

## PROFILE 8

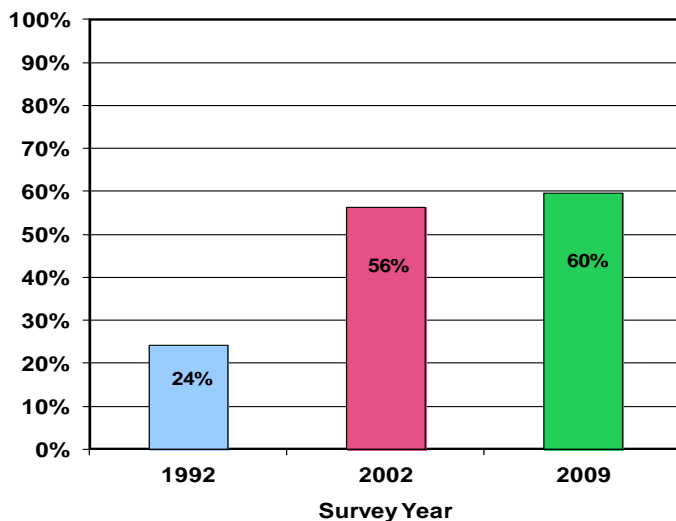
### Employee Access to Employee Assistance Programs and Financial Support

Three population-based surveys conducted in 1992, 2002 and 2009, examined the prevalence of addiction and mental health problems across Alberta's workforce. In 2009, *The Alberta Survey of Addictive Behaviours and Mental Health in the Workforce* assessed 2817 employed adults. This profile highlights the availability of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and financial support for employees dealing with an addiction or mental health problem.

#### **How many workers in Alberta have access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?**

As displayed in Figure 1, access to EAPs has increased over time. In 1992, EAPs were clearly not the norm, yet by 2009, 60% of workers identified having access to an EAP at their place of employment. When employers were queried about lacking EAP Services, nearly half claimed that their organization was too small to support that type of programming, while a large percentage of the remainder felt that EAPs were not a pertinent need (see Table 1).

**Figure 1: Proportion of Workers with Access to an EAP**



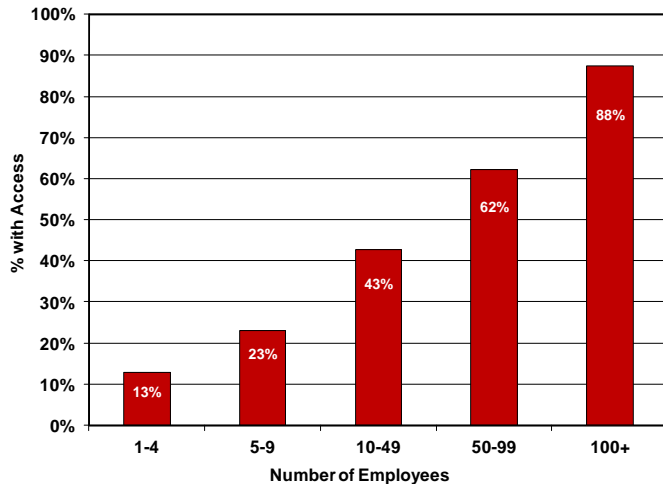
**Table 1: Employer reasons for the absence of EAP**

Reason	%*
Too small	44.5%
Not needed	36.1%
Unaffordable	18.3%
Scattered sites	8.4%
Other	15.2%
Don't know	16.2%

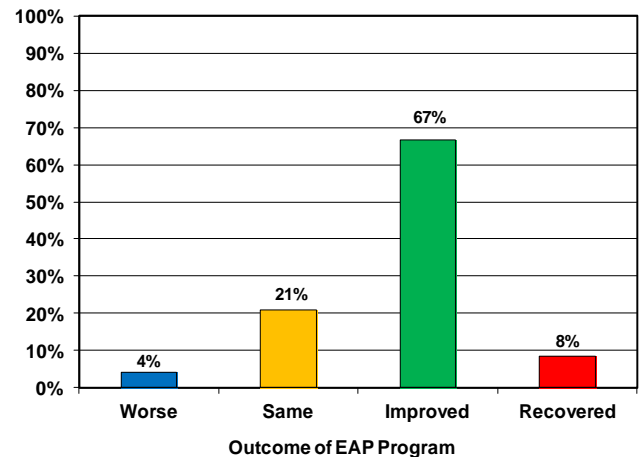
\*Respondents can select multiple reasons; therefore % total to more than 100.

Clearly the size of an organization also plays a significant role in whether or not an EAP is deemed feasible. As shown in Figure 2, the larger the establishment the greater the access to an EAP. Ninety percent of employees working for an organization with 100 + people had access to an EAP. Of those who had access, 92% felt that their EAP was a good way to deal with their substance use and/or gambling problems. Furthermore, these programs appear to produce reasonably positive outcomes, with the majority (75%) of employees reporting improvement or recovery from their illness (see Figure 3).

**Figure 2: Employee Access to an EAP as a Function of Organization Size**



**Figure 3: Average Self-Reported Benefit from involvement with an EAP**



### Employer Support

Companies were less likely to financially support employees' path to recovery (see Table 2). Only 41% of employers confirmed that financial assistance was available to staff members seeking treatment for their addiction or mental health problem. Perhaps more alarming was the fact that 20% said that they would suspend or terminate an employee who was getting treatment. This attitude can create a culture of fear and reduce the likelihood that members of Alberta's workforce will admit to struggling with an addiction or mental illness, or seek professional help for their concern.

**Table 2: Employer Support**

Support Options	%
Sick Leave – Full Pay	20%
Sick Leave – Partial Pay	21%
Short Leave – No Pay	40%
Suspension	9%
Dismissal	11%

### Summary

- Access to EAPs has increased substantially over the last couple of decades; however, the likelihood of having access in part depends on organization size.
- The majority of employees felt that EAP programming was beneficial and three quarters of those who had used these services reported positive outcomes.
- Unfortunately, many employers were not inclined to offer financial support to employees dealing with an addiction or mental health issue; a fifth even said that workers were in jeopardy of suspension or permanent termination if they requested time for professional treatment.

The results suggest that while some advancement in employee support has been made, more work needs to be done. Alberta workplaces are progressively improving in terms of the EAPs available to employees dealing with an addiction or mental illness; however, there has been less headway in the realm of financial support and job security during the course of treatment. The latter is not aligned with the views of mental health advocacy groups, the Mental Health Commission of Canada or the Canadian Human Rights Commission, which implies a need for employers to review and possibly amend their workplace practices in these areas.

For a link to the full report, *The Alberta Survey of Addictive Behaviours and Mental Health in the Workforce: 2009*, visit: <http://ihe.ca/publications/library/2011/the-alberta-survey-of-addictive-behaviours-and-mental-health-in-the-workforce-2009/>

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