

HOW TO START A SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTER

WHAT ARE THE FIRST STEPS IN STARTING A SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTER (SBHC)?

Educate yourself about SBHCs. Visit operational SBHCs in your area. Research the essential features of a SBHC. Conduct a needs assessment of the population you wish to serve. What are the health needs of the children enrolled in your school? Do they have a medical home? Do they have other access to physical, mental and dental health care? Are there specific health services that are difficult to access or too expensive for some families? Identify stakeholders that would be supporters of a SBHC. These stakeholders may include the school district superintendent, school principal, teachers, the school nurse, the local hospital or health center, parents, students, private physicians, etc. Develop an advisory committee of interested persons. Lastly, identify a licensed health care provider willing to operate the SBHC. This entity or person is called the “medical sponsor”.

WHAT ADDITIONAL STEPS ARE NEEDED?

Determine feasibility. Do you have the support of the key people in the community? Is adequate space available in the school? If not, is there space on school grounds to construct a facility or place a modular building? Research funding options. Create a business plan to present to potential funders. Obtain formal approval from the school district.

WHO OPERATES SBHCs IN COLORADO?

Community health centers, community hospitals, physician and nurse training programs, physician group practices, and specially-created non-profit organizations currently serve as SBHC medical sponsors. Programs sub-contract with other health entities in the community for mental health and dental services.

WHAT ARE FACILITY START-UP COSTS?

Start-up costs vary depending on the need for new construction, remodeling, the purchase of a modular building, supplies, equipment, etc. Some SBHCs receive in-kind donations such as the physical space in the school, medical equipment from the local hospital or pre-packaged pharmaceuticals from a local pharmacy. Many programs obtain start up costs through grants or donations.

HOW ARE SBHCs CURRENTLY FUNDED?

Most programs receive funding from a variety of sources including federal, state, local and foundation grants, private donations, and in-kind support from the school district and medical sponsor. Additionally, some SBHCs rely on patient fees and reimbursement from third party payers such as Medicaid and the Child Health Plan Plus.

WHAT SERVICES SHOULD BE OFFERED?

The minimum set of services should include preventive care (comprehensive well child exams, immunizations) and primary medical care (diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic conditions). It is strongly recommended that services include mental health care. When resources are available, SBHCs also provide preventive dental care such as education, screening and sealants. Services should be available to all students, regardless of their ability to pay.

WHAT KIND OF STAFF IS NEEDED?

Staff may include an office coordinator, a Medicaid/CHP+ enrollment specialist, a registered nurse or medical assistant, a nurse practitioner or physician assistant, a licensed mental health professional and, usually, a supervising physician. In Colorado, nurse practitioners and physician assistants have prescriptive authority and can provide direct care.

CAN THE SBHC SERVE MORE THAN ONE SCHOOL?

Yes – definitely. This decision should be part of the planning process. Some SBHCs start out by serving students enrolled in the “host” school and then gradually expand to include “feeder” schools. The “hub and spoke” model should be considered if there is a need to serve multiple schools efficiently.

WHERE SHOULD THE SBHC BE LOCATED?

The preferred location for a SBHC is inside the school, in a visible, high traffic area. When the SBHC is built as part of a new school, it is often placed within the same suite as the school nurse and school psychologist. You may want to consider constructing an exterior entrance so that patients and families can access the health center after school hours or during the summer months. When there is no available space inside the school, a modular unit is a possible option.

WHAT PROCEDURES NEED TO BE IN PLACE TO OPERATE A SBHC?

Most importantly, parents must consent to their child receiving services in the SBHC. Generally, once per year, when a child is registered for school, the parent(s) sign a clear and concise consent form. The medical sponsor must meet all federal and state requirements. Laboratory space must meet certain standards (you must obtain a certificate of waiver under the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendment commonly called a CLIA waiver), pharmaceuticals must be properly packaged, stored and dispensed, and Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OHSA) regulations must be followed. In addition, financial policies and procedures are required.

HOW DO STUDENTS PAY FOR SERVICES?

Some SBHCs do not charge for services. Others collect a small payment at the time of service, usually on a sliding scale depending on the parents’ income. Some SBHCs also bill Medicaid, Child Health Plan Plus, and private insurance. Although a SBHC may collect payment, students are not turned away based on their ability to pay.

HOW DO SBHCs WORK WITH THE SCHOOL NURSE?

The school nurse, school social worker, and school psychologist are partners in the care of students. However, there are federal laws that govern the sharing of health and education-related information. The SBHC must have written policies and procedures regarding information sharing that meet legal requirements. Medical information is never disclosed without the written consent of the patient, parent or guardian.

WHAT KIND OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE TO HELP WITH START-UP?

The Colorado Association for School-Based Health Care (CASBHC) provides information to individuals and community groups engaged in learning about school-based health care. This includes publications, consultations, workshops, and on-site assistance. CASBHC also provides training and technical assistance for communities that are planning or operating a SBHC. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and the Colorado Department of Education also provide information and technical assistance on school health services.

WHERE CAN I FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

Additional information is available at the following websites: Colorado Association for School-Based Health Care (CASBHC) (www.casbhc.org), National Assembly on School-Based Health Care (NASBHC) (www.nasbhc.org), Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) (www.cdphe.state.co.us/ps/school/index.html), and The Centers for Health and Health Care in Schools (www.healthinschools.org).