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Connecticut*

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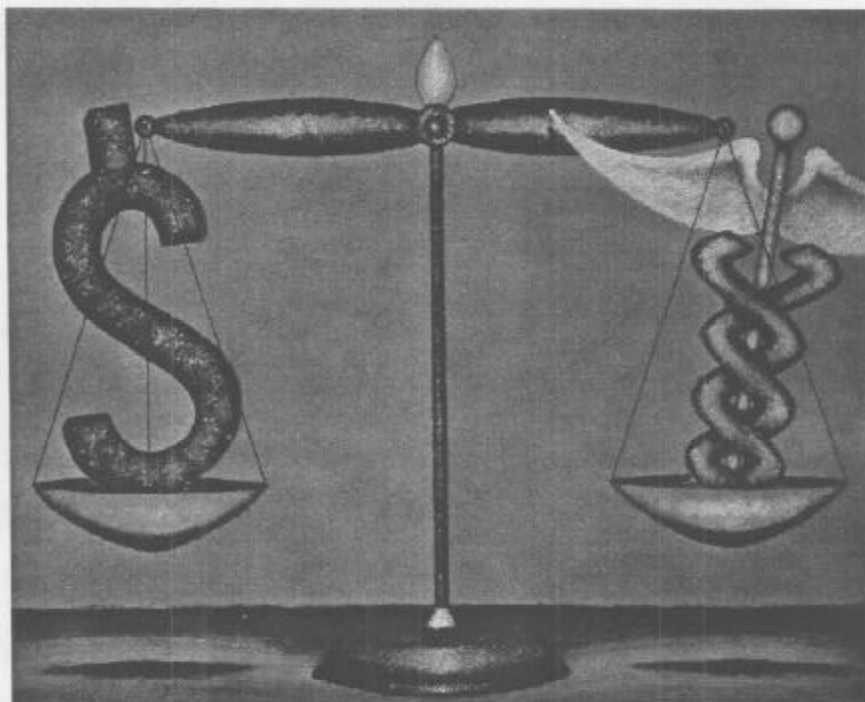
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Employers struggling to afford health benefits

Still reeling from last year's double-digit jump in health benefit costs, employers are bracing for a similar blow this year.

"Health benefit costs overall are increasing about an average 13%. Ours are in that ballpark," says Richard Patterson, president and chief executive officer of The Durham Manufacturing Co., a maker of metal packaging products. "Our insurance contract is coming up for renewal this spring. We're concerned about what the cost increase will be," says Patterson, who chairs CBIA's Small Business Advisory Council.

Also concerned is Kenneth Porter, president of Keeper Corp., a North Windham manufacturer of bungee cords and other tie-down items. "Our health insurance is going up 23% as of Feb. 1. We just alerted our people about this," says Porter, chair of CBIA's board of directors. "The dilemma we face now is how much do we, as a company, absorb? And how much do we pass along to employees?"

Companies all across the state are asking those questions, according to a survey conducted for CBIA by the University of Connecticut's Center for Survey Research and Analysis. "The survey shows how hard employers