

DOCTORS IN CALIFORNIA

The cornerstone of the health care system is the ability of a patient to see a doctor. The size, composition and distribution of the physician workforce in California is the foundation of a quality health care system. Without a plentiful, diverse and well-distributed supply of physicians, access to health care services and quality of patient care will be diminished, and health disparities made worse.

Access to Doctors

- ***Finding a doctor in California will get increasingly more difficult.*** In the next two decades California's population is projected to increase by more than 10 million people. By 2030 the number of seniors will double, and one in six Californians will be over 65 years old. As people age, their demand for physician services increases. This increasing need for doctors, an aging physician workforce, changing physician practice patterns, and inadequate medical education capacity suggest that California and the nation will see significant doctor shortages in the near future.
- ***A 2001 CMA survey found that nearly half (44%) of physicians were able to spend less time with their patients than five years earlier.*** Doctors report that the time they have with patients has declined even more since the survey was conducted. The same survey found that doctors' greatest source of satisfaction is their relationship with their patients.
- ***On average in California, there are 2.4 active physicians for every 1,000 persons, or about 417 people for every doctor.*** There are fewer than 100,000 doctors licensed to practice medicine in California. However, many of these physicians are not active in the practice of medicine, so the total number of licensees is deceiving. Data show that 20% of licensed physicians in California are *not* active in patient care. Many more do not see patients full-time.
- ***Most California counties have so few physicians that they are classified as Health Professions Shortage Areas (HPSAs).*** Roughly two-thirds of HPSAs are in rural areas, and the remaining third are in very urban areas.
- ***Geographic shifts are likely to increase disparities in access to care.*** Some of the most robust population growth is expected in the Inland Empire (Riverside, San Bernardino Counties) and the San Joaquin Valley -- areas of the state that are already reporting physician shortages.

The Future of Medical Education in California

- Nearly 70% of physicians in California are 45 or older.
- The number of practicing doctors over 65 more than tripled between 1978 and 2002 and the number aged 55 to 65 doubled. At the same time, the number of physicians under 40 has declined since the early 1990s.
- There are only 10 schools in California that offer medical education. Statewide these ten schools admit an average of about 1,340 first-year students each year and maintain an enrollment of about 5,500 students.
- California is the most populous state in the nation. However, California ranks 39th in the nation in the number of medical students per capita. The national average is 27 medical school students per 100,000 people. In California, there are about 16 medical students per 100,000 people.
- Only about a quarter of active physicians in the state attended medical school in California. California has historically depended on importing physicians into the state to make up for its lack of sufficient medical school capacity.