

How School-Based Health Centers (SBHC) Benefit from Youth Engagement

As the primary stakeholders in school-based health centers, youth are the most important factors in school based health care.

Youth can offer critical support in SBHC development and service delivery, as well as advocacy for school-based health services

Youth engagement enhances quality and operations of SBHCs and is an opportunity for young people to become empowered about their health.

Community asset mapping and needs assessments are vital for SBHCs to gauge the pressing health concerns of a school campus and its surrounding community. Youth are key informants with regard to providing insight on the health conditions of their environment. Young people who are engaged in school health can likewise assist in survey development and community data collection, with peer-to-peer surveys, and in the dissemination of their findings.



Youth can provide input on the **types of services** they most often seek and suggest what services should be offered and how such services can be best delivered. Additionally, youth can speak to the level of cultural competency within the SBHC and recommend practices that would facilitate more meaningful client-provider interaction. By partnering with youth, SBHCs uphold patients' priorities in the fullest sense: they listen to and respect the needs of their clients and actively participate in more meaningful health care delivery.

Young people can bolster **outreach and promotion** of school-based health services. As SBHC clients, students can serve as a conduit between the health center and new clients, especially when they are enthusiastic about the services and programs provided by the health center. In this regard, youth are a key resource in promoting a positive image of SBHCs 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

In line with service delivery, **peer-to-peer health education** is another way young people can become engaged with a health center, relevant adolescent health issues, and the peers they educate. With thorough preparation and culturally competent health curricula, young people can be trained to educate students and other youth on a variety of health topics, conflict mediation, positive relationships, and SBHC resources.

Youth are also poised for **policy and advocacy mobilization** on behalf of SBHCs. Young school health advocates bring an often unheard voice to the local, state, and even national policy level. In turn, most community stakeholders and policymakers value youth engagement and the integrity youth bring to the table. Youth can lead advocacy actions, legislative visits, letter-writing campaigns, neighborhood forums, and other activities that support the SBHC's cause.