

Medical cannabis

Access to safe, effective treatment is an important part of an injured worker's safe and early recovery and return to work. This remains our primary focus when assessing whether the benefits outweigh the risks for all types of drugs or treatment, including medical cannabis.

We will consider the approval of medical cannabis for the medically necessary treatment of work-related injuries in some specific cases. Our medical cannabis policy reflects medical evidence, advice and knowledge about the benefits and risks of medical cannabis use, as well as the law that governs use of cannabis for medical treatment in Canada.

What is medical cannabis?

- Pharmaceutical cannabinoids which are prescription drugs approved by Health Canada to treat specific medical conditions. These include Nabilone (Cesamet™ and generics) and Nabiximols (Sativex™), and
- Medical cannabis which is a broader term that includes multiple forms of cannabis (e.g., dried, topical, oil, edibles, etc.). authorized for use as medical therapeutic treatment, sourced from official Health Canada approved providers.

"Medical cannabis" is different from recreational cannabis. WCB does not provide coverage for recreational cannabis in any form."

Coverage for medical cannabis

We may consider coverage for medical cannabis if it is authorized by a medical doctor for the treatment of any of the following condition(s) resulting from a work-related injury or disease or its treatment:

- Chronic neuropathic pain resulting from an injury to the nervous system.
- Spasticity resulting from an injury to your central nervous system or spinal cord.
- Nausea, vomiting, and loss of appetite associated with cancer chemotherapy.
- Opioid/narcotic harm reduction.
- Palliative care

All of the following criteria must be met before medical cannabis is approved:

1. It is authorized for one of the designated conditions listed above.
2. It is authorized by the worker's treating health professional.
3. All conventional treatments are exhausted.
4. It is authorized following clinical assessment.
5. The benefits outweigh the risks.
6. Medical cannabis does not interfere with the worker's recovery and safe return to work.

Modified work and safe return to work

Modified work and a safe return to work are cornerstones of Alberta's workers' compensation system. Return to work is one of the factors WCB considers when assessing whether the benefits of medical cannabis outweigh the risks.

One of the conditions of suitable modified work is that "the worker can perform the duties without endangering their recovery or safety, or the safety of others." For more information on how WCB evaluates safe return to work (including suitable modified work and safety sensitive positions), see Policy 04-05, Part II, Application 4 or read our [temporary modified work employer fact sheet](#).

Safety sensitive positions

The impact of treatment is a key consideration in return-to-work planning. A worker's job duties are considered when assessing whether the benefits of coverage outweigh the risk. In addition, policy specifies:

- Medical cannabis should be cannabidiol (CBD)-rich with minimal tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC is primarily responsible for effects on mental state, while CBD reportedly has minimal psychoactive effects.
- Before coverage is approved, the worker must enter into a cannabinoid/medical cannabis treatment agreement with the authorizing medical doctor. The agreement outlines risks associated with cannabis use and includes

conditions for the worker to agree to (e.g., restrictions of driving or operating heavy machinery within a certain time period of using cannabinoids or medical cannabis.)

Suspending or ending coverage

WCB may suspend or end coverage for medical cannabis when it has confirmed it is no longer necessary or appropriate, it impedes return to work, or there is evidence of misuse.

Duty to cooperate

Workers and employers both have responsibilities when it comes to return to work, however, valid reasons will always be considered for the worker or employer not being able to meet their responsibilities. For more information on how WCB evaluates whether workers and employers have met their duty to cooperate, see [EFS Duty to cooperate.pdf \(wcb.ab.ca\)](#).

Duty to accommodate

Under the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, employers have the obligation to accommodate to the point of undue hardship an employee who has identified as having a disease, injury or disability, including substance dependence and medical authorizations to use cannabis for medical purposes.

WCB may refer an injured worker for medication assessment and management including addiction assessment and treatment, and/or rehabilitation programs. For more information on how to accommodate substance dependence, please read the Canadian Human Rights Commission's guide [Impaired at Work – A guide to accommodating substance dependence](#).

