



Hallways to Health Act

Purpose: To improve access to, and the delivery of, primary health and behavioral health services to children and adolescents through the use of school-based health centers (SBHCs). There are more than 2,300 school-based health centers across the country. SBHCs are critical access points providing comprehensive care to children and adolescents in schools, including primary care, behavioral and oral health services, and prevention and early intervention. The population of children and adolescents served by SBHCs are predominantly low-income, medically underserved, and covered by Medicaid or CHIP.

The Hallways to Health Act creates a grant program for school-based health centers to utilize community health workers to encourage children and their families to adopt healthy behaviors. Community health workers are recognized by HRSA as valuable part of the safety net workforce and a proven model of care for low income, medically underserved populations. The SBHC community health workers will serve as an extension of the services provided on site and help ensure that the child's family and home environment support the SBHC directed medical treatment. This may include but is not limited to, working with the family to access other community based programs to address employment, housing or nutritional needs, thereby leading to better health outcomes for the children and youth.

The Hallways to Health Act will also offer the creation and expansion of tele-health use by SBHCs. Many SBHCs serve rural communities where there are limited pediatric and behavioral health services. Giving SBHCs the means to provide tele-health services creates new access points for populations who are without community based health services and therefore often relying on the local emergency department for care. Tele-health is offered in various SBHCs throughout the country and proven tremendously successful in providing additional capacity. This grant program would continue these programs and help create and expand to additional communities in need.

Perhaps most importantly, the Hallways to Health Act will create equity in reimbursement and designation for SBHCs as a national health care safety net provider. It would not only formally recognize SBHCs as an essential community provider but will also ensure that all public health insurance programs reimburse SBHC providers for services delivered to children and youth covered by Medicaid and CHIP. These improvements are also critical to the long-term financial sustainability of school-based health centers.

Finally, the bill will make technical improvements to the school-based health center authorization established in 2010 to support SBHC operations and expansion. In addition, it will create or support already existing state-based technical assistance centers to help support SBHCs in providing high quality care to the nation's most vulnerable youth.

A recent OIG report notes only 63% of Medicaid-covered children received regular preventive screenings (Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment – EPSDT) in 2013. Children and youth succeed when both physically and mentally healthy. The Hallways to Health Act will enable SBHCs to offer access to the services that will achieve this goal-- where children spend their days—in their school building.