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Mexican health care for Americans studied

Regulatory reforms needed, experts say

BY [SANDRA DIBBLE](#), UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER
 WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 2010 AT 9:09 P.M.

Rising medical needs in the United States are creating new opportunities for Mexico's health care industry to serve a broad range of U.S. patients, from baby boomers to Southern California's large Latino work force.

But participants in a daylong conference Wednesday at the Institute of the Americas on the UC San Diego campus said that a range of legislative and regulatory changes are needed. The event drew health care experts, tourism officials, nonprofit groups, real estate promoters and others who see the potential for growth in cross-border care.

With health care costs in Mexico available at a fraction of U.S. prices, Mexican facilities can help fill a growing demand for services including dentistry, surgery, long-term care and assisted living, advocates said. But providers still face hurdles, and one major step would be certifying private Mexican hospitals to U.S. standards so that older Americans could use their Medicare benefits in Mexico.

"Congress is not going to approve Medicare for Mexico until they're very comfortable that the quality of medical care is there," said Paul Crist, president of Americans for Medicare in Mexico. As a first step, he urged Mexico's federal government to carry through with plans to accredit the country's private hospitals by 2011.

President Felipe Calderón is expected to urge President Barack Obama to consider the issue of Medicare reimbursement in Mexico when the two meet in Washington next month. But Jeffrey Davidow, president of the Institute of the Americas, was doubtful there will be imminent changes.

"I personally think the biggest changes are coming through the private insurance companies," he said.

U.S. health care reform is expected to expand the pool of workers with medical insurance, with 100,000 to 300,000 additional enrollees expected in San Diego and Imperial counties by 2014, said Frank Carrillo, chief executive of SIMNSA Health Plan, which sells group insurance plans to U.S. employers whose workers receive medical care in Mexico.

"The system cannot handle it here, so they need to look at Mexico as a safety net," Carrillo said, adding that many of the newly insured will be legal immigrants from Mexico who are comfortable with Mexican physicians.

In Baja California, the state government recently joined with the private sector to promote the state as a destination for those interested in medical procedures. Oscar Escobedo, Baja California's tourism secretary, said 500,000 people crossed into the state for medical care last year, and the aim is to increase that number.

Escobedo said that two key medical projects are in the pipeline in Baja California, including a plan by Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim's Grupo Carso to build a "world-class hospital and hotel" complex in Tijuana, which would open in late 2012. Another facility is being planned next year in the Guadalupe Valley, he said, but did not provide details.

The National City-based International Community Foundation, which expects to release its study on health care for Americans in Mexico next week, has found a need for assisted living and long-term care for older Americans in Mexico.

"Mexico is a great place for active retirees, but it's not a very good place to age in place today," said Richard Kiy, the foundation's president.

Mauricio Monroy, a partner in a Tijuana accounting firm who has long been active in cross-border issues, said the conference was a good first step. He said Mexico's federal government must now play a central role, through guidelines and regulatory reform.

"That's the starting point: How do you license a hospital, doctors, nurses, land use? How do you take care of immigration, tax issues? There's a lot to do," Monroy said.

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 **dcsocal** 12 minutes ago

1 person liked this.

And just what pray-tell is going to protect the Medicare system from fraudulent practices that occur in Mexico? With an underworld driven economy seemingly in control from everything from the most basic services to the criminal justice system, WHO is going to assure USA that fraud can/will be adequately handled...people with USA entitlements will be lending their medicare numbers to 'friends and family while willing doctors will join all kinds of crazy systems designed to fraud the USA system....Especially with the reputation of Mexico's own health care system.... Think- in a country where murderers aren't even readily brought to justice, whose going to waste time with investigating or keeping Medicare billing fraud in check... Give me a break!....


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 **Red_Eagle** 29 minutes ago

Mexican health care? Isn't that an oxymoron? If their health care is so good, why do hundreds of American doctors fly down to Mexico and operate free clinics for the Mexican people? (at the doctors and volunteers their own expense)

As for reimbursements to Mexico,.. How about reimbursement From Mexico for caring for 20 million of their citizens in the US illegally?

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 **Rapier** 52 minutes ago

Separate legislation passed earlier this year but not related to Obamacare went into effect April 1st. It reduces provider reimbursements by 21% for Medicare and Tricare patients.

As a result many providers are backing away from both, creating a shortage and a new market for low cost providers.

So now we are sending senior citizens and our military to Mexico for health care. It was foreseeable that Mexico would seek an agreement allowing foreign payment for medicare.

Mexicans just doing the work the Obama administration won't pay for.

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Rapier 58 minutes ago

I might... but not in this life.

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Cameron_Poe Today 07:52 AM

My insurance already covers me in Mexico. Been going to the same dentist for 40 years and love it!

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AustrianSchool Yesterday 10:51 PM

1 person liked this.

This is excellent news. People have been going to Mexico unofficially for years. My buddy says that prescriptions are cheaper in Mexico than just the co-pay is in the US.

We should open a hospital in the US with Mexican workers for middle class people that aren't rich or on the government teat.

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dcsocal 10 minutes ago [in reply to AustrianSchool](#)

they may in fact be cheaper but just as with drugs, illegal workers, etc... as soon as a demand is created the underworld will target it for advantage, i.e. counterfeit drugs that you think are the real thing

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AustrianSchool 44 seconds ago [in reply to dcsocal](#)

It's no different here. As soon as there is money to be had in American health care, it's targeted by all kinds of corruption.

We give consumers an option and let them choose. For many it's a decision between having nothing or having this. It's the only humane thin to do.

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disqususer Yesterday 11:49 PM [in reply to AustrianSchool](#)

1 person liked this.

I like your positive attitude. As a recipient of medical care south of the border, I have found it to be inexpensive and good quality.

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bthewall Yesterday 10:12 PM

3 people liked this.

Mexico isn't moving out of the neighborhood anytime soon. This is a great way to build a stable middle class in Mexico while keeping US health care costs (and government spending!) under control.

Those who hate government waste and illegals should back this to the hilt.

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LunarCycle Today 04:38 AM [in reply to bthewall](#)

I bet Glenn Beck is going to have a nervous breakdown over this, and get so worked up on Faux News, that he'll have to go to Mexico to get treatment :-)

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Cbad Today 07:21 AM [in reply to LunarCycle](#)

Why should the prospect of Americans seeking health care in Mexico bother Beck?

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lalasyen22 Yesterday 10:09 PM

Under Health Care Reform, Medical insurance is a must, but you can easily find medical insurance for you under \$40 <http://ow.ly/1AqF1>

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undertheradar Yesterday 09:33 PM

3 people liked this.

The United States has failed to the point where Mexico is now our safety net?

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AustrianSchool Yesterday 10:49 PM [in reply to undertheradar](#)

2 people liked this.

Its not like that. Every market needs to have different levels of product available at different prices. Without a low price option, our health care costs will keep growing to the sky. Let people choose form themselves how they want to spend their resources.

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Bernardo Yesterday 10:18 PM [in reply to undertheradar](#)

5 people liked this.

Unfortunately, yes. The best days of the U.S. are over. I'm glad that I experienced its zenith.

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