

Californians who access health care services in another country

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Objectives: Quantify and compare California adults who seek medical care and prescription medicines in other countries, with specific reference to Mexico.

Methods: Data were obtained from the 2001 California Health Interview Survey “AskCHIS” online query. Outcomes were given as weighted, aggregate estimates of the number and percent of persons for the respective variables with 95 percent confidence intervals.

Results: An estimated 356,000 California residents went to another country for medical care; 74% to Mexico. Approximately 695,000 residents bought medicines in another country; 86% in Mexico. The number and proportion of residents who went to Mexico for medical care or medicines was higher in regions closer to the Mexico border. Rural residents sought medical care and medicines in Mexico in higher proportions than urban residents. Non-citizens sought medical care in another country in the greatest number and proportion, but the U.S.-born bought medicines in Mexico in the greatest numbers (N=336,000). Latinos sought medical care in Mexico in the greatest number and proportion. A nearly similar number of Latinos and whites bought medicines in another country, the majority in Mexico.

Conclusions: A significant number of California residents sought medical care and medicines in another country, particularly Mexico. This behavior was greater among non-citizens, Latinos, rural residents, and those nearer the Mexico border. However, a significant number of U.S.-born and white residents also bought medicines in Mexico. These findings are relevant to health care providers and policy-makers in both California and Mexico, and support further investigation of the phenomena.