

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

# MEDICAL CANNABIS AT WORK



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An employer's approach to drug and alcohol policies, occupational health and safety and employee accommodation can raise a myriad of legal issues, including with respect to testing, discipline and accommodation; these issues should be addressed on a case-by-case basis, as they arise.

This article does not intend to provide any specific or actual legal advice, but rather, provides some broad and important considerations. Employers may want to consult legal counsel on specific issues.

For questions, please email [support@collage.co](mailto:support@collage.co)

# Introduction

The number of Canadians using cannabis (marijuana) for medical purposes has grown more than 800% since 2014<sup>1</sup>. Yet the number of Canadian workplaces prepared to deal with medical cannabis policies, accommodations, and benefits is lagging far behind.

**Only 11% of companies surveyed in 2017 have a policy in place to address medical cannabis. Even fewer (2%) have made efforts to get medical cannabis benefits coverage for their employees<sup>2</sup>.**

With full-blown legalization on its way, the number of cannabis users is only expected to increase. This will have implications for worker safety, legal liability, and workplace culture as we know it.

We wrote this guide to dispel myths, outline compliance requirements, and lay out the medical cannabis benefits landscape so that Canadian businesses can be better prepared for the cultural changes to come.

## We'll cover:

- ✓ Facts you need to know about medical cannabis
- ✓ Current cannabis laws in Canada
- ✓ Accommodating medical cannabis use
- ✓ How to create an effective drug and alcohol policy
- ✓ Medical group benefits coverage options

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<sup>1</sup> Market Data: Drugs and Health Products: Archived - Licensed Producers. (2017). Health Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Clearing the Haze: The Impact of Marijuana in the Workplace. (2017). HRP.

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## FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MEDICAL CANNABIS

Before digging into the details, here are some facts and common misconceptions about medical cannabis in Canada:

- 1 The total number of Canadians registered for medical cannabis use has grown from under 20,000 in 2014 to over 200,000 in 2017. It is expected to reach 450,000 by 2024<sup>3</sup>.
- 2 Prescribed medical cannabis has been legal in Canada and in Canadian workplaces since 1999.
- 3 Medical cannabis is used to help treat a large variety of common health conditions. These include arthritis, epilepsy, digestive issues, anxiety, depression PTSD, chronic pain, sleep disorders, and many others.
- 4 Medical cannabis is an approved medical expense under Canada Revenue Agency Guidelines. This means patients can deduct the expense on their personal tax return.
- 5 Cannabis does not need to be smoked. Patients can use medical cannabis in many forms, such as capsules, edibles, oils and topical creams.
- 6 Not all cannabis gets you ‘high.’ Many medical cannabis products are CBD-based and do not cause psychoactive effects.
- 7 Studies show that patients who use medical cannabis can decrease their use of opioid-based medications<sup>4</sup> and the overall cost of their treatment.
- 8 Accessing medical cannabis is strictly regulated by Health Canada. The only way to legally buy medical cannabis is through a Health Canada-approved licensed producer. ‘Dispensaries’ are not regulated and are illegal across the country.

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<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Press. Health Canada swamped with medical marijuana business applications. (2014). tCBC News.

<sup>4</sup> Reiman, A; Welty, M; and Soloman, P. Cannabis as a substitute for opioid-based medication: Patient self-report. (2017). Cannabis and Cannabinoid Research.

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## CHAPTER I :

# MANAGING CANNABIS AT WORK



Medical cannabis has been legal in Canada for almost two decades. Still, current laws and employer obligations are rarely discussed and often misunderstood.

Since issues and incidents related to cannabis at work will only become more prevalent with increased use, employers must begin to educate themselves now.

We believe that facilitating better conversations around medical cannabis can lead to reduced risk to employers and more inclusive, healthier workplaces. And those conversations must begin with informed, fact-based, and balanced knowledge.

**With regard to employer rights and responsibilities, the three most important topics to understand are:**

- 1.** Current cannabis laws in Canada
- 2.** Accommodating medical cannabis use
- 3.** How to create an effective drug and alcohol policy

**READY?**

**Let's get started**

# Current Cannabis Laws

As of this writing, cannabis (marijuana) remains a Schedule II drug under the Controlled Drug and Substances Act. Possessing and selling cannabis for nonmedical purposes is illegal across Canada<sup>5</sup>.

This is expected to change when Bill C-45 comes into force, but for the moment, we'll continue to focus on medical cannabis only.

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## What is Bill C-45?

Bill C-45 is also known as the Cannabis Act. It intends to legalize the production, distribution, and sale of recreational cannabis. The federal government has stated its intention to pass Bill C-45 by July 1, 2018<sup>6</sup>.

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Medical Cannabis is currently regulated under the ACMPR, or Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Regulations. The ACMPR allows Canadians who have been authorized by their health care practitioner to access safe, quality-controlled cannabis for medical purposes.

Under the ACMPR, Canadians may access medical cannabis in three ways:

1. Registering to grow their own
2. Designating a registered grower
3. Purchasing from a Health Canada approved licensed producer (LP).

LPs are strictly regulated and deliver medically-authorized cannabis by mail only. Marijuana storefronts and dispensaries, on the other hand, are unregulated and illegal at the time of this writing.

In each case, current cannabis law is meant to ensure that only Canadians with a medical need and authorization from their healthcare professional can access this form of treatment.

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<sup>5</sup> Legalization and Regulation of Cannabis: Current Cannabis Laws. (2017). Government of Canada, Department of Justice.

<sup>6</sup> Legalizing and Strictly Regulating Cannabis: The Facts. (2017). Government of Canada.



# Employer Responsibilities

**Now that we've covered the legal landscape, what do employers need to know specifically?**

Employers have **two** key responsibilities to their employees:

1. First, they are required by law to ensure safety in the workplace.
2. Second, they are bound by a duty to accommodate employees with stated medical needs or disabilities to the point of undue hardship. This includes medical cannabis use as well as a drug and alcohol dependency.

Ensuring a safe workplace and accommodating medical cannabis users are not mutually exclusive. But they do require strong employee-employer communication and an understanding of both sides' obligations.

We'll begin by providing a framework for an effective drug and alcohol policy that will encourage communication and safety at work. Then, we'll explain the employer's duty to accommodate.

Finally, we've included a section specifically on employees in safety-sensitive positions (i.e. truck drivers or heavy equipment operators.) Because of their special circumstance, different laws and policies may apply.

# Employer Responsibility #1:

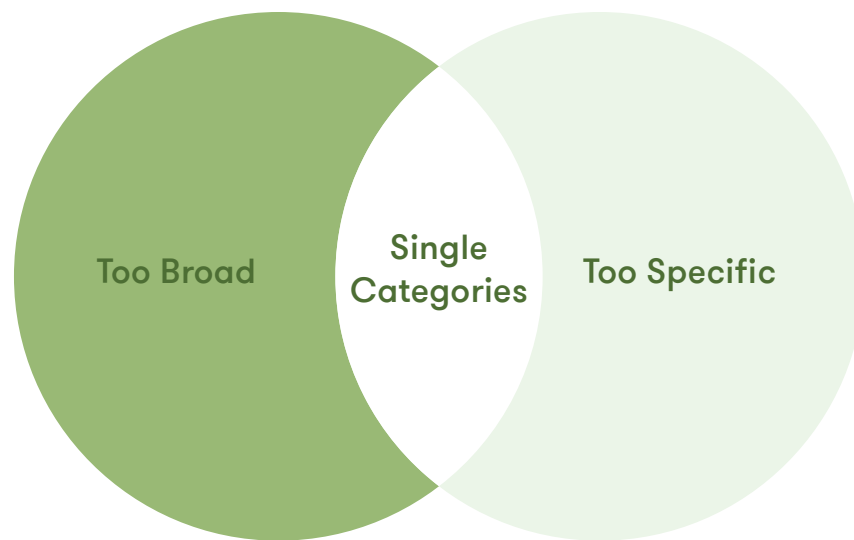
## Creating an Effective Drug and Alcohol Policy

As mentioned above, workplace safety hinges on strong employer-employee communication. A clearly defined drug and alcohol policy can help set expectations, mitigate risk, and outline processes for accommodation.

**With the legalization of recreational cannabis on its way, these policies have never been more important.**

The difficulty for many organizations is that drug and alcohol policies can either be too broad and difficult to enforce, or else they are too specific and require frequent updating and re-writing as legislation evolves.

Rather than developing multiple policies for multiple substances, we suggest a single, flexible, policy framework.



# How to Write a Sustainable Drug and Alcohol Policy

A useful drug and alcohol policy framework categorizes substances based on their current legal status. MedReleaf's Director of HR, Jason Fleming, CHRL, has devised a drug and alcohol policy guide based on the following four categories<sup>7</sup>:

1. **Legal, non-medical substances that cause impairment**, such as alcohol, certain over the counter drugs, and, eventually, recreational cannabis;
2. **Illegal, non-medical substances that cause impairment**, such as cocaine and heroin;
3. **Prescription substances that cause impairment**, used legally, such as medical patients with prescriptions for opioids, medical cannabis, etc., and;
4. **Prescription substances that cause impairment**, used illegally, such as users of opioids without a prescription.

A policy based on these four classifications will have the flexibility to accommodate regulatory changes to specific substances. As a substance moves from illegal to legal (such as recreational cannabis), it will simply move to a new category within the framework. There is no need to re-write any portion of the policy.

Importantly, each category of substance will have its own considerations for use, accommodation, disciplinary action, and/or drug testing protocols.

The details of your drug and alcohol policy must be tailored to your organization. Above all, their purpose is to protect the health and safety of all employees. Drug and alcohol policies should always be written with this in mind. Always consult with an HR or legal professional on specific issues.

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<sup>7</sup> Fleming, J. *Managing Marijuana*. (2017). Canadian HR Reporter.

# Employer Responsibility #2:

## Understanding Your Duty to Accommodate

The duty to accommodate arises under the Canadian Human Rights Act. It protects individuals in the workplace from discrimination on the basis of medical need, disability, age, sex, or creed. Under the Act, employers must accommodate an individual's need—including their right to use prescription drugs—to the point of undue hardship.

Undue hardship generally means that the employer can prove that:

1. The accommodation will be financially or operationally unsupportable; or
2. It will cause intolerably high health or safety risks.

Each claim of undue hardship is assessed on a case-by-case basis. To date, no employer has successfully established undue hardship based on the health and safety risks posed by medical cannabis<sup>8</sup>.

### What does accommodation look like?

Accommodation can look very different from case to case. In general, accommodation refers to removing barriers that prevent an individual from doing their jobs. Some examples of workplace accommodation include:

- Building wheelchair access ramps
- Allowing employees to leave work for doctor appointments
- Allowing employees to not work on certain holidays or to wear religious clothing at work

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<sup>8</sup> Waggot, G and Ranking, J. Medical Marijuana in the Workplace: Risks for Employers. (2014). McMillan LLP.

# Employer Responsibility #2:

## Understanding Your Duty to Accommodate

**In the case of medical cannabis, accommodation could take the following forms:**

- Allowing a flexible work schedule so that patients can follow their medical cannabis treatment schedule
- Modifying an employer-sponsored health benefits plan to include medical cannabis coverage
- Temporary or permanent job restructuring (for example, moving an employee to a non-safety-sensitive position)
- Authorizing a leave of absence while the employee undergoes treatment with medical cannabis
- Providing support to an employee with a cannabis dependency.
- Developing a long-term “Safe Cannabis Use” plan for employees in safety-sensitive positions in order to balance the employee’s medical cannabis use plan with the safety requirements of their role.

# Employer Responsibility #2:

## Understanding Your Duty to Accommodate

Fulfilling the duty to accommodate can look very different from company to company and even employee to employee. Here are some key facts to help clarify rights and responsibilities:

- Accommodation is not always required. If the use of medical cannabis does not impact an employee's ability to work, require them to be impaired at work or create safety risks, no accommodation is required.
- Employees must initiate the duty to accommodate by disclosing their need and making a formal request to the employer.
- Employers cannot demand private information, such as the employee's diagnosis or medical history. Employers may only request reasonable documentation in order to assess the need for accommodation (i.e. doctor's letters).
- Employees are not entitled to their preferred form of accommodation. Employers and employees should work together to determine appropriate forms of accommodation. However, the employer has final say on which one the organization will implement.
- Employers cannot deny a request for accommodation without proving undue hardship. If you aren't sure how to handle a particular request, seek outside advice.
- A prescription for medical cannabis does not entitle an employee:
  - to compromise their safety
  - to compromise the safety of others
  - to smoke in the workplace
  - to have unexcused absences
  - to be impaired at work<sup>9</sup>

The bottom line is that employers have a broad responsibility to communicate with their employees, understand their needs, and take every reasonable action to help them return or continue to work.

Strong employer-employee communication and an effective drug and alcohol policy will go a long way towards keeping workplace safe and compliant.

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<sup>9</sup> Allison E. MacIsaac. Accommodating the Use of Medical Marijuana in the Workplace. (2017). HR Professional Now.

# Special Considerations :

## For Safety-Sensitive Positions

Organizations with employees in safety-sensitive positions will need to be particularly vigilant in developing and administering their drug and alcohol policy.

**Safety-sensitive positions are those in which impairment due to drugs or alcohol could result in direct and significant risk of injury to the employee, others, or the environment.**

Examples include truck drivers, heavy equipment operators, or individuals dealing with hazardous chemicals.

To determine if an employee is in a safety-sensitive position, employers should consider the context of the industry, the workplace, and the employee's direct involvement in a high-risk operation. To mitigate risk, organizations should create list of all safety-sensitive positions and manage them carefully in regards to drug and alcohol use. This list is also the best place to start when you begin training on a new or revised drug and alcohol policy.

Generally speaking, only employees in safety-sensitive positions can be tested for drugs and alcohol, and only under certain circumstances<sup>10</sup>.

If you have employees in safety sensitive positions, it is recommended to provide them with additional training and management following the implementation of your revised drug and alcohol policy. Transparency and communication are key.

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<sup>10</sup> Canadian Human Rights Commission's Policy on Alcohol and Drug Testing. (2009). Canadian Human Rights Commission.

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CHAPTER II :

# GROUP BENEFITS COVERAGE

FOR

# MEDICAL CANNABIS





Medical cannabis coverage through employer-sponsored benefits is uncharted territory for the majority of Canadian employers and insurance providers. Only 22% of employers have implemented or have plans to implement medical cannabis benefits coverage. The remaining 78% say they have no plans to do so<sup>11</sup>.

This lack of coverage leaves a significant gap for Canadians seeking for financial support from their employers for their medical cannabis needs. It also exposes employers to discrimination charges if medical cannabis is determined to be an employee right.

Yet even if employers want to add medical cannabis to their benefits plan, it's not necessarily easy. Two common obstacles make cannabis coverage more complicated than traditional prescription drugs:

### **First, unlike other prescription medications in Canada, medical cannabis does not have a DIN (drug identification number).**

DINs are issued by Health Canada to all prescription and non-prescription drugs available on the market. They indicate that the drug has passed a rigorous review of its formulation, labeling, and instructions for use. Until medical cannabis is issued a DIN, it cannot be covered by conventional drug plans. This requires employers to utilize innovative strategies for covering medical cannabis in their benefits plans, which we'll discuss below.

### **Second, employers lack direction and support when establishing their coverage models.**

This is likely due to negative stigmas surrounding cannabis use and a lack of precedents for coverage structure.

Despite these challenges, a growing number of Canadian organizations, including Shoppers Drug Mart, Weston, and OPSEU, have begun adding medical cannabis to their group benefits plans.

Drawing on these and a number of other precedents, we've outlined the most common and relevant questions employers face when contemplating medical cannabis coverage for their employees.

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<sup>11</sup> Clearing the Haze: The Impact of Marijuana in the Workplace. (2017). HRP.

# Medical Cannabis Coverage :

## Questions and Answers

### What conditions are treated by medical cannabis?

Medical cannabis is used to treat many medical conditions, including chronic pain, PTSD, digestive conditions, depression, anxiety and sleep disorders. It is a highly versatile, natural treatment option, which is one of the primary reasons why the number of Canadians using medical cannabis continues to grow.

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#### Medical conditions treated with medical cannabis include:

- Depression, PTSD & anxiety disorders
  - Cancer
  - Chronic pain
  - Crohn's & Colitis
  - Epilepsy & Seizures
  - Fibromyalgia
  - Glaucoma
  - Multiple Sclerosis
  - Sleep disorders
  - ADD / ADHD
  - Arthritis
  - Addiction
  - Digestive issues (such as IBS)
  - Inflammation
  - Liver and Kidney disease
  - Nausea & Vomiting
- 

### How much does medical cannabis cost?

Due to the large variety of medical conditions treated by medical cannabis, there is a significant variation in the annual costs of an individual's medication. For example, some patients may only use medical cannabis products 2-3 times a month. Others may use it cannabis products multiple times a day.

Other cost considerations are the type of cannabis product used and the specific strain of cannabis. As such, the annual cost of medical cannabis can range anywhere from \$500 to over \$10,000 per year.

It is important to note that in Canada, medical cannabis qualifies as a medical expense under CRA guidelines. This means patients can deduct the expense of the cannabis itself (not including equipment, such as vaporizers) from their personal tax return.

## Questions and Answers

### What are the advantages of covering medical cannabis for employees?

- 1. Potential for cost-reduction.** In many cases, medical cannabis is less expensive than other medications and/or treatments and can reduce the total costs of an individual's medication use. For example, Benefits Canada points out that the anti-nausea drug Zofran (used for chemotherapy patients) costs about \$40 per pill, while a single dose of medical cannabis can cost as low as \$2 or \$3<sup>12</sup>. Additional research has found that cannabis is less addictive than opioid-based medications, and can therefore encourage patients to reduce or cease costly opioid-based treatments<sup>13</sup>.
- 2. Meeting employee needs and expectations.** A group benefits plan is an important component of an employee's total compensation package. Given the fast-growing number of Canadians using medical cannabis, it is likely that employees will begin to seek medical cannabis coverage from their employers. The more knowledge and understanding you have, the better you can respond to employee requests for coverage.
- 3. Protecting your organization from potential human rights complaints.** A recent human-rights commission decision in Nova Scotia (*Skinner v Board of Trustees of the Canadian Elevator Industry Welfare Trust Fund*, 2017) ruled that medical cannabis coverage is an employee right.

As stated by the board:

*"In the absence of evidence that extending coverage would unreasonably alter the plan premiums or risk its financial sustainability, **non-coverage of a medically-necessary drug may amount to discrimination.**"*

While this decision does not mean all instances of medical cannabis use must be covered by employer-sponsored benefits plans, it does demonstrate the importance of being familiar with human rights obligations before responding to an employee's request for coverage.

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<sup>12</sup> Paterson, J. Medical questions, regulations create confusion for medical pot coverage. (2016). Benefits Canada.

<sup>13</sup> Reiman, A; Welty, M; and Solomon, P. Cannabis as a substitute for opioid-based medication: Patient self-report. (2017). Cannabis and Cannabinoid Research.



## Questions and Answers

### What are the risks of covering medical cannabis for employees?

Now that we've gone over the advantages, it's worth noting some risks that employers should be aware of before including medical cannabis in their group benefits plan.

- 1. Increased safety risks and incidents of impairment at work.** Without proper communication and enforcement of your organization's drug and alcohol policy, employees in safety-sensitive positions may consume medical cannabis without first disclosing it to their manager. This can lead to an increased risk of safety incidents or injuries. Avoid this risk by providing information and training as well as creating an environment in which employees feel comfortable disclosing their medical need and seeking accommodation.
- 2. Unnecessary litigation.** Drug and alcohol testing, the duty to accommodate, and discrimination are among the most contentious issues in Canadian employment law. To avoid unnecessary, expensive, and painful litigation, keep an open line of communication between yourself, your employees, and HR or legal professionals. Handle all cases of medical cannabis use, accommodation, and benefits coverage with respect, good faith, and careful attention.
- 3. Increased group benefits costs.** As mentioned above, medical cannabis is often less expensive than other prescription drugs. However, any time you add coverage to your plan there is a reasonable chance of increased overall costs. Creating an overall cost-effective group benefits plan requires an understanding of the different medical cannabis coverage options as well as your employees' needs. To avoid paying excessive costs, determine your budget and employees' needs ahead of time and discuss all options with your benefits broker.

# Medical Cannabis Coverage :

## Top 4 Benefits Plan Models

Because medical cannabis lacks a DIN, it cannot simply be added to a traditional group benefits plan. There are, however, many options for covering medical cannabis as part of your benefits plan. On the next page, we've listed four of the most popular coverage models today.

Other structures and options do exist, each with their own advantages and cost requirements. What's important is to select a plan that suits your organization's budget, needs, and culture. A group benefits broker or provider can provide you with a personalized assessment and quote based on your organization's budget and needs.

It is also recommended to speak directly with a Health Canada-licensed medical cannabis producer in order to get a better understanding of the costs and uses of cannabis products available.

Licensed producers such as MedReleaf offer preferred or exclusive supplier models to employers with medical cannabis benefits plans. With a preferred model, employers get access to HR and management training, accommodation support, product discounts, and subject matter expertise regarding medical cannabis in the workplace. To learn more, contact MedReleaf's HR team at <https://medreleaf.com/contact-us/>

# Medical Cannabis Coverage :

## Top 4 Benefits Plan Models

COVERAGE MODEL	PROS	CONS
<b>1. Individual employee eligibility assessment</b>  Employers engage a third-party to assess the employee's eligibility based on a pre-approved list of health conditions. The employer can choose to offer unlimited coverage, a percent of the claim coverage, or an annual budget for each approved employee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limits the number of employees using medical cannabis and associated costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential risk of discrimination if an employee is denied coverage</li> <li>Significant time, cost, and paperwork is required for third-party assessments</li> </ul>
<b>2. General HSA (Health Spending Account)</b>  An HSA (also known as HCSA) is a non-taxable account for employee healthcare spending. Employers can set aside a fixed annual dollar amount for employees to spend on <a href="#">HSA expenses approved by the CRA</a> (including prescribed medical cannabis).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HSAs are cost-controlled, flexible, and offer 'hands off' administration for employers</li> <li>HSAs exist in thousands of organizations today, so simply adding medical cannabis coverage can be simple and fast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing the limit to accommodate medical cannabis on top of all other eligible healthcare expenses can quickly become costly to employers.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Separate HSA for Medical Cannabis Expenses</b>  A distinct HSA for medical cannabis claims keeps healthcare costs separate and contained. This account can be included as top-up to either a traditional benefits plan or a general HSA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cost-controlled and offers 'hands off' administration for employers</li> <li>Eliminates the need to increase HSA limit for all employees, even if they do not use medical cannabis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It can be challenging to set an annual allowance for medical cannabis, given the range of patient needs and product expenses.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Broad coverage for any employees with a prescription for medical cannabis</b>  With this structure, employers offer unlimited coverage or a percentage of the cost of medical cannabis coverage. This option is the most similar to traditional prescription drug coverage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensures employee medical cannabis costs are covered as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can be costly for the employer</li> <li>Requires significant administration to adjudicate and administer claims</li> </ul>

# Case Study :

## Adding Medical Cannabis to a Group Benefits Plan

In 2017, MedReleaf conducted a case study of a small manufacturing company (approximately 100 full-time employees) in the GTA that had decided to add medical cannabis coverage its group benefits program with MedReleaf as an exclusive supplier.

The information shared in this case study is based on the first six months of medical cannabis coverage in the organization.

### The Back Story:

1. The company decided to implement a medical cannabis benefits plan after various employees disclosed that they had prescriptions to use medical cannabis. Some of these employees had also inquired about coverage options.
2. While open to the idea, company is cost-conscious and wanted to understand the maximum financial exposure they may face if they decide to add this benefit.
3. Some positions within the company are safety-sensitive in nature. From a safety-standpoint, the company was also concerned about potential impairment on the job and how to mitigate risks.
4. The company had previously offered an HSA for management personnel only and a traditional benefits package for other full-time employees. They did not want to add a generic HSA for all employees due to the significant increase in cost that would entail.

## The Process:

### Revising the Drug and Alcohol Policy

First and foremost, the company wanted to establish a proactive plan for introducing medical cannabis in the workplace. They began by revising their drug and alcohol policy prior to announcing the medical cannabis coverage.

This policy identified:

- Clear responsibilities for employees not to be impaired in the workplace
- The need for employees in safety-sensitive positions to disclose medical cannabis use
- A process for employees to request accommodation if needed.

Additionally, the company conducted a comprehensive training program for their HR team on handling cannabis in the workplace.

### Implementing a Group Benefits Plan

After consulting a benefits broker, the company's plan administrator determined that the most appropriate and cost-effective coverage model was a cannabis-specific HSA with an annual limit of \$1,000 per employee.

The company identified three main advantages of the cannabis-specific HSA:

1. Cost control: the exact cost exposure is determined at the beginning of the year.
2. No paperwork: All eligible claims are automatically approved by the HSA administrator via online submission. No individual eligibility assessments required.
3. Positive reception: The company was hesitant to restrict coverage to a defined list of health conditions as they feared employee criticisms of discrimination, bias, or unreasonable limitations in coverage. With the HSA, any employee with a valid prescription for medical cannabis can make a claim and be reimbursed up to their coverage limit.



## The Results:

### Notable findings

After six months of implementing medical cannabis coverage at the manufacturing company, MedReleaf identified the following key findings:

1. 19% of the workforce made a claim to their cannabis-specific HSA
2. 14% of employees placed one order only (i.e., made no subsequent orders within six months)
3. The company did not experience any workplace injuries, safety incidents or workplace impairment issues associated with medical cannabis
4. Employees used a variety of products
5. Nearly 50% of participating employees used CDB-based products (that is, medical cannabis products with no psychoactive effects)
6. The employee absenteeism rate was unchanged during the six-month period
7. After six months, only 20% of the maximum cost exposure of the program had been used

Although it is still early, the impact of adding medical cannabis coverage to their company-sponsored benefits plan resulted in less employee claims and costs than anticipated. The foundation of a solid drug and alcohol policy as well as open and transparent communication with employees helped add medical cannabis coverage to the employer's benefits plans without incident for the first six months.

# Conclusion :

Changes to Canadian cannabis legislation are on the horizon. For some employers, this may mean rethinking their entire approach to drug and alcohol use in the workplace--beginning with basic workplace safety and human rights obligations.

For others, increased medical cannabis will indicate a need to revise their drug and alcohol policy and group benefits package.

**For all employers, the bottom line is simple: the more you know, the more you can protect, serve, and take care of your people.**

By opening the line of communication between your employees, HR professionals, and benefits industry experts, you can take a proactive approach to successfully managing medical cannabis—and eventually, recreational cannabis—in the workplace.

# About MedReleaf



MedReleaf has taken a leadership role in preparing employers and the health benefits industry on managing cannabis in the workplace and through benefits plan coverage. In addition to offering preferred and exclusive coverage models for employers, MedReleaf launched its advisory services program in 2016. This program provides Canadian employers and benefits advisors with comprehensive training, HR support and medical cannabis benefits consulting.

MedReleaf sets The Medical Grade Standard™ for cannabis in Canada and around the world. The first and only ICH-GMP and ISO 9001 certified cannabis producer in North America, MedReleaf is a R&D-driven company dedicated to patient care, scientific innovation, research, and advancing the understanding of the therapeutic benefits of cannabis. Sourced from around the world and perfected in one of two state of the art facilities in Ontario, MedReleaf delivers a variety of premium products to patients seeking safe, consistent and effective medical cannabis. MedReleaf is regulated by Health-Canada and operates production facilities in Markham, Ontario as well as Bradford, Ontario; with plans to further expand production capabilities.

# About Collage



Collage is an all-in-one HR and benefits platform dedicated to helping small and medium businesses offer an incredible employee experience while meeting their HR compliance, employee wellness, and organizational development goals.

Designed by certified HR professionals and benefits experts in Toronto, Canada, Collage is for organizations who care about spending less time on tedious administrative work; extracting meaningful insights from their people data; ensuring they manage their people in a compliant way; and providing a modern benefits plan that employees actually understand.

Our mission at Collage is to help businesses take care of their people with the least risk and the least effort. To do this, we've built a next-generation software platform and assembled a team of experts. [Sign up free to see it work.](#)



**Take care.**