



The National Agreement guarantees veterans a means of assistance when it is needed most

This probably comes as no shock to you, but the federal government is the largest employer of military veterans in the country. Also not-so-surprisingly, the Postal Service is one of the largest employers of veterans in that federal sector. Historically, veterans make up between 17 and 18 percent of all postal employees. For letter carriers, that percentage may be a little higher.

NALC and the Postal Service are better organizations because of the large number of veterans who carry the mail. Veterans bring to the workplace skills and training from their military experience and we all benefit—civilians and veterans alike.

Unfortunately, veterans sometimes have service-connected issues that civilians don't. In 2014, veterans accounted for 18 percent of all deaths from suicide among U.S. adults, while veterans constituted 8.5 percent of the U.S. population.

Regardless of the numbers or rates, any veteran suicide is one too many. For that matter, any work or non-work-related stress or burden that affects the physical or mental well-being of our members—especially our military veterans—is a stress or burden that need not be borne alone.

The USPS/NALC National Agreement provides letter carriers the right and opportunity to use the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as a means of addressing an employee's personal problems. Article 35.1 states, in relevant part:

Section 1. Programs

The Employer and the Union express strong support for programs of self-help. The Employer shall provide and maintain a program which shall encompass the education, identification, referral, guidance [for] employees. ... This program of labor-management cooperation shall support the continuation of the EAP for alcohol, drug abuse, and other **family and/or personal problems** at the current level. [Emphasis added.]

In other words, NALC negotiated a national program for employee counseling of alcohol or drug abuse as well as for other types of family or personal problems. EAP has trained outside professionals who provide free confidential counseling

to all postal employees and their family members.

Many employees wrongly believe EAP is only for dealing with drug and alcohol dependence. This could not be further from the truth. Yes, if drugs and/or alcohol are a problem EAP is there, but the clear language states EAP is equally available for *family and/or personal problems*. That is an absolute fact.

Confidentiality is the cornerstone of EAP counseling. EAP counselors are bound by very strict codes of ethics, as well as by federal and state laws, requiring that information learned from counseled employees remains private. EAP counselors have licenses and master's degrees in their fields of expertise.

Don't be concerned that participation in EAP will negatively affect your job. The *Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)* spells that out specifically in Chapter 9, stating:

941.31 Job Security

Participation in EAP is voluntary and will not jeopardize the employee's job security or promotional opportunities.

EAP counselor services are available, through voluntary self-referrals, to letter carriers and their family members. The national contact number for such self-referrals is 800-EAP4YOU (800-327-4968). Additional information is also available at www.eap4you.com. When you call, a live counselor will answer and begin the process.

EAP services are provided through a contract with Magellan Healthcare and employees may be able to schedule up to 12 visits at no cost. If additional counseling is advised or necessary, the EAP counselor can make referral for additional counseling. This additional referral counseling is at the employee's expense. However, most of the health plans in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan (FEHB) cover this type of counseling. Depending on which FEHB plan you have, there may be some out-of-pocket expense for these referral visits.

EAP counselors have the responsibility to accept all referrals; schedule face-to-face or telephone interview appointments within a reasonable period from the time the request is made by the employee or family member; and crisis counseling must be available by telephone 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The rules for scheduling an EAP counseling session are also covered in the *ELM*, which states:

941.35 Scheduling

The following guidelines apply to scheduling and whether EAP sessions take place on or off the clock:

- An employee's first visit to EAP is on the clock ... unless the employee prefers to visit the EAP unit on his or her own time.
- Subsequent consultations are on the employee's own time.
- If a reasonable period of time has elapsed since a management referral or a previously disclosed self-referral, the manager or supervisor may, on a case-by-case basis, approve an additional on-the-clock session.
- To receive pay for an on-the-clock session, the employee must authorize the EAP provider to disclose his or her attendance to management.

Many veterans are already aware of the Veterans Administration 24/7 Veterans Crisis Line (800-273-TALK), which provides immediate access to mental health crisis intervention and support. Frankly, some veterans would prefer not to use this VA-sponsored recourse for a variety of reasons. For those, and for any other veteran who chooses, NALC has negotiated the alternative EAP services that are available for you.

If you find yourself burdened by events or circumstances, there is no good reason to carry it alone. Take advantage of this opportunity to address your situation with a trained counselor who is ready to listen. Your workplace should never be a place you need or want to avoid and we need you as a co-worker. Remember, your rights to use EAP are guaranteed without fear of harassment or reprisal and are strictly confidential.

As a veteran, you stepped up when you saw a need. For all our veterans, NALC hopes we are stepping up for you when you need us.