

How to Prepare for a Meeting with Elected Officials about School-Based Health Care

1. Know a bit of history:

The Oregon Legislature has been tremendously supportive of SBHCs in recent years. In fact, while many programs have been cut, SBHCs are one of the few programs that have grown! Since 2007, the number of SBHCs has grown from 44 to 55, and there are 7 additional sites that will be up and running in 2011. One of the main things you will do at SBHC Awareness Day is to THANK your legislators for their support of SBHCs and to make sure that they know how important SBHCs are in your community.

2. Know WHY we are having SBHC Day

- a. We are building AWARENESS of the existence and importance of SBHCs.
- b. We are THANKING legislators for their support.
- c. We are building SUPPORT for SBHCs amongst people who have the power to expand or cut money for the program.
- d. We are giving youth a chance to SHARE what they are doing in their community and to LEARN from others.
- e. We are giving people the opportunity to ADVOCATE for their health care.

3. Know your Legislator. What district does she/he represent? Are there significant children's health problems there, such as high rates of asthma? Do kids have access to other primary care, or is the SBHC the only source of such care? Know his/her position on issues related to the ones you plan to discuss. Has he/she supported or opposed SBHC funding? **If the Legislator has been good on any of our issues, always start out by thanking him/her for past support.**

4. Develop a strategy for the meeting. If you are accompanied by others, decide who will speak, and on what issues. Don't feel intimidated. You "hire" your Legislators with your vote and "pay" them with your taxes. They want to represent their constituents' interests and need to hear from you.

Here are some ideas for talking points:

- a. What problems do kids face when they don't have access to health care?
- b. What do you like best about your school based health center?
- c. What data make the case for school based health centers?
- d. What impact does your school based health center have (or will it have) on your school?
- e. What makes school-based health care different?

5. **Focus on what you want.** For example, when urging his/her support for SBHC funding, ask him/her to write to the Assembly Speaker or Senate Majority Leader to request that funding for SBHCs be retained in the state budget.
6. **Do your research, bring local data to support your position.** Examples include: the number of uninsured kids served; cuts in clinic funding and impact; asthma cases treated; complications prevented; hospitalizations averted.
7. **Give real case examples, without real names,** of kids with complex problems who were served by the SBHC, to show the important and unique role your clinics play in the communities the Legislator represents.
8. **Listen carefully.** Politicians tend to speak generally. Try politely to draw out specific answers to your specific questions about SBHC funding and legislation. If you are confused by the answer, ask for further clarification.
9. **Don't be afraid to admit ignorance.** If you don't know the answer to a question, say you will find out and report back later.
10. **Thank them for the visit.** Invite them to see your clinics in their district. (Be sure to follow up when you get back home with a specific date for them to visit the clinic.)
11. **Send a thank you letter that summarizes your understanding of what the Legislator agreed to do.** Let them know you are available to provide them with further information if needed. During the year, send relevant clippings or articles with a brief note to keep the issues on their radar screen.
12. **Schedule an appointment AFTER 12:15 pm.** Call your legislators and ask them for 15 minutes of their time on February 9, anytime after 12:15. We will be training in the morning and out of respect for the youth who are preparing those training, **we ask you not to schedule a morning meeting.** 11:30 will begin our lunch hour in the Micah Ballroom. Legislators will be in Salem on the week of January 10th, so you might be able to reach them at their Capitol office number on those days. The main switchboard number is 1-800-332-2313. You can find your legislators at: <http://www.leg.state.or.us/findlegsltr/>.

Make your appointments NOW.

Now you are ready!

During the Meeting:

- **Be polite!** You are representing your community.
- **Be confident**—shake their hands and look them in the eye.
- **Don't be disappointed** if you meet with staff: meeting with legislative staff is as important as meeting with a legislator.
- **Be flexible:** Legislators have extremely busy and unpredictable schedules, which means you may not always have as much time as you thought you would. A 15-minute appointment could turn into a 5-minute session, so you need to know what your key points are and be able to condense your message on short notice. Practice ahead of time and be ready to summarize!

Suggested Meeting Guide:

- The main points you may want to emphasize (**see Best Messages**):
 - SBHCs are a great place for kids to access health care and will see you regardless of your insurance status.
 - SBHCs get students the care they need, when they need it, so they can get back to class and learn.
 - SBHCs reduce absenteeism and tardiness
 - SBHCs are important to you—their constituent!
- **Make sure everyone has a role in the meeting.** You might consider assigning the following “roles” for your group:
 - a. **The Opener:** This person will introduce the group (have the kids say who they are) and tell a little bit about your school and why you are there. Explain that today is School-Based Health Center Awareness Day (the kick off event for SBHC Awareness Month) and they are there with the Oregon School-Based Health Care Network.
 - b. **The Data Guru:** This person will present 2 or 3 data points (such as the number of students who visited your health center last year, the number uninsured children in your county, the percent of kids with asthma, etc) that make the case for SBHCs. If you did not bring data with you, look in the data resources found in your packet.
 - c. **The Story Teller:** This person will tell a brief story about how their SBHC helped them, or, if your school doesn't have an SBHC, the story teller will talk about a story where they could have used an SBHC. Please do not tell stories that are private or that someone would not want you to tell.
 - d. **Community members:** If there are parents, advisory council members, teachers or other SBHC supporters present, this is the time for them to talk about why SBHCs are (or will be) important in their community.
 - e. **The Closer/ Inviter** This person will close the meeting with a thank you to the legislator for supporting SBHCs and for meeting with you. **Invite the legislator to come to visit their SBHC or to visit your school to talk about health care.** This person will provide contact information for the person they should call. This person will follow up on the invitation after the event. Have this person give the legislator packet to the legislator. This person may give them a brochure of your center, show pictures of your center, etc.