



ILLINOIS MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH COALITION

1256 West Chicago Avenue ♦ Chicago, Illinois 60642
Tel: (312) 491-8161 ♦ Fax: (312) 491-8171 ♦ Email: ilmaternal@ilmaternal.org
Website: www.ilmaternal.org



Illinois School Health Centers – A Record of Success

School health centers (SHCs) have been an integral part of the Illinois health care safety net since 1982. Serving as doctor's offices in schools, they offer comprehensive, culturally competent physical, mental, and oral health care services to Illinois' most vulnerable population – its children and adolescents. 98% of SHCs are located in low-income districts where more than half the school population is eligible for free and reduced lunch. In the 2012 school year, more than 90,000 students were enrolled to receive services at 58 SHCs statewide.

SHCs are staffed by physicians, nurse practitioners, social workers, psychologists, dentists and physician assistants. They are sponsored by hospitals, health departments, universities, non-profit organizations, community mental health centers, and school districts. This multi-disciplinary approach and diverse funding stream has its advantages but can lead to instability.

Sustainability continues to challenge SHC sponsoring agencies as the main patient population is Medicaid or un/underinsured. Also, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), the certifying agency for SHCs, mandates that no student be turned away regardless of their ability to pay for services. Unfortunately, agencies that have traditionally sponsored SHCs are experiencing budget issues and in one rare case, have had to pull back from their commitment to the model. Nevertheless, the federally qualified health centers, hospitals, local health departments, and school districts that currently sponsor SHCs remain committed to the SHC model and the shared mission of all safety net providers.

SHCs have also received decades of support from the foundation community to supplement services. That is an enormous strength – for instance, in Chicago, more than four health care foundations provide some degree of financial support to SHCs. Furthermore, an appropriation in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) funded capital, construction, and equipment projects for SHCs. This recognition for the value of SHCs from the federal government is promising, but unfortunately does not cover operational costs which keep the SHCs' doors open.

The health care landscape is changing and SHC champions have begun preparations to keep SHCs viable facilities for Illinois families. They cannot continue to operate in the same manner and remain sustainable. To that end, SHCs have taken steps, including opening the facility to the wider community, adjusting staffing models, and demonstrating community benefit, in order to maintain services. Correspondingly, the quality of care continues to improve at these sites, and the number of students served continues to increase annually.

Because SHCs are community partnerships that link education and health care, they are uniquely positioned to address the specific health care needs of students, keeping them in class and learning, with a clear focus on prevention of unhealthy behaviors. The Illinois Coalition for School Health Centers, a project of the Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition, is working closely with IDHS, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the Chicago Department of Public Health, and other stakeholders in the SHC community to be proactive and seek solutions to combat these financial challenges. The results and feedback collected from convening this group in Chicago will be adapted to address the needs of SHCs statewide.

Additionally, we are working with partners in the business community to develop a funding model that capitalizes on the SHC return on investment. We intend to work with the funding community to leverage existing resources and fortify this invaluable health care model.

The state of the IL SHC field remains strong and its champions committed.