



Ten Modifiable Health Risk Factors are Linked to More than One-fifth of Employer-Employee Health Care Spending

An underlying premise of the Affordable Care Act provisions that encourage employers to adopt health promotion programs is an association between workers' modifiable health risks and increased health care costs. Employers, consultants, and vendors have cited risk-cost estimates developed in the 1990s and wondered whether they still hold true.

Examining ten of these common health risk factors in a working population, we found that similar relationships between such risks and total medical costs documented in a widely cited study published in 1998 still hold. Based on our sample of 92,486 employees at seven organizations over an average of three years, \$82,072,456, or 22.4 percent, of the \$366,373,301 spent annually by the seven employers and their employees in the study was attributed to the ten risk factors studied. This amount was similar to almost a quarter of spending linked to risk factors (24.9 percent) in the 1998 study. High risk for depression remained most strongly associated with increased per capita annual medical spending (48 percent, or \$2,184, higher). High blood glucose, high blood pressure, and obesity were strongly related to increased health care costs (31.8 percent, 31.6 percent, and 27.4 percent higher, respectively), as were tobacco use, physical inactivity, and high stress.

These findings indicate ongoing opportunities for well-designed and properly targeted employer-sponsored health promotion programs to produce substantial savings.

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