


# FRANCES BAARD DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY

## EMPLOYEE WELLNESS ASSISTANCE POLICY



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## **1. OBJECTIVE**

To enable Frances Baard District Municipality (FBDM) to provide a professional help service to those employees who have or may develop social or psychological problems, affecting their work and/or performance, for whatever reason. The municipality will have a high productivity rate and less impaired job performance by encouraging and maintaining the well-being and productivity of employees.

## **2. PURPOSE**

- 2.1. The FBDM is concerned with the health, safety, welfare, improving the well-being, work performance, quality of life and job satisfaction of employees.
- 2.2. It is recognized that most human problems can be treated or resolved provided that each is identified in its early stages. This is true whether the problem is one of physical illness, mental or emotional stress, marital or family conflicts, chemical dependency, financial problems or other concerns. These are serious problems, which may have a profound impact upon the lives of those employees affected, their families, fellow employees and their job performance.
- 2.3. The intent of the Employee Assistance Programme [EAP] is therefore to ensure the well-being of the employee and appropriate job performance, not the termination of employment.

## **3. BENEFITS OF AN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE-PROGRAMME**

- 3.1. Improve productivity in order to reduce absenteeism, sick leave, accidents and improve the morale of the employee;
- 3.2. Focussed interventions build the employee's capacity to deal with problems and allow employees to take responsibility for their own mental health;
- 3.3. Provide a system to enable employees to address their psycho-social lifestyle;
- 3.4. Assist line managers to deal with work performance issues; and
- 3.5. Enhance the organisation's image within the community as an organisation which cares for its employees.

## **4. POLICY PRINCIPLES OF EAP INTERVENTION**

In its commitment to the FBDM's EAP initiative, council accepts the basic principles which are generally internationally accepted in the support of successful EAP intervention:

- 4.1. The broad-brush principle, which refers to all problems which could affect job performance;
- 4.2. The accessibility principle, committing the employer to make the service available to all employees including the contractual employees employed by the councils;

- 4.3. The principle of confidentiality, which safeguards the details that troubled employees reveal, and includes the safekeeping of all records, the non-sharing of any information other than with the employee's written consent and that interviews be conducted in a place which is considered private;
- 4.4. The principle of voluntarism, which acknowledges that the most effective form of referral is self-referral;
- 4.5. The principle of neutrality, that the role and function of the EAP should not be affected by collective bargaining issues pursued by management and the workforce. That the EAP thus maintain a state of confidentiality as defined by Section 16(5)(c) of the Labour Relations Act of 1995, which stipulates that "*...an employer is not required to disclose information that is confidential, and if disclosed, may cause substantial harm to an employee or the employer*".
- 4.6. The principle of constructive action, that management should suggest to, motivate or give employees the option to make use of EAP services in conjunction with job action;
- 4.7. The principle of permanency, by means of a mutually agreed policy statement, which guarantees the survival of the programme.

## **5. PARTICIPATION IN THE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME.**

- 5.1. All employees are eligible to participate in the programme. On occasion, members of employee's families may participate in the when activities are related to employee problems.
- 5.2. Participation in the programme is voluntary. Choosing to participate, or not to participate, will neither adversely affect an employee's job security and promotional opportunities, nor excuse and employee from adherence to municipality policies and procedures concerning job performance and basic conduct.
- 5.3. Contact with the EAP must be confidential, except through written authorization by the employee, or in cases of an abused person, an unexplained, unusual or suspicious death, or a threat to one's own life or that of another, as prescribed by law.
- 5.4. EAP records will be retained within the offices of the EAP, and will not become part of, or referenced to any employee's personal file, medical file, or other file which may be accessed by any other department. Visits to the EAP by an employee may be made during work hours while the employee is on employer time but must be coordinated through the employee's supervisor.

## **6. PROCEDURE**

The specific core activities of the EAP will include:

- 6.1. Expert consultation and training of appropriate persons in the identification and resolution of job performance issues related to the personal concerns identified above.
- 6.2. Confidential, appropriate and timely problem assessment and resolution services including referrals for appropriate diagnosis, treatment and assistance, establishment of linkages between the workforce and community resources that provide such services, and follow-up assistance to employees who use those services.
- 6.3. Referrals to EAP may be requested by the employees themselves on a voluntary basis, or the union in consultation with the manager in the department when an employee's work performance has declined or the basic conduct of an employee is not of an acceptable standard as expected or defined by FBDM policies. However, the decision to accept a manager's referral to EAP and subsequent referrals for further treatment are voluntary, and are the personal responsibility of the employee.
- 6.4. FBDM employees or members of their families requesting an appointment for EAP should contact the nominated EAP practitioner. Employees seeking assistance from the EAP are encouraged to do so before job performance is impaired. Problems treated early are usually simpler to resolve.
- 6.5. Employees referred to an external professional service provider will not be responsible for all costs associated with those outside services. Although the employee's medical aid may cover some of the costs applicable in terms of the fund rules, the employer will cover all the remaining costs or all costs when the medical aid of the employee does not cover such costs.
- 6.6. When the employee does not have a medical aid, the employer will cover the cost according to the affordability of the service.

## **7. TYPES OF SERVICES.**

EAP services include assessment, counselling, referrals (if indicated) and all follow-up sessions. The Employee Assistance Programme initial appointment will be made as soon as reasonably possible after a request is made and approved. EAP services include, but are not limited, to counselling in the following areas:

- 7.1 Budgeting/financial challenges
- 7.2 Family responsibility
- 7.3 Serious illness/injury.
- 7.4 Depression in career
- 7.5 Depression
- 7.6 Divorce or separation
- 7.7 Drug or alcohol abuse or other addictions
- 7.8 Emotional and personal conflicts
- 7.9 Family and relationship concerns
- 7.10 Grief
- 7.11 Managing stress and change
- 7.12 Parenting
- 7.13 Work performance issues

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## **8. COUNSELLORS.**

All professional counsellors whose offices are not on the municipal premises. Some consultation may be made first with internal experts. All information discussed with the counsellor will be treated as strictly confidential.

## **9. LEAVE TO ATTEND COUNSELLING OR TREATMENT**

Employees who attend EAP counselling sessions or treatment must use their sick leave or vacation leave, which is paid leave, or unpaid leave should the employee have no paid leave available if requested and approved.

## **10. CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information regarding an employee's use of the EAP will be treated as strictly confidential. Records will not be kept in the employee personal file, except to document a mandatory referral, to indicate that a referral has been made. No identifying information will be released to personnel, with the following exceptions:

- 10.1 If an action is initiated by an employee and the information is relevant to the claim or defence in such action.
- 10.2 If required by law.
- 10.3 If requested by a person bearing a release of information signed by the employee, and;
- 10.4 If an employee has been referred mandatory to the EAP, the municipality will be told:
  - 10.4.1 Whether the employee came to their appointment.
  - 10.4.2 The date an employee begins treatment.
  - 10.4.3 If an employee will be able to work while in treatment.
  - 10.4.4 An employee's compliance status with regard to his/her recommended treatment, including on a monthly basis.
  - 10.4.5 The date an employee completes all treatment requirements.
  - 10.4.6 If an employee is subject to testing, the dates of the return-to-duty test and schedule of any follow up tests, or
  - 10.4.7 Date the EAP coordinates the tests if required.

Under any of these circumstances, only those who need to know whether or not any employee successfully completed treatment or other related information will have access to it. An employee who wilfully discloses or releases information in violation of this policy will be subject to disciplinary action up to including termination from employment.

## **11. GUIDELINES**

- 11.1 The employee's participation in the EAP will not be a factor and/or create discrimination in job security or promotional opportunities and will not become part of personal records.
- 11.2 Employees participating in the EAP will be entitled to all the benefits given under current contracts, agreements and/or policy. Costs incurred over and above those covered by the employee's benefit package will be the responsibility of the employee. Where a family

member accesses EAP services, he/she will do so at no additional cost to the Municipality, provided that the services rendered will be for in-house assistance.

- 11.3 The EAP will not waive the traditional rights of employees to the grievance procedures and usual rights of the employer to maintain discipline.
- 11.4 A response to a request for service should occur as soon as possible, preferably within one working day.
- 11.5 The first counselling session should occur within two weeks unless unforeseen circumstances arise which prevent this from occurring.
- 11.6 The programme normally offers up to three sessions for each new case.
- 11.7 Where employees are likely to be involved in critical incidents because of the nature of their work, the municipality must develop a procedure for initial counselling and follow-up. The same can apply to cases that involve threats of violence or suicide.
- 11.8 EAP training sessions for managers and supervisors should cover, at minimum:
  - 11.8.1 The administrative role with respect to EAP, the confidentiality aspects, and the procedure for accessing the programme;
  - 11.8.2 The administrative role with respect to EAP and referrals.
  - 11.8.3 The concept and methods that allow for early detection of problems that interfere with job performance;
  - 11.8.4 Constructive methods to deal with employees experiencing performance problems due to personal or behavioural problems; and
  - 11.8.5 Support approaches to assist the employee.

## **12 PREVENTION ACTIVITIES**

Consistent with the objective of the EAP policy, preventative programmes will be held where possible to educate employees about personal problems related to life style and work environment, and the possible responses. This may involve cooperation with the Public Health Services and the safety and health committee or the safety and health representative.

## **13 MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME**

- 13.1 An integral part of any EAP is the monitoring process that ensures that the service continues to operate effectively.
- 13.2 The monitoring, evaluation and review process requires service providers and employees alike, to review operations of the EAP.

- 13.3 The municipality undertakes that all parties are adhering to the principles and spirit of the agreed policy statement.
- 13.4 That adequate emphasis is given to the preventative side of problems that become apparent.
- 13.5 That the service is making contact with those most in need of assistance, and such people are receiving the benefits of the programme.
- 13.6 Under resumption of duties, following a successful completion of treatment under the programme, no person will suffer any disadvantage.
- 13.7 Information and education to promote the health and well-being of staff are being provided.
- 13.8 Special attention is being devoted to facets of the work environment that may contribute to personal or work-related problems.

**End**