



Integrating SBIRT into School-Based Wellness Centers

Wellness & Adolescent Substance Use Prevention Project (WASUP)

Introduction

Substance use disorders are the leading cause of preventable death and disability—and most individuals begin using alcohol and other substances in adolescence.¹ To address this important public health issue, Children’s Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) and The L.A. Trust for Children’s Health (The L.A. Trust) partnered with four schools and their associated school-based Wellness Centers to incorporate Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) and provide prevention education as well as information regarding practical strategies for reducing negative consequences associated with substance use through the Wellness & Adolescent Substance Use Prevention (WASUP) Project. The purpose of this brief is to highlight the successes and lessons learned from this project to support similar efforts to integrate sustainable evidence-based interventions in the school environment.

Key Takeaways

Multi-sector Partnerships are Powerful

CHLA, The L.A. Trust, and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) have forged a strong coalition while navigating a variety of different governing policies and systems. Staff and community members collaborated across all levels of these complex institutions to promote the health, wellness, and safety of young people. This type of multi-sector partnership is critical to create sustainable change.

Champions and Advocates Set the Foundation

The goal of embedding Wellness Centers (UMMA Community Clinic, South Central Family Health Center, and St. John’s Well Child & Family Center) on school campuses is to improve school and educational performance while increasing student and community access to affordable health and allied health care services. The fact that Wellness Centers and schools have different governance, leadership, funding mechanisms, missions, and different ways of

measuring outcomes presents some unique challenges. CHLA and The L.A. Trust have been successful only because of the advocates and champions that have emerged at all levels of LAUSD and from our collaborating Wellness Centers. These champions and advocates were identified by systematically meeting with each stakeholder and by having an on-going presence at the school campuses.

Educational Institutions Make a Difference

LAUSD high school principals and administrators have enormous responsibilities overseeing some of the largest and most diverse school populations in the country. Although some school leaders are at the forefront of addressing social and behavioral issues that impact learning, other school leaders are still exploring the best routes to provide a well-rounded education (per Title VI Part A) for students facing challenges with substance use. It is important to promote greater awareness that the involvement of educational institutions is imperative to reducing the impact of substance use on young people. In support of LAUSD’s commitment to implement restorative justice practices in all schools by 2020, the WASUP project has provided education to school faculty, staff, and students about restorative justice practices and harm reduction approaches and worked to promote more consistent policy awareness and adherence across school sites.

Youth Engagement is a Win-Win

The WASUP Project design included a component to engage students across four high school campuses. These students are trained as youth health advocates, providing education and raising awareness in their peer groups and providing training to school faculty and staff. WASUP’s youth health advocates have presented at local conferences and professional development seminars, and are conducting outreach to refer their classmates to school based services. These student leaders have been important sources of information about how these schools work and they have played a critical role in the education of their peers and linkage to the school Wellness Centers.

Location is the First Step toward Access

In order to serve both students and community members, each Wellness Center selected for WASUP is located near a street entry rather than embedded in the main campus. Wellness Centers have different entrances and separate waiting rooms for students and community members to support student access to minor consent services. However, sometimes the location of the Wellness Center is a challenge for students because they must be chaperoned or signed out of class to access health care, including mental health and substance use services. Promoting greater access for students may involve rethinking the location of school-based providers.

Turnover Impacts Sustainability

During the course of WASUP, there was frequent, often unexpected, turnover in key positions in our school and health care partners, including principals, organizational facilitators, Healthy Start coordinators, medical directors, and School Board representatives. The loss of key advocates for restorative justice and harm reduction philosophies at school sites impacted the project team's ability to establish sustainable practices for prevention and early intervention. To address this challenge, we have developed orientation materials to introduce new hires to ongoing initiatives.

Reimbursement Mechanisms May Expand SBIRT

The systematic delivery of Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) for all students seeking care at school-based Wellness Centers is challenging due to continuing confusion regarding what services are billable. The L.A. Trust is working to develop reference materials to help Wellness Centers bill appropriately for these services. Further assessment of funding mechanisms for SBIRT is needed to advance this work.

Governing Rules are Essential to Protecting Minors

The co-location of Wellness Centers on school campuses can cause a lot of confusion about how to protect the privacy and confidentiality of students. Schools and medical providers are governed by different rules of consent and confidentiality. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects the privacy of student records at schools while the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) safeguards health information in medical facilities. Minor consent laws in California also provide separate guidance about what services adolescents ages 12 and over can consent to without parent or guardian consent. While there are resources to help providers and educators navigate these challenges (such as the California School-Based Health Alliance), it will be important to incorporate guidelines into the policies and procedures for schools and school-based Wellness Centers that address the unique culture and environment of each location.



Students lead Impairment Goggles Activity at Manual Arts High School.

Conclusion

The Wellness & Adolescent Substance Use Prevention Project (WASUP) is an ambitious project involving multiple, complex service systems and with the goal of increasing student access to and utilization of substance use screening, prevention, and treatment services. During the first two years of the project, CHLA and The L.A. Trust made substantial progress toward meeting this goal. Recognizing and documenting the lessons learned, celebrating our allies, and addressing the continuing challenges will be necessary to reach our ultimate goal of bringing these changes to scale across Los Angeles.

¹ Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. (2012). Program Strategy for Substance Abuse. https://hilton-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/42/attachments/Substance_Abuse_Strategy_Paper.pdf?1440114031



The Wellness & Adolescent Substance Use Prevention Project is a collaboration between Children's Hospital Los Angeles, The L.A. Trust for Children's Health, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), John C. Fremont, Thomas Jefferson, Manual Arts, and Washington Preparatory high schools, UMMA Community Clinic, South Central Family Health Center, and St. John's Well Child & Family Center. Funding for this project is provided by California Community Foundation and The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.