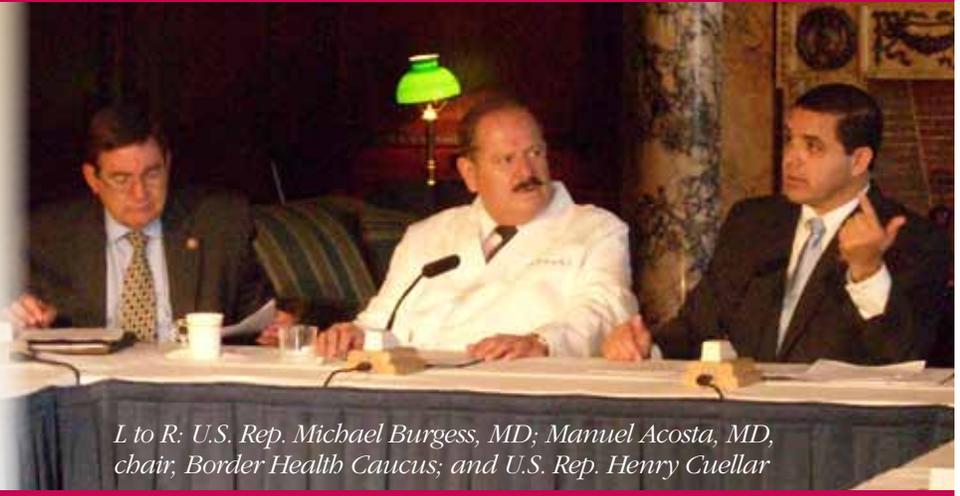


Border Health Caucus

Border Health Caucus members know firsthand their visits each year to Capitol Hill make a difference.

“A strong handshake and an eyeball-to-eyeball visit are worth more than 100 e-mails. And we were not shy about expressing our opinion that politics as usual during this trying time is not acceptable, nor is it acceptable for Congress to use physicians and our patients as a political football between the House and Senate.”

— *Linda Villarreal, MD*
Edinburg internist and member of TMA Council on Legislation



L to R: U.S. Rep. Michael Burgess, MD; Manuel Acosta, MD, chair, Border Health Caucus; and U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar

The status of health care along the U.S.-Mexico border is the canary in a coal mine for the rest of the United States. The 32-county region tops the nation's charts for its high rates of residents who live in poverty or are uninsured, obese, or diabetic. The demand for health care is great. Yet the region has one of the lowest rates of physicians per capita to care for its poor and sick and to promote healthy behaviors and disease prevention. Greater awareness among state and federal lawmakers is needed.

Physician leaders from cities and county medical societies along the border and south Texas including Brownsville, Corpus Christi, El Paso, Eagle Pass, Edinburg, Harlingen, Laredo, McAllen, Pharr, Rio Grande City, and San Antonio, united in 2001 to form the Border Health Caucus (BHC). Their mission is to ensure lawmakers in Austin and Washington, D.C., understand the unique health challenges facing the border region and improve access to care.

Since 2001, BHC continues to be a strong voice for patients and their communities regarding health care policy and regulation. Here are a few of its accomplishments:

- ✓ **Medical liability reform Day of Awareness:** The caucus identified medical liability reform as its top priority in 2002 and organized a Day of Awareness. Physicians closed their offices to raise awareness of lawsuit abuse in Texas, which was forcing physicians to leave the state.
- ✓ **Passage of landmark liability reforms:** In 2003, BHC joined the Texas Medical Association (TMA) in the fight to pass medical liability reform and Proposition 12. In conjunction with TMA, border physicians built a strong grassroots campaign that was critical in passing Proposition 12, which has become a nationally recognized model for medical liability reform.
- ✓ **Legislator Preceptor Program:** Physicians take legislators on a tour of the border's health care infrastructure. The goal is to help legislators better understand the forces affecting the health care system and patients (their constituents).

✓ **Annual Border Health Conference:** Each year since 2004, BHC physicians and health care experts from along the U.S.- Mexico border and south Texas take their concerns and solutions directly to Washington, D.C. The goal of the conference is to raise awareness of the many health care challenges along the border and to ask the U.S. Congress to:

- Strengthen the border's public health infrastructure;
- Remove health care disparities;
- Prevent chronic disease;
- Improve patients' access to a physician by shoring up the health care workforce; and
- Fix Medicare so it is sustainable and can better serve the seniors, people with disabilities, and military families who depend on it for care.

✓ **First Tuesdays at the Capitol:** Each year, physicians spend time at the state capitol advocating for their patients and their profession.

✓ **Legislative Tour of the Valley:** This year, BHC participated in the Rio Grande Valley Partnership's legislative tour. The tour aims to educate legislators about the complex health care needs of the region.

Make a difference.
Together, with one unified voice,
physicians can affect health care policy.

For more information, call Patsy Slaughter, Executive Director of El Paso County Medical Society, at (915) 533-0940 or Jake Fuller at (214) 893-5823.

