



# *CaliBaja Moving Forward Together* *CaliBaja Avanzando Juntos*

## Takeaways from meeting “Medical tourism: challenges and opportunities”

May 28, 2024 / 9:00-10:30 AM PT

Medical tourism occurs when patients travel to another country to obtain health services provided by industry professionals, including diagnostic services, treatments, cures, or surgical interventions. This is complemented by wellness tourism and retirement tourism.

A [study](#) published by Deloitte in 2019 identified that the main source markets for medical tourism in Mexico are the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Central and South America. The primary incentives for these markets include the lack of public medical coverage, wait times, and price differences, with the United States being the most expensive medical market globally.

Several competitive advantages make Mexico a destination for medical tourism, including its brand positioning as a tourist destination, abundant and specialized human capital, proximity to the United States and Canada, and its complex and developed healthcare industry.

The number of hospitals and private clinics has grown impressively and organically in the Mexican states bordering the United States. In Baja California, there was a 47% increase between 2019 and 2024. The state has the highest number of specialists in plastic, aesthetic, and reconstructive surgery in the country and is a leader in bariatric surgeries. 38 of 47 (81%) of the specialties available in Mexico are practiced in Baja California.

In addition to the already mentioned services, the main medical services available in the state include dental services, general medicine, cardiology, ophthalmology, gastroenterology, oncology, neurology, urology, pediatrics, fertility, and trauma and orthopedics. Some municipalities specialize in specific services, such as Los Algodones in dental services and Tecate in wellness services.

CaliBaja's differentiators compared to other border regions for medical tourism include the availability of the Cross Border Xpress, the only binational bridge in the world with over 4 million users annually, the Agile Vehicle Crossing Program, which facilitates border crossing for medical service users from the United States, its location in the world's busiest border strip, costs up to 80% lower compared to the United States, internationally recognized human capital, foreign insurance coverage for some procedures, and the quality, warmth, and safety of the services.

The state government is implementing various initiatives to promote medical tourism and ensure access to safe and quality health services. The signing of a collaboration agreement between the health and tourism secretariats in October 2022 led to the creation of an advisory council to generate an integrated and long-term vision on the subject. As a result, programs such as the State Registry of Health and Wellness Service Providers (REPSSABI), the



# *CaliBaja Moving Forward Together*

## *CaliBaja Avanzando Juntos*

State Tourism Registry (RET), and the Health and Wellness Services Excellence Catalog (CEETSB) available at [bajahealthtourism.com](http://bajahealthtourism.com) were launched. Strategies are also being designed to offer experiences that combine medical treatment with vacations for both patients and their companions.

Health is the fourth most important reason for visiting Baja California, representing 13.3% of total visitors to the state. The average expenditure per trip is \$8,949.30 pesos. It is estimated that the visit of 2.6 million medical visitors generated an economic impact of \$3 billion dollars in 2023. 83% of these visitors came from the United States, mainly from California and Arizona. These services are primarily demanded by Mexican-American visitors, Spanish speakers, and the 90,000 people who make up the floating population between Tijuana and San Diego.

Given the above, medical tourism is a sector with great potential for the CaliBaja transborder region. Some opportunities for bilateral collaboration to leverage these competitive advantages include:

- Temporary employment programs for Mexican medical personnel in the United States and Canada, which, in addition to enhancing their skills to serve this population, will help create the necessary networks to promote medical tourism.
- Co-investment in clinics and care centers for long-term conditions, such as rehabilitation, retirement homes, and chronic mental conditions.
- Co-investment in real estate investment projects for the elderly.
- Evolution of insurance policies for expatriates and digital nomads. Although Baja California has been a pioneer in insurance policies marketed in the United States, it is an issue that was delayed in the USMCA negotiations and can be reconsidered in the 2026 review.
- Establishment of policies for the safe use of fentanyl to avoid the criminalization of health professionals.
- Exchange of information and joint research to ensure the correct use of antibiotics and understand the current state of antibiotic resistance on both sides of the border.

This document was prepared thanks to the support provided by Semptra and Otay-Tijuana Venture, LLC.