

### WORKPLACE WELLNESS

#### Issue Thumbnail

As a nation, obesity is driving our health care costs up and dragging our economy down. Experts estimate that obesity in our workforce costs businesses more than \$73 billion each year in higher health care costs and lower productivity.

#### Issue Background

Obesity is both a personal and public policy problem. With two-thirds of adults overweight or obese, the costs to the country in higher health care expenses and lower productivity are significant.

The aggregate numbers are staggering. For example, it's estimated that obesity costs employers more than \$73 billion annually. That's because employees who are obese have higher health care costs (according to the CDC, the annual medical costs of an obese person are \$1,400 more on average than for someone who's not obese), are absent more often, and may not be as productive when they are on the job.

Fewer than one-third (28%) of private sector employees have access to an employer-sponsored workplace wellness program. But some experts expect this percentage to increase.

#### Key Stats

- It's estimated that obesity costs employers more than \$73 billion annually in higher health care costs and lower productivity.
- Obese workers on average are absent one more week each year than other employees.
- Obesity and related diseases have driven much of the increase in healthcare costs for employers.
  - Obese persons spend 77 percent more on necessary medications than non-obese people.
  - Medical expenses are 42 percent higher for an obese person than for a normal weight person.
- According to the CDC, the annual medical costs of an obese person are \$1,400 more on average than for someone whose BMI is in the normal range.
- Worksite wellness programs can make a difference. According to one study<sup>i</sup>:
  - Medical costs fell by \$3.27 for every dollar spent on wellness programs
  - Absenteeism costs fell by \$2.73 for every dollar spent

# THE WEIGHT OF THE NATION

## Community Activation Kit: Topics

### Watch More

- The first film in *The Weight of the Nation* series, *Consequences*, includes a discussion of the economic impact of the obesity epidemic. The relevant section of the *Consequences* discussion guide provides additional context.
- *Choices*, the second film in *The Weight of the Nation* series, includes the story of Gigi and her co-workers at a customer service call center in Nashville and their efforts to make their workplace a healthy one. The *Choices* discussion guide provides additional information.
- *The Weight of the Nation* short film, *Overweight in the Workplace*, looks at the efforts of one small corporation—the Nabholz Construction Company in Conway, Arkansas—to improve the health of its workforce and save money. The accompanying discussion guide provides additional information. All films can be found on HBO's *The Weight of the Nation* Website at <http://theweightofthenation.hbo.com/>.

### Learn More

- HBO's [The Weight of the Nation website](#) features a Healthy at Work section.

### Do More

- Conduct a [Health Risk Appraisal](#) (<http://goo.gl/32FXV>) to understand the health of employees
- Form a [wellness committee](#) (<https://businessnet.kp.org/health/plans/ca/workforcehealth/resourcecenter/healthworks>) to spearhead initiatives for making healthy changes at the work place.
- Make your workplace meetings [healthy meetings](#) (<http://goo.gl/peZrP>) by doing things like serving healthy food and including breaks for physical activity in the agenda.
- Review options for creating healthier workplaces using our Do-It-Yourself resources. (<https://businessnet.kp.org/health/plans/ca/workforcehealth/resourcecenter/doityourself>)
- Make sure the cafeterias and vending machines in your workplace offer and promote healthy food and beverages. Refer to our Healthy Picks vending machine program resources ([https://businessnet.kp.org/health/plans/ca/workforcehealth/resourcecenter/doityourself?contentid=/html/workforcehealth/cal/resourcecenter/doityourself/healthypicks\\_entrypage.html](https://businessnet.kp.org/health/plans/ca/workforcehealth/resourcecenter/doityourself?contentid=/html/workforcehealth/cal/resourcecenter/doityourself/healthypicks_entrypage.html))
- Create workplace [walking](#) programs (<http://www.everybodywalk.org/>).
- Share ideas for a healthy workplace with your coworkers and your boss.
- Find other evidence-based and innovative strategies with the [Environmental Nutrition and Activity Community Tool \(ENACT\)](#) (<http://goo.gl/LJhuO>).

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<sup>1</sup> Baicker K, Cutler D, Song Z. Workplace Wellness Programs Can Generate Savings. *Health Affairs*. 2010;29(2):304-11