



**ZEVO HEALTH**

# The Gap in Trust & Safety: Why EAP isn't enough



# Why Trust & Safety deserve better than an EAP

Employee Assistance Programs, or EAPs, have been around since the 1930s, when employers provided support for employees suffering from alcoholism. Would you believe Macys developed the very first EAP to help white-collar employees deal with alcoholism. Today, EAPs are present in most large companies, and they provide a wide range of mental and physical health support, but the overall usage is low. For employees who work in Trust & Safety, monitoring egregious and non-egregious content, an EAP is not suitable ....

This ebook looks at the major elements of EAPs, how they work, and where their shortcomings are when you look at the requirements of Trust & Safety teams. We finish with an analysis of what we believe is needed to support Content Moderators, and the wider Trust & Safety teams, as well as how to ensure you are providing the very best for your employees.

## What is an EAP

According to Gartner, an EAP is a “benefit program that assists employees with personal or work-related problems that may impact their job performance, health and general well-being. EAPs usually offer free and confidential assessments, short-term counseling, referrals and follow-up services for employees.” EAPs provide services to employees dealing with various personal and work-related problems.

The market for EAPs is expected to reach [\\$9.4 billion by 2027](#), and there are over 800 companies providing these kind of services, with [97% of large companies](#) in the US providing an EAP to their employees. However, the usage of EAPs is low – various reports estimate utilization is anything from 3% to 7%, which fails to align with the global mental health epidemic happening.



## Global Mental Health Crisis

According to the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), 15% of working-age adults were estimated to have a mental health disorder in 2019, and globally 12 billion working days are lost every year to depression and anxiety, at a cost to the employers of US\$1 trillion in lost productivity. The [WHO](#) also estimates that 20 million days and billions of dollars of productivity are lost in the US due to mental health illnesses. [The World Economic Forum](#) reports that at any time, one in ten workers are out sick due to anxiety, burnout or depression. Mental health conditions are a [leading cause of disability](#) and significantly impact employees' lives and productivity.

Especially since the pandemic, burnout has become a major challenge in the workforce, with [57% of employees](#) report at least moderate levels of burnout. Burnout is linked to reduced productivity, higher absenteeism, and increased irritability, contributing to a toxic work environment and affecting overall company performance.

But why, if people are suffering with their mental health, and an EAP provides support, is usage so low?

## How EAPs Work

Before we talk about the utilization challenge, we first need to look at how EAPs work. Employees contact the EAP through various means such as a dedicated phone line, email, or an online portal. This initial contact is usually handled by an intake specialist or counsellor who assesses the employee's needs.

The intake process involves a brief assessment to understand the employee's issues and determine the appropriate level of care. This may include questions about the nature of the problem, its duration, and its impact on the employee's work and personal life. Based on the assessment, the employee is referred to appropriate services within the EAP or to external resources.

EAPs typically offer a limited number of free counselling sessions (usually between 3 and 6) with licensed mental health professionals. After the initial sessions are completed, follow-up services may be provided to ensure the employee continues to receive the necessary support. If long-term counselling is required, the EAP counsellor will facilitate referrals to external therapists or community resources.

EAPs provide crisis intervention in the event of critical incidents such as workplace accidents, natural disasters, or traumatic events affecting the workplace. EAPs also provide webinars, workshops and training for employees on a broad range of topics as well as wide selection of resource materials about wellbeing.



# Challenges with the Service

Due to the nature of the service EAPs provide, there are some challenges with the solution

## What do Employees Think of EAPs?

The [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#) carried out a great piece of US research with employees' views of their employer's mental health support. The results were interesting:



- About 1 in 5 say it is hard to find mental health care through their employer that is affordable, in network or available in a timely manner.
- Women, LGBTQ+ and young employees are often more likely than their counterparts to report it is hard to access mental health care through their employer.
- Nearly 3 in 5 (58%) employees who have employer-sponsored mental health care coverage say it is adequate. However, a significant group (29%) are unsure.
- Many (31%-46%) report not knowing how hard it is to access mental health care through their employer across various aspects such as location, in-network status, affordability or finding a provider with specific specialties, availability or personal background.
- Young adults (ages 18-29) are significantly less likely to say they are satisfied with mental healthcare insurance coverage versus older employees
- Fewer employees report being satisfied with their employer-sponsored mental healthcare coverage than their employer-sponsored health insurance coverage (66% vs. 78%, respectively.)

# Why is EAP Usage so Low

There are several reasons for the low uptake of EAP services:

- **Stigma** – Stigma around discussing mental health at work remains a significant barrier. Employees often feel uncomfortable sharing their mental health struggles, leading to a lack of support and increased burnout. The level of perceived stigma is often impacted by the leadership's view of mental health and the openness with which these topics are talked about in the organization.
- **Awareness of the Service** – Many employees are not aware of the benefits offered or how to access them – this lack of understanding is usually the second reason behind stigma to avoid the employer's EAP provider.
- **Short Term** – EAP services often provide short-term counseling, which might not be sufficient for employees with chronic or severe mental health issues. This limitation can deter employees from seeking help, as they might believe that EAP services won't provide the long-term support they need.
- **Scepticism of Effectiveness** – People may question how effective the EAP service will be given their concerns. This skepticism can be particularly pronounced if there are past negative experiences or hearsay regarding the EAP's effectiveness.
- **Too Busy** – A 2023 report by primary care service One Medical found that 45% of employees who did not seek mental healthcare [said they were too busy](#).
- **Younger employees** – Employees aged 18 to 29 are more likely to consider quitting due to mental health issues related to work compared to older age groups. They also report lower satisfaction with mental health coverage.
- **Gender and Sexual Orientation Challenges** – Women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and employees from minority backgrounds often face greater challenges in accessing mental health care through their employers. These groups are more likely to report difficulties in finding affordable, in-network, and timely mental health services.



# The Challenges of Using EAPs to Content Moderators

Many of our customers believe that Trust & Safety teams need specialized care, due to the nature of their work and the potential for vicarious trauma and burnout. There are several issues we have heard from market-leading organizations who have elected to provide a more specialized wellbeing service including:

- **Trauma Specialization** – Standard EAPs may lack specialists trained in dealing with trauma and vicarious trauma, which is critical for moderators exposed to egregious content.
- **Intensity and Frequency of Exposure** – The high frequency and intensity of disturbing content viewed by moderators can result in more severe mental health issues than those typically addressed by standard EAPs.

- **Comprehensive Trauma Therapy** – Long-term and specialized therapeutic approaches such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) and trauma-focused CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) may be necessary, which standard EAPs might not offer.
- **Burnout and Compassion Fatigue** – Content Moderators are at high risk of burnout and compassion fatigue, requiring specific interventions that standard EAPs might not cover.
- **Workplace Culture and Support** – The unique stressors of the Trust & Safety environment may require organizational changes and a supportive workplace culture, beyond what EAPs typically address.
- **Preventive Care** – There is a need for proactive and preventive mental health care strategies, including regular psychological check-ups and resilience training, which are not commonly part of standard EAPs.
- **Peer Support Programs** – Effective mental health support for Content Moderators often includes peer support programs where moderators can share experiences and coping strategies, which are not usually part of standard EAP offerings.
- **Confidentiality Concerns** – Moderators might be hesitant to use EAP services due to concerns about confidentiality and potential stigma, especially if the EAP is perceived as being closely tied to their employer.
- **Specialized Training for EAP Providers** – EAP counselors might lack the specific training required to understand the unique psychological impact of constant exposure to harmful content, limiting their effectiveness in providing adequate support.
- **Short-Term Focus** – EAPs typically provide short-term counseling, often limited to a set number of sessions (usually 3-6). This can be inadequate for employees dealing with difficult working conditions that require long-term therapy or speedy access to therapy.

- **Productivity Impact** - If EAP services are not available outside of standard working hours, it can be difficult for employees to find the time to attend sessions without impacting their work responsibilities, especially in Content Moderation roles where there are strict productivity guidelines in place.
- **Consistency of Care** - The quality of care provided by EAP counselors can vary widely. Inconsistent quality of services can lead to negative experiences, discouraging further use. Where employees want to revisit an issue, they may not be allowed, or not be able to access the same therapist.

## What Content Moderators Need

The Everest Group has developed a wellbeing best practice guidelines for the Trust & Safety industry, which includes 10 major requirements to ensure Content Moderator psychological health and safety. Their blog 'The Shift in the Wellbeing Horizon: The Critical Need for Outsourced Wellbeing Solutions in Today's Business Landscape', published in June 2024, documents their experience of the best practice in wellbeing solutions.



Figure 1- The Everest Group - Content Moderator Wellbeing Best Practice

## There are 10 key elements:

1. Wellbeing initiatives start even prior to hiring when moderators are tested for resilience along with clear job descriptions highlighting the impact of the job on their wellbeing. Most of the leading organizations mandatorily have robust training for all new joiners to enhance their resilience.
2. Access to individual and group counseling programs along with Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) with features including 24/7 support and virtual counseling. This is also complemented with onsite trauma and T&S-trained therapists who provide one-on-one support, especially during critical incidents.
3. Enforced wellbeing breaks and defined maximum limit on exposure to sensitive content.
4. Peer support groups focused on mental health and wellbeing.
5. In multiple cases, especially those including moderation of highly egregious content, enterprises mandate access to tooling such as blurring, resizing, access to transcripts, AI-based filter mechanisms, etc., despite the impact on the productivity of the moderators.
6. Several service providers also have trained managers to identify and support employees in distress.
7. Building a wellbeing-first culture at the organization with openness towards discussion regarding wellbeing.
8. Awareness of cultural differences among moderators while designing the programs (customizing the wellbeing modules for regions)
9. Testing and tracking the efficacy of the wellbeing program/ practices and leveraging the data to improve outcomes.
10. Providing post-exit support for moderators, such as access to counselors, EAP resources, exit opportunities, etc., up to one year of exit of the moderator.



## Conclusion

At Zevo Health, our entire focus is on the wellbeing of Content Moderators and the wider Trust & Safety team. Because of the specialist requirements of their roles, moderators need access to a wide range of services including preventative and ongoing support. We also know that the wider Trust & Safety, Recruitment and HR Team also need support hiring and ensuring the team is productive, well and happy.



**ZEVO HEALTH**

Empowering the psychological health and wellbeing of content moderation teams

[hello@zevohealth.com](mailto:hello@zevohealth.com)

[www.zevohealth.com](http://www.zevohealth.com)

