

Sexual Health Services (SHS) School-Based Referral Systems

What Will it Take?



SCHOOLS AS PUBLIC HEALTH PARTNERS

Schools can play a vital role in promoting the health and well-being of our nation's youth. For well over a decade, city, state and federally funded-initiatives have been focused on engaging schools at the state, districts and school building level to improve student access to health services. Given increased rates of STI/HIV among youth, schools can play a vital role in reducing disparities by establishing policies and systems to identify, refer, and link students to services.



DEFINING A SCHOOL-BASED REFERRAL SYSTEM

To increase youth access to health services through referrals, processes need to be clearly identified. CAI developed an evidence-informed framework that defined seven core components of a school-based referral system (policy; staff; procedures; referral guide; communications & marketing; monitoring & evaluation; and management & oversight).



IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL-BASED SYSTEMS TO REFER AND LINK ADOLESCENTS TO HEALTHCARE

CAI surveyed and interviewed **nineteen** district and school building staff and their community health and public health partners from **two** US cities to learn more about the facilitators and barriers to implementing a school-based SHS referral system. ***What's important to know as we move forward:***

- ▶ **In the absence of dedicated funding**, interviewees believed that referral systems could not be sustained
- ▶ **No two school districts are alike**; each referral system must build on individual school, district, and community strength and resources
- ▶ **Partnering with key stakeholders** (e.g., public health department, CBOs, district leaderships) in referral system planning, implementation, and monitoring activities builds buy-in, supports resource identification, and promotes sustainability
- ▶ **Multiple state, district, and school policies** are confusing for school staff to interpret and make staff hesitant to refer adolescents for SHS services despite awareness of need
- ▶ **Leveraging existing formalized networks** (e.g., school counselors, nurses) among school staff can lead to a successful and sustainable referral system
- ▶ **Integrating staff from community-based providers** into schools structure to provide SHS care and referrals is a promising model for enhancing access and promoting sustainability
- ▶ **District and/or school leadership commitment** is essential to SHS referral system implementation
- ▶ **School staff are aware** of extent of disparities in sexual and reproductive health outcomes for adolescents
- ▶ **School staff believe** schools can provide services to reduce those disparities
- ▶ **Student awareness** of SHS referral system resources is limited and marketing and communication efforts to ensure awareness is critical
- ▶ **Tracking and monitoring referrals** is challenging; innovative, low intensive strategies are needed



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Lesson learned can help inform the development of referral systems to support adolescent access to health services thus, improving the health of our youth.