

School-Based Health Centers: *On the front line for mental health*

Today, over 1700 school-based health centers deliver **primary preventive and early intervention services** to more than a million children of all grade levels in urban, rural and suburban schools across 45 states.

For most school-based health centers, the interdisciplinary team includes mental health professionals: according to a survey by the National Assembly, **69% of school-based health centers have a full-time mental health staff**, whether masters-prepared clinical social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, or substance abuse counselor.

In less than ten years, the percentage of school-based health centers with mental health staff went from 30 to nearly 60. It is the **fastest growing component** of school-based health care.

In studies of school-based health center service utilization, mental health counseling is repeatedly identified as the **leading reason for visits** by students.

A national survey of 1100 school-based health centers found the following **mental health and counseling services**:

- Crisis intervention 77%
- Psychosocial assessment 75%
- Grief and loss therapy 71%
- Substance abuse 68%
- Assessment and treatment of learning problems 39%
- Peer support group counseling 59%
- Classroom behavior modification 49%
- Gang intervention 26%

Several studies have shown that the **barriers experienced in traditional mental health settings – stigma, non-compliance, inadequate access – are overcome in school-based settings** and that the users are more likely to be at higher risk for psychosocial problems.

One study found that adolescents with access to SBHCs were more than **10 times more likely** to make a mental health or substance abuse visit.

Another study found that students served by health centers had **fewer discipline problems, course failures, and school absences.**

A National Assembly survey of school-based health center providers found that **expansion of mental health services was the first priority** for any expansion of program funding.

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