



*Connecting Students to Careers,
Professionals to Communities,
And Communities to Better Health*

Strategic Visioning for the Future

Assuring a Health Care Workforce to Meet the Needs of Communities and America's Most Vulnerable Populations

Area Health Education Centers: A long history serving vulnerable populations

For more than 30 years AHEC has played a vital role in assuring a health care safety net for underserved people. As conceived by and maintained by Congress since 1971, the three legs of the safety net include: health care services through Community Health Centers; training and education through Area Health Education Centers; and financial incentives for practitioners through the National Health Service Corps

The national AHEC Network now includes AHEC programs in nearly every state and over 200 community-based AHEC centers. The network has a proud record of success in carrying out its traditional education and training roles:

- **Health Career Recruitment & Preparation:** Provide information about and prepare young people for health careers (diversity)
 - *Annually over 300,00 students ranging from kindergarten through college are introduced to health careers*
- **Training Health Professions Students:** Support clinical training for primary care health profession students (distribution)
 - *Annually nearly 50,000 health profession students training AHEC community settings*
- **Supporting Health Professionals:** Provide continuing education for professionals in underserved areas (quality)
 - *Annually, over 330,000 health professionals received CE credits through AHEC programs*

Serving Communities and Vulnerable Populations in Today's Health Care Environment: Challenges for AHEC

American's health care safety net faces persistent and changing challenges:

- An aging and more diverse population
- An aging health care work force
- Rapidly expanding medical knowledge
- A persistent, if not increasing, un- and under-insured population
- Ever-expanding health technology
- Ever-expanding cost of health care

America's health care safety net is needed now more than ever. AHEC and HETC roles are as vital now as they were when Congress recognized the importance of education and training in assuring high quality, accessible health care for the most vulnerable. Yet, new ways of carrying out these roles and new roles are needed if we are to meet the challenges.

Strategic Visioning: Positioning AHEC and HETC to Meet Workforce Needs

The National AHEC Organization (NAO) is engaged in a dynamic process of study and action designed to enable it to meet today's health care challenges.

Strategic planning guides our work across four foci, representing nine specific program priorities:

FOCUS: DEMONSTRATED CAPACITIES

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: Preparing a workforce to meet the needs of the underserved.

- Provide information about and prepare young people for health careers (diversity)
- Support clinical training for primary care health professions students (distribution)
- Provide continuing education for professionals in underserved areas (quality)

FOCUS: DEVELOP PROGRAMMING THAT ADDRESSES HIGH PRIORITY HEALTH CARE AREAS

HEALTH LITERACY: Improving communication between providers and patients for improved health outcomes

We are working to expand the training capacity and resources of each AHEC center having to assure that health professionals can implement health literacy practices and that consumers can participate in and understand their health and health care.

WELLNESS: Connecting wellness to economic development

We envision the AHEC Network playing a vital role in improving the health of America's current and future workforce through wellness/prevention training programs.

WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT: Broadly addressing health care workforce recruitment (entire pipeline)

We will increase the effectiveness of our extensive health career promotion efforts through national partnerships and expand our capacity to recruit the health care workforce underserved communities need.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER COLLABORATION: Expanding CHC-AHEC collaboration to meet the needs of the underserved

We are committed to increasing the effectiveness of the health care safety net by working with community health centers, locally and nationally to meet the needs of the nation's most vulnerable populations.

PREVENTION: Developing and implementing strategic prevention and population health education programs

We will build upon the public health efforts initiated by the Health Education Training Centers, by expanding our community training capacity to address prevention issues of societal importance.

FOCUS: DEVELOP NATIONAL MODEL PROGRAMS THAT ENHANCE AHEC/HETC NETWORK IMAGE

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS: supporting the development of this unique workforce

We are committed to assuring that community health workers are well prepared for their important health care roles and have needed organizational support.

THE LAST MILE: Bridging the last mile from research to practice

We envision AHEC playing an increasing facilitative role in developing and supporting community-based research and translating it into practice.

FOCUS: POLICY AND AUTHORIZATION

SUSTAINING AHEC AS A NATIONAL RESOURCE: Maintaining the financial security of the AHEC Network

We believe AHEC is a vital part of the national strategy to meet the health care needs of our vulnerable populations, and we will work vigorously towards maintaining its recognition and financial viability.