

# Cannabis Industry Employers See Costs Rise with Obesity Rates

The cannabis industry has seen rapid growth over the last decade, with more states and countries legalizing the cultivation, processing, and sale of cannabis. However, as the industry grows, so do the challenges that employers face when managing their workforce. One such challenge is the rising cost associated with employee health issues, particularly obesity. As obesity rates increase, cannabis industry employers are seeing the financial impact in various areas, including healthcare costs, reduced productivity, and increased workplace injuries. This article explores how obesity is affecting the cannabis industry and what employers can do to address the issue.

## The Link Between Obesity and Workplace Costs

Obesity is a global health issue that has significant consequences for individuals and businesses alike. In the workplace, obesity can lead to various problems that directly impact operational costs. For the cannabis industry, where manual labor is prevalent, the impact can be even more pronounced.

### Increased Healthcare Costs

One of the most direct costs associated with obesity is healthcare. Obese employees are more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and musculoskeletal disorders, all of which require ongoing medical care. This leads to higher health insurance premiums and increased out-of-pocket expenses for employers.

In the cannabis industry, which often operates on thin profit margins, the rising cost of healthcare can significantly cut into earnings. Employers may face higher premiums for group health plans or be forced to take on more of the financial burden themselves. This increase in healthcare costs also makes it more difficult for cannabis companies to offer competitive employee benefits, putting them at a disadvantage when recruiting top talent.

### Lower Productivity Levels

Obesity has a direct impact on employee productivity, especially in industries like cannabis where physical labor plays a significant role. Obese employees may have reduced stamina, making it more difficult to perform physically demanding tasks such as planting, harvesting, and processing cannabis. Additionally, employees with obesity-related health issues may require more frequent breaks or experience fatigue more quickly, which can slow down production lines and reduce overall efficiency.

In the cannabis industry, where efficiency and speed are critical during key periods like harvest time, even slight reductions in productivity can have a considerable impact on the bottom line. If employees are unable to keep up with the physical demands of the job, it may result in missed deadlines, delayed shipments, or the need to hire additional temporary workers, all of which add to operational costs.

## **Increased Risk of Workplace Injuries**

Obesity is also linked to an increased risk of workplace injuries, particularly in physically demanding industries like cannabis. Obese employees are more likely to suffer from musculoskeletal injuries, such as sprains, strains, and back injuries, due to the additional strain placed on their joints and muscles. This risk is compounded by the repetitive nature of many tasks in the cannabis industry, such as trimming plants or operating heavy machinery.

Workplace injuries not only result in immediate costs related to workers' compensation claims but can also lead to long-term expenses. These include the cost of hiring temporary replacements, retraining injured employees, and the potential for legal liability if the injury is deemed to be the result of inadequate workplace safety measures.

## **Obesity and Its Impact on Employee Absenteeism**

Another significant issue that cannabis industry employers face is increased absenteeism due to obesity-related health problems. Employees who suffer from obesity are more likely to take time off work due to illnesses or injuries, leading to higher absenteeism rates. This can disrupt operations, particularly in small to mid-sized cannabis companies that may not have the resources to cover for absent employees without impacting production.

### **Chronic Health Conditions Lead to Time Off**

Obesity increases the risk of several chronic conditions, such as Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and respiratory problems. Employees with these conditions may require frequent medical appointments, extended recovery times from illness, or even long-term medical leave. This not only disrupts daily operations but also puts a strain on co-workers who may need to take on additional responsibilities during the absence.

For cannabis companies, which often operate with lean teams, even a short-term absence can have a ripple effect across the entire operation. If key workers, such as cultivation managers or extraction technicians, are out of work for extended periods, it can delay production schedules and lead to missed opportunities in a competitive market.

### **Presenteeism: The Hidden Cost of Obesity**

In addition to absenteeism, obesity can also contribute to "presenteeism," where employees are physically present at work but are not performing at their full capacity due to health issues. This can be particularly problematic in the cannabis industry, where attention to detail and physical stamina are essential for maintaining product quality and ensuring compliance with strict regulations.

An employee who is dealing with the physical and mental strain of obesity may struggle to focus on their tasks, make more errors, or work at a slower pace. Over time, this reduction in productivity can lead to increased operational costs and lost revenue.

## **Strategies for Addressing Obesity in the Cannabis Workforce**

While obesity poses a significant challenge for cannabis industry employers, there are several strategies they can implement to mitigate its impact. By focusing on employee wellness and creating a supportive work environment, companies can help improve the health and productivity of their workforce while reducing the associated costs.

## **Implement Employee Wellness Programs**

One of the most effective ways to address obesity in the workplace is by implementing employee wellness programs. These programs can provide employees with the tools and resources they need to make healthier lifestyle choices, such as access to nutrition counseling, fitness classes, or weight management support.

Cannabis companies can also encourage physical activity by offering on-site exercise facilities or incentivizing active commuting, such as biking to work. Wellness programs that promote healthy eating, such as providing nutritious snacks or offering discounts on healthy meal options, can also help employees maintain a balanced diet and manage their weight more effectively.

## **Create a Supportive Workplace Culture**

In addition to formal wellness programs, cannabis industry employers can foster a supportive workplace culture that promotes overall health and well-being. This includes creating a positive environment where employees feel encouraged to prioritize their health without fear of judgment or stigma.

Employers can also promote work-life balance by offering flexible schedules or encouraging regular breaks, particularly for employees who perform physically demanding tasks. Allowing employees to take time for self-care can improve both physical and mental well-being, reducing the risk of obesity-related health problems.

## **Provide Ergonomic Solutions and Safety Training**

Another important strategy for reducing the impact of obesity on workplace injuries is to invest in ergonomic solutions and provide ongoing safety training. Cannabis companies can make simple changes to the workplace, such as adjusting the height of workstations or providing ergonomic tools, to reduce the physical strain on employees' bodies.

Additionally, offering regular safety training on proper lifting techniques, posture, and body mechanics can help prevent injuries, particularly among employees who may be at higher risk due to obesity. By reducing the likelihood of workplace injuries, employers can save on workers' compensation costs and maintain a safer, more productive work environment.

## **The Future of Employee Health in the Cannabis Industry**

As the cannabis industry continues to grow, so too will the need for employers to address the health and wellness of their workforce. Obesity is a complex issue with far-reaching consequences, but by taking proactive steps to promote employee health, cannabis companies can reduce costs, improve productivity, and create a safer, more supportive workplace.

The costs associated with obesity are real, but so are the benefits of investing in employee wellness. By focusing on prevention and creating an environment that encourages healthy living, cannabis industry employers can mitigate the impact of rising obesity rates and ensure the long-term success of their business.

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