

# Re-thinking obesity in the workplace

Obesity is a chronic condition that impacts us all. You likely know someone living with obesity: today, more than **7 million Canadian adults** are living with obesity,<sup>1</sup> and many require support to effectively manage their condition.

## Defining obesity

Obesity is a chronic condition that can increase over time – it is known as a condition involving extra or abnormal body fat that affects your health and is classified as having a BMI (body mass index) of  $\geq 30$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>2</sup> Obesity is a medical condition that can be caused by multiple factors:



### Environmental

Surroundings and their effect on lifestyle and health



### Genetic

Characteristics inherited from parents



### Physiological

The biology of the body's functions



### Psychological

A person's mental state



### Socio-economic

A person's social and economic position

## Obesity in Canada

- 27% of Canadians adults were identified as living with obesity in 2016-2017<sup>3</sup>
- As of 2016, ~1 in 7 Canadian children are now considered to be living with overweight or obesity<sup>4</sup>
- Currently, there are 3 times more Canadians living with obesity compared to 1985, and by 2030, >30% of Canadian adults are expected to be living with obesity<sup>5,6</sup>

## Obesity and COVID-19

Obesity is linked to multiple serious co-morbidities, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, mental health issues, and cancer.<sup>7</sup> More recently there is a growing body of evidence linking those living with obesity and poorer outcomes if they are to contract COVID-19.<sup>8</sup>

## Obesity management: A science-based approach to managing weight

The Canadian Medical Association Journal published the [Obesity Management 2020 Clinical Practice Guidelines](#), based on input from various healthcare professionals, that outline the ideal approaches to treat obesity and prevent its associated health complications:<sup>2</sup>



### Behavioural modifications

Nutrition, physical activity and cognitive-behavioural therapy



### Pharmacotherapy

For people who have a BMI of  $\geq 27$  kg/m<sup>2</sup> and suffer from weight-related health conditions, or those with a BMI of  $\geq 30$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>



### Bariatric surgery

For people with a BMI of  $\geq 35$  kg/m<sup>2</sup> who are living with obesity-related health complications, or a BMI of  $\geq 40$  kg/m<sup>2</sup> when other treatments have been unsuccessful

This guideline update reflects substantial advances in the epidemiology, determinants, pathophysiology, assessment, prevention and treatment of obesity, and shifts the focus of obesity management toward improving patient-centred health outcomes, rather than weight loss alone.

# SUPPORTING OBESITY IN THE WORKPLACE

## The obesity management toolkit

Novo Nordisk Canada has developed the **Obesity Management Toolkit** to support interactions and programs within the workplace to manage obesity, while breaking down common misconceptions and encouraging those living with the condition to seek support and proper treatment.

## Obesity impact in the workplace

Canadians living with obesity often face **bias and discrimination** from strangers, employers, co-workers, the media, friends, family and even healthcare professionals.<sup>9</sup>

**54%** of adults with obesity have reported being **stigmatized** by their co-workers, facing difficult **barriers**, such as **negative stereotypes**, **lower hiring success** and **lower starting salaries**.<sup>10</sup>  
In the workplace, obesity can also **negatively impact productivity** and lead to increased rates of **absenteeism and short-term disability**.<sup>11</sup>

**The high costs of obesity:**  
It is estimated that over **\$7 billion** in annual **healthcare costs and lost productivity** can be attributed to obesity in Canada.<sup>11,12</sup>

## What can employers do? Take action on obesity

**As an employer, you play a critical role in supporting employee health and wellness, and have the opportunity to address obesity within your workplace.**

Ensure your benefit plan provides adequate access to evidence-based treatments for obesity, create a safe environment free of bias and stigma for employees to talk about weight, and encourage employees living with obesity to start their weight management journey by talking to their health care provider.



**Novo Nordisk offers a variety of resources and tools that will:**

- Help you understand the impact of obesity on your workforce
- Help you implement an obesity awareness program in your workplace
- Provide you with tools and resources to educate and engage your employees

### References

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To learn more about obesity and weight management or request additional tools and resources, please contact Novo Nordisk Canada Inc. at [NNCICustomerCare@novonordisk.com](mailto:NNCICustomerCare@novonordisk.com)

