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## Employee Assistance Professionals Association

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*Sponsor of the CEAP Certification Program*

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Dear Fellow EAPA Members:

As many of you are aware, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has launched a service called EAPrefer, which it describes as “a revolutionary new program connecting Employee Assistance Professionals with the Network Providers who need them.” This service is offered through NASW’s for-profit subsidiary, NASW Assurance Services, Inc. (NASW-ASI).

At first glance, this may appear to be a positive development for the EA profession. However, a closer look reveals that the EAPrefer materials infer clearly that a social work degree and license, along with appropriate professional liability insurance, qualifies a clinician to be considered and promoted as an “employee assistance professional.”

Many of you have expressed your serious concern about this to the EAPA Board and EACC, and we, in turn, have tried to reach out to NASW and NASW-ASI to attempt to develop a cooperative approach that accomplishes their goals, but also respects the importance and distinctiveness of the employee assistance body of knowledge. Unfortunately, our attempts at outreach have so far been rebuffed. (A more detailed list of our attempts and interactions up to now follows at the end of this letter.)

As you know, EAPA, through its Employee Assistance Certification Commission (EACC), has for many years developed and refined the CEAP® credential, which requires, among other things, passing a psychometrically and empirically validated examination testing mastery of the employee assistance body of knowledge. Much of this unique body of knowledge and skill set is not covered or included in social work (or any other profession’s) education or licensure.

Moreover, the unique dual client nature of employee assistance work creates ethical challenges that don’t exist in other aspects of social work or other clinical practice and that therefore are not covered in their various codes of ethics. Those EA-specific ethical challenges and issues *are*, however, covered in the EAPA Code of Ethics and the CEAP® Code of Conduct. These differing ethical requirements and considerations represent another substantial reason that simply being licensed as a social worker or other professional does not qualify someone to be represented as or considered to be an employee assistance professional.

EAPA and the EACC are concerned that the aggressive promotion and marketing currently being undertaken by EAPrefer blurs the distinction between employee assistance and other social work. Therefore, we have created a Task Force, chaired by EAPA Secretary/Treasurer (and social worker), Mike Cipressi, to develop a strategy to continue to reach out to NASW and, at the same time, promote the CEAP® credential and the distinct knowledge and skills needed to truly be an employee assistance professional.

The Task Force is developing a three pronged approach:

1. Keep EAPA members and CEAPs informed about the background and future developments related to EAPrefer. This letter serves as the initial activity in this area, and we will keep you informed on a regular basis.
2. Encourage all EAPA members and CEAPs, particularly those who are also NASW members, to reach out to local and state NASW leadership to express their concerns. We believe that NASW, through the EAPrefer program, is encouraging its members to practice beyond the scope of their expertise. To assist in expressing this and other concerns, we have developed a letter “template” that members can use or draw from to communicate with NASW. (View and download the template, <http://www.eapassn.org/files/public/Template.doc> .)
3. The EAPA Board and the EACC will intensify their efforts to highlight the distinctiveness of the EA body of knowledge and promote the CEAP® credential. We are seeking the assistance of EAPA members and others to help in this process. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact me or any member of the Board or EACC.

We will continue to work toward developing a positive and productive relationship with NASW and other professional associations and to leveraging the current situation into an opportunity to strengthen the broader recognition in the business and clinical communities of EA ethics, program standards, knowledge and professional skills. Please contact me or anyone on the Board of Directors or EACC if you have questions or want to assist in our efforts.

Sincerely,

*Jeff Christie*

Jeff Christie, LCSW, CEAP  
President

#### Timeline of EAPrefer developments:

- In 2009, representatives of NASW-ASI contacted EAPA, expressing interest in exploring how they and EAPA might work together to benefit both memberships, including some sort of strategic alliance. As part of this exploration, they requested EAPA's help in arranging and advertising three focus groups at the 2009 EAPA Conference in Dallas to help them learn more about EAPs. EAPA honored this request with the understanding that they would share their findings and we would continue to explore mutually beneficial cooperation. Although the focus groups were conducted as planned, EAPA was never given any feedback. EAPA's follow-up calls to NASW-ASI went unreturned.
- NASW-ASI purchased an exhibit booth to introduce their new program, EAPrefer, at the 2010 EAPA Conference in Tampa. EAPA agreed to let them exhibit, believing it would give us a opportunity to resume a productive dialogue with them. Although this opportunity did not materialize at the conference, EAPA CEO, John Maynard, did receive a response to his outreach in January, 2011, that they would be happy to set up a meeting sometime in March to explore mutually beneficial opportunities. This meeting never occurred, and again EAPA's attempted contacts were not returned.
- While onsite in Tampa in 2010, EAPrefer had pre-purchased a sponsorship and an exhibit booth for the 2011 EAPA Conference in Denver. During 2011, EAPrefer began actively promoting their services to EAPA members, several of whom contacted EAPA and the EACC with their concerns.
- In July, 2011, EACC Chair, Melvina McDonald, sent a formal letter to NASW President, James Kelly, providing background about EAPA, the EACC, and the CEAP® credential. The letter requested a phone conversation with "the appropriate NASW and EAPrefer representatives to discuss further how our respective organizations can cooperate to improve the opportunities for NASW members and others, while respecting the established Employee Assistance professional scope of practice." (View the EACC letter, <http://www.eapassn.org/files/public/EACC.pdf> .) No response was ever received to the letter.
- In September, 2011, EAPA President Jeff Christie, himself a social worker and NASW member, was able to arrange a phone conversation with NASW Executive Director, Betsy Clark, to discuss EAPA's concerns. Ms. Clark made it clear that she did not and would not recognize the existence of a distinct EA body of knowledge nor any credential (CEAP) based on such a body of knowledge.
- Jeff Christie reported this conversation at the EAPA Board of Directors meeting and at EAPA's Annual Business Meeting at the 2011 Conference in Denver. Based on these developments, EAPA decided not to accept any further sponsorship, advertising, or exhibit booth purchases by EAPrefer until and unless we have been able to resolve our concerns
- Many EAPA members who are also NASW members continued to report being contacted by EAPrefer to participate in their network. Some members erroneously assumed EAPrefer was endorsed by EAPA – it is not.
- In November and December, 2011, the EAPA Board of Directors created a Task Force comprised of concerned EAPA members, Board Directors, and EACC Commissioners to develop a strategy as described above.