

THE PRIVATE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

There is also a parallel private health care system, catering to affluent Mexicans, which is financed entirely by user fees. This system is supported to some extent by private insurance policies. Data provided by the *Asociación Mexicana de Instituciones de Seguros (AMIS)*, Mexican Association of Insurance Institutions, indicates that less than three percent of Mexicans are covered by private health insurance.

There are no reliable statistics describing the non-insured use of private health care. Estimates developed for the U.S. Department of Commerce suggest that about 20 percent of all health care services in Mexico come from the country's 2,200 private hospitals. Industry observers in Mexico believe that the private sector market share is actually much lower. Uncertainty regarding the coverage of the private system does not affect the statistics cited in this profile for the public system, since private system users are also covered by the public system.

BLOOD BANKS

The *Secretaría de Salud (SS)*, Secretariat of Health, sets standards for the national blood supply. In recent years, the processing of blood and plasma products has been restructured to ensure a high level of quality. Accordingly, *SS* oversees all collection of blood products and all of the distribution to the public institutions. The private hospitals have their own blood banks but they too are supervised by the *SS*.

THE RED CROSS

La Cruz Roja, the Red Cross, is the largest emergency and rescue service provider in Mexico. It operates hospitals in addition to providing ambulance and rescue services. It also delivers first aid and nursing training programs. Its emergency services include transportation of critically ill and injured people, medical attention to stabilize a client's condition during transport, disaster-related aid, maternity and post-natal services, blood banks, and organ donor services. People who use Red Cross emergency services are given primary care while in the ambulance and taken to the hospital of choice. There is no fee for using the Red Cross emergency services.

RED CROSS INFRASTRUCTURE

La Cruz Roja, the Red Cross, operates 420 posts in Mexico and has a total of 1,800 ambulances. It also maintains 70 hospitals throughout the country, the majority of which are specialized in traumatology, emergency-related services and minor surgeries. The Red Cross provides general medical and hospitalization services in its hospitals which are located in areas where there is no public institution. About 450,000 volunteers comprise 80 percent of Red Cross staff.

