

institutions and 44% in private hospitals. By 1992, there were 13,970 public health units with 66,165 beds and 2,250 private hospitals and clinics with 22,000 beds.

The improvement in health and well-being attained by the Mexican population at large have been very significant in this century, characterized by a market downturn in mortality and a simultaneous increase in births, followed later by a stabilization and a subsequent decline in birth rates. While between 1940 and 1960 the birth rate was of an average 46 births per 1,000 inhabitants, in 1981 this rate had declined to 43 and 32 since 1986, basically in response to the decrease in the overall fertility rate from 6.6 children to 3.8 children per woman of fertile age. Whereas in 1930 life expectancy was less than 40 years, by 1950 it had increased to 47 years, and by 1992 the average life expectancy in Mexico is of 69.7 years, 66 for men and 73 for women. These factors are reflected in the country's population structure where 12 of every 100 Mexicans are under five years of age, 27 are between 5 and 14, and 21 are aged between 15 and 24. Mexico's rural population represents some 30% of the country's total population of 84.5 million and mostly lives in widely dispersed areas. Although the IMSS is active in every state of the Republic, as are many other public health units, these factors have made the generalized delivery of health services difficult and expensive.

In response to a variety of events, including a commitment by the Mexican government to provide health services to a wider population, to provide higher quality services, to modernize existing facilities and to decentralized health services, as spelled out in the 1989-1994 National Development Plan; the fact that much of the medical equipment used in Mexico is technologically outdated and needs to be replaced; the need to modernize rural clinics and hospitals; the growth of domestic consumption as a result of Mexico's economic recovery and the growth of the Mexican population; and Mexico's trade liberalization policies, which have made the importation easier and relatively cheaper through the reduction in import tariffs and the elimination of prior import permits, the Mexican market for medical equipment and supplies has increased very rapidly in the past few years, at an average annual rate of 27% between 1984 and 1992. The above mentioned factors will continue to be influential in shaping the Mexican market for medical equipment and supplies, and translate into future growth.

The expansion and modernization of Mexican health care installations is presently one of the principal priorities of the government. The continuous growth of this sector is reflected in the increasingly wider coverage of the Mexican population by both public and private health services. The quality of these services has also been improved upon, but much remains to be done to medically cover the country's population. The public sector health care system will expand to meet the demands of this growing population, as well as population located in rural areas.