



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINING SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTERS

The unique contribution of school-based health centers (SBHCs) is their focus on school campus delivery of services, including clinical care to all students. SBHCs are not necessarily all students' assigned primary care provider, so many SBHCs provide unreimbursed clinical services when an urgent student health need arises. In addition, many SBHCs provide health education, case management, parent support, and teacher consultation, much of which is not reimbursable. These 10 recommendations from the field suggest ways to sustain SBHCs services by *increasing SBHC enrollment and utilization*. These are not billing tips. For information on maximizing reimbursement, see our "Third Party Billing Manual" and other resources on our [website](#).

- 1. Provide the right services, to the right target population/s.** It is crucial to examine existing school and community health data to identify health needs in the school community before launching services and also annually. In addition, conduct initial and periodic surveys with students, school staff, school nurses, other school health personnel, and parents to assess student and SBHC client health needs. Finally, map existing school and community health resources and assets to avoid duplicating services. This data will help determine services provided as well as help answer questions such as should clinical services be extended to the neighboring 0-5 year old population? And if you serve adults as well as teens, how will you structure services so adolescents have appropriate confidentiality (e.g., teen-only hours)?
- 2. Develop clear operating agreements and shared goals with the school.** One of the most important factors in utilization of SBHCs is active support and ongoing referrals from school administrators and staff. While most SBHCs are authorized under a general memorandum of understanding between the school district and sponsoring organization, few have a clear operating agreement with school site leadership. These agreements should:
 - outline expectations, common interests and goals for SBHC services
 - clearly define systems for communication between school and SBHC leadership
 - clarify responsibilities and protocols for school staff and SBHC providers in areas that overlap (such as referral mechanisms and hours of student appointments)Developing, and periodically checking, an operating agreement will also build a stronger partnership!
- 3. Align SBHC enrollment with school registration.** Many SBHCs can educate and enroll students at in-person school registration, or by including SBHC information and enrollment forms in school registration packets. Some SBHCs find that school events (e.g., back to school night, open house) are ideal opportunities to get students and family members enrolled at the SBHC. Forms should be translated into commonly read languages and staff interpreters should be available to help families complete enrollment forms in person or over the phone. Check our website for related tips on [ensuring utilization of your SBHC](#).
- 4. Cultivate and engage youth leaders in promoting the SBHC.** Students can bolster outreach and promotion of school health services. Youth should also be engaged in planning service delivery as their insights are critical to developing responsive teen services. As SBHC clients, students can serve as an effective conduit between the SBHC and new clients, especially when they are enthusiastic about the services and programs provided by the health center. Youth are a key resource in promoting a positive image of the SBHC for their peers—an image that emphasizes safety, friendliness, and trust. When [youth engagement](#) is prioritized, SBHCs gain the added advantage of having passionate advocate-clients.

5. **Conduct health insurance outreach and enrollment.** Increase your billable services by helping clients get enrolled into health insurance! Train SBHC staff, or identify partner agencies, to serve as certified application assistants (CAAs) to help families complete the Medi-Cal or Healthy Families enrollment process. There are also online enrollment mechanisms in some counties through One-E-App. Ensure your outreach and enrollment efforts meet the needs of the SBHC community (e.g., offer enrollment assistance in the evening, CAAs should speak dominant languages). If clients get (re-)enrolled in health insurance through your SBHC, they will be more likely to select your SBHC as their primary care provider – and you will be reimbursed for their care. Be sure to develop an agreement with the school district to outline your role in conducting outreach and enrollment with students and families.
6. **Collect data on SBHC quality of care and patient outcomes.** The ability to accurately gather SBHC data and track outcomes is directly related to securing and sustaining grant funding, and may enhance other payments based on clinical quality measures. Electronic health records (EHRs) or another data collection tool can be effective for tracking outcomes. Information on EHRs and provider incentive payments is on our [EHR webpage](#). You can demonstrate that your SBHC provides high-quality care by conducting satisfaction surveys, offering comment boxes, and holding focus groups with students, families, and school staff.
7. **Participate in student support and safety efforts.** Increase referrals to the SBHC and become indispensable to the school community by closely supporting other student initiatives. There are many ways to become involved:
 - join the school’s student success team (SST)
 - take lead role in the school’s safety plan
 - if your SBHC is inside the school, help monitor the hall during passing periods
 - support violence/bullying prevention efforts by modeling and upholding student behavior guidelines

Get involved in efforts to [improve school climate](#) and [reduce absenteeism](#), not only by delivering related clinical services to targeted students, but also by participating in planning committees.

8. **Conduct health outreach and education with families, school staff and community.** Providing health education and screenings in the school community often brings in new patients who didn’t previously know the SBHC. Some SBHCs offer health activities at existing events, such as open house or parent night, and others host their own events such as student health fairs, healthy cooking classes, or peer health education programs. Other SBHCs offer staff wellness events, which builds support and increases referrals to the SBHC. There are endless possibilities! The wisest SBHCs engage clients, whether just students or also adults, in planning and implementing these events to ensure that they meet community needs, and to maximize participation.
9. **Train, support, and retain SBHC staff.** Invest in providing professional development for staff so they are youth-friendly and culturally competent, and so they feel valued and will stay with the SBHC. Staff turnover can be expensive, reduce productivity, and upset continuity of care. Ensure that staff are cross-trained for an efficient, seamless system of care. Many SBHCs benefit most from peer learning and problem-solving with other SBHC staff. Look for partnerships to develop a volunteer and intern-based model to increase staffing: many SBHCs augment medical, mental health, and dental services with trainees, including nursing students, medical residents, social work interns and dental hygienist students.
10. **Seek collaborative funding opportunities.** When third party billing doesn’t cover it, seek grants to fund health education, youth development, and other programs prioritized by students and school staff. Share your funding needs with school leadership, so they can help identify grants that the school district or other SBHC partners could apply for, such as afterschool or violence prevention grants. CSHC posts a list of [current grant opportunities](#) on our website.