



Taking action on obesity: It's time to address obesity in the workplace

Obesity is a growing concern, with the number of people being affected on the rise. If no action is taken, **Canada's obesity rate is projected to reach nearly 30% by 2030.**^{1,2}

Internationally, **obesity has been recognized as a chronic disease** by organizations including the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists (AACE), and World Obesity Federation (WOF).³⁻⁵

Obesity has many contributing factors:^{6,7}



Environmental



Genetic



Physiological



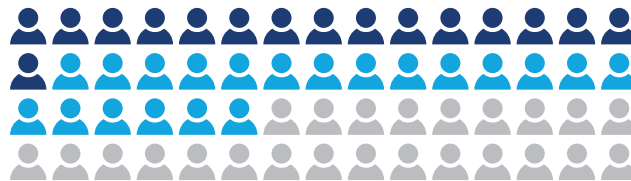
Psychological



Socio-economic

According to a study conducted by Statistics Canada, in 2016 and 2017:⁸

34% of the Canadian population met the body mass index (BMI) classification for **overweight**



27% of the Canadian population were determined to be living with **obesity**

In people with obesity, **the risk of developing other health issues, such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, depression, and sleep disorders, is increased.**⁹ Obesity also puts individuals at an increased risk of developing at least 13 different types of cancer.^{8,10} Recently, the Canadian Cancer Society estimated that excess weight will soon become the second leading cause of cancer, after smoking.¹⁰

In the workplace, obesity can also negatively impact productivity and lead to increased rates of absenteeism and short-term disability.¹¹

There is a high cost associated with obesity—it is estimated that annually over **\$7 billion** in healthcare costs and lost productivity can be attributed to obesity in Canada.^{12,13}

Managing obesity is a life-long process. Like any other chronic condition, such as diabetes or asthma, it requires a holistic approach.¹⁴

The key to effective weight management

Effective obesity management is possible and can help to improve health, quality of life, and workplace performance. Given that obesity is a complex and chronic condition, a multi-faceted approach to treatment is often necessary.

Canadian treatment guidelines recommend a stepwise approach in treating obesity. Treatment begins with **behavioural modifications** that address diet, physical activity, and unhealthy eating patterns. If this is insufficient, some individuals may benefit from adding on **pharmacotherapy** and/or moving on to **bariatric surgery**.⁹



Supporting your employees

Similar to other chronic diseases, it is essential to provide employees living with obesity access to evidence-based treatment options to help them appropriately manage their weight. Your employees may require treatment with some, or a combination of, the resources that are mentioned above. Therefore, your employee benefits plan should include access to:

Dietitian or nutritionist services

A dietitian or nutritionist can help people with obesity develop a healthy eating plan to address diet modifications.

Many employers have now begun covering dietitian/nutritionist services through their Extended Health Benefits.

Exercise health professional support

An exercise health professional, such as a kinesiologist, can help people with obesity work to incorporate physical activity into their lifestyle in a safe and manageable way.

You may wish to provide access to an exercise health professional through either a wellness account or as a dedicated part of your Extended Health Benefits.

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT)

Cognitive-behavioural therapy helps people living with obesity identify and address unhealthy patterns in their eating habits and develop strategies to cope with them.

Ensure your plan provides adequate coverage of CBT through your mental health benefits.

Anti-obesity medications (AOMs)

AOMs are used by certain individuals who require additional weight control, in conjunction with behavioural modifications.

Many drug plans do not cover AOMs as a standard. Those that do may have an annual maximum that is a barrier for those requiring treatment. Make sure your plan provides adequate coverage.

It is important to review what is currently covered under your benefit plan to ensure that it supports employees with obesity. Many of these treatments may already be available through your plan; however, your employees may be unaware that they have access to them. You may wish to repackage your benefit plan offerings and promote them to increase awareness and further support your employees living with obesity.

Available resources

To learn more about obesity and its management, and to find out what resources are available to you, please contact Novo Nordisk Canada Inc. at NNCICustomerCare@novonordisk.com

References: 1. Statistics Canada. Projections of overweight and obese adult men in Canada, 2000/2001 to 2030. 2017. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/170621/cg-a002-eng.htm>. Retrieved January 7, 2020. 2. Statistics Canada. Projections of overweight and obese adult women in Canada, 2000/2001 to 2030. 2017. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/170621/cg-a001-eng.htm>. Retrieved January 7, 2020. 3. Canadian Medical Association. CMA recognizes obesity as a disease. 2015. Available at: <https://www.cma.ca/En/Pages/cma-recognizes-obesity-as-a-disease.aspx>. Retrieved March 3, 2017. 4. Bray GA, et al. Obesity: A chronic relapsing progressive disease process. A position statement of the World Obesity Federation. *Obes Rev.* 2017;18(7):715-723. 5. Mechanick J, et al. American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists' position statement on obesity and obesity medicine. *Endocr Pract.* 2012. 6. Mayo Clinic. Obesity. 2015. Available at: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/obesity/symptoms-causes/syc-20375742>. Retrieved July 10, 2019. 7. Pi-Sunyer F, et al. Clinical guidelines on the identification, evaluation, and treatment of overweight and obesity in adults. *NHLBI.* 1998:98-4083. 8. Statistics Canada. Obesity in Canadian Adults, 2016 and 2017. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2018033-eng.pdf>. Retrieved May 22, 2019. 9. Lau DCW, et al. 2006 Canadian clinical practice guidelines on the management and prevention of obesity in adults and children. *CMAJ.* 2007;176(8):1-117. 10. Canadian Cancer Society. Excess weight expected to become 2nd leading preventable cause of cancer, after tobacco. 2019. Available at: <https://www.cancer.ca/en/about-us/for-media/media-releases/national/2019/compare/?region=on>. Retrieved July 26, 2019. 11. Health and Safety Ontario. The Business Case for a Healthy Workplace. 2011. Available at: https://www.wspss.ca/WSPS/media/Site/Resources/Downloads/BusinessCaseHW_Final.pdf?ext=.pdf. Retrieved August 10, 2019. 12. Janssen I. The public health burden of obesity in Canada. *Can J Diabetes.* 2013;37(2):90-96. 13. Anis AH, et al. Obesity and overweight in Canada: An updated cost-of-illness study. *Obes Rev.* 2010;11(1):31-40. 14. Obesity Canada. What Causes Obesity. 2019. Available at: <https://obesitycanada.ca/understanding-obesity/>. Retrieved July 18, 2019.