

Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Programs and School-Based Health Centers

Lessons and Insights from the Field

OVERVIEW

In response to the youth mental health crisis, ongoing disparities of access to psychiatric services,¹ and shortage of mental health specialists, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022 provided federal funding to 48 **Pediatric Mental Health Care Access (PMHCA) programs** to expand into schools, school-based health centers (SBHCs), and emergency departments.² **The School-Based Health Alliance (SBHA)** was one of several organizations funded to provide technical assistance to PMHCA programs, focusing on building PMHCA program capacity to work in school settings and, in particular, in SBHCs.

SBHCs increase access to integrated health care, including physical, vision, dental, and mental health services, where children spend much of their time – in school.³ PMHCA programs increase equitable access to high-quality youth mental health care in more accessible, low-stigma primary care settings. Equity is a driving principle of PMHCA programs, and of SBHCs in particular; and due to their similar goals, systems and structures – as well as a complementary workforce and model of care – they are natural partners for increasing access to mental health care for children and adolescents.⁴

Currently, there are no established guidelines, best practices, or roadmaps for PMHCA Programs to follow as they explore expansion into schools or SBHCs. Therefore, as part of its technical assistance efforts, the SBHA developed a document summarizing innovative lessons and insights from PMHCA programs that are collaborating in this new domain. With input from an advisory group of several diverse PMHCA programs that have established connections with SBHCs, the document, **PMHCA Programs and SBHCs: Lessons and Insights from the Field** is a preliminary resource for PMHCA programs expanding or enhancing their services to SBHCs. It includes:

- ▶ Why PMHCA programs and SBHCs are natural partners for increasing access to mental health care.
- ▶ Steps PMHCA programs are taking to identify, locate, and engage SBHCs.
- ▶ **Key Lessons Learned** and spotlights on PMHCA programs that are already collaborating with SBHCs.
- ▶ Modifications and innovations that PMHCA programs are making related to service implementation in SBHCs.
- ▶ How evaluation, program monitoring and quality improvement efforts can capture data specific to a SBHC audience.
- ▶ Recommendations for **future directions** for PMHCA program and SBHC collaboration.
- ▶ Resources and appendices to help guide PMHCA program expansion into SBHCs.

What PMHCA Programs are telling us ...

Though the PMHCA delivery model for SBHCs is still evolving, some key lessons learned across PMHCA programs collaborating with SBHCs include the importance of:

1.

Learning about the uniqueness of SBHCs.

2.

Keeping relationships at the center of collaboration.

3.

Developing strong partnerships with diverse SBHC stakeholders and champions.

4.

Working in stages with an eye toward long term results.

Future Directions

While PMHCA programs have made significant strides in expanding services to SBHCs, areas to further explore that will advance their practice, maximize their impact, and sustain their efforts include:

CONVENING

thought leaders to develop "best practices" that will guide future PMHCA-SBHC partnerships.

CREATING

shared spaces for learning, exploration, and exchange of tools and resources.

PROVIDING

open-access resources and ongoing technical assistance.

CONDUCTING

collaborative national and statewide needs assessments that collect data related to PMHCA collaboration, interest, and capacity to expand to SBHCs.

DEVELOPING

evidence-based practice models and pilots to examine the impact of PMHCA-SBHC partnerships.

PROMOTING

SBHCs to PMHCAs (and vice versa) through educational materials, cross-training, joint funding, and collaboration on national newsletters and websites.

REFERENCES

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2. Pediatric mental health care access. MCHB. Accessed September 14, 2023. <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/programs-impact/programs/pediatric-mental-health-care-access>.
3. What is School-Based Health Care? School-Based Health Alliance. Accessed September 14, 2023. <https://www.sbh4all.org/what-we-do/>
4. Series: School-Based Health Centers and Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Programs: A Natural Fit for Improving Access to Mental Health Care. (create citation once online)

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