



Policy Brief

Increasing Access to School-based Health Care (SBHC) for Underserved Communities

Introduction

Access to quality health care is a fundamental right for all individuals, including children. However, this right remains elusive for many marginalized communities, where limited access to health care services results in significant health disparities and adverse outcomes. In particular, children from marginalized backgrounds often face numerous barriers in accessing the health care they need to thrive and reach their full potential. Moreso, 2,300 die every day from diseases that can easily be treated and cured (UNICEF Nigeria Health Fact Sheet)¹

To address these disparities and promote equitable health care for all children, school-based health care programs play a crucial role. By bringing essential health services directly into the school setting, these programs offer a unique opportunity to bridge the gap and ensure that every child has access to the care they deserve. By providing comprehensive care within the familiar and accessible environment of the school, children can receive the necessary medical attention without the burden of transportation, financial constraints, or other barriers that may prevent them from seeking care outside of school.

School-based health care programs go beyond addressing immediate health needs. They have a profound impact on academic performance and overall well-being. When children's health needs are met, they are better able to focus on their studies, leading to improved academic outcomes. Additionally, by addressing health disparities at an early age, these programs lay the foundation for a healthier future generation, reducing the burden of chronic diseases and promoting long-term well-being.

However, despite the evident benefits, the availability of school-based health care services remains inconsistent, especially in marginalized communities. Limited

¹ [UNICEF Nigeria Health Fact Sheet \(2023\)](#)

resources, inadequate funding, and a lack of prioritization often leave these communities underserved.

This policy brief aims to highlight the importance of making school-based health care available, particularly in marginalized communities, the challenges, and provides key recommendations for policymakers to address this issue effectively.

The Importance of School-based Health Care



Enhanced Health and Well-being

School-based health care programs are vital in promoting better health and well-being among students through a range of preventive care services, including regular health check-ups, health screenings, and disease management.



Improved Academic Performance

The connection between health and academic performance is well-established. Good health supports improved concentration, cognitive abilities, and mental alertness, enabling students to better comprehend and retain information. When students are in good health, they can attend school regularly, actively participate in class, and engage with their studies.



Early Intervention

School-based health care programs play a crucial role in early identification and intervention for various health conditions. Trained health care professionals within the school setting can identify potential health issues that may impact a student's well-being and academic progress. By identifying these concerns early on, school-based health care programs facilitate timely intervention, ensuring that appropriate treatments and referrals.

Reduced Absenteeism

Provision of health care services within the school premises minimizes the need for students to miss school for health reasons, even as they are confident that help is available in school. This consistent attendance promotes continuity in learning, allows students to stay on track with their studies, and reduces the likelihood of falling behind academically.

Health Education

A comprehensive health education component is an integral part of school-based health care program. Equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed choices about their health. Health education fosters a culture of wellness and equips students with essential life skills beyond their academic pursuits.


Convenient Access


School-based health care eliminates barriers to access, such as transportation challenges, limited availability of health care providers, and financial constraints. Students can receive first aid assistance, and other necessary health care interventions within a familiar and easily accessible environment. This ensures that students can promptly address their health needs and receive necessary care without undue delay or obstacles.


Prompt First Aid Response:


Prompt first aid response helps manage and alleviate immediate health concerns, reducing the severity of injuries or illnesses and preventing complications. This quick response not only ensures the well-being of students but also enhances the overall safety and security within the school premises.


Challenges in Access to School-based Health Care


 Insufficient funding limits the availability and quality of school-based health care programs, especially in marginalized communities, leading to inadequate staffing and resources.


 Insufficient supportive government policies or inadequate policy implementation may hinder the establishment and sustainability of school-based health care programs.


 Disparities in the execution of health care systems across different schools or regions can result in unequal access to health care services for students.


 Inadequate facilities and resources pose challenges in providing necessary health services within school premises, including the absence of dedicated health centres or proper medical equipment.


 A lack of emphasis on training teachers in first aid techniques and creating a safety-conscious environment can impede their ability to respond effectively to health emergencies.


 A disconnect between parents and the school regarding children's health resulting in lack of effective communication, collaboration, and shared responsibility between these two key stakeholders.

 The absence of proper medical first aid facilities within schools hampers the immediate response to health emergencies or accidents, hindering the ability to provide prompt and effective care.

 Limited understanding of the positive impact of comprehensive health services on academic outcomes may lead to underinvestment in school-based health care programs.

 Lack of partnerships between schools, parents, local health care providers, and community organizations, limiting the ability to leverage resources, expertise, and funding for comprehensive school-based health care.

 Limited engagement of community leaders, schools, and parents in the planning and implementation processes of school-based health care initiatives.

 Shortage of skilled personnel trained in providing health care services within schools can compromise the quality and effectiveness of care.

Recommendations



Allocate sufficient funding to school-based health care programs, with a specific focus on marginalized communities.



Establish and implement comprehensive government policies that prioritize and support the establishment, sustainability, and integration of school-based health care programs.



Implement strategies to address disparities in the execution of health care systems across schools and regions.



Invest in improving school infrastructure by providing dedicated health centres or spaces within schools, equipped with necessary medical equipment and resources.



Educate teachers on the importance of their role in responding to health emergencies and promoting a safe and healthy school environment (first aid techniques, safety protocols, and basic health care).



Increase awareness among stakeholders, including policymakers, parents, educators, and students, about the positive impact of comprehensive school-based health care on academic outcomes.



Address the shortage of skilled personnel by implementing initiatives to attract and retain health care professionals within schools.



Foster partnerships between schools, local health care providers, and community organizations to leverage resources, expertise, and funding for comprehensive school-based health care.



Engage community leaders, schools, and parents in the planning and implementation processes.



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