

# CHAPTER 02 School-Based Health Center Planning

## PLANNING AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

All SBHCs should provide services that respond to the needs of students, families, and the community. The first step in starting an SBHC is to bring together interested parties in your community. This action is essential for planning and assessing community interest and resources. The planning stage helps you identify community concerns about the health center before they become a sticking point. It allows you to draw on expertise from other individuals and groups so you do not have to re-evaluate key components (such as floor plans or health center services) after they are established. It will also allow you to involve important community decision makers who can help tell your story and become your “champions.”

A well thought-out and effective community planning process can make the difference between a successful SBHC and one that closes its doors due to lack of community support or funding. This process should reflect the diverse racial, ethnic, religious, class, and cultural composition of the community and acknowledge community priorities. Community planning activities ideally involve a wide range of school and community members, and can include:

- Conducting a needs assessment;
- Selecting your sponsoring agency and other participating providers (see Chapter 4 for more information on sponsoring agencies);
- Deciding on services based on needs of community and existing available services;
- Identifying and recruiting community champions and launching outreach efforts.

## WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED

**SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS** - If the health center will be located on school property, school administrators will be important decision-makers. In this case, the health center will effectively be a guest in the school, and its coordinator should communicate on a regular basis with the school administration, especially the principal. School administrators can also be instrumental in helping identify funding for the health center and will need to support and promote the center to students, families, and staff. They also are able to provide in-kind support for items such as the physical plant, phone and fax, utilities, and custodial services.

**SCHOOL BOARD** - If the health center will be based on school property, you will also need the approval of the school board. School boards typically pass a resolution in support of a school-based health center in order for the health center to open, and they may need to approve any changes to health center services. The school board will also need to approve any financial support from the school district and any major policies that impact the center.

**SCHOOL STAFF** - Many school staff – including teachers, school counselors and coaches – can benefit a great deal from school health services, and will be critical to the success of your site. Involve school staff during the planning process - everyone from secretaries to librarians to school psychologists – as they can be a great resource for determining what types of services students need most. They will also be influential in encouraging students to use the health center. Collaborate with school nurses, teachers, counselors, and administrators to identify ways the health center can support them in their work. They should also understand early on the role of the health center and its limitations. Explaining and pre-discussing policies around topics such as confidentiality/student information sharing, clinic access for students, and responding to crises can prevent future frustration and misunderstandings (see Chapter 7, Operations).

**YOUTH** - For middle and high school sites, youth are critical to the planning process because they will be the primary stakeholders! Involving youth in the planning process is essential to understanding the services they value, their priorities, concerns, etc. Youth who are involved in the planning process will also help generate a “buzz” regarding the health center so that there is interest from their peers once the center is established. Look for youth who volunteer at other wellness organizations, are members of youth groups actively engaged in wellness work, and/or belong to youth commissions within your community. Identify youth who represent the population you will be serving (some of these youth may not be involved in other groups). See Chapter 3: Youth Engagement, for effective strategies to involve youth in needs assessment and planning efforts.

**PARENTS/CAREGIVERS AND FAMILIES** - By engaging parents in the earliest planning efforts, the center can design services that work for families, ensure that parents will bring their children (or encourage their teens) to use the center, and develop strong advocates. Any objections or concerns parents may have about the health center are best addressed during the planning stage, and any problems or potential conflicts can be resolved together before impacting the future operation of the center. Finally, it is important to remember that many of the health decisions affecting youth occur within families. By involving parents, your health center may be able to have an important impact on healthy choices that are made at home. Additionally, if your health center will serve the broader community, beyond students, families may be your future patient base.

**COMMUNITY LEADERS** - Community leaders can assist you with fundraising efforts, building community support, telling your story, and can serve as an introduction to other key decision makers. These leaders can include business owners, civic clubs, local elected and appointed officials as well as state and federal legislators, media, religious leaders, or other influential people in your community. Look for leaders of community organizations, particularly other youth serving organizations, whose missions are compatible with yours.

**HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS** - It is important to communicate to health care professionals that it is not the intent of the school-based health center to take business away from local providers; in fact, referrals from the center can help increase their patient base. Involving health care professionals at the start of your planning efforts will help to build a good foundation for future communication and coordination with primary care and specialty providers.

**PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS** - Public health departments can be great partners in helping you determine the types of services your health center should provide and potential partners in providing this care. In some cases, public health departments are willing to provide health care practitioners to work at the health center, thus offsetting the costs of providing the services. The SBHC can work with the local health department on public health measures such as immunizations, STD testing, enrollment in health insurance, or influenza surveillance.

**COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICE PROVIDERS** - In most communities there is a range of non-profit organizations that provide accessible, affordable health, mental health and social services to low-income families.

### **HANDLING QUESTIONS ABOUT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES:**

Some community members, families, or school staff may feel concerned about the provision of sexual and reproductive health services to adolescents. This can prove to be a sticking point in the planning process. CSHA believes that school-based health centers should try to provide as comprehensive services as possible, and that adolescents are best served by having access to this type of service. An historically effective strategy for navigating this topic is to ground the discussion in the needs assessment data. Often, the communities that have the most resistance to sexual and reproductive health services are communities with the highest rates of teen pregnancy and STI rates. Drawing upon the data can be an effective tool to discuss the necessity of sexual and reproductive health services in a specific school or community. Another promising strategy is to engage youth leaders in advocating for these services. Finally, another potential strategy is reassuring parents and administrators that clinic staff will both discuss abstinence as an option and also promote parent-child communication. Providers work within their scope of services (to provide health care according to their training) legally and ethically, which for adolescents includes preventing unwanted pregnancies and STIs.

They are described in more detail in Chapter 4: Health Center Structure. Of particular interest will be those that provide medical and behavioral health services to the population in question.

**OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS** - Groups such as the American Lung Association, Boys and Girls Clubs, and others may be involved in health education, promotion, prevention, or treatment within your community. They know the community and can help advocate and refer to your services. They can also help identify youth and other community leaders who are supportive of a school-based health center. There are also community groups that work on social or environmental issues, or that are organized around the issues of specific populations (e.g., Latino families, disability groups) that may have an interest in school health services. These groups can offer valuable perspectives for the community planning process.

## CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A “needs assessment” is a process for gathering information to determine: 1) existing services and resources in the community, 2) gaps in services, needs, and priorities of the community, and 3) best methods for addressing those needs. Needs assessments can include a number of tools, including surveys, focus groups, interviews with community leaders, community meetings or other strategies you develop to gather relevant information. It is also important that your needs assessment gather information about the ways culture and history in your community influence views about health care and education. Common questions that needs assessments can answer are listed below.

### WHAT YOU CAN LEARN FROM A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- What are the biggest health problems and/or concerns for students and the community?
- How are these concerns different for different segments of students or community members, for example, based on gender, race, class, and ethnicity?
- In what ways do race and culture influence views about health and education in the community?
- What community and school health resources already exist?
- Which health facilities, programs and services are used most, by whom, and why?
- What are the barriers to care for students and families?
- How are services coordinated?
- Are different segments of the community satisfied with the current set of services?
- Given the needs and existing services, what are the gaps?
- How have previously implemented programs worked? For which segments of the community did they work well or not work well and why?
- Would the school-based health center model be best suited to meet student and community needs? Should other models be considered?
- What will it take to make the school-based health center effective in serving all of the different segments of the student body and community you hope to reach?
- What resources are available for a school-based health center and what additional resources do you need?
- Who are the key persons and agencies that need to be involved in program planning and implementation?

### STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING NEEDS ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

There are many ways to answer the questions listed above. You will most likely need to use a few different strategies in order to answer all your questions. The strategies for collecting data for a needs assessment are the same as those you use for evaluation but with a different focus. These include collecting your own data through surveys, focus groups, public forums, or key informant interviews, as well as compiling data from existing sources such as statewide surveys, public health records, or school data. A description of each of these different types of data is included below.

## CALIFORNIA STUDENT HEALTH INDEX

In 2021, the California School-Based Health Alliance created a free and publicly available resource that combines data sources to help individuals advocate and plan locally for new school-based health centers. The Student Health Index (<https://www.schoolhealthcenters.org/student-health-index/>) is the first statewide comprehensive analysis to identify the counties, districts, and schools where new SBHCs will have the greatest return on investment for improving student health and education equity. To make the Student Health Index more accessible, a dashboard was created to provide a public, interactive mapping tool that spans all large K-12 public schools in the state of California, and allows users to view, download, and explore school-level data on health, socioeconomic, and school demographics and outcomes. The Index and Dashboard can be a helpful resource as a part of or in conjunction with your needs assessment.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT DATA SOURCES

The California Department of Health Care Services, California Department of Public Health, California Department of Education, and local health departments collect and make available a wide variety of public health indicator data. The state departments as well as larger counties make these data available via searchable databases.

It is important to track down health and education data for your area to determine your school’s health care needs. It will also prove helpful later when you start writing grant proposals. The following table provides some useful online resources. Local public health departments and even school districts may have access to regional and local data about student health outcomes and gaps in services. School level data may be available for information on health insurance, vaccination records, chronic health conditions, and vision and hearing screenings.

DATA SOURCE	WHAT IT CONTAINS	URL
California Department of Education	Data and statistics on enrollment, dropouts, student demographics, attendance, suspensions, etc.	<a href="http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds">www.cde.ca.gov/ds</a>
California School Dashboard	California’s accountability system that reports how districts, schools, and student groups are performing across state and local measures. Much of the data available above is organized in this dashboard.	<a href="http://www.caschooldashboard.org">www.caschooldashboard.org</a>
California Health and Human Services Open Data Portal	Collection of non-confidential health and human services data from departments under HHS, like the Department of Health Care Services.	<a href="https://data.chhs.ca.gov/">https://data.chhs.ca.gov/</a>
California Health Interview Survey	Access to data from adolescent health telephone survey	<a href="http://www.chis.ucla.edu">www.chis.ucla.edu</a>
California Healthy Kids Survey	Results of school administered survey since 1999	<a href="https://calschls.org/">https://calschls.org/</a>
Kidsdata	Collection of data from various other sources (including many of those mentioned here) that highlights children’s health and well-being at different geographic levels (i.e. county, legislative districts, some cities and school districts).	<a href="http://www.kidsdata.org">www.kidsdata.org</a>
UCSF Health Atlas	Data curated to capture various domains of social determinants of health, as well as relevant health outcomes.	<a href="https://healthatlas.ucsf.edu/">https://healthatlas.ucsf.edu/</a>

## LONG-TERM COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Conducting your needs assessment, and perhaps starting a youth advisory committee are all ways to get the community involved in your school-based health center. As mentioned previously, these activities are important to ensuring adequate support for a new health center. However, maintaining that community involvement long-term is essential to your school-based health center's ongoing success. Ideas for maintaining community involvement follow:

- Host an open house at the beginning of each school year so that students, parents, and community leaders are familiar with the school-based health center.
- Create a health email newsletter that lets students and parents know what is happening in the school-based health center. (Consider collaborating with an appropriate academic class to produce the publication once a quarter; the class then becomes another recruitment source for your advisory council.)
- Plan a luncheon twice a year with members of the health community.
- Train a cadre of youth to conduct outreach to youth-serving organizations in the community.
- Ask adult and youth stakeholders to help you organize booths or information tables at local community festivals, cultural holidays, or other events that parents, students, and potential supporters are likely to attend.
- Partner with community leaders and other organizations on community activities and events to maintain visibility and position the school-based health center as a recognized resource for meeting the needs of young people in your community.