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Local leaders can use ARPA to improve & expand school-based health care

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Every day in Ohio children and young adults of all walks of life head to school. They have endured unstable and often chaotic learning environments during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has exacerbated [students' need for quality mental health services](#),* due to elevated stress and social isolation caused by the move to virtual learning. In [Ohio](#), there has been an upsurge of [mental health concerns](#) among K-12 students. The Ohio School Wellness Initiative conducted by [Miami University of Ohio](#) found that among participating K-12 schools, [75%](#) reported an increased concern for moderate or severe depression, significant anxiety, and social isolation among students. Additionally, 60% of respondents said they had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and admitted to increased suicidal thoughts and attempts.

In [March](#), Gov. Mike DeWine announced his administration would dedicate \$25.9 million to establish 136 new [school-based health centers](#) and expand existing centers. DeWine stated that “the partnerships between health care providers and schools support the whole child and ensure that every child may realize their full potential.” New and expanded clinics will provide primary care services and preventive care in schools. School-based health centers such as the one in [Lima City School district](#) have reduced the number of students who screen positive for various health issues, and improved teacher attendance. [Overall](#), school-based health centers provide health care to children who lack adequate transportation, or don't have a regular provider or medical home. The centers improve racial health disparities by connecting Black and brown youth in underserved communities to necessary care.

Data from the 2019-2020 National Survey of Children's Health shows that [12.4% of Ohio children](#) under the age of 17 do not receive the health care they need. Data also illustrated that 1 in 10 Ohio children miss more than seven days of school each year due to illness or injury. [Barriers to health care services](#), especially for students of color and economically disadvantaged students, are a growing problem in Ohio that needs to address. [The Children's Defense Fund of Ohio](#) stated that when children miss yearly check-ups and are unable to get care for a toothache or earaches, it can force them to miss school, and lead to being chronically absent or falling behind. Using ARPA, lawmakers can break down barriers to health care and create sustainable and equitable connections between families and providers.

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Policy recommendations

- **Expand [HB 169](#).** State lawmakers passed House Bill 169 to help Ohioans recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. They appropriated \$9 million to expand school-based health care in Ohio. This funding can be committed beyond the current biennium, so youth and families of all races and in all communities have sustained access to quality medical care and providers.
- **Provide long-term funding for school-based health centers in all districts in the state.** Ohio has around 85 school-based health centers with [more added](#) each year. Funding provided by the DeWine administration is a good step, but there is a growing need for more centers, especially in rural districts, where people have lower access to quality medical care and services.
- **Increase the number of school nurses and counselors and improve their technological skills.** Funding can increase the number of school health personnel such as nurses, behavioral interventionists, and counselors in schools, like officials did in [Cincinnati](#). ARPA funds can provide technological resources and support to help school nurses and counselors meet students' health needs through things like telehealth.
- **Establish medical mobile units.** People without reliable [transportation](#) have a difficult time accessing quality health care services. ARPA funds should be used to purchase and develop medical mobile units that can visit schools in districts across the state.
- **Create partnerships among students, school districts, families, and community health care networks and providers.** For school-based health centers to develop and thrive in the state there must be more collaboration and transparency among school districts, advocates, families, communities, and health care networks and providers. ARPA funds can help [build these partnerships](#) by creating programs and providing resources and services. Expanding partnerships across Ohio will increase existing capacity so more youth receive the care they need and deserve.

The Ohio Children's Budget Coalition called on Gov. DeWine to craft a 2022-2023 state budget that prioritizes children's health and wellness. State funding for school-based health centers help more children in underserved communities get the physical and mental health services they need. It also can improve public safety by addressing a young person's issues before they become ensnared in the criminal legal system. Research from the Ohio Department of Education shows that school-based health centers attract typically hard-to-reach populations, such as Black and brown students. Policymakers have a responsibility to wisely spend these funds to improve health outcomes for Ohio's youth and their families, so that they can lead healthier and happier lives.