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Mexico President Visits Washington

Posted on May 19, 2010 by [Glynnna Prentice](#)



Mexico's President Felipe Calderon will visit Washington, D.C., today and tomorrow in a two-day meeting to cement the relationship between the U.S. and [Mexico](#). These days the two countries are working together more closely than they have in years, as the on-going—but to date unsuccessful—drug war attests.

One topic that isn't expected to make this week's agenda is extending U.S. health care benefits—including Medicare—to Mexico, a step that potentially is a win-win for both countries. According to Mexico City sources, Calderon wants to discuss the issue with President Barack Obama sometime this year.

The idea of extending Medicare to Mexico has been gaining support for several years on both sides of the border. A million U.S. expats are estimated to live in Mexico already either full- or part-time. Many of these are retirees who qualify for Medicare but can't use it unless they return to the U.S. for treatment. Extending Medicare coverage to Mexico would save these expats costly and time-consuming travel to the U.S.

It also potentially would save the U.S. billions of dollars. [Medical procedures in Mexico](#) cost only 25% to 30% of what they do in the U.S., according to a Deloitte LLP study in 2009.



Mexico also stands to benefit enormously if Medicare coverage is available there. Medical tourism—already a major industry for dental care and elective procedures like cosmetic surgery—is likely to boom. So too is the number of U.S. retirees who move to Mexico for its lower cost of living.

But extending Medicare abroad faces a long and rocky road. Medicare guidelines require a small-scale pilot program before any change in Medicare is made permanent. In this case, because the pilot program would be in a foreign country, Congress must authorize it.

And the Medicare administration must also feel confident that Mexico can offer a quality of care comparable to what the U.S. offers. Mexico currently has an initiative under way to certify all private hospitals under a standard

set of qualifications by the end of 2011. Any private hospital that cannot meet the standards will be dropped from the national organization. Top-ranked hospitals have also qualified for, or are seeking, certification by the [Joint Commission International \(JCI\)](#), an internationally-recognized health care benchmark.

But expats in Mexico already have confidence in the quality of care they receive there. In a new [study by the International Community Foundation](#), which interviewed retiree expats living on Mexico's coasts, 61% believed that medical care in Mexico is as good as that in the U.S. And 79% were in favor of a pilot program to extend Medicare coverage to Mexico.

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