

PARTNERING

In developing the organizational model health centers can, and in fact should, develop relationships with other community providers that include contracting and collaborating for services. This might be developing a partnership with a local community mental health center to provide the behavioral health program or a local dentist for oral health care. An affiliation is an agreement that establishes a relationship between a health center and one or more entities. Prior to participating in an affiliation, a health center should closely review the agreement with legal counsel who is familiar with FQHC regulations to assure that the organizational documents and contractual agreements:

- 1) Accurately reflect the parties' affiliation objectives;
- 2) Pose no risk to the health center's integrity or autonomy as an FQHC, specifically regarding corporate structure and governance;
- 3) Address:
 - Anti-kickback statutes,
 - Antitrust,
 - Tax-exempt status of the health center,
 - Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement issues, and
 - State law.

It is important to become very knowledgeable about Policy Information Notices 97-27 (<ftp://ftp.hrsa.gov/bphc/docs/1997pins/97-27.pdf>) and 98-24 on affiliations (<ftp://ftp.hrsa.gov/bphc/docs/1998PINS/PIN98-24.PDF>).

B. Access and Location

Access is a core criterion for the health center. The location must be easy to reach and convenient for the population(s) you have made a determination to serve. Depending on the target population(s), it may make more sense to locate the health center near a residential area where people live, near major employers, or on a heavily traveled route between residential and commercial areas. Public transportation access is often a critical factor in determining where to put the health center.

C. Space Considerations

In looking for space, try to plan for growth as successful start-up operations may grow considerably during the initial years. This means that the health center will need to plan for expansion of:

- Administrative, clinical and information systems functions;
- Areas devoted to specific functions such as reception, clinical records, patient waiting and counseling, laboratory and x-ray; and
- Provider offices, patient exam and treatment rooms; and, if applicable, dental operatories and offices for behavioral health counseling.



Because each new health center will have its own particular circumstances pertaining to physical space (including basic considerations such as cost and availability), it is difficult to say that there is one standard approach that all new health centers should adopt. However, most health centers do plan for:

- Two-to-three exam rooms for each medical provider (physician, nurse practitioner or physician assistant). This layout allows for efficient triage and patient flow. In addition, it is always desirable to be on the ground floor to best accommodate people with limited physical mobility (if the clinic is not on the first floor access must be assured through an elevator or the like);
- Two-to-three operatories for each team of a dentist and dental hygienist;
- One office for each mental health professional with at least one space large enough for group sessions; and
- A meeting room that serves as a place for Board meetings, educational and staff meetings, and a gathering place for community groups.

It may be cost-effective in the long term to secure professional assistance from an experienced functional space planner to help identify the space and equipment required by health center operations. Space planners can not only ensure that adequate space has been allocated for each of the health center's major functions, but can help avoid costly oversights, exclusions and overbuilding.

Capital Link www.caplink.org is a non-profit organization partially funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration to assist health centers in accessing capital for building and equipment projects. They provide extensive technical assistance with financial and market feasibility studies, business plan and proposal development for capital projects, space design and project planning, debt financing, and fundraising. Because they are partially funded by HRSA, many of their services are free for Section 330 funded health centers.

