



The Colorado Health Foundation™



**BRIEF**

# School-Based Health Centers: Gateway to Healthier Children

May 2009

# School-Based Health Centers: Gateway to Healthier Children

Children and adolescents spend almost half their waking hours in school, making schools the ideal place to address a variety of health concerns. At Durango High School, 60 students visit the school-based health center (SBHC) each day to receive services that include treatment for a cut finger, an immunization or information on how to avoid STDs. With on-site access to care, Durango students spend less time out of the classroom and often receive treatment they might not otherwise have without the center.

For many of Colorado's kids, SBHCs are their only source of acute care, chronic disease management and preventive services because their families can't afford insurance, they don't have transportation to a doctor's office or their parents can't miss work to take them to doctor's appointments. Studies show that teens with access to an SBHC are less likely to suffer from costly health problems such as substance abuse, injuries and teen pregnancy. SBHCs also lower health care costs by teaching kids how to manage chronic conditions such as diabetes and asthma. In addition, access to an SBHC has been linked to less absenteeism and fewer disciplinary problems, factors that influence academic performance.

## *One Student's Story*

When he began his senior year at high school, Jonathan Miller weighed 385 pounds. Three years later and 137 pounds lighter, he credits his SBHC for breaking his cycle of obesity. He signed up for the center's Nutrition and Physical Activity Program that included counseling sessions and exercise classes. In his 2008 testimony before Congress, Jonathan said, "If every student had access to a school-based health center like I did, they too could have a safe place to begin this life transformation."

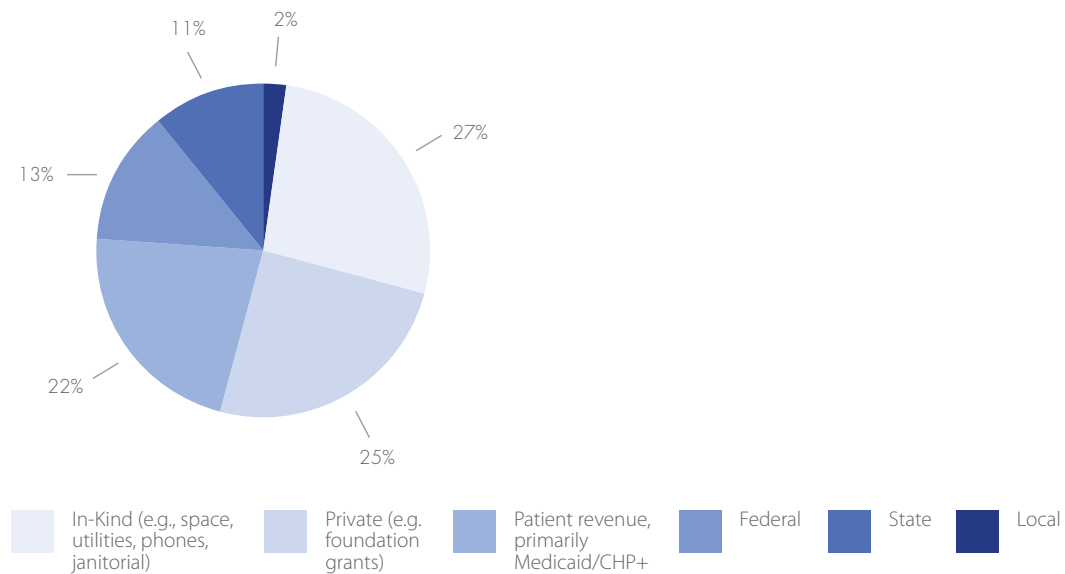
# What is a School-Based Health Center?

An SBHC is generally defined as a health care facility located within or on school grounds. These centers are typically staffed by medical, behavioral and sometimes dental health professionals. In some cases, centers offer only mental and/or dental health services and do not qualify as a full-fledged SBHC, but they still serve an important role in meeting health care needs. The most successful SBHCs have medical oversight and a relationship with the health care system in the community.

At the Durango High School SBHC, all services are free; the center is financed by government grants and private donations. Some SBHCs charge on a sliding scale or bill insurance companies. The sustainability of SBHCs could be enhanced by improving their billing practices (one of the goals of the Colorado Health Foundation’s SBHC initiative).

Most centers survive on a variety of revenue streams. In Colorado, \$1 in \$4 comes from private sources such as foundation grants (Figure 1). Many states offer some type of support. For example, Colorado’s School-Based Health Center Grant Program provides funding, ranging from \$20,000 for planning grants to \$100,000 for start-up sites. But these state grants cover only a portion of annual operating costs, which average \$239,500 per SBHC. Other potential sources of Colorado state funding—such as the Primary Care Fund and the Comprehensive Primary and Preventive Care Grant Program—are limited by requirements that services be provided to all age-groups and on a year-round basis, or that clients cannot be eligible for public programs such as Medicaid or Child Health Plan *Plus* (CHP+).

Figure 1. Revenue Sources for SBHCs in Colorado, 2006–2007



Source: Colorado Association for School-Based Health Care.

# How SBHCs Can Improve Children's Health

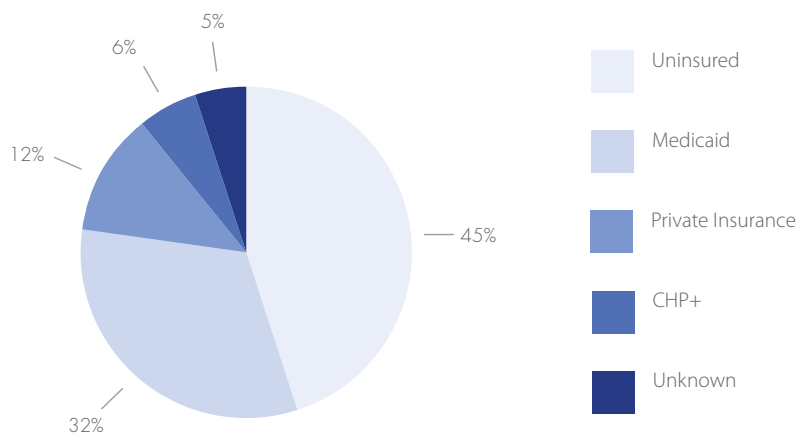
SBHCs offer substantial health benefits to children and adolescents by:

- Serving communities where access to health care is limited because of low family income, under-/uninsurance and geography (e.g., rural areas)
- Providing convenient, on-site care, so parents don't have to miss work or arrange transportation to a doctor's office
- Promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing disease
- Providing early intervention for children with physical and psychosocial problems
- Offering integrated services and continuity of care
- Helping children manage chronic conditions such as asthma and diabetes
- Identifying and enrolling eligible children in Medicaid/CHP+
- Treating under-/uninsured children and those in public programs who may have trouble accessing care elsewhere
- Educating children and their parents about healthy living, how to access health care and how to talk with their health care providers

## SBHCs in Colorado

There are 45 SBHCs in Colorado. The majority of students who use them are either uninsured or covered by public programs (Figure 2). In 2006–2007, 21,000 Colorado students used SBHC services. Most visits were for primary medical care, including treatment of acute illness or injury and management of chronic conditions such as asthma.

**Figure 2.** *Insurance status of Colorado SBHC Users, 2006–2007*



**Source:** Colorado Association for School-Based Health Care.

# SBHCs and the Colorado Health Foundation

Strengthening existing SBHCs and creating new ones brings the Foundation closer to all three of its Community Outcomes and affects many of its measurable results.

- **All Coloradans have access to the components of *Healthy Living***  
Measurable results:
  - Increase number of parents who are educated on child development, nutrition and preventive health care.
  - Increase number of Coloradans who are educated on chronic disease management.
- **All Coloradans have *Health Coverage***  
Measurable result:
  - Increase enrollment of eligible Coloradans in Medicaid and CHP+.
- **All Coloradans receive quality, coordinated, cost-effective *Health Care***  
Measurable results:
  - Increase number of underserved Coloradans who receive integrated care.
  - Increase number of underserved Coloradans who regularly receive primary, mental or oral health care.

The Foundation's many SBHC grants include a 2006 grant of \$1.3 million to the Denver Health Foundation, which oversees 12 SBHCs in Denver Public Schools serving more than 6,400 students. Part of this grant was used to provide application assistance and enroll eligible children into Medicaid and CHP+, as well as to open a new SBHC in Kunsmiller Middle School.

In 2008, \$116,000 was awarded to Durango School District 9-R to strengthen and expand its SBHC services. The goals of this project touched on two of the Foundation's outcomes by providing integrated care to 600 students and by promoting healthy eating and active living. In 2007 and 2008, the Foundation awarded a total of \$477,000 to Montrose County School District RE-1J to open two new SBHCs, one of which is now available to the 390 students at Northside Elementary School and the other, at Olathe Elementary School, will open in the summer of 2009.

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