providing assistance to resolve issues that affect an employee's well-being or job performance.

1. Roles and responsibilities
   1. The employer

* actively promote awareness of the EAP among employees and encourage to seek help when needed
* be proactive in addressing these concerns with empathy and offering assistance through the EAP
* where appropriate, managers should refer employees to the EAP for professional assistance.
  1. Employees
* take initiative to seek assistance through the EAP when experiencing issues that affect well-being, job performance, or mental health
* understand and respect the confidentiality and privacy policies of the EAP
* actively participate in the counseling or support services provided by the EAP.

1. Access and confidentiality

The EAP is accessible 24 hours, 7 days a week, providing all VCAA employees with up to 4 sessions to address personal and work related challenges. Notably, immediate family members over the age of 18 are also eligible to benefit from the program.

The EAP offers:

* flexibility to choose a time and location that works for you – over the phone, video or face-to-face
* provision for accessing specialist counsellors for Aboriginal, LGBTIQ and family violence matters
* all counselling sessions led by a psychologist or social worker with a minimum of 5 years in practice
* the option to speak to another counsellor if you are dissatisfied with the service.

The EAP service can provide advice and coaching on a range of issues such as approaching a difficult conversation with employees, managers and managing challenging team dynamics, leading through uncertainty and change, supporting employees at risk and managing the impact of mental health issues within the workplace.

These services are provided by Converge International, which is an independent organisation experienced in delivering these services in other workplaces. The VCAA funds this service as part of its commitment to health, safety and wellbeing. Employees can call Converge International directly on 1300 291 071 to make an appointment at a preferred time and location.

For more information on using the EAP, please read to the FAQs document [ Pages - Casual jobs (vcaa.vic.edu.au)].

1. Managing this guideline
   1. Authorisation

This guideline is issued under the authority of the Chief Executive Officer.

* 1. Accountability for the guideline

The owner for this guideline is VCAA Human Resources. The owner reports to the Chief Executive Officer on the management of this guideline.

The owner is responsible for:

* development and regular review of this guideline
* development of protocols, processes and guidelines to support implementation
* monitoring compliance of applicable employees, organisational units, and/or locations.
  1. Important dates

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| Date of adoption: | July 2024 |
| Date of last amendment: | July 2024 |
| Date of next review: | July 2026 |

1. Related documents

* VCAA drug and alcohol policy
* VCAA sexual harassment policy
* VCAA equal opportunity and anti-discrimination policy
* VCAA workplace bullying policy
* VCAA misconduct and unsatisfactory performance policy.