AHEC's Niche in Continuing Education

Gretchen Forsell MPH, RDN, LMNT
Executive Director
Northern Nebraska AHEC

What is AHEC?

Area Health Education Center

The purpose of the AHEC program is to:
• Develop and enhance education and training networks within communities, academic institutions, and community-based organizations.
• AHECs in turn support HRSA’s Bureau of Health Workforce strategic priorities to:
  • Increase diversity among health professionals
  • Broaden the distribution of the health workforce and enhance health care quality
  • Improve health care delivery to underserved areas and populations

AHEC Across the Country

• 53 AHEC Programs
• 248 AHEC Centers
• 46 states and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Palau, Yap, American Samoa, Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Republic of the Marshall Islands
• Serving more than 85% of counties in the United States
Slide 4

**Goals of AHEC**
- Increase the number and diversity of health professionals
- Increase training opportunities for health profession students
- Provide support and activities to retain health professionals

*All with an emphasis on rural and underserved communities*

Slide 5

**Health Career Promotion**
- AHECs are committed to expanding the health care workforce by maximizing diversity and distributing opportunities, especially to rural and underserved communities.
- Offer creative, hands-on and innovative health careers curriculum for students (grades 9-16).
- Introduce students to a wide assortment of health career possibilities, guide them in goal-setting and educational planning, and offer courses that strengthen critical thinking skills (grades 9-16).
- Work with schools, colleges and community partners to target economically disadvantaged students and those from underrepresented minority groups in school programs and summer institutes.

Slide 6

**Health Professions Students**
- AHECs are uniquely qualified to facilitate clinical placements because of its linkages to local healthcare systems and organizations.
- Coordinate AHEC clinical placements by putting health professions students in real-world settings: migrant, urban, rural, CHC’s and health departments working with underserved populations.
- Have students participate in AHEC Service Learning programs to help them develop an awareness of the economic and cultural barriers in healthcare delivery.
- Give health profession students who participate in AHEC-sponsored clinical placements a better understanding of the complex needs of underserved communities.
- Motivate students to practice in underserved areas following training.
**Health Care Professionals**

- AHECs focus on recruitment, placement, and retention activities to address community and state health care workforce needs.
- Provide accredited continuing education programs and professional support to meet the needs of health care professionals, especially those practicing in underserved areas.
- Designed programs to enhance clinical skills and help maintain professional certifications.
- Provide information dissemination on health care issues and participate in collaborative community-based research.

---

**Nebraska AHECs**

- Central Nebraska AHEC: 33 counties
- Northern Nebraska AHEC: 26 counties
- Nebraska Panhandle AHEC: 14 counties
- Southeast Nebraska AHEC: 17 counties
- Omaha AHEC: 2 urban counties

---

**Refined Focus**

- In FY 2017 the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) is undertaking a redesign of several programs, including the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) program, to reduce duplication of HRSA-funded programs, increase measurable outcomes, and increase programs’ success.

**Focus Areas**

- **Distribution**
  - Improving workforce distribution throughout the state, particularly among rural and underserved areas and populations.
- **Diversity**
  - Ensuring a diverse, culturally competent primary care workforce representative of the populations we serve.
- **Practice Transformation**
  - Developing and supporting the models of care that are projected to deliver high-quality care in our modern, complex health care system with an emphasis on rural and underserved communities.
**Core Topics**

- Support didactic and experiential training focused on the following core topic areas
  - Interprofessional Education
  - Behavioral Health Integration
  - Social Determinants of Health
  - Cultural Competency
  - Practice Transformation
  - Current and emerging health issues

**Why Continuing Education?**

- AHEC has strong connections with health professionals who train health profession students
- Past experience with continuing education providing local and national programming
- Strong linkage with UNMC
- Linkages with the National AHEC Organization continuing education projects
  - Veterans Mental Health
  - Health Insurance Marketplace
  - Opioids
  - HPV Vaccination

**Regional Educational Collaborative**
Regional Educational Collaborative

Why a collaborative?
- Better utilization of federal funds
- More partners, healthcare partners, established healthcare networks
- Large pool of potential speakers
- Ability to replicate best practices across state lines
- Nebraska is the lead with the National AHEC Organization and HRSA with over 8 years of experience doing national continuing education programming

Regional Educational Collaborative

Who is involved?
- South Dakota AHEC
  - 2 AHEC Centers
  - Strong FQHC network
  - Native American focus
- Missouri AHEC
  - 6 AHEC Centers
  - Large AHEC Network with multiple academic partners
  - Multiple healthcare partners
  - Diversity focus
- Nebraska AHEC
  - 5 AHEC Centers
  - Strong university linkages
  - Expansive university network
  - National expertise in webinar technology
Regional Educational Collaborative

- How will this work?
  - Each state will be responsible for a certain number of programs yearly
  - Nebraska AHEC will provide the leadership for technical components (webinar, post webinar activity, registration and evaluation)
  - CME/CE availability has not been determined

Next Steps

- Speakers
  - Speakers will come from needs assessment responses
  - Each state’s own experts and leaders

- Advertising
  - Done by state AHEC entities
  - Partner organizations
  - Websites and Social Media

Next Steps

- Needs Assessment
  - Needs Assessment will be designed in early fall
  - Assessment to be conducted December/January in each state

- Educational offerings
  - First webinar early 2018
  - Anticipate quarterly for 2018
  - Moving to bi-monthly in 2018-2019
Call to Action

- What can you do?
  - Let us know your interest in educational programs with a statewide focus
  - Share topics of interest for education
  - Let us know if you'd like to be a speaker, or know a speaker
  - Let us know your interest in sharing the needs assessment with your health professionals

Contact information

Gretchen Forsell MPH, RDN
Northern Nebraska AHEC
gforsell@nnahec.org