

## Partnerships between Schools and HRSA-Supported Health Centers: 10 Need-to-Know Tips

A Technical Assistance Resource to Ensure Access to School-based Health Services

Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra and Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona sent [letters](#) in July and March highlighting federal resources available to states and schools to invest in mental health services for students. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Education (ED) continue to work closely together to improve the health and well-being of children and youth by ensuring they have the physical and behavioral health services and supports they need to build resilience and thrive.

HHS and ED jointly hosted a webinar, [Expanding School-Health Center Partnerships](#), on March 30, 2022. Created in collaboration with ED, this document summarizes some key takeaways and resources for schools interested in establishing partnerships with health centers supported by the HHS Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

**Here are the top 10 questions and answers from the webinar:**

1. **What are HRSA-supported health centers?** HRSA-supported health centers, often referred to as community health centers or Federally Qualified Health Centers, are community-based and patient-led organizations that deliver comprehensive, culturally competent, high-quality primary health care, as well as supportive services such as health education, translation, and transportation, to the nation's medically underserved communities, including populations experiencing homelessness, agricultural workers, and residents of public housing. In 2021, health centers served one in three people living in poverty and one in five rural residents. Of the 30 million individuals served by health centers in 2021, 90 percent had incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, 24 percent were best served in a language other than English, and 63 percent identified as racial or ethnic minorities. For more health center data, please visit: <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/data-reporting/program-data>.
2. **What services do health centers provide?** Health centers provide comprehensive primary care services, including behavioral health (mental health and substance use disorder) and oral health services. By emphasizing coordinated care management of patients with multiple health care needs and the use of key quality improvement practices, health centers increase access to care and help reduce health disparities. There are approximately 1,400 health centers that operate more than 14,000 service delivery sites in every state, U.S. territory, and the District of Columbia. [Find out more about health centers](#).
3. **What are some key benefits of partnerships between schools and health centers?**
  - Health centers have a long history of providing care in schools. In 2021, 42 percent of health centers offered school-based services.
  - Health centers provide a range of high-quality, comprehensive primary care services, including required general primary medical care, immunizations, and well child services,

among others. In addition, health centers may provide additional health services, such as mental health and substance use disorder services, to meet the needs of its patients.

- Health centers collaborate with other providers in their service area, including local hospitals, specialty providers, and social service organizations, to provide access to services not available through the health center, such as certain specialty services that children and youth with disabilities may need.
  - Health centers provide non-clinical services like translation, care coordination, transportation, and eligibility assistance that enable people to access health care and improve health outcomes.
  - Health centers can ensure access to care for the entire family year-round and after hours through a combination of school-based and other service delivery sites.
  - Health centers provide access to services for all, regardless of ability to pay.
  - Health centers have a billing infrastructure, federal support, and access to other benefits that make their model of care sustainable.
4. **What are health center School-Based Service Sites (SBSS)?** Health centers provide comprehensive primary care services through permanent, fixed service delivery sites, temporary locations, mobile units, and through service delivery sites located in or proximate to schools. SBSS help to facilitate access to essential services for both students and other members of the community.
  5. **How can schools identify a potential health center partner?** To learn more about which health centers are located in your community, please visit [Find a Health Center](#). Additionally, the School-Based Health Alliance recently released an updated [Children's Health and Education Mapping Tool](#), featuring new capabilities that enable health, education, and other stakeholders to identify each other at a local level and develop new partnerships.
  6. **Do HRSA-supported health centers require additional resources to open a SBSS?** Health centers generally require additional resources, particularly to provide comprehensive services in a school. However, depending on a number of factors, individual health centers may be able to provide services in schools, including via telehealth, absent additional funding.
  7. **Are health center school-based services available only to children and adolescents who attend the school affiliated with the health center's SBSS?** No. Health centers must ensure all residents of the general community will have access to all primary health care services. Health centers and schools determine together which services will be available through the SBSS and the extent to which staff, family members, or other community members will have access to them at the school or at other health center service delivery sites.
  8. **Can a school direct what services health centers provide to students and how they are provided?** Health centers partner with schools to determine how best to meet the health care needs of the students in the school. However, health centers must maintain compliance with all Health Center Program requirements, including those described in the [Health Center Program Compliance Manual](#) as well as those relating to [scope of project](#), in operating new or expanded SBSS.

These include the following requirements:

- Health center providers (i.e., employees, contractors, or volunteers) work under the direction of the health center;
- Health center providers deliver services in accordance with the health center's policies and procedures;
- Health center provider time is compensated by the health center;
- The health center establishes and/or maintains a patient record for all individuals served;
- The health center bills for the services, as applicable; and
- The health center's patient-majority governing board retains control and authority over the activities/provision of any services, regardless of whether the activities take place at a health center site or at another location within the community.

9. **Where can I go to learn more about HRSA's Health Center Program and building partnerships?**

Please visit the following resources:

- [Find a Health Center \(HRSA\)](#)
- [Child Health and Education Mapping Tool \(SBHA\)](#)
- [Primary Care Associations \(HRSA\)](#)
- [Webinar: Expanding School-Health Center Partnerships \(HHS & ED\)](#)
- [Virtual Workshop: Health Centers Interested in School-Based Care \(NACHC\)](#)

10. **Where can I go to learn more about funding to support this work?** Please visit the following resources:

- [Find Funding \(HRSA\)](#)
- [Health Center School-Based Service Sites \(HRSA\)](#)
- HRSA's [Primary Care Digest](#) is a weekly newsletter for the health center community.
- [School-Based Health Alliance \(SBHA\)](#)
- List of [school-based health services resources \(HHS\)](#)