

# School-Based Health Centers: Suicide Prevention

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## Executive Summary

School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) play a vital role in identifying and preventing suicide risk among adolescents. With mental health challenges rising sharply in recent years, particularly among youth, SBHCs provide on-site access to timely, confidential, and culturally responsive mental health services. These centers offer screening, counseling, crisis intervention, and referrals—critical elements in suicide prevention strategies. Academic research shows that SBHCs reduce barriers to care and help lower suicide ideation and attempts among adolescents, particularly in underserved populations.

## Key Findings

- **Increased Access to Mental Health Care:** SBHCs significantly expand access to mental health services, particularly for students in communities with limited resources. Research shows that adolescents with access to SBHCs are more likely to receive mental health counseling, which is associated with reduced suicidal ideation (Bains & Diallo, 2016).
- **Early Identification and Intervention:** SBHCs use evidence-based screening tools to identify students at risk for depression and suicide. Early detection followed by timely intervention has been shown to reduce suicide attempts and self-harming behaviors (Mason-Jones et al., 2012).
- **Reduced Stigma and Enhanced Trust:** Being embedded within schools, SBHCs offer a familiar and trusted space, lowering the stigma often associated with mental health services. This leads to higher rates of help-seeking behavior among youth experiencing suicidal thoughts (Paschall & Bersamin, 2018).
- **Tailored and Culturally Competent Support:** SBHCs frequently offer trauma-informed and culturally responsive care, which is critical in addressing suicide risk among marginalized youth populations such as LGBTQ+ students and students of color (Schapiro et al., 2020).

## Context

### Why It Matters

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among adolescents in the U.S., with rates

disproportionately higher among LGBTQ+ youth, youth of color, and students facing chronic stress or trauma. Traditional barriers to care—such as lack of insurance, transportation, and stigma—exacerbate risk. SBHCs are uniquely positioned to meet these needs by offering free, on-site, and integrated mental health services where students already are: at school.

## Implications

SBHCs offer an essential layer of protection in school-based suicide prevention efforts. Their presence not only provides immediate support for at-risk youth but also creates a culture of care and mental wellness across school communities. By addressing suicide risk through education, screening, and intervention, SBHCs support students' safety, emotional well-being, and academic continuity.

## Next Steps

- **Expand Mental Health Staffing in SBHCs:** Increase funding and workforce capacity to ensure every SBHC has licensed mental health providers trained in suicide prevention.
- **Implement Universal Screening Protocols:** Encourage all SBHCs to adopt standardized, evidence-based suicide risk screening tools and follow-up procedures.
- **Enhance Collaboration with School Staff:** Foster partnerships between SBHCs, school counselors, and teachers to support early identification of students in emotional distress.

## Key References

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