



February 5, 2024

TO: House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care  
FROM: Our Children Oregon  
RE: Support for HB 4070, School-Based Health Center Funding

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice-Chair Goodwin, Vice-Chair Nelson, and Members of the Committee

Our Children Oregon's (OCO) mission is advancing equitable policymaking and whole-child advocacy statewide to ensure our children and youth—regardless of their race, identity, ability, or where they live—have what they need to thrive. We collect, analyze, and elevate data and research that, alongside lived experience, drives conversations in support of Oregon's future.

**We strongly support HB 4070 because we believe in the importance of equitable, effective, and accessible mental health care services for Oregon's youth.**

Young people in Oregon, and nationwide, are struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. Data from 2016 and 2020 indicate children across the nation were more likely to deal with anxiety or depression during the first year of the pandemic (2020) than previously. In Oregon, 11.5% of children between the ages of 3 to 17 reported having anxiety or depression in 2016. In 2020, that jumped to 16.1% – 1 in 6 young people. That's an increase of 40% over 4 years, meaning **nearly 34,000 more Oregon children are experiencing anxiety or depression in the first year of the pandemic.**<sup>1</sup> For 11th graders, 43% reported having depressive symptoms in 2020.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, data from 2020 shows 14.5% of youth have unmet mental health needs.<sup>3</sup> The pandemic has been particularly difficult for Oregon's youth, and the mental health repercussions will continue if not addressed.

**We must ensure every child has access to the mental health care they need, when and where they need it.** Oregon School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) are helping to meet this need by providing health services where kids are – at school. Prior to implementation of SBHCs, 1 in 5 students would miss up to a full day of school to access outside services.<sup>4</sup> SBHCs provide quality, comprehensive on-site health care services to help students of all identities thrive in school and in life. They are focused on prevention, early identification, and treatment of medical

<sup>1</sup> <https://ourchildrenoregon.org/2022-kids-count-national-report-and-oregon-state-data-cards-release/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/BIRTHDEATHCERTIFICATES/SURVEYS/Pages/SHS-2020-Results.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <https://ourchildrenoregon.org/publications/oregon-kids-count/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://sharedsystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/1e8926.pdf>

and behavioral concerns that may interfere with students' learning.<sup>5</sup> In the 2021-2022 school year, 44% of SBHCs visits were for behavioral health reasons. A study conducted in Oregon found that youth at SBHCs were:

- 12% less likely to report a depressive episode
- 16% less likely to report suicidal ideation
- 18% less likely to report a suicide attempt<sup>6</sup>

SBHCs are not the only solution to address Oregon's youth mental health crisis, but they provide affordable and accessible care for everyone. These resources are important tools helping to strengthen the connection between health care, education, and community – improving student health and educational success in urban, rural, and frontier counties. This bill requests:

- \$8.25 million from the School-Based Mental Health Fund to expand services:
  - \$1,400,000 in planning grant opportunities for local communities to implement SBHC or school nurse models depending on their needs.
  - 10% increase in inflationary increase moving forward to account for the rising cost of living (\$936,00).
  - \$7.85 million for increased mental health and substance use services.
- \$10 million in capital bonds to implement mass construction of SBHCs – including more SBHCs closer to school sites.

Mental health is just as important as physical health in a child's ability to thrive. As our state continues to navigate the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, we must do more to ensure all kids have access to the care and support they deserve to cope and live full lives.

Thank you for your time and efforts to improve the well-being of children and youth across the state. We urge your support of HB 4070.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

Rachel Hamid, Policy and Advocacy Intern

Ivy Major-McDowall, Policy and Advocacy Director

Jenifer Wagley, Executive Director

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<sup>5</sup> <https://osbha.org/sbhc>

<sup>6</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29132951/>