



# **EAP Evidence: Debunking Marketing Myths about the Purpose, Use and Effectiveness of Employee Assistance Programmes in South Africa**

**Mark Attridge, PhD, MA**  
President, Attridge Consulting  
United States

Employee Assistance Professionals Association - South Africa

Virtual Presentation - September 20, 2023

# Speaker: **Mark Attridge, PhD, MA**



President, Attridge Consulting, Inc.

Minneapolis, MN USA

[mark@attridgeconsulting.com](mailto:mark@attridgeconsulting.com)

Dr. Attridge is a research scholar and business strategy consultant as President of Attridge Consulting in Minneapolis. Since starting his own practice in 2007, he has supported over 70 corporate and non-profit clients across the United States and internationally, most of whom are providers of employee assistance programs (EAP) or other workplace mental health specialty services. Mark is a prolific writer, scholar and trainer with more than 30 peer-reviewed published papers and book chapters and 250+ other written works, presentations, industry workshops and corporate trainings. Get free downloads from: <https://www.eaarchive.org>



# Key Ideas

1. Technology-focused New Providers – Imposter EAPs?
2. Distinguishing True EAPs from Imposter EAPs
3. Conceptual Continuum of Pure Techno to Pure Worksite EAP

Featuring: New Survey Results from EAPs in South Africa

# Understanding the Challenge

## PART 1

### Technology and the Rise of Imposter “EAPs”

# Last Year at Eduweek 2022



## Effectiveness of Human and Machine-based Counseling: Opportunities for Employee Assistance Programmes

**Dr. MARK ATTRIDGE**

**Virtual Presentation**  
September 6, 2022

<http://hdl.handle.net/10713/19714>

# This Year at Eduweek 2023



**NEW  
GENERATION  
WORKPLACE**

#proactiveEAP #redefiningwork

 **EAPA-SA ANNUAL EDUWEEK**  
18 - 21 SEPTEMBER 2023, WILD COAST SUN

in association with **momentum**  
 **METROPOLITAN**

# Troubling Trends in Marketing of EAP Services

Demand had soared for workplace mental health support since the COVID-19 pandemic. One consequence was billions of dollars of venture capital going into companies new to the EAP global market.

These providers sell some mix of digital Apps and internet platforms.

It's time to fact check the marketing against the professionalism and research in our field. The evidence shows the true business value of employee assistance when properly delivered.



## EAP Evidence: Responding to the Challenges of “Imposter EAPs”

| By Mark Attridge, Ph.D., M.A.



Attridge, M. (2023).

EAP Evidence (new column):  
Responding to the Challenge of  
Imposter EAPs.

*Journal of Employee Assistance*,  
53(3), 24-26.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10713/20763>

No cost download

# Imposter EAPs

I call these new businesses “Imposter EAPs” because they strive to replace True EAPs with technology focused products that lack many of the core components of employee assistance.

- How many leaders at these new companies know the conceptual Core Technology of EAP that has guided the field since the 1980s?
- How many of their executives and staff clinicians have earned the certifications specific to employee assistance service delivery (CEAP) or other substance abuse treatment specialties (SAP)?
- How many of these new companies are active members of our industry professional organizations? Such as EAPA, APEAR, EAEEF, NBC.
- Do these companies follow the professional practices and ethical standards developed over decades by EAP and Social Work fields?

# EAP is More Than Just Mental Health

- Machine-based tools and robot Apps - by design - are focused on specific clinical diagnostic conditions (anxiety, depression, stress, etc.). Thus, they can miss important aspects of the client's real life situation.
- EAP industry data shows that only about half of all users of EAP counseling have issues involving psychological or substance problems. But the other half of users seek support for a broad array of non-clinical relationship, family, work, personal legal or financial issues.
- This is why the comprehensive assessment conducted by a counselor at the start of EAP use is critical to identifying the right mix of professional and practical resources in benefits or the local community that best serve the unique needs of each client. Robots can't do this.
- Employees need more than just mental health educational materials and self-therapy computerized programs delivered via smartphone Apps or websites.

# Dual Purpose of EAP: Worker & Workplace

- A dysfunctional workplace can cause mental health problems among some employees.
- A healthy workplace can prevent risks and restore employee well-being.
- True full-service EAPs are a specialized professional resource that supports both the worker and the workplace.
- Most EAPs now also offer technology tools and digital care delivery options for serving the work organization. But they also have staff with the experience to know how to help managers and leaders with work-related issues.

# Yet, EAPs Do Need Techno Tools & Partners

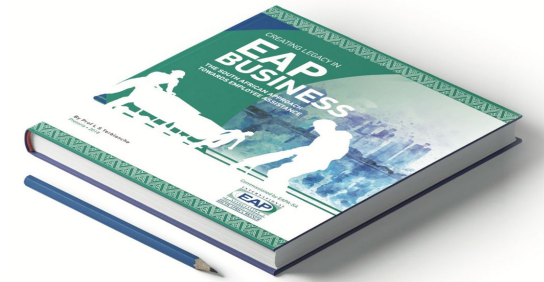
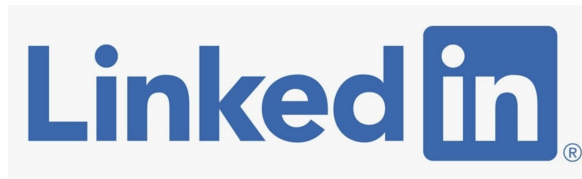
- Techno tools can drive important innovations in reducing stigma concerning mental health issues and increasing access to prevention and treatment services.
- Techno tools offer significant opportunities for integrating the promotion and day-to-day service operations of the EAP into the larger work organization and other wellness service providers.
- Techno tools can make EAPs more efficient by shifting pre-clinical (lower severity) users of counseling to use self-service supports.
- Digital data collection encourages quality improvement for service delivery and better customer reporting on use and outcomes.

# **Your Voice**

## **A New Survey of EAPs in South Africa**

# Survey Study Recruitment – 2023 Aug/Sep

- A non-random sampling process
- Invitations about online questionnaire were distributed via:
  - Posts on LinkedIn by researcher (3,000+ views)
  - Personal e-mails by researcher to EAP contacts (100+)
  - Social media – EAPA-South Africa (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)
  - Personal e-mails by Professor **Lourie Terblanche** in South Africa (200+)
  - Incentive to do survey = Chance to win \$100 honorarium



# Study Sample of Respondents – South Africa

## Type of Employment Context:

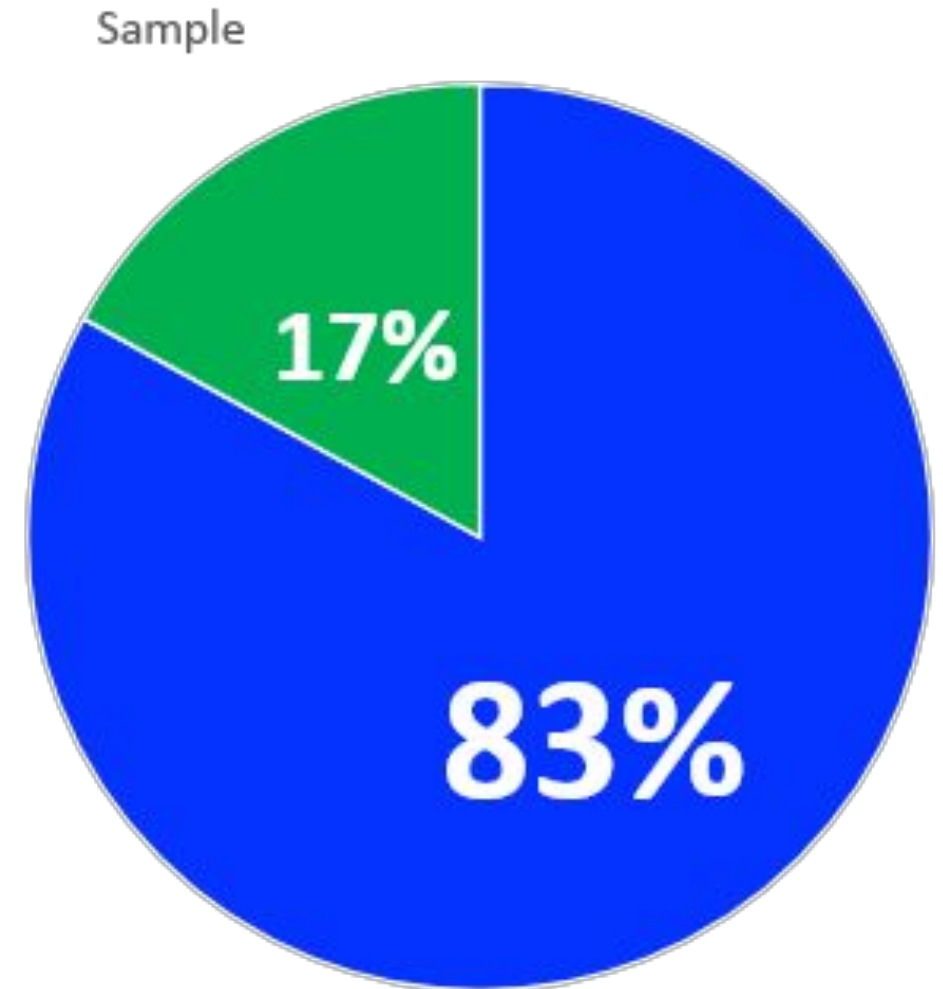
- 42% Internal Staff EAP (n = 29)
- 29% Purchaser of EAP - Employer (n = 20)
- 12% Wellbeing Provider (n = 8)
  
- 10% External Vendor of EAP (n = 7)
- 7% EAP Specialty Services or Affiliate Counselor (n = 5)



# Study Sample in South Africa

## Type of Employment Context:

- Internal EAP & Wellness
- External EAP



# Study Sample of Respondents - South Africa

## Background:

- Sex: **Female 76%** / Male 24%
- Age: **39 years**; range 28 to 58
- Race: **Black 79%**; Other 13%; Asian 2%; White 3%
- Experience: **9 years in EAP** field (range 3 to 30)
- Certified Employee Assistance Professional (EAPA): **41% Yes CEAP**



*Note:* N = 120 additional sample of people from other countries to be presented in future.

What is the Business Objective of  
Techno EAPs in South Africa?

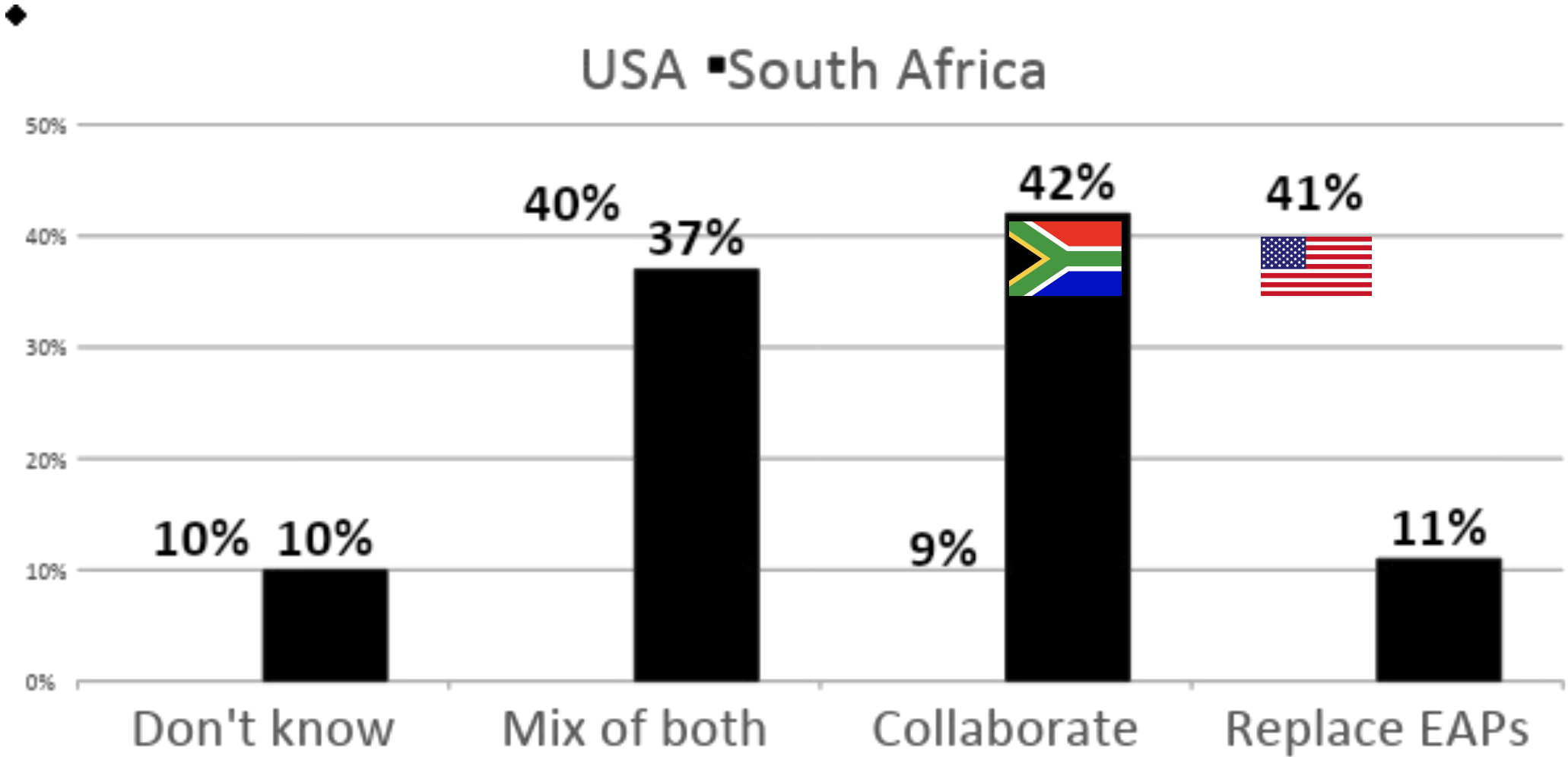
Are They Friend or Foe?

## Survey Q:

Research indicates that most employers who are interested in adding the newer techno tool service providers already have some kind of EAP counseling benefit in place to serve the organization.

In this context, do you think that techno providers of mental health support services are trying to **replace EAPs** or trying to **collaborate with EAPs**?

# Business Goals of Techno EAPs



Large difference,  $p < .001$

USA n = 85; SA n = 38

# **Understanding EAP Purpose, Value and Use**

## **PART 2**

**What Distinguishes True EAPs  
from Imposter EAPs?**

# My Research Study 2011: 7 EAP Core Services

EASNA RESEARCH NOTES Volume 2, Number 3, October 2011

## Trends in EAP Services and Strategies: An Industry Survey

Mark Attridge, PhD, MA  
Attridge Consulting, Inc.

John Burke, MA  
Burke Consulting / Empathia

Copyright ©2011 Employee Assistance Society of North America (EASNA). Contact at: Phone: (703) 416-0060  
Website: www.easna.org Address: 2001 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1004, Arlington, VA 22202

**ABSTRACT.** This Note describes the results of a new research study of trends in the services and strategies offered by employee assistance programs (EAPs). Survey data was collected from 150 professionals in management and clinical roles from the United States and Canada who were active in the EAP industry. Seven kinds of services were examined and rated for three issues: (a) frequency of use by organizational clients; (b) importance to defining what EAP should be; and (c) business value. Results of statistical analyses revealed three groupings of services: (1) **Core EAP Services** include counseling and referral for individual employees, manager consultations and organizational support, and critical incident response; (2) **Pareto EAP Services** involve using the EAP to find and support individuals in need of behavioral health expertise for treating high-risk conditions and for assistance with return to work for mental health and addiction disability; and (3) **Connecting EAP Services** using the Internet and other new technologies and also the integration of the EAP with Wellness and Work/Life programs to connect individuals to self-care and prevention services. Other trends and strategies for success of the field are addressed. Providing strategic, proactive and consultative approaches to the organization is a promising area for EAPs.

### Introduction

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) have a long history of supporting employees and organizations in a variety of ways. The role of employee assistance (EA) in supporting worker mental health and job performance is already a key component to the overall success of thousands of organizations. This study surveyed senior level professionals active in the EAP industry to explore trends in the use, importance, business value, and perceived viability of key kinds of services. The potential for providing more strategic consulting by EAPs at the organizational level was also examined. A final issue of interest was to determine which societal trends are shaping the future of the industry.

### Methodology

#### Study Design

The study design was a single-group of volunteer participants assessed at one point in time. Data was obtained from a self-report survey featuring both quantitative and qualitative items. The study authors created all of the measures on the survey. Independent consultants conducted this research and thus the study methodology was not examined by a university-based internal review board (IRB). However, the guidelines required by the American Psychological Association for ethical research practices were followed in the study.

## featurearticle



### Future Trends in EAP

*Highlights From an Industry Survey*  
"...the organizations we work with are eager for services that are more proactive and preventative (addressing the entire population) and also more strategic in nature..."

By Mark Attridge, Ph.D., M.A. & John Burke, M.A.

In the fall of 2011, the authors of this article conducted a survey to examine trends in the services and strategies offered by employee assistance programs (EAPs). This article features some of the key findings from this research, which was presented at the National Behavioral Consortium. For more details about this study, see the *EASNA Research Note* (October 2011, Volume 2, Number 3), available at [www.easna.org/publications-research-notes](http://www.easna.org/publications-research-notes).

#### About the Study

Survey data was collected via a secure website from 150 EA professionals in the U.S. and Canada. Most were in senior management or clinical leadership roles. Respondents were associated with the EAP field in a variety of roles, including working for external vendors of EA services (51%); working for internal programs (23%); an individual provider of clinical services (11%); consultant or academic (5%); or "other" (9%). The following seven services were included:

- Counseling with assessment, brief clinical support, and referral;
- Management consultations and organizational support;

- Critical incident response;
- Integration of EAP with work/life and wellness;
- High-risk case finding and long-term case management;
- Support for employees on STD/LTD disability leave; and
- Technology and web-enabled services.

These services were rated on three issues: (a) estimated frequency of use by organizational clients; (b) importance in defining EAP; and (c) business value. The potential for providing more strategic consulting by EAPs at the organizational level was also examined with a qualitative question.

#### Part I – A Profile of EA Services

The findings for each question for the seven services (listed above) are presented in Table 1 on page 25. Results of various statistical factor analyses of this data consistently revealed three general clusters of different types of EAP services: 1) Core EAP services; 2) "Pareto" EAP services; and 3) Connecting EAP services. Each cluster is described in greater detail below.

➤ *Cluster 1: EAP Core Capabilities – "The Big 3."* This

set includes counseling and referral for individual employees, manager consultations and organizational support, and critical incident response. These three services had the highest ratings of importance in defining EAP (average of 84% of the sample rating it of high importance). Each of these services also has a proud history as a key component of the original core technology of EAP. Brief counseling and referral for individual employees was characterized by high use and stable business value. Management consultations and support to organizations was characterized by mostly moderate use and stable to rising business value. Critical incident response was characterized by mostly moderate use and rated as stable to rising in business value.

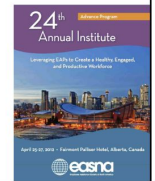
➤ *Cluster 2: "Pareto" Cases with High-Touch EAP Services.* This set of services includes using the EAP to find and support individuals who need behavioral health expertise for high-risk mental health and addiction conditions and for those who need assistance with return to work for disability due to mental health and addiction issues. These are called "pareto" services in reference to

© Attridge Consulting, Inc. & Burke Consulting

## The State of the Employee Assistance Industry: What are the "Core" Services and Strategies that Define the Industry?

Employee Assistance Society of North America  
24<sup>th</sup> Annual Institute – Calgary, AB, Canada  
April 26, 2012

Mark Attridge, PhD, MA  
John Burke, MA

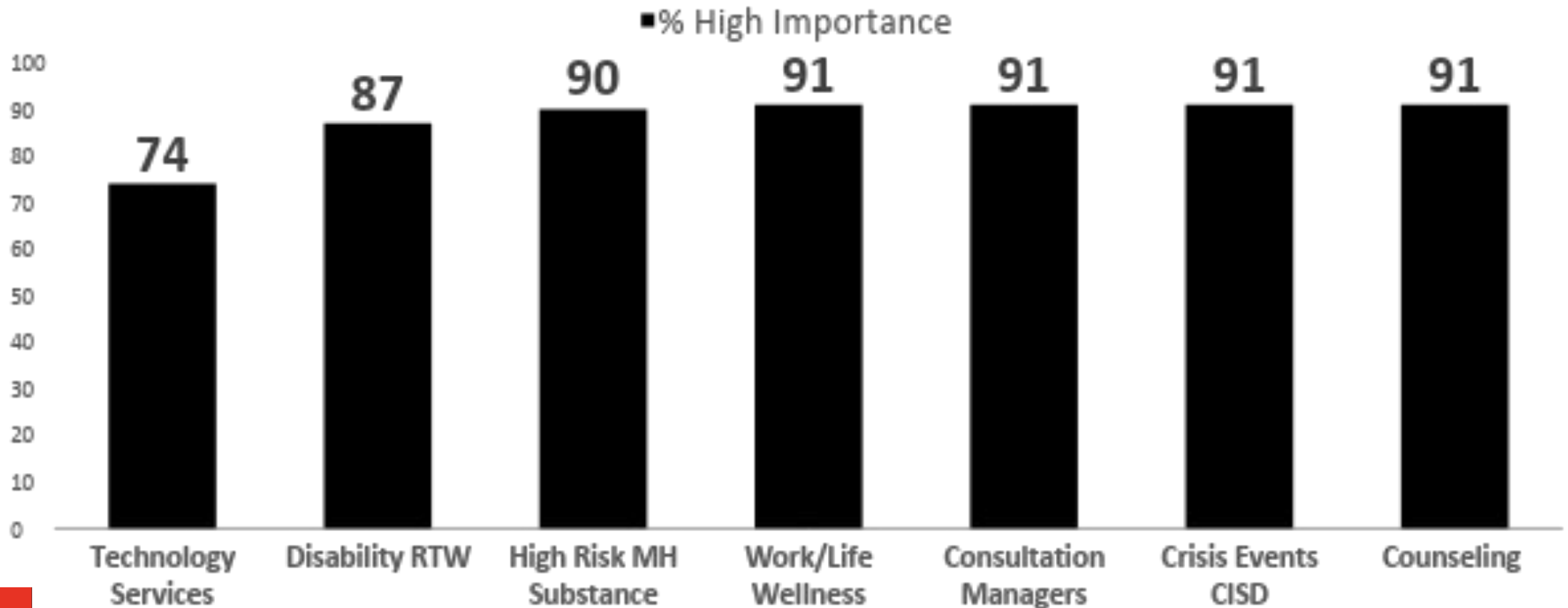


## Survey Focused on Seven Kinds of EA Services

Based on review of the research literature and consulting experience, these services are featured:

1. Counseling and referral for individuals
2. Manager consulting and organizational support
3. Crisis and critical incident response
4. Integration with Wellness and Work/Life
5. Case management for mental health & addiction
6. Support for STD/LTD disability claim cases
7. Technology and web-enabled services

# How important is this type of service to **defining** what an EAP should be?



# Research Results: EAP Core Services in SA

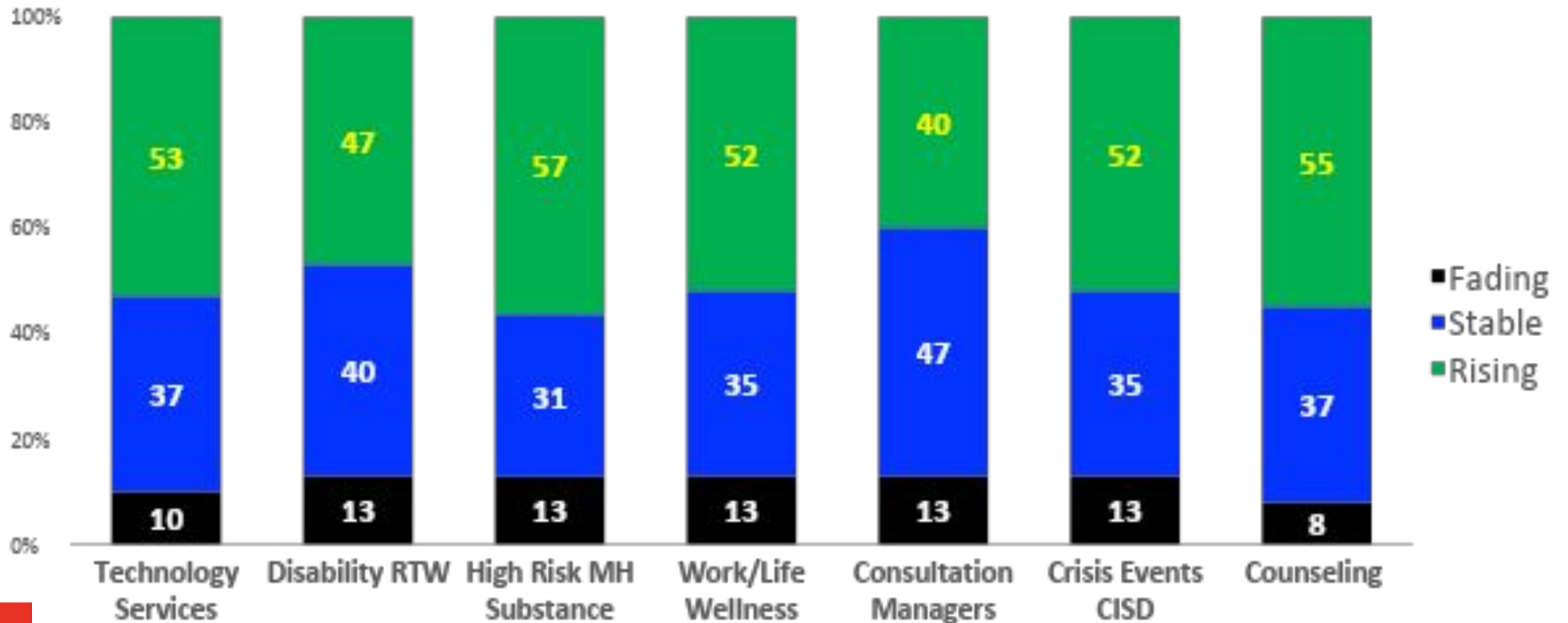
*In your opinion, how important is this type of service to **defining** what an EAP should be?*

All seven service areas were highly important to defining EAP by the vast majority of sample.

- Six areas highly importance by 90%.
- Technology services was lowest but still at high importance by three-fourths of people.



# How is the **business value** of this type of service currently perceived in the EAP industry?



# Research Results: EAP Core Services in SA

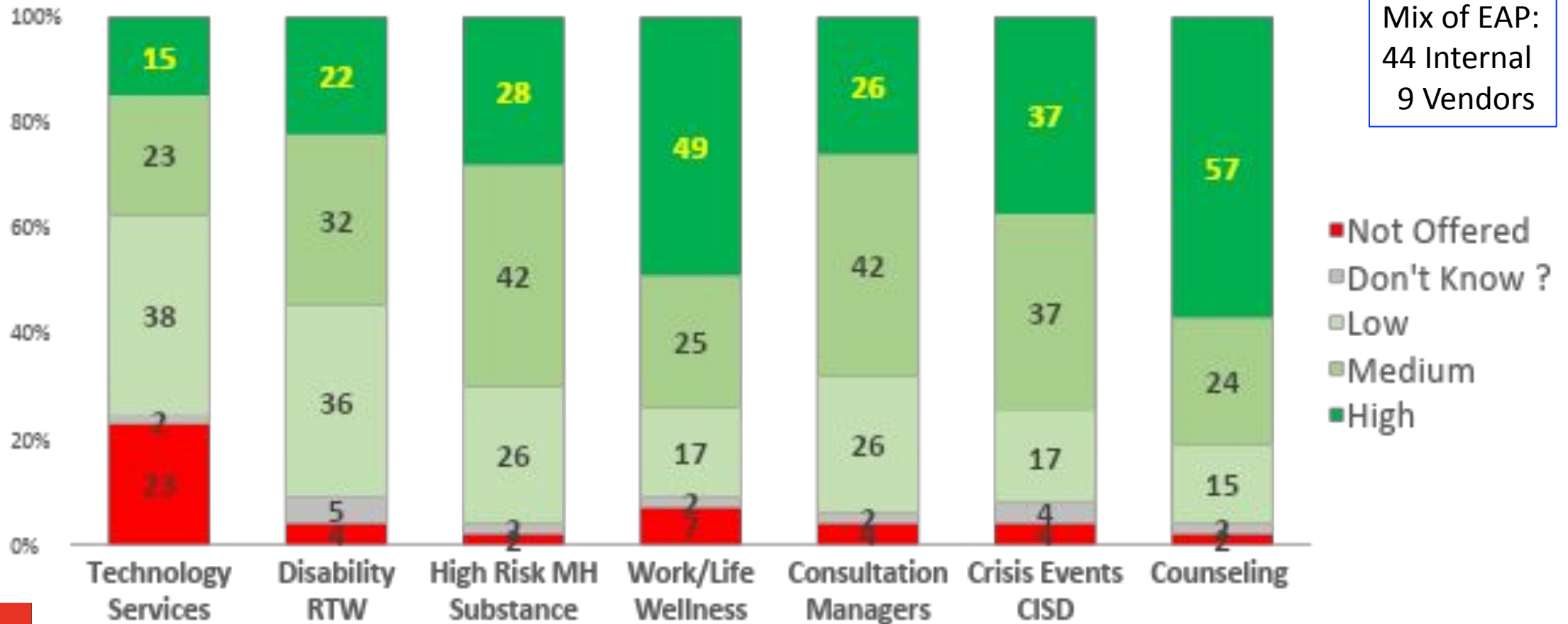
*How is the **business value** of this type of service currently perceived in the EAP industry?*

Similar results across all seven service areas:

- About half say services are **Rising** in value.
- About a third say services have **Stable** value.
- Only 12% say services are **Fading** in value.



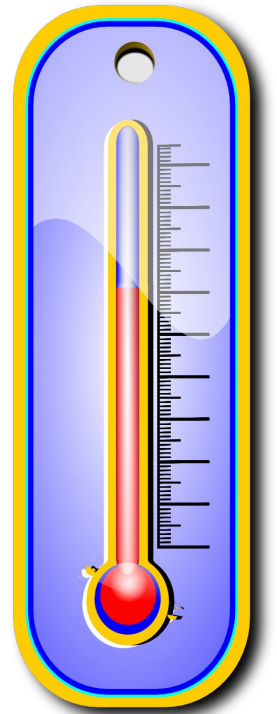
# At your EAP, how often is this service used by your client organization(s)?



# Research Results: EAP Core Services in SA

*At your EAP external vendor business or EAP internal program, **how often is this service used** by your client organization(s)?*

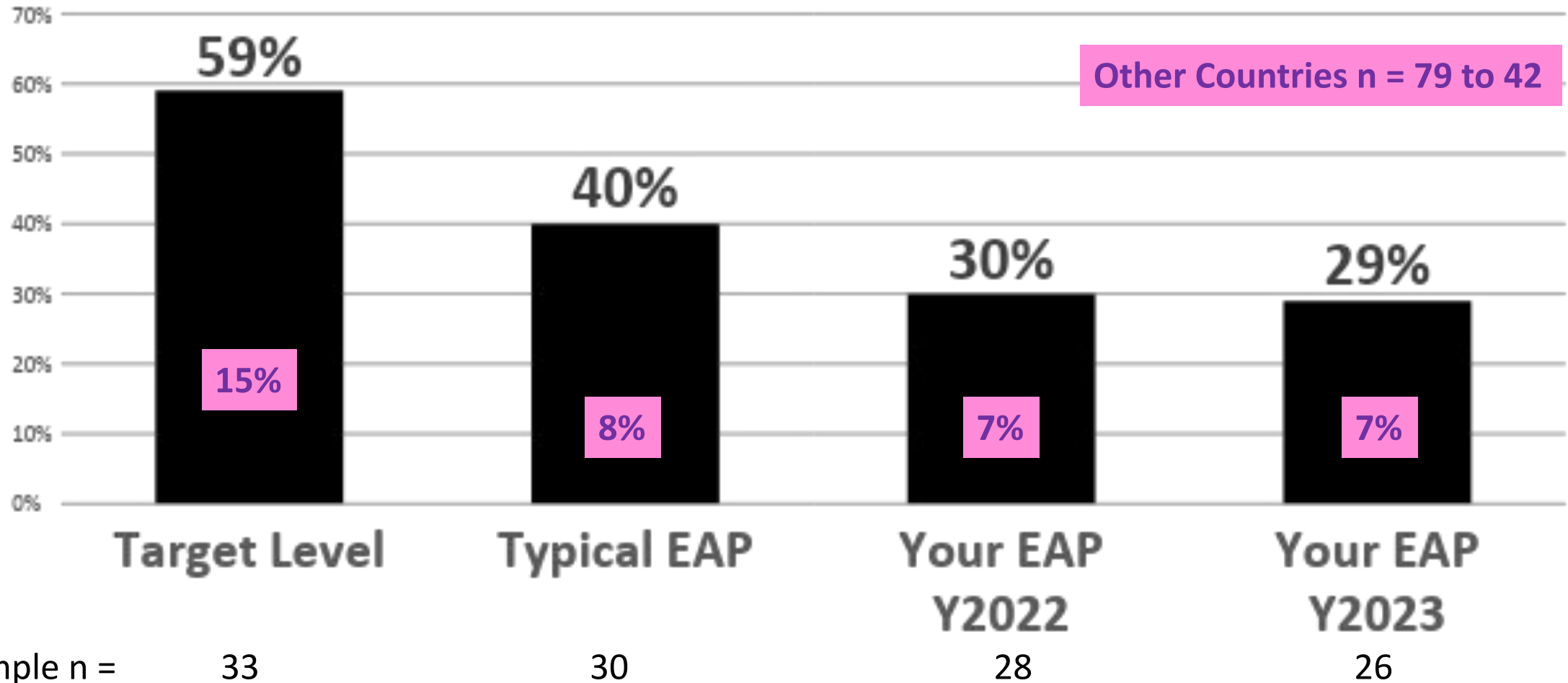
- Six areas were offered by > 90% of EAPs. But Technology was NOT offered by 1 in 4 EAPs.
- Level of use ranged across services:
  - **Counseling** and integration with **wellness & work/life** were the highest (> half of EAPs at high use)
  - The other services with high use levels at only 1 in 4 EAPs. Technology was lowest use.



# How Much are EAPs Actually Used Today?

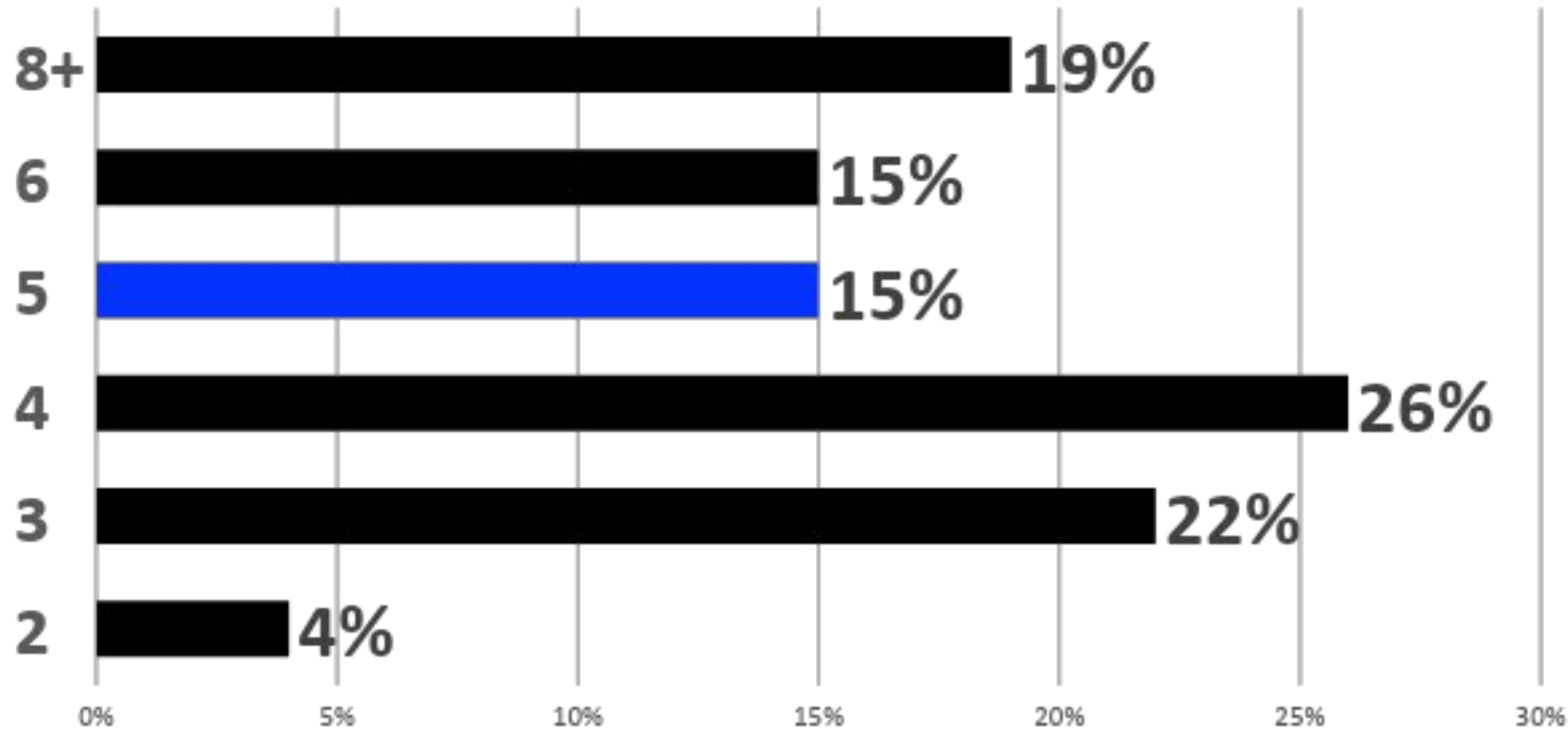
# Utilization of EAP & Wellness Program in SA

Average % of All Employees per Year Who Use Program



# Sessions of EAP Counseling Per Case in SA

Average Sessions of Counseling per EAP Case



**YEAR 2022**

**Sample n = 27**

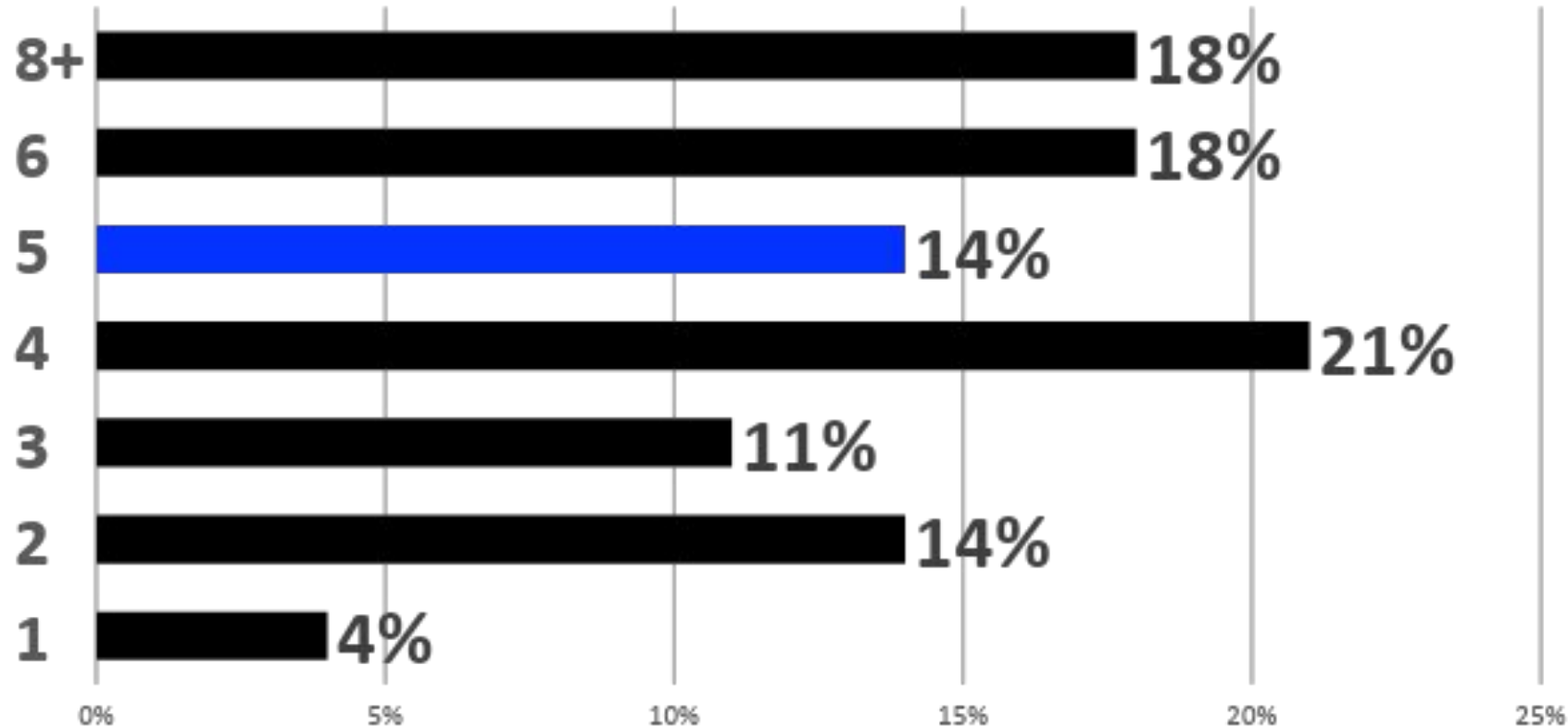
**AVG = 5.3**

**Other Countries: 4.3  
n = 57**



# Sessions of EAP Counseling Per Case in SA

Average Sessions of Counseling per EAP Case



**YEAR 2023 YTD**

**Sample n = 28**

**AVG = 5.0**

**Other Countries: 4.3  
n = 57**



# Key Points: EAP Utilization in SA

Overall program use for individual cases at EAP/Wellness is around 30% of all covered employees per year at the organization. [vs. 7% in USA]

But this average level is only reaching *half* of the ideal target of 59%.  
Does this make EAPs vulnerable to techno providers who promise higher engagement rates?

Average of 5.3 sessions per counseling case is slightly higher than 4.3 for EAPs in US. But does the wide range between EAPs indicate differences in quality or effectiveness?

# EAP Use Criticized in Techno Marketing

- One of the most common criticisms of Traditional EAPs is that their utilization rates are “too low.”
- But what kind of use is relevant to compare?
  - Engagement rates from just trying out techno tools (websites and Apps)?
  - Are users of workplace wellness and prevention services also included?
  - Only focus on the clinical case rate for individual users of EAP counselors?
  - Overall program rates for worksite services and worker users of EAP?
- This use data shows EAPs in South Africa are less vulnerable to the low use attack by Techno EAPs than are those in United States.

# Understanding the Big Picture

## PART 3

Continuum of Service Options from  
Pure Techno to to Pure Workplace

# Conceptual Continuum of EAP Services from Pure Techno to Pure Worksite

Historically EAP started here

In-person  
Counselor office  
Training rooms  
Wellness events

Worksite  
Human Provider  
Prevention or Clinical  
Individual User or  
Groups of Users

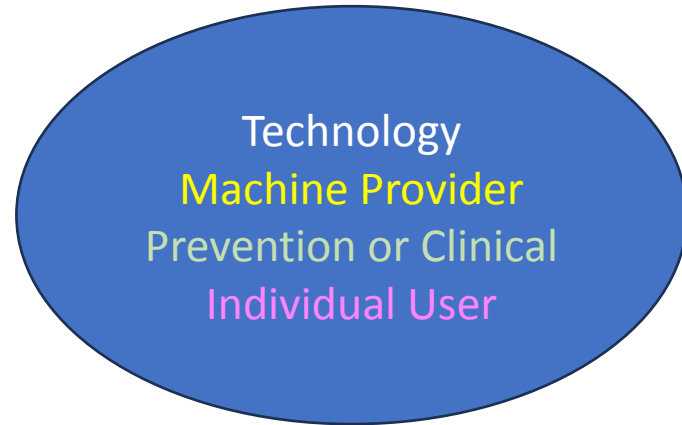
# Conceptual Continuum of EAP Services from Pure Techno to Pure Worksite

Started 1990s – Advanced now



Telephone  
Video internet  
e-mail / texts

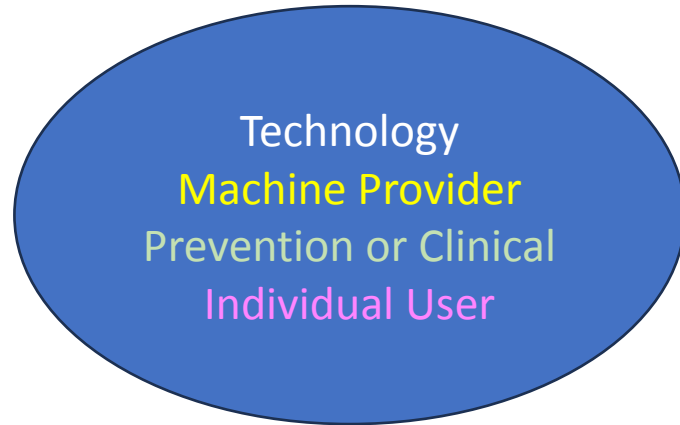
# Conceptual Continuum from Pure Techno Provider to Pure Worksite EAP



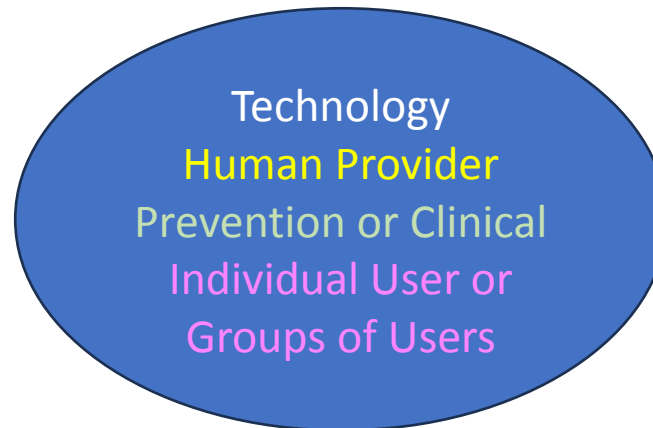
Websites  
Apps & AI  
Surveys  
iCBT programs  
VR headset

Rapid growth in past decade

# Conceptual Continuum of EAP Services from Pure Techno to Pure Worksite

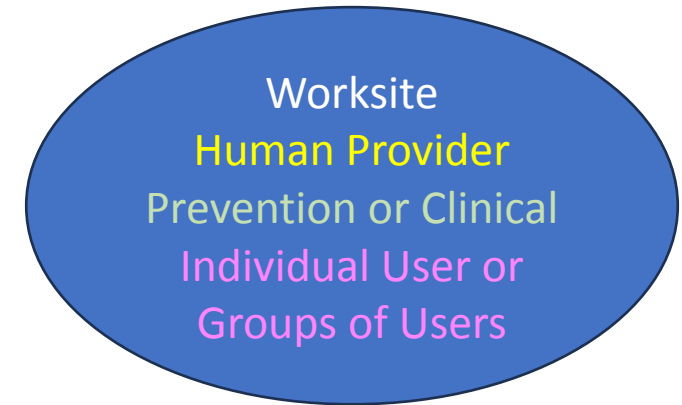


Websites  
Apps & AI  
Surveys  
iCBT programs  
VR headset

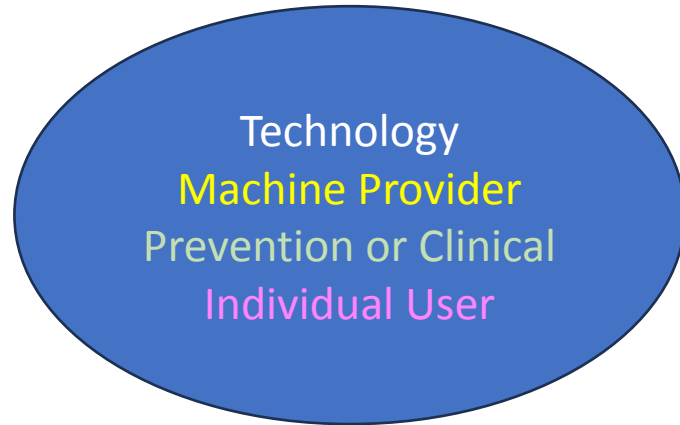


Telephone  
e-mail / texts  
Live Video

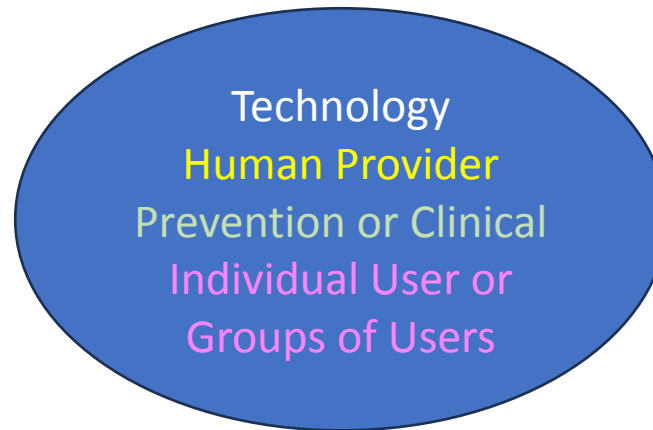
In-person  
Counselor office  
Training rooms  
Wellness events



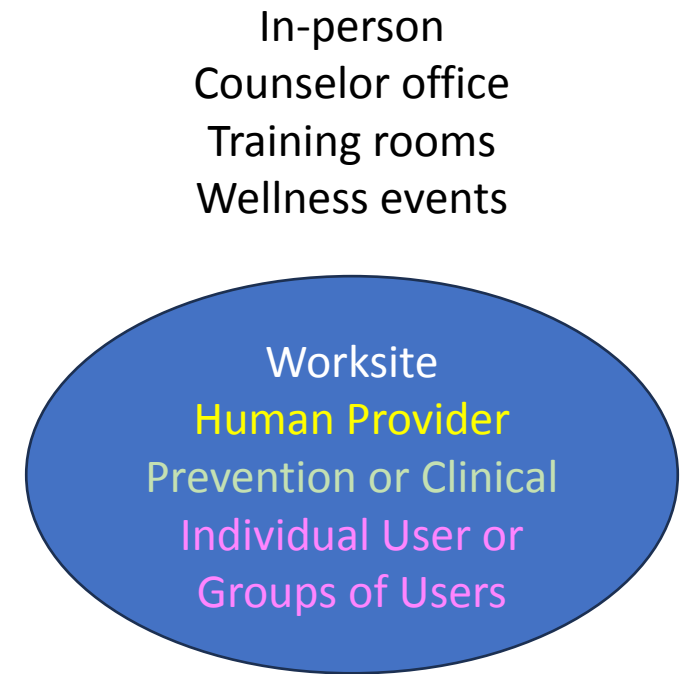
# Conceptual Continuum of EAP Services from Pure Techno to Pure Worksite



Websites  
Apps & AI  
Surveys  
iCBT programs  
VR headset

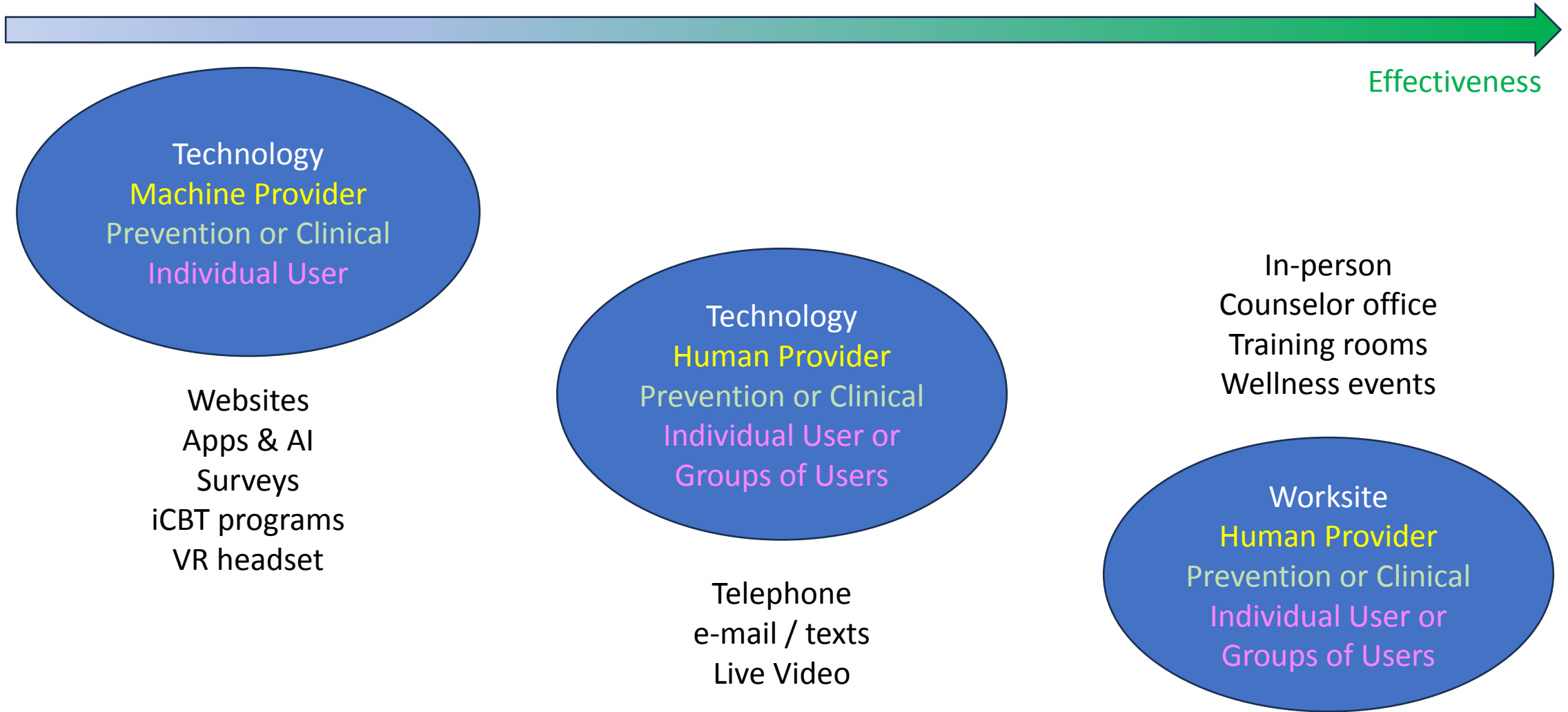


Telephone  
e-mail / texts  
Live Video

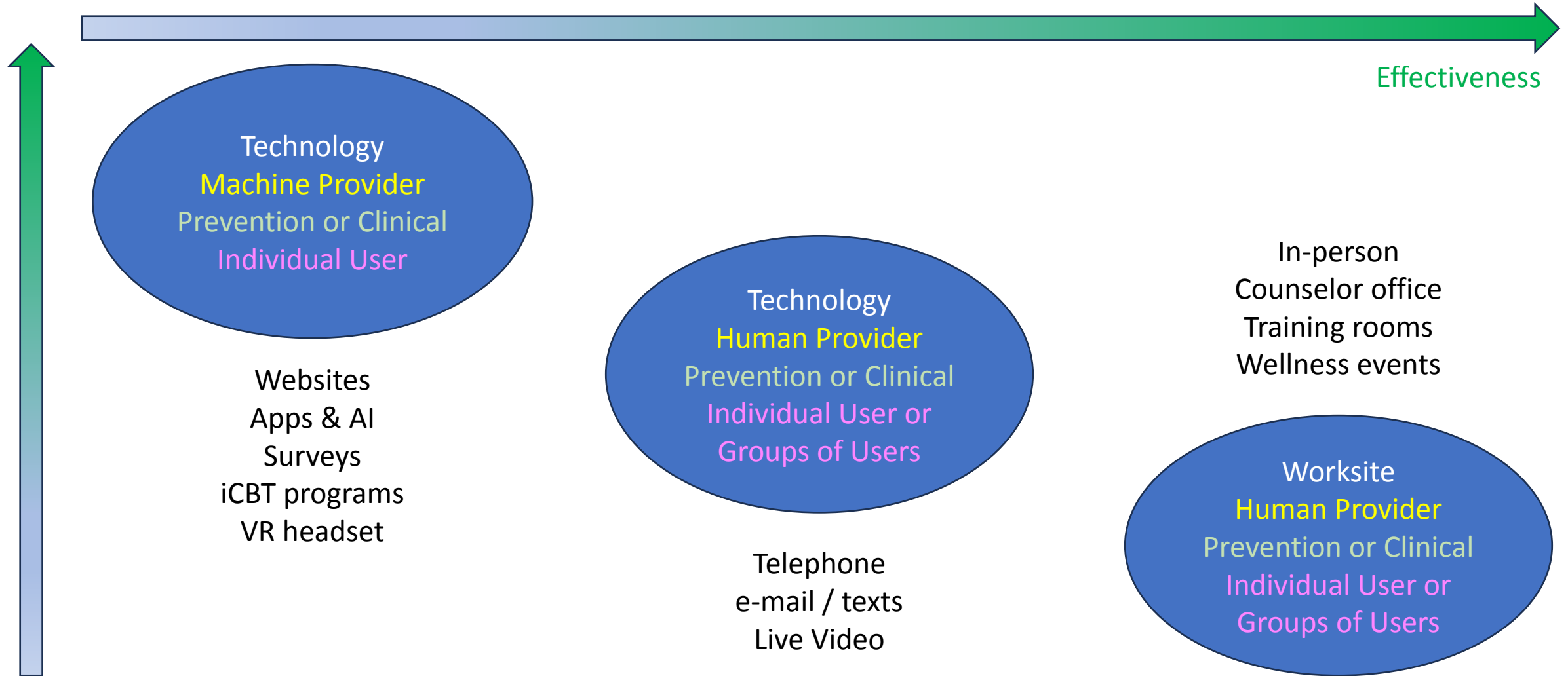


Reach into employee population

# Conceptual Continuum of EAP Services from Pure Techno to Pure Worksite



# Conceptual Continuum of EAP Services from Pure Techno to Pure Worksite



Reach into employee population

Where are YOU on this model?

# Conceptual Continuum of EAP Services from Pure Techno to Pure Worksite

**Opportunity 2:**  
Missing Machine  
Only Services

**Opportunity 1:**  
Missing Techo Delivery  
of Human Services

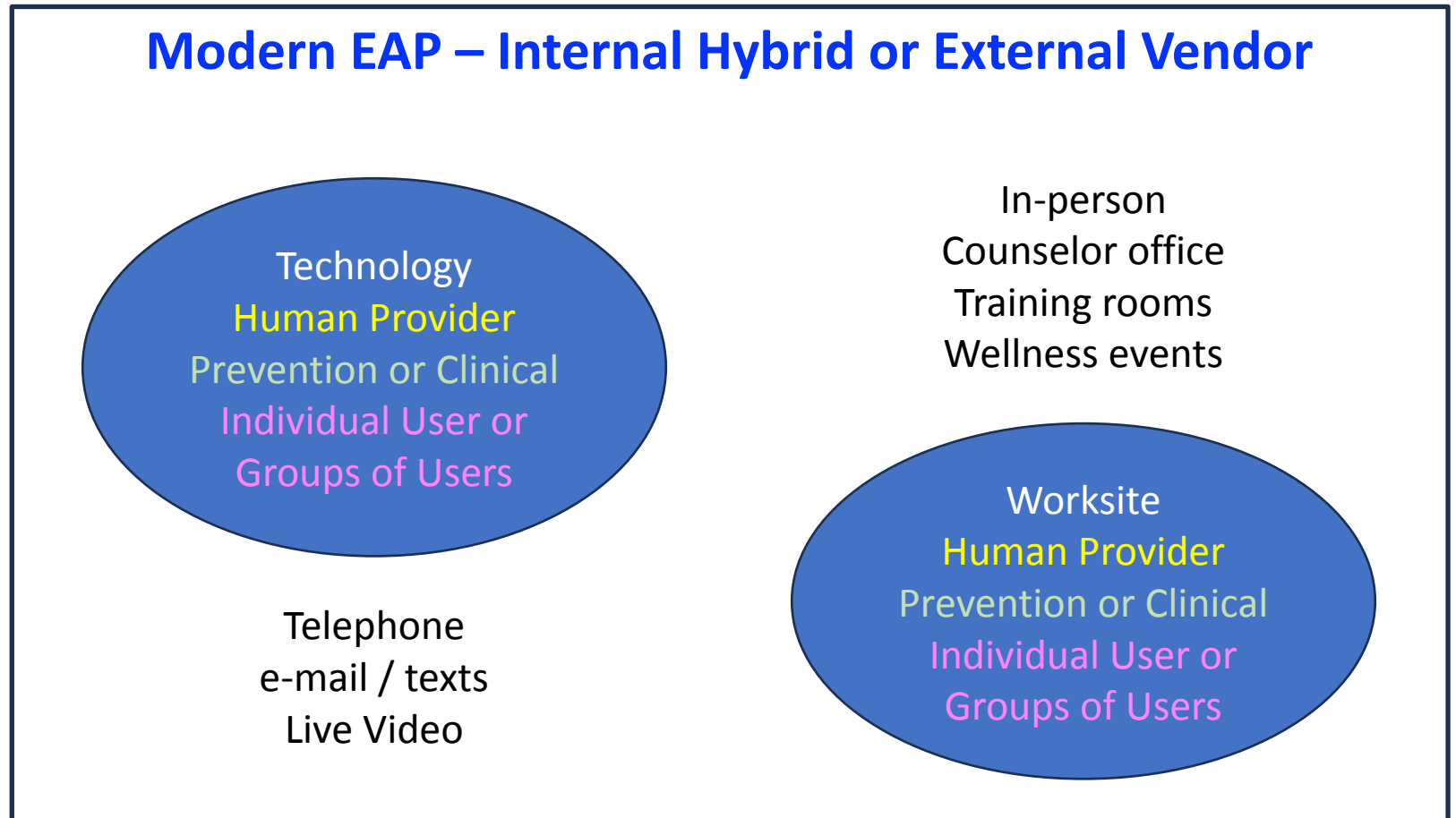
## Traditional Internal Staff Model EAP

In-person  
Counselor office  
Training rooms  
Wellness events

Worksite  
**Human Provider**  
Prevention or Clinical  
**Individual User or  
Groups of Users**

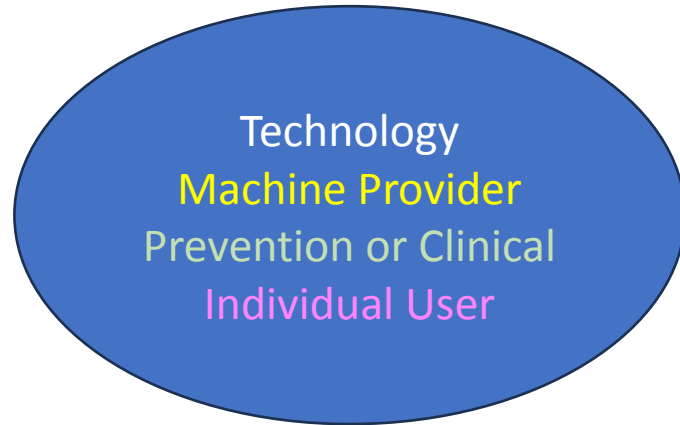
# Conceptual Continuum of EAP Services from Pure Techno to Pure Worksite

**Opportunity:**  
Missing Machine  
Services



# Conceptual Continuum of EAP Services from Pure Techno to Pure Worksite

## Pure Techno Provider



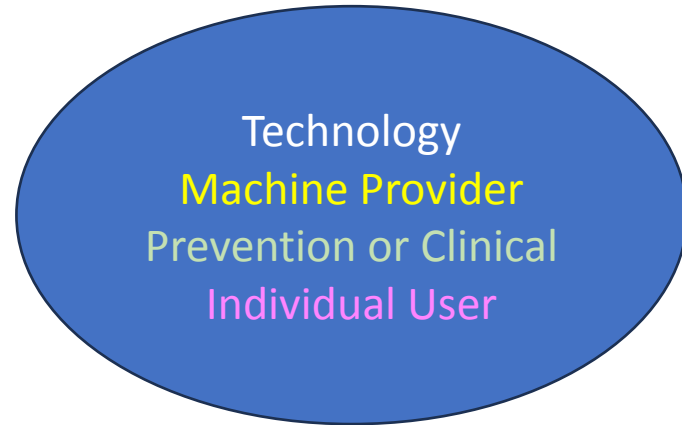
Websites  
Apps & AI  
Surveys  
iCBT programs  
VR headset

**Imposter EAP if:  
Missing Human  
EAP Services  
via Technology**

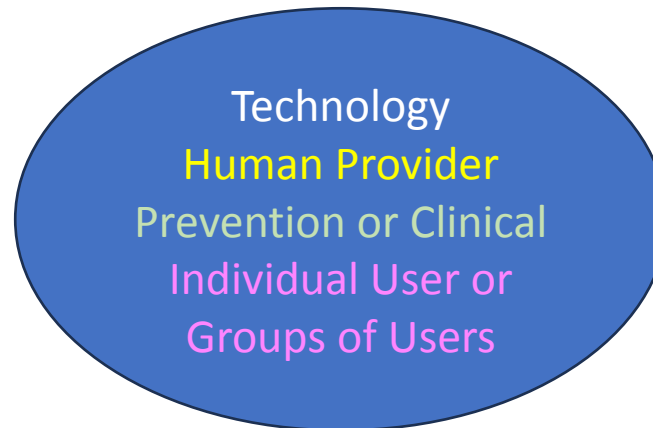
**Imposter EAP if:  
Missing Onsite Human  
and Workplace  
EAP Services**

# Conceptual Continuum of EAP Services from Pure Techno to Pure Worksite

## Blended Techno Provider



Websites  
Apps & AI  
Surveys  
iCBT programs  
VR headset

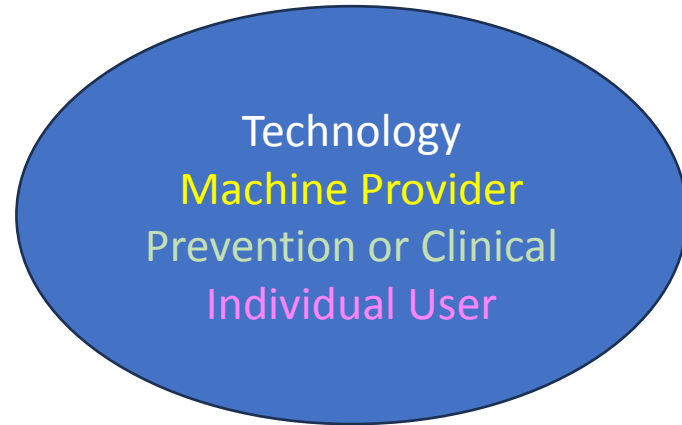


Telephone  
e-mail / texts  
Live Video

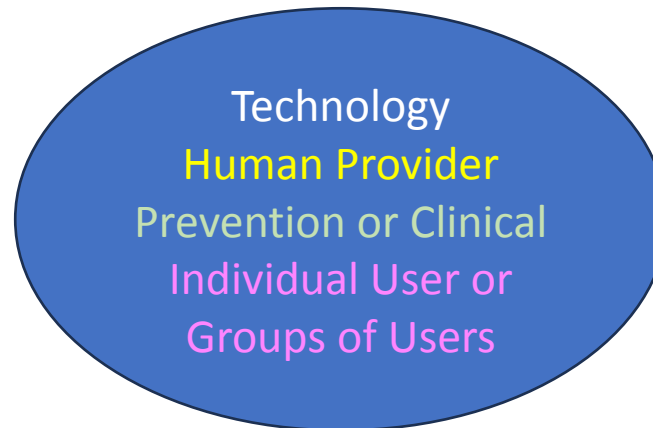
**Imposter EAP if:  
Missing Onsite Human  
and Workplace  
EAP Services**

# Conceptual Continuum of EAP Services from Pure Techno to Pure Worksite

## Complete Provider – Both Techno & EAP

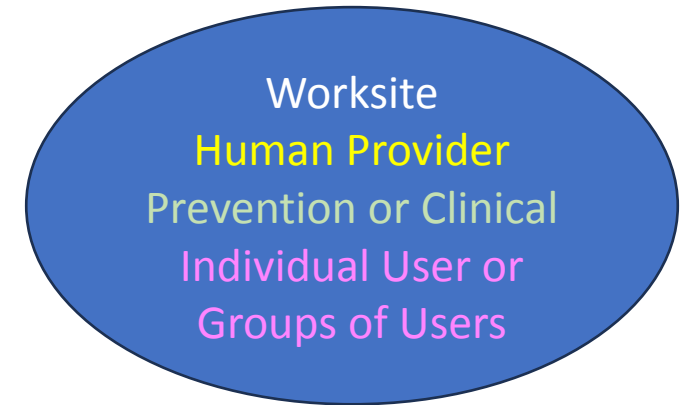


Websites  
Apps & AI  
Surveys  
iCBT programs  
VR headset



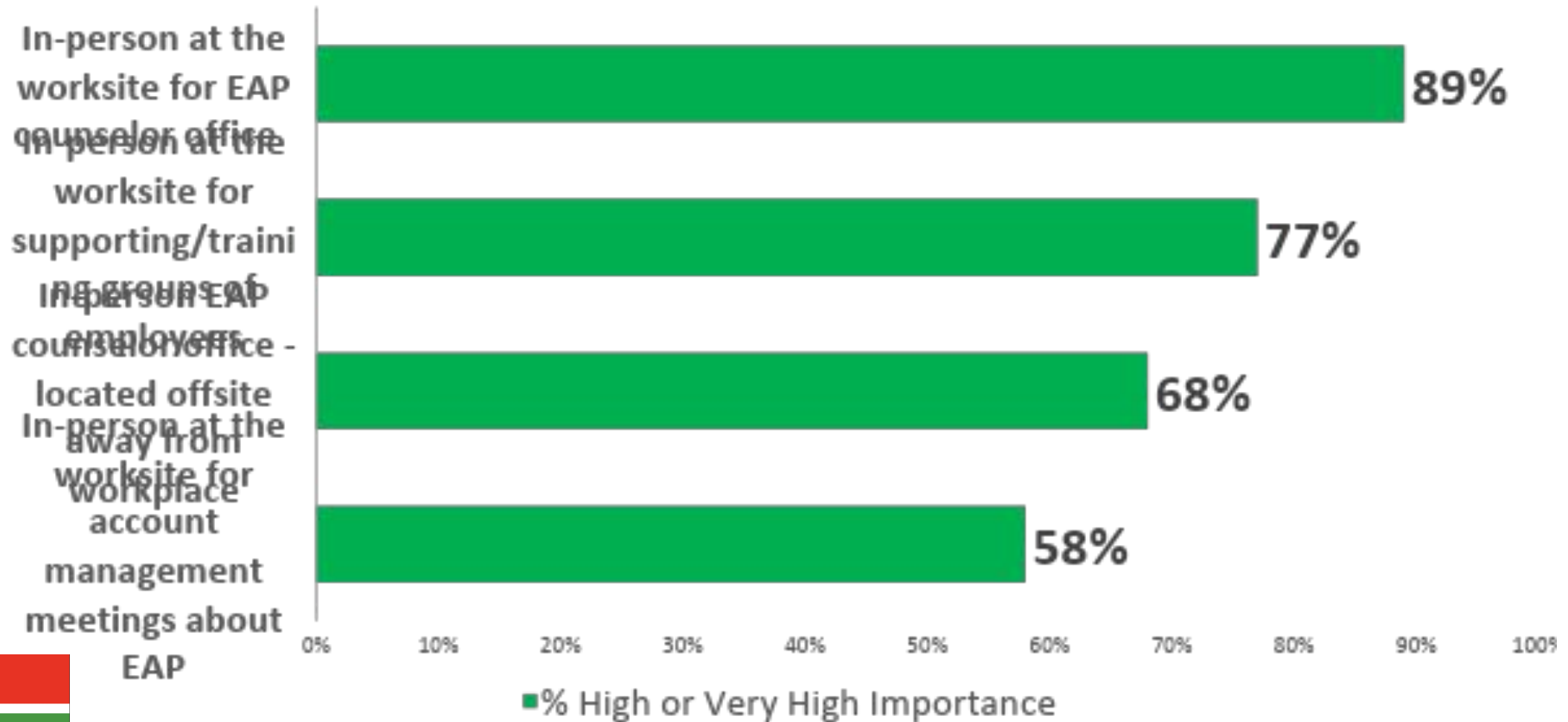
Telephone  
e-mail / texts  
Live Video

In-person  
Counselor office  
Training rooms  
Wellness events



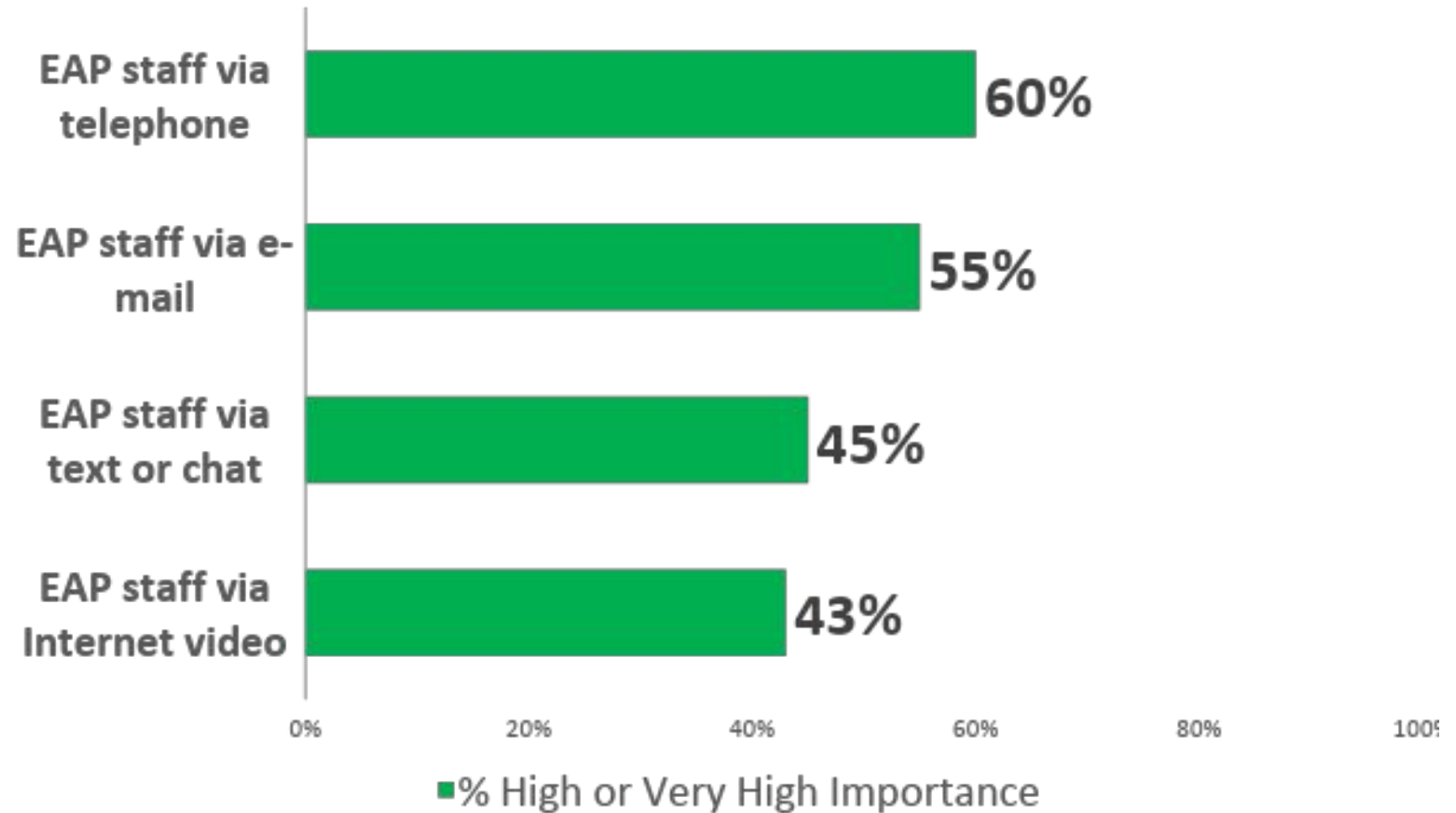
# Which Kinds of Delivery Options On Continuum Model of Services are Important to EAP?

In general, how important to employer efforts overall to support workplace mental health are the following different ways to access or use the EAP for counseling or other EAP workplace and account management services? **HUMAN EAP IN-PERSON**

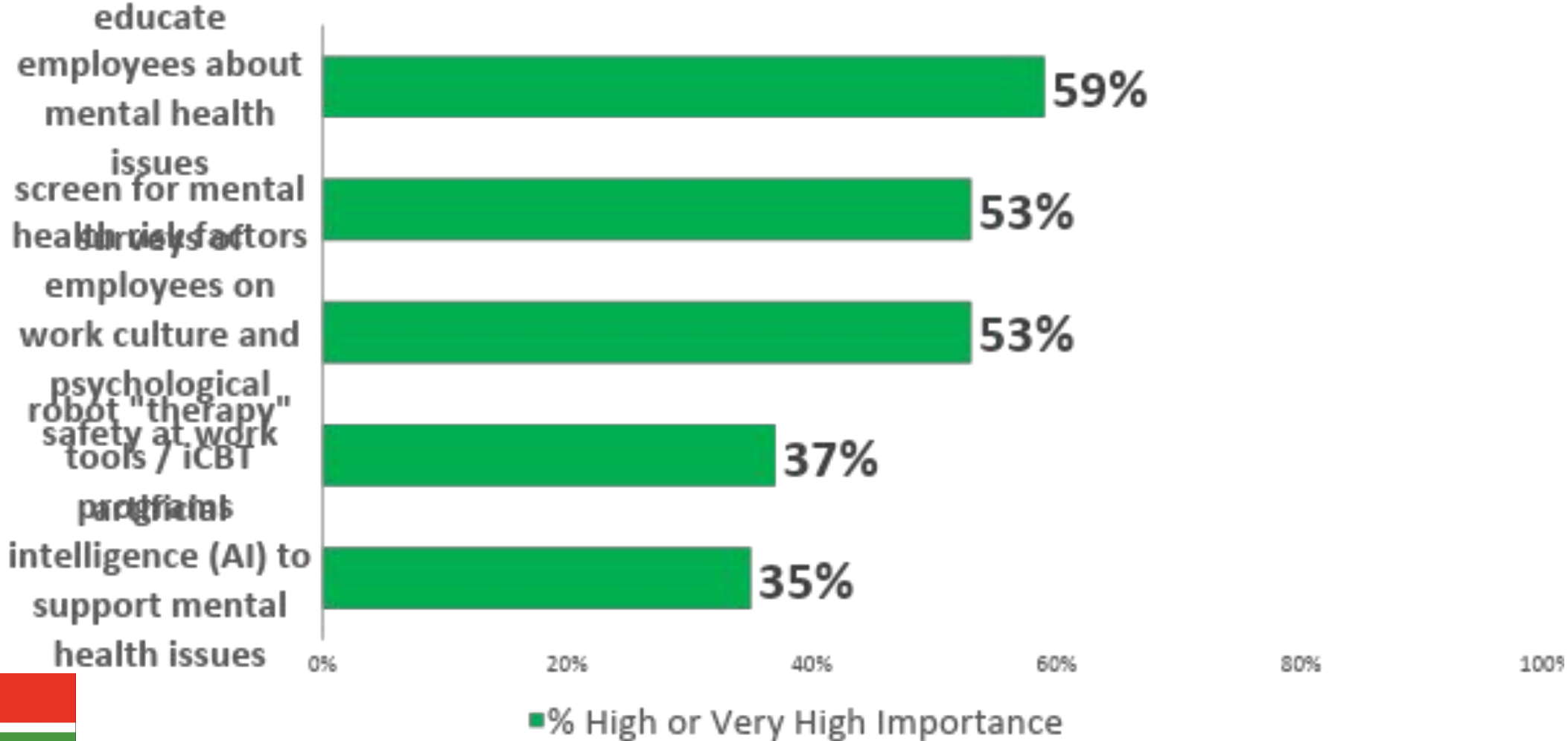


N = 53

In general, how important to employer efforts overall to support workplace mental health are the following different ways to access or use the EAP for counseling or other EAP workplace and account management services? **HUMAN EAP via TECHNO**



In general, how important to employer efforts overall to support workplace mental health are the following kinds of technology-based kinds of services (website and smartphone Apps)? **TECHNO MACHINE TOOLS ONLY**



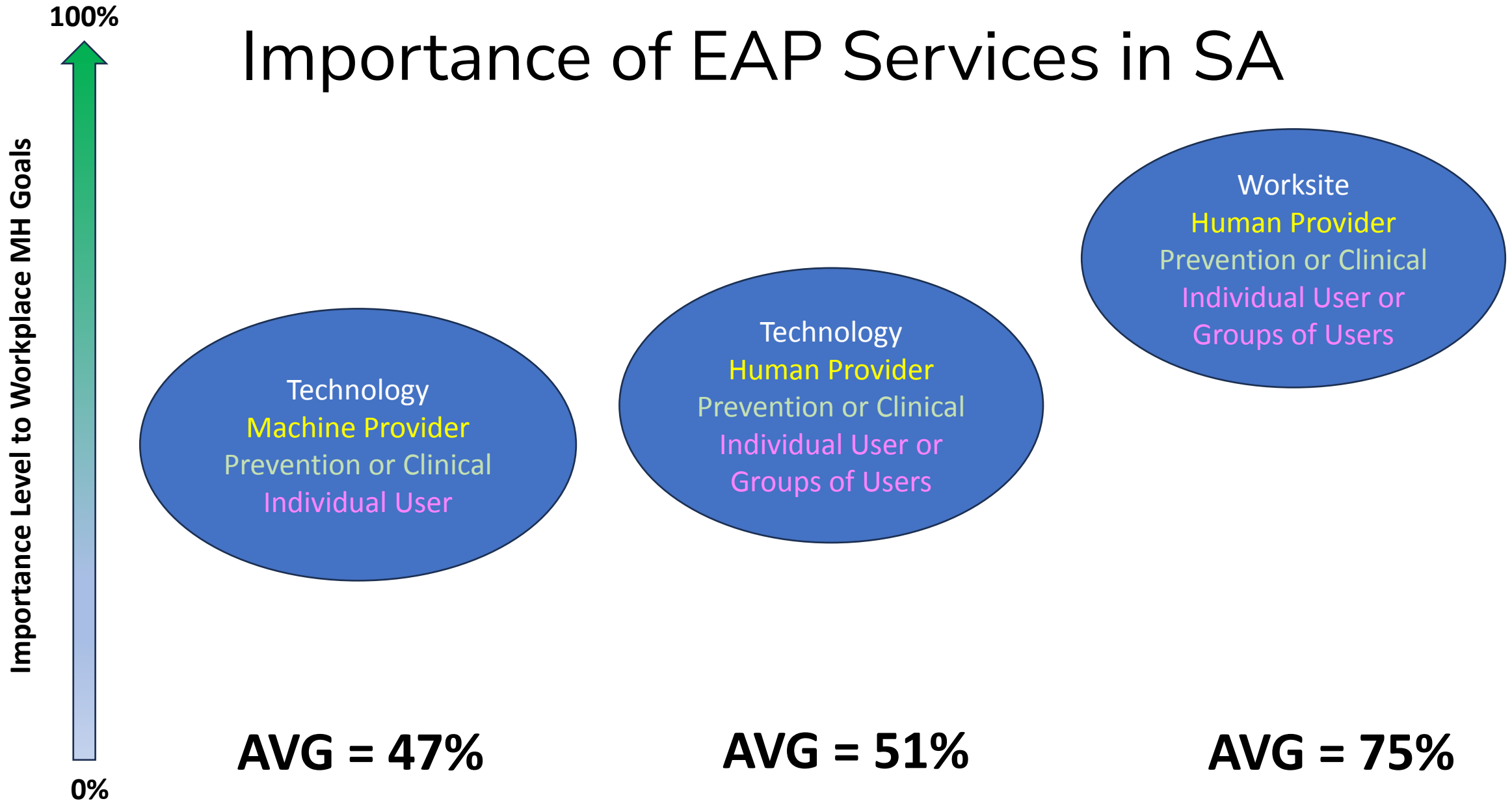
# Key Points: EAP Service Delivery in SA

In-person delivery by a human was most important to EAP: AVG = 75% rated as high importance

Technology-based delivery by a human was relatively less important to EAP: AVG = 51% rated as high importance

Technology-based delivery by a machine (no human) also was less important to EAP: AVG = 47% rated as high importance

# Importance of EAP Services in SA



# Closing **SUMMARY** of Key Ideas

1. Technology-focused New Providers – Imposter EAPs?
2. Distinguishing True EAPs from Imposter EAPs
3. Conceptual Continuum of Pure Techno to Pure Worksite EAP

Featuring: [New Survey Results from EAPs in South Africa](#)

**THANK YOU**

**Questions  
or  
Comments**

**Please type into the SLIDO App in your phone**