



## **AB 2386: California Physician Expansion Act**

### **Summary:**

One quarter of California's population lives in health professional shortage areas, causing many residents to travel a long distance to access care for themselves and their families. To address this critical gap, AB 2386 seeks to expand California's healthcare workforce by creating new pathways for international physicians. By doing so, the bill aims to not only alleviate the physician shortage but also promotes more culturally responsive care for communities across the state.

### **Background:**

California and Mexico share a unique relationship rooted in geographic proximity, economic integration, and strong cultural ties. This interconnectedness extends beyond trade and labor markets to include public health and shared innovation. Recognizing the value of culturally responsive care, the state launched the Mexican Pilot Program in 2002 to increase healthcare access for Latin populations. Through this initiative, 30 licensed physicians from Mexico provided care in underserved community health centers in California. Although the program demonstrated success, its three-year temporary license limit and restrictions on the number and specialty of participating physicians limited its lasting impact, leaving the broader physician shortage unaddressed.

### **Problem:**

Despite these targeted programs, healthcare accessibility remains a pressing issue across the state. Physicians are unevenly distributed, with economic factors, personal preferences, and a lack of training programs in underserved areas deterring doctors from practicing in high-need regions such as the Inland Empire, Northern and Sierra regions, and the San Joaquin Valley. By 2030, California will

require an estimated 8,243 additional physicians to meet residents' basic health needs, as nearly 11 million Californians currently lack adequate physician access. Without new solutions, more residents will resort to emergency rooms for treatable conditions like asthma, ear infections, or the flu, simply because primary care clinicians are unavailable. These populations already experience significant delays in care, from traveling long distances for appointments to facing longer wait times and worsening health outcomes. Language barriers further compound these challenges, increasing the risk of miscommunication and limited access to interpreter support.

### **Solution:**

AB 2386 builds on the lessons of the Mexican Pilot Program by establishing a provisional license for international physicians. International physicians will still undergo California's rigorous application process, but with flexible requirements that recognize their training and experience abroad. After a successful provisional period, these physicians will be eligible for permanent licensure. This measure ensures that communities receive the care they need, which will help preserve and strengthen healthcare accessibility for all Californians. By integrating international medical talent into California's workforce, AB 2386 offers a sustainable, culturally responsive solution to the state's evolving healthcare needs.

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**Support:**

California Primary Care Association (co-sponsor)

Alta Med (co-sponsor)

