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MEDIA ADVISORY FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

School-Based Health Clinics: A Lifeline for Children's Mental Health, Say Local Leaders

Allentown, PA - September 27, 2024, at 11am – As Pennsylvania's youth mental health crisis escalates, local leaders will convene a press conference on **Friday, September 27, 2024, at 11 AM** at **Brigadier General Anna Mae Hays Elementary School** to advocate for **school-based health clinics (SBHCs)**. These clinics, embedded within schools, are a critical intervention for children who may otherwise never receive the care they need.

In recognition of **Suicide Prevention Awareness Month**, speakers will highlight the alarming statistics on youth mental health and the need for upstream, preventative solutions. In Pennsylvania **60% of children who die by suicide never receive mental health services** and over **40% of Pennsylvania's students report feeling anxious or depressed most of the time**. It's clear that our mental health system is failing too many children in need of care. SBHCs provide a lifeline — breaking down barriers like stigma and transportation, offering immediate access to mental health care and are a key solution to addressing the mental health crisis for Pennsylvania's youth.

"Every day we lose children to mental health issues that could have been addressed if they had access to care earlier," said **Nate Boateng**, Vice President of Community Impact and Engagement at Valley Health Partners. "We need to stop waiting until children are in crisis. School-based clinics can intervene early and give children the support they need to thrive."

"As a school nurse, I saw firsthand the growing mental health struggles that children faced every day. I didn't have the resources to give them the help they needed," said **Katie Noss**, Manager of Clinical and Quality Improvement from the Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers (PACHC). "School-based health clinics are not just important — they are essential. They provide the early intervention that can save lives, and we need to expand them across the state to ensure no child falls through the cracks."

As a growing number of children in Pennsylvania struggle with mental health issues, it's clear that preventative mental health care — delivered early and in accessible settings — is crucial.

The speakers will emphasize that school-based health clinics offer a proactive approach, supporting access to mental health services for children before reaching crisis points.

Speakers will include Co-Chair of the Pennsylvania House Mental Health Caucus **State Representative Michael Schlossberg**, Vice President of Community Impact and Engagement from Valley Health Partners **Nate Boateng**, Administrator of Integrated Behavioral Health and Social Services, Valley Health Partners **Tommy Acevedo**, Manager of Clinical & Quality Improvement from the Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers **Katie Noss**, and the Principal of Hayes Elementary School **Naaman Schlegel**.

WHAT: Valley Health Partners Hayes Site Visit & Press Conference

WHO: State Representative Michael Schlossberg
Nate Boateng, VP of Community Impact & Engagement, Valley Health Partners
Tommy Acevedo, Administrator of Integrated Behavioral Health & Social Services, Valley Health Partners
Katie Noss, Manager of Clinical & Quality Improvement from the Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers
Naaman Schlegel, Principal of Hayes Elementary School

WHEN: Friday, September 27, 2024, 11:00am

WHERE: Brigadier General Anna Mae Hays Elementary School, 1227 West Gordon Street, Allentown, PA 18102

The speakers will call for increased investment in school-based health clinics (SBHCs), a vital service that provides accessible, high-quality mental and physical health care to children directly within their schools.

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Children First is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that improves the lives of children in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties by developing initiatives and advocating for quality health care, childcare, public education, and family stability. Learn more at www.childrenfirstpa.org, and on Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube at @childrenfirstpa.

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