

## Mexico's Medical Tourism Sector

### What is medical tourism?

Medical tourism occurs when patients travel internationally with the intention of obtaining privately funded medical care. Our research team, based at Simon Fraser University (in British Columbia, Canada), studies medical tourism from a number of perspectives.

### What trends are occurring in Mexico's medical tourism industry?

Mexico, officially the United Mexican States, is the fifth largest country in the Americas and is comprised of 31 states and a federal district. It shares a northern border with the United States (US) and a southern border with Guatemala and Belize. Medical tourism in Mexico is an established and growing industry and is primarily concentrated in the major metropolitan centres of Mexico City and Monterrey – the capital city of Mexico and state capital of Nuevo León respectively – as well as in northern border towns. Mexico's proximity to the US has long contributed to its history of medical tourism, beginning in the 1960s with Hispanic workers seeking dental care in border cities and expanding throughout the 1990s with an increasing number of American retirees seeking affordable health care in Mexico. Medical tourism in Mexico is supported and promoted by national and state governments, primarily through promotional campaigns in Canada and the US. This promotion has contributed to a push for hospital accreditation at international levels to develop a positive reputation and attract medical tourists.

### What our research is showing about the current state of medical tourism in Mexico:

- Growth in Mexico's medical tourism industry has taken place almost entirely in the private sector, reflecting larger trends in the expansion of Mexico's private health sector more generally over the past two decades. Most notably is the emergence of: large, highly specialized private hospitals; private facilities seeking international accreditation resulting in improvements in health infrastructure; and a shift in the population seeking private medical treatment, especially from Hispanic Americans to older Americans living part- or full-time in Mexico.
- The growth of Mexico's medical tourism industry is understood as positively impacting health human resources across the country, primarily due to compliance with rigorous and high quality international accreditation standards. Increasing demand for English communication skills among health workers interacting with medical tourists has prompted the Ministry of Health to initiate a bilingual pilot training program. Finally, new standards of care and the growth of specialized areas of care provide new training opportunities and increased financial compensation, which encourages the retention of health workers in Mexico. The majority of these benefits are limited to the private sector and could result in migration from the public to private sector.

For more information: [www.sfu.ca/medicaltourism/](http://www.sfu.ca/medicaltourism/)

Contact us: [medtour@sfu.ca](mailto:medtour@sfu.ca)

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