

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

1. **PURPOSE:** To establish policy and procedures for the Alaska VA Healthcare System (AVAHS) Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that provides assistance for employees with personal, financial, marital, or family problems.
2. **POLICY:** It is agency and AVAHS policy:
 - a. To offer employees assistance in resolving personal, family, marital, financial, and employment issues that may impact negatively on their job performance or conduct.
 - b. To recognize emotional illnesses as treatable health problems.
 - c. To make substance abuse assistance available.
 - d. To encourage employees who feel they may have a problem that affects their work performance to voluntarily seek information, counseling, or referral at the earliest stages.
 - e. To assure that no employee has job security or promotion opportunities jeopardized by a request for counseling or referral assistance except as limited by Title 2, Section 210 (c) (2) of Public Law 91-616, and Section 413 (c) (2) of Public Law (P.L.) 92-255, relating to sensitive positions.
 - f. To assure that the AVAHS does not condone employee activity that is contrary to law. When management has good reason to believe criminal conduct is directed towards or is potentially harmful to the person or property of others, the first obligation is to those persons or properties, and then to the employees involved.
 - g. To grant up to 1 hour (or more as necessitated by travel time or unusual circumstances) of excused absence for each counseling session, up to a maximum of 8 total hours, during the assessment/referral phase of intervention. These absences during duty hours for treatment must be charged to the appropriate leave category in accordance with law and leave regulations and VA Handbook 5011, Part III.
3. **RESPONSIBILITY:**
 - a. **The Director** is responsible for:
 - (1) Administering the provisions of the program,
 - (2) Reviewing procedures,
 - (3) Issuing policy statements, and
 - (4) Designating appropriate staff officials.

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b. **The Human Resource Officer** is responsible for:

- (1) Providing policy and regulatory guidance to program officials, supervisors, and employees, and is responsible for the overall administrative coordination of the program.
- (2) Coordinating the activities of various AVAHS employees and supervisors.
- (3) Advising managers and supervisors of the EAP and procedures for mandating referrals.

c. **Employee Health Service** provides Medical care of employees directed to the Employee Health Unit as described in AVAHS Numbered Memorandum "Employee Health Services."

d. **Service/Division Chiefs and Supervisors** are responsible for:

(1) Recognizing when employees are not fulfilling job performance and/or conduct responsibilities. When employees fail to fulfill job expectations, supervisors have a duty as well as an obligation to discuss with them the deficiencies, and to provide them with opportunities to correct the problems, regardless of their cause.

(2) Supervisors should be observant of work and/or behavior changes of assigned employees and ultimately refer the employee for counseling for personal problems which may be impacting negatively on performance, attendance, or other job-related factors.

(3) Document specific instances of unacceptable work performance, behavior, or attendance.

(4) Counsel the employee regarding poor performance or inappropriate behavior and provide information about EAP services if such performance or behavior appears to be caused by a personal or health problem.

e. **Employees** are responsible for his/her on-the-job performance and conduct. They are encouraged to seek assistance for medical, emotional, or personal problems. They are expected to correct problems identified by the supervisor, by accepting assistance offered, or seeking assistance of their own choosing.

4. **PROCEDURES:**

a. **Referrals:**

(1) Employees will be afforded a confidential assessment and referrals to appropriate resources. To assure the employee's privacy, EAP Consultants is available twenty-four hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-869-0276 or at www.eapconsultants.com.

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(2) **Self-Referrals**: Any employee may contact the EAP directly at 1-800-869-0276 to schedule an appointment. If the employee elects to contact EAP while on duty, the employee will obtain supervisor permission to be away from the work site and will request the appropriate leave.

(3) **Supervisory/Management Referrals**: Supervisors should conduct an interview with the employee focusing on work performance that is not meeting the employee's job performance standards or behavior that is inappropriate in the work place. The employee should be informed of and offered available counseling services if it is believed poor performance or conduct is caused by any personal or health problem that may negatively affect performance, conduct or well-being. When supervisory methods are not bringing about improvement in an employee's performance and/or conduct, the supervisor should consult the Employee Relations Specialist in the Human Resources Management Service for advice on how to proceed.

b. **Emergency Situations**: When an employee appears for duty with behavior that disrupts the orderly processing of work, or presents a danger to him/herself, other persons or property, the supervisor should take immediate action to ensure safety and direct the employee to the EAP toll free number for evaluation and referral. The supervisor may consult with the Employee Health Physician for medical advice. The action, including behavior, should be documented and the situation discussed with the Employee Relations Specialist in the Human Resources Management Service.

c. If the **Employee Health Provider** recommends, the employee be excused from duty, the supervisor is notified. The supervisor should grant appropriate leave if requested by the employee. In situations involving the need to get the employee off the premises immediately and the employee refuses to contact the EAP toll free number or Employee Health physician, or to request leave, the supervisor should consult the Employee Relations Specialist in the Human Resources Management Service.

d. **EAP Service**:

(1) The EAP toll free number makes Employee Assistance available on a twenty-four-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week basis.

(2) The EAP toll free line provides counseling referrals and assists in linking the employee with other community services.

(3) Initial counseling consists of not more than three (3) sessions per identified issue per calendar year. The EAP is not an ongoing treatment program. For extensive care, employees may be referred to community agencies, except when eligible as veterans, and may be treated by VA under veteran eligibility.

e. **Relationship to Disciplinary Actions**: In relating personal problems to performance and discipline policies and practices, it is important to consider non-disciplinary procedures aimed at counseling and rehabilitation. However, if the employee refuses to accept assistance offered through the program, or to otherwise correct poor performance or misconduct,

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disciplinary measures may be invoked on the basis of unsatisfactory job performance or conduct. Immediate disciplinary action may be warranted where there is an overt act of misconduct as a result of the employee's problems. Disciplinary action may be especially necessary when the employee occupies a position involving direct patient care. It is essential, however, for supervisory personnel to make contact with the Employee Relations Specialist in the Human Resources Management Service at the earliest practicable time to ensure an appropriate course of action is achieved in light of this and other personnel program requirements.

5. REFERENCES:

5 CFR, 792, "Federal Employees Health and Counseling Programs"

Privacy Act Law of 1974

Employee Health Services, dated March 19, 2009

AFGE Master Agreement, March 2011

VA Handbook 5011, Part III

VA Handbook 5019, Part II

VA Handbook 5021

VA Handbook 5019, Occupational Health Services Part VI, Employee Assistance Program,
dated April 15, 2002

6. RESCISSION: Numbered Memorandum 116/122-03, dated February 11, 2008.

7. OFFICE OF RESPONSIBILITY: Human Resources Management Service.

8. EXPIRATION DATE: Three years from the date of issue.



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Distribution: All Employees.