



Property & Business Services

**Sector EAP analysis
and clinical insights**

assure
PROGRAMS

COMMENTARY

Introduction

This report considers the psychosocial risks and insights derived from EAP (Employee Assistance Program) observations for customers in the Property & Business Services Sector. It is intended to support Assure Programs' business partners in exploring trends at an industry level and is best used in conjunction with each customer's individual EAP reporting and other data sources, to inform proactive mental health and wellbeing strategies.

Assure covers over one million Australians across all industry sectors including employees' family members, and in 2019 provided 65,000 hours of EAP counselling and 6,800 hours of support for critical incidents and significant events. 77% of all Assure's counselling sessions were face to face, and 95% of clients were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their counselling experience.

In the Property & Business Services Sector, Assure provides EAP services to 75 organisations, totalling 29,000 employees plus their families. In 2019 Assure provided 3,100 counselling sessions and 170 hours of support for critical incidents and significant events in this sector.

Mental health issues are the most common reason people are accessing EAP at Assure, comprising 35% of all presenting concerns. Because we only use experienced psychologists (not provisionally registered psychologists, counsellors, social workers or chaplains) we are able to assess and treat these issues (particularly complex and trauma-related cases) using evidence-based interventions. Additionally, if appropriate, we offer continuity of care for longer term treatment in conjunction with a GP Mental Health Care Plan, where clients can receive rebates through the Medicare system when necessary and continue to use the same Assure psychologist if they choose.

Industry context and psychosocial risks

The broad nature of the Property & Business Services Sector means that there are a broad range of potential risks that may implicate the mental health and wellbeing of those working in this sector. Of particular note is the fact that changes in the economic climate can have a significant effect on the Property & Business Services Sector. For example, fluctuations in interest rates, job growth, population size, and the availability of financing may influence overarching trends in supply and demand, with flow-on effects to the profitability of businesses in this sector. Periods of peak demand may create a wealth of opportunities for businesses in the Property & Business Services Sector; on the contrary, periods of reduced demand could be a source of great fear, anxiety and stress for employees. Inherent to these fluctuations is the need for adaptability, resilience and a strategic mindset in the face of rapid change.

Furthermore, having a high degree of client focus is also critical in the Property & Business Services Sector. High performance and a competitive nature are both required in order to secure key sales or cater to the urgent needs of clients, placing pressure on organisations to establish their credibility in the marketplace and articulate the selling points or competitive advantage that distinguish their work from that of their competitors.

Relatedly, clients may frequently expect near-constant availability from employees during the evenings and weekends via email, over the phone and face-to-face (e.g., to facilitate property inspections), which may pose challenges in terms of switching off, maintaining work-life balance, and completing other activities that support wellbeing. Helping employees in this sector to strike an appropriate balance and set appropriate expectations is therefore of great importance in this sector.

Direct interaction with the public may also create the need to deal effectively with conflict or confrontational conversations, either as a mediator between two parties (e.g., providing mediation between a landlord and a tenant, or a seller and a buyer) or as one of the parties directly engaged in the conflict (e.g., dealing with a dissatisfied client, either directly or through social media). The social and emotional demands that these interactions may entail could cause distress or anxiety for employees in this sector, particularly those exposed to intimidation, verbal abuse or physical violence during site visits or other activities completed over the course of their work. Providing employees with the conflict management and de-escalation skills required to manage these complex situations may therefore be essential to protecting their wellbeing and mental health.

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The high degree of client focus and competitive nature of this industry may pose unique psychosocial risks for employees working in the Property & Business Services Sector, particularly at times when the demand for these services is either very high or very low.

Providing employees with the conflict management, de-escalation skills and self-care strategies required to manage complex interactions and care for themselves is likely to be essential to protecting their wellbeing and mental health.

EAP Insights

The information on the following pages summarises EAP utilisation for Assure's customers in the Property & Business Services Sector over the past two years, in comparison with all other sectors. We can make the following observations and insights:

- Overall utilisation slightly increased from 7.53% in 2018 to 8.57% in 2019, compared to 8.15% for the all-sector average in 2019. This degree of utilisation may suggest that there has been a stable level of awareness and acceptance of mental health issues between 2018 and 2019. In the future, it could be beneficial to encourage an even greater awareness and acceptance of mental health issues throughout the coming years. This, in turn, may increase the rate of utilisation further.
- It is notable that clients aged 30-39 were substantially over-represented in the Property & Business Services Sector (38%) compared to other sectors (33%); on the other hand, clients aged 40 and above were less represented in the Property & Business Services Sector (32%) compared to other sectors (39%). This may suggest that employees aged between 30 and 39 may be more likely than older employees to be willing to reach out for support from EAP. Alternatively, it could also reflect the high degree of pressure faced by mid-career professionals in this competitive sector.
- 73% of clients were in their first 4 years of tenure, compared to 56% across all sectors. By way of contrast, 12% of clients had exceeded 8 years of tenure, compared to 25% across all sectors. In line with the previous comment about age, this potentially suggests that the initial years of working at a new organisation may be especially demanding for those working in the Property & Business Services Sector.
- More clients were male (42%) than for other sectors (37%). This may be consistent with the overall gender mix of employees in this sector, and also highlights the importance of addressing mental health stigma in male-dominated workplaces within this sector.
- Access by family members was consistent between 2018 (11%) and 2019 (also 11%). This rate of utilisation was somewhat lower than the rate across all sectors during 2019 (13%).
- Employee awareness about their EAP service comes predominately from HR or People & Culture (38%), which was substantially higher than in other sectors (22%). This data suggests that equipping HR personnel with the capabilities required to support vulnerable staff members and offer a referral to EAP when needed may be of particular importance in this sector, given that these personnel are the primary gateway to EAP for many employees. By way of contrast, hearing about EAP from a supervisor was less common in the Property & Business Services Sector (15%) than in other industries (20%), reflecting a potential need to educate more supervisors about how to refer staff on when needed.
- The mix of workplace concerns (32%) and personal concerns (68%) was consistent with other sectors and remained more or less stable. However, it should be noted that whilst relationships and mental health issues are classified as personal concerns, they often have their origin in workplace pressures.
- Among personal concerns, symptoms of anxiety (including pre-existing anxiety) were the most commonly reported concern (23%), which is consistent with the all-sector average (also 23%). This was also accompanied by concerns about relationship issues within couples (21%), which is slightly higher than the all-sector average (19%).
- Among workplace concerns, excessive workload pressures (14%), reduced productivity (11%), conflict with supervisors (7%) and work life balance (7%) were the most commonly reported. The frequency of these concerns was more or less consistent between 2018 and 2019, as well as between the Property & Business Services Sector and other sectors.
- Access to Assure's Manager Support Program was primarily to help employees through change, critical incidents and other stressful situations (37%), which was substantially more frequent during 2019 than during 2018 (23%) and also more frequent than in other sectors (33%). The second most frequent purpose was to manage a distressed employee or colleague (33%), which was slightly lower than the rate during 2018 (35%), but higher than the rate in other sectors (26%). This may suggest that providing managers with the skills needed to support vulnerable team members (especially during times of organisational change) may be particularly valuable in this sector.

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Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategies

Assure has been working with a number of its customers in the Property & Business Services Sector to develop and deliver proactive mental health and wellbeing strategies. Every organisation has its own challenges and priorities so there is no one-size-fits-all solution, but common themes include:

- Mental health awareness (for leaders and employees), including how to support staff in need and refer them to EAP when required
- EAP awareness: Assure has an awareness video to allow much greater reach via customer Intranets and email
- Dealing with aggressive clients and difficult client conversations
- Change management
- Leading resilient teams
- Handling vicarious trauma
- Creating psychologically safe workplaces
- Wellbeing assessments and positive psychology programs have also been helpful for people who are already coping well ('surviving') but want to raise their performance to another level ('thriving').
- Electronic or virtual delivery of training and awareness programs allows employees to access them in geographically dispersed locations and at times that fit with business requirements.
- A number of customers have looked at extending Assure's support to their clientele, as a way to make their client offering more competitive.

Resilience and self-care: Noting the increasingly complex and uncertain environment within the modern workplace, the need to build a resilient and agile workforce is critical. Research tells us that one-off resilience training simply does not cut it, so how can we create sustained behaviour change to help employees and leaders navigate our increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous work environment?

Assure has designed a program Thrive to address this, using an assessment tool based on the 6 key neuroscience pillars of resilience, that can be targeted to the specific needs of each organisation. Acknowledging the need to scale up across large, geographically dispersed workforces, this program incorporates virtual coaching via state-of-the-art technology and artificial intelligence, alongside face-to-face training and coaching programs. This approach provides an interactive and engaging way to build resilience through a comprehensive program tailored to different learning needs.

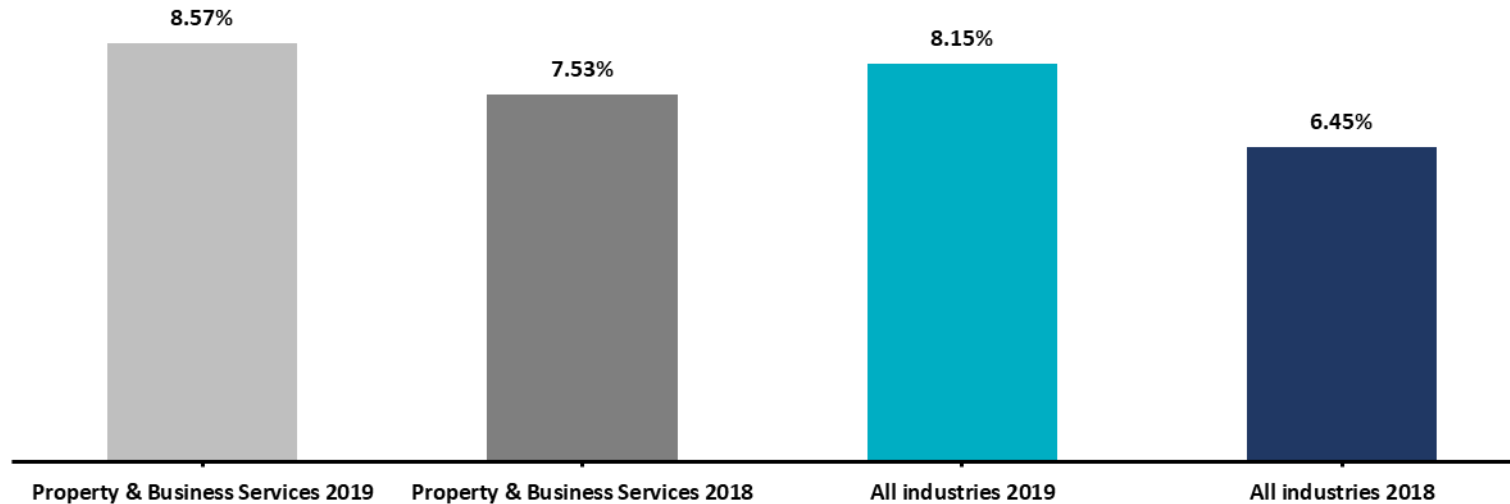
Psychosocial risk assessments: As a precursor to deciding on specific mental health and wellbeing initiatives, and to help target investment in the most cost effective way, we would recommend carrying out an assessment of psychosocial risks across your organisation. Assure has developed an online assessment tool the Backbone of Mental Health & Wellbeing in the Workplace which allows business leaders and employees to assess strengths, or areas to improve, within 8 key areas of clinical risk.

If you would like to discuss your strategy for proactively improving the mental health and wellbeing of your organisation, please talk to your Assure Programs Customer Care Manager or call (07) 3211 8919.

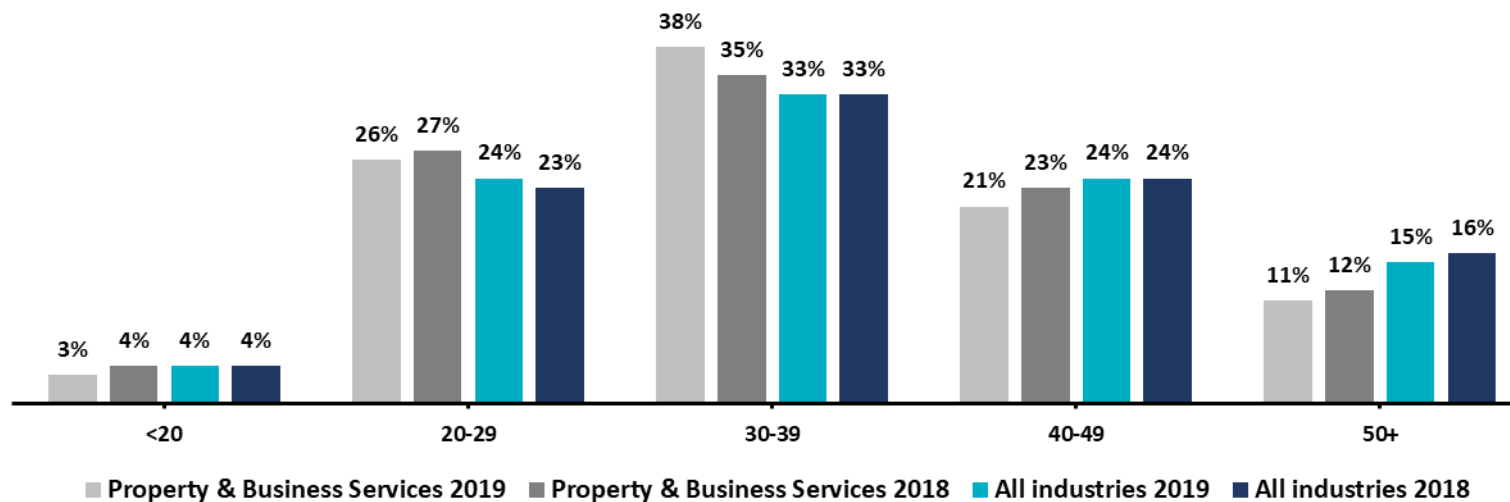
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WHO HAS BEEN ACCESSING EAP?

EAP Utilisation

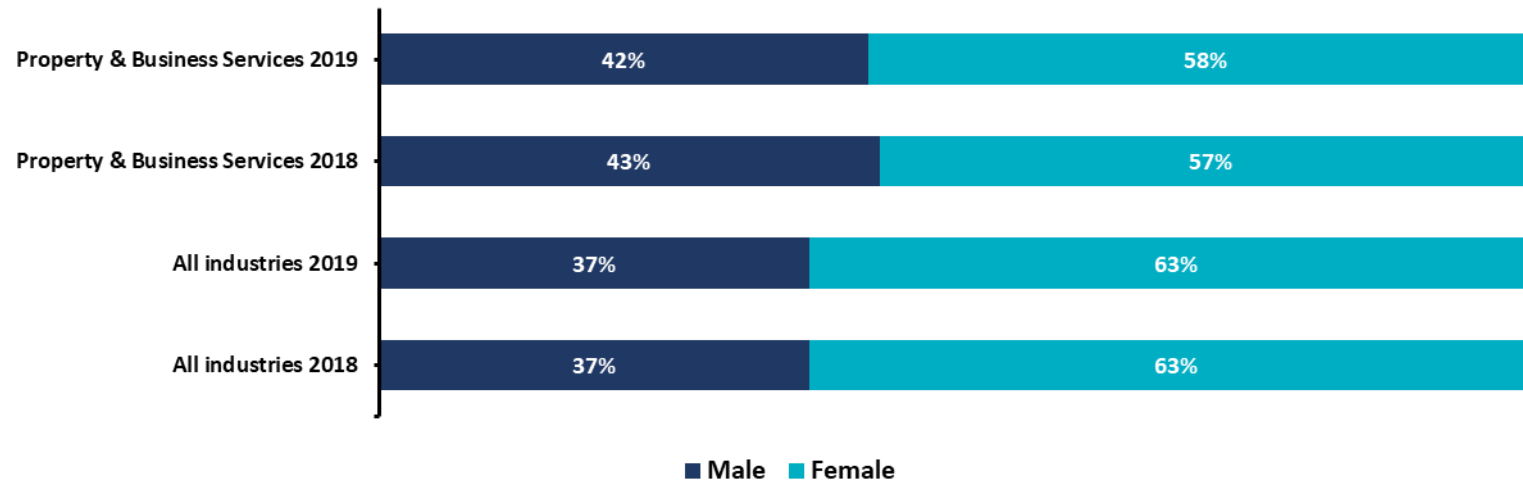


EAP client age (as % of all clients)

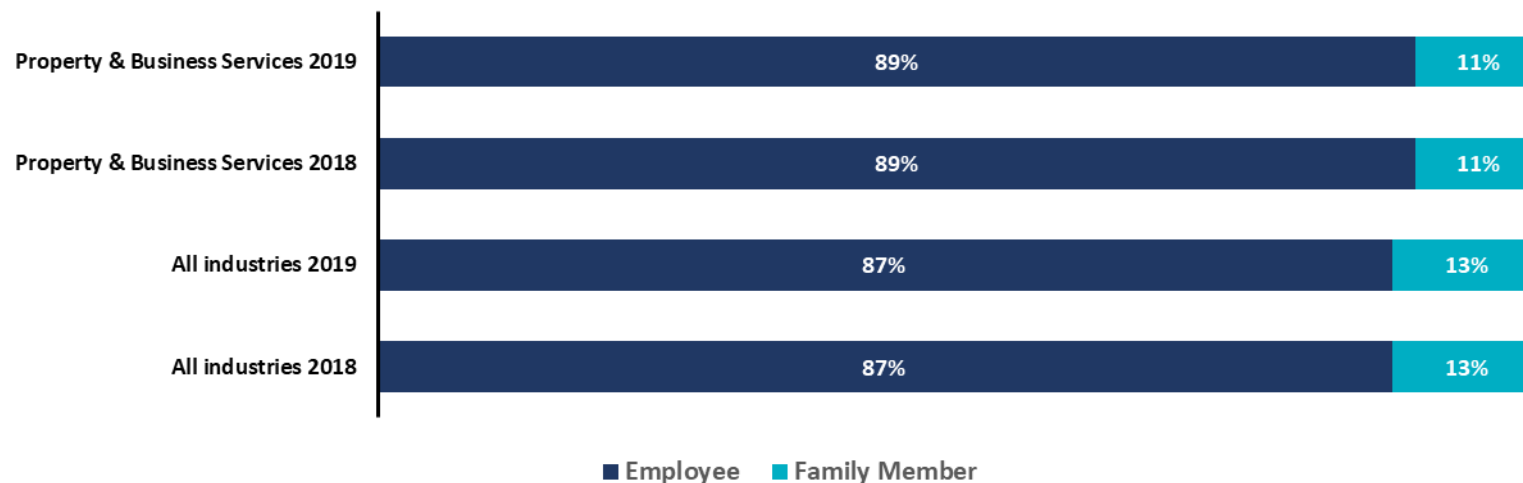


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EAP client gender (as % of all clients)

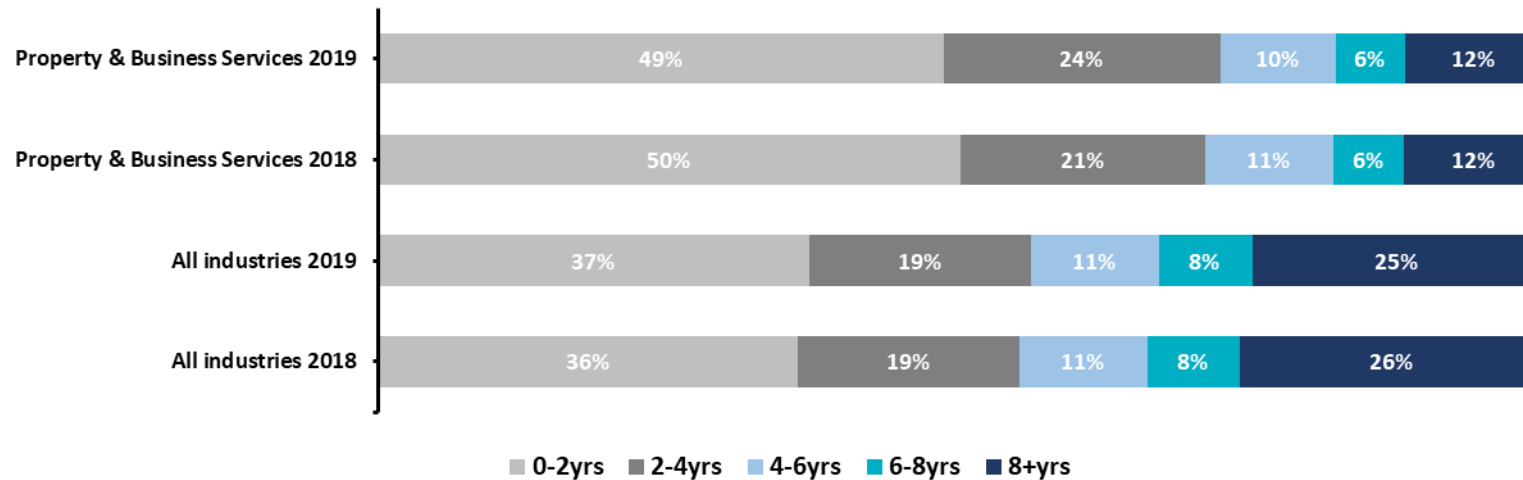


EAP client type (as % of all clients)

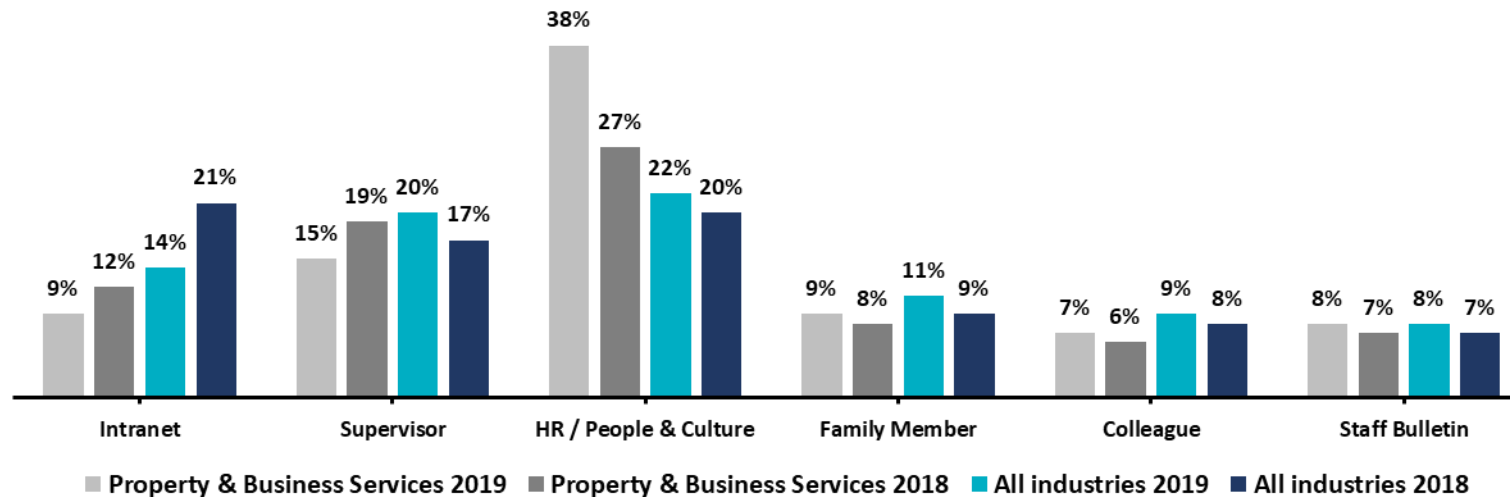


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EAP client length of employment (as % of all clients)



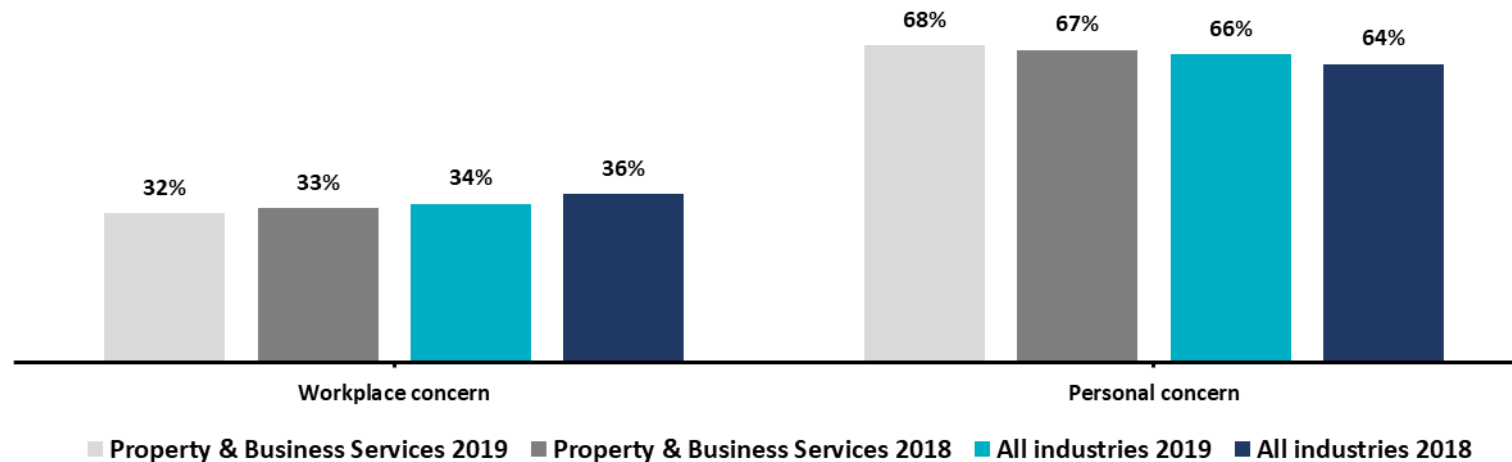
How learnt of EAP? (as % of all clients)



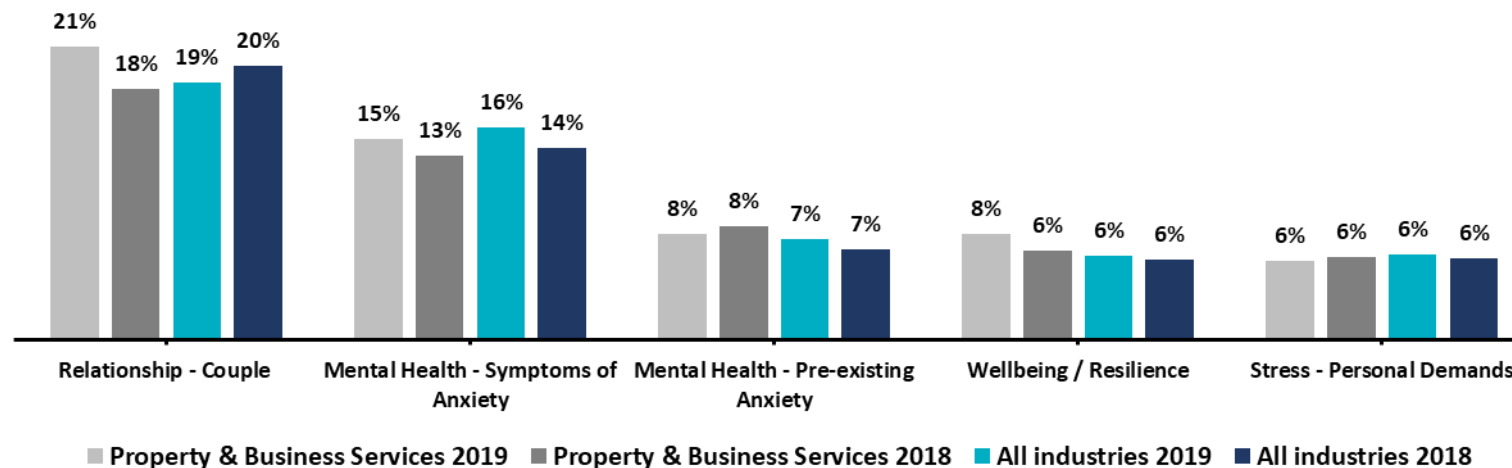
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WHY HAVE PEOPLE BEEN ACCESSING EAP?

Primary presenting concern (as % of all clients)

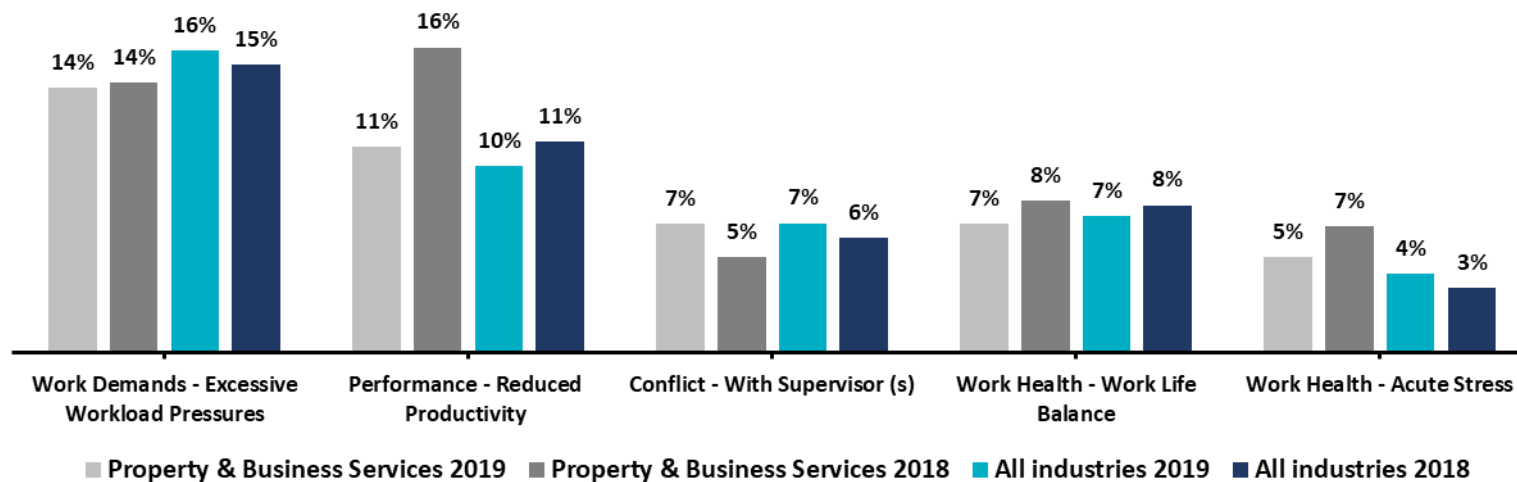


Top 5 primary presenting concerns - PERSONAL (as % of all clients)



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Top 5 primary presenting concerns - WORKPLACE (as % of all clients)



Reasons Managers accessed Manager Support Program (as % of all MSPs)

