

February 2010 is School-Based Health Care Awareness Month

For 25 years, SBHCs have provided accessible, quality health care in schools in Oregon

(January 29, 2010) –Governor Kulongoski has proclaimed February 2010 as School-Based Health Care Awareness Month. This year also marks the 25th anniversary of SBHCs in Oregon.

School-based health centers offer high quality, affordable health care, mental health, prevention messages and health education to children in school. There are 54 state-certified school-based health centers in 20 Oregon counties. In the 2008-2009 school year, Oregon’s SBHCs saw 25,000 clients and had more than 72,000 visits.

“We’re kicking off Awareness Month by bringing 130 students and supporters to the state capitol to talk about the need for quality health care in schools,” says Liz Smith Currie, policy director for the Oregon School-Based Health Care Network, a policy and technical assistance non-profit organization. The Network is helping communities plan awareness-building events across the state to mark SBHC Awareness Month.

The SBHC movement is growing in Oregon and nationally. During the 2009-2011 budget process, the Oregon legislature made SBHCs one of the few programs to receive additional investment; 14 communities are now implementing planning grants to develop new SBHCs as part of the Healthy Kids plan. Nationally, there are now about 2,000 school-based health centers and Congress voted to include federal authorization of school-based health centers in both the House and Senate federal health care reform bills.

SBHCs are locally controlled and are supported in the communities they serve.

“There is a unique advantage in placing affordable health care for kids in schools,” said Deborah Kafoury, Multnomah County Commissioner. “SBHCs provide care for kids who might not get the care they need, because of lack of insurance, transportation or other barriers. Without these clinics, many families would put off getting care and end up in the emergency room. By supporting this model we ensure that thousands of children in our community have access to the care they need, when they need it, and that is a smart investment for our community.” Multnomah County runs 12 school-based health centers and has a planning grant to develop a new center.

“SBHCs are a win-win for schools—we are excited to have a healthier school population. We believe kids will miss fewer classes and get back to class sooner,” says Michael Ralls, assistant principal at Milwaukie HS, which is in the beginning stages of developing a new SBHC. Studies show that SBHCs reduce tardiness, absenteeism and behavior problems, notes Ralls.

“I miss less school,” says Althea Olds Selover, a student at South Eugene High School. “Before I went to the SBHC, I would maybe miss an entire school day to go see a doctor. Now I can have my appointment at school and can get back to class. It is really helpful.”

Nancy Borges, nurse practitioner at North Eugene HS believes the model is the best way to provide access to health care for children. “We typically see kids for well-child exams, strep throat, helping them manage their asthma or diabetes. But we also have a mental health therapist who can talk to them about their emotional health,” said Borges. “It is like having a doctor’s office right down the hall, only better,” said Borges. “Because we are right there on campus, the kids get to know us in a way they

probably couldn't with a regular primary practice and they feel comfortable talking to us about what is really happening with them. We are there at the right time, when they need the care."

Borges recalls a time when a young child came in to the health center for prophylactic dental treatment. "We also did a physical, since he was a new to the school. It turned out this child had the most profound heart murmur I had ever heard. The family was transient and had no health insurance. We were able to work with a Doernbecher cardiologist to get the child open heart surgery that he needed to probably save his life. Four weeks later the family moved again. It is really a case of being at the right place at the right time. And because we are on campus, we are in the right place. Our clinic is just down the hall and ready to help."

Quick data on Oregon SBHCs:

- 54 state certified SBHCs in 20 counties in Oregon
- 14 grants have been given to communities to develop new SBHCs
- 47,511 students had access to an SBHC in their school in 2008-2009 school year
- Oregon SBHCs served 24,995 students in 72,080 visits in the 2008-2009 school year
- SBHCs are located in elementary, middle and high schools
- 47 percent for clients report NO insurance at their first visit
- 23 percent of clients report they are on the Oregon Health Plan at their first visit
- 24 percent of clients report they have private insurance at their first visit

For more information about SBHCs in Oregon, visit www.osbhcn.org