

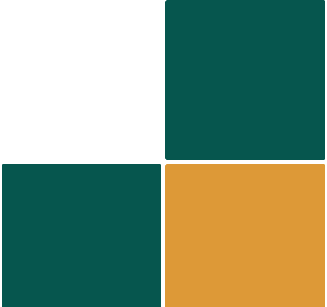
2026 ANNUAL REPORT



Oregon
AHEC



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Director's Message

Oregon AHEC continues to grow despite some funding challenges. I am deeply grateful to all our regional center directors and staff, volunteer board members, clinical preceptors, partners, host organizations, and Oregon Health & Science University for their partnership and support. Oregon AHEC is nothing without its partners.

With support from Oregon Health Authority, we continue to expand our middle school and pathway programs. We often describe pathway programming as, "You can't become what you can't see." Our goal is to ensure students from rural Oregon and vulnerable communities get to meet healthcare professionals, both from local and state academic institutions. Building on our success, we are a recipient of Rural Health Transformation Program funds. This will secure Oregon AHEC pathway work for the next two years.

We continue to be visible nationally. I want to recognize the work of Meredith Lair, North East Oregon AHEC (NEOAHEC) Director for her National AHEC Organization (NAO) board service. We represented Oregon well during the NAO Leadership conference where we presented Senator Ron Wyden with an award recognizing his national support of AHEC. Congratulations to the authors who contributed to our AHEC Scholars work in BMC Medical Education journal. Our article, "Building the future healthcare workforce: the impact of Oregon AHEC scholars' program 2018-2022" summarizes some of our successes.

Oregon AHEC is funded by the US Congress and administered by HRSA via a grant process with a 5-year cycle. We are currently focused on developing the next grant and shaping Oregon AHEC for the future. We look forward to hearing input from all our stakeholders as we move through this process.

With Gratitude,



Dr. Eric Wiser
Program Office Director



AHEC Directors and Program Office Staff Attending an Award Ceremony for Senator Wyden, Washington D.C. 2026

Meet The Program Office Team



Lexie Zimbelman, MA
AHEC Program Manager

With 10+ years' experience in public health, K-12 education, and program management, Lexie brings both domestic and international expertise to the AHEC team. She enjoys traveling, reading, learning, and CrossFit.



Kate Hubbard, BA
AHEC Scholars Coordinator

Kate, who grew up in a rural community, has 10+ years of experience in health care and education. She holds a bachelor's degree in English, is a certified Mental Health First Aid Instructor and End-of-Life Doula, and enjoys creative writing, baking, and exploring in her free time.



Emily Felsenstein, MA
Pathways Program Coordinator

Emily has a background in Education and 10+ years of experience developing engaging, hands-on educational programs for students and communities. She enjoys spending time with her two kids, painting, and practicing yoga.

OREGON AHEC REGIONAL CENTERS

Area Health Education Centers

Oregon Area Health Education Center (AHEC) is part of a nationwide system created by Congress in 1971 to improve the distribution, diversity, quality and supply of health care workers in rural and underserved areas.

Through five regional centers and a central program office housed at Oregon Health & Science University, Oregon AHEC cultivates Oregon's future health workforce. We engage learners at every step of their pathway, beginning with career exploration in youth, supporting them throughout their education, and continuing to provide opportunities as they enter professional practice.

Oregon Pacific AHEC

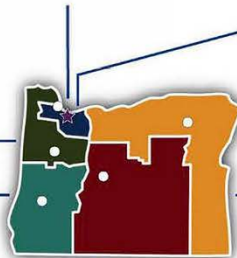
Hosted at Samaritan Lebanon Community Hospital. The Center serves communities along the Oregon Coast and I-5 Corridor including the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians and the counties of Benton, Clatsop, Columbia, Lincoln, Linn, Marion, Polk, Tillamook and Yamhill.

Jaime Montgomery, Director



Oregon AHEC Program Office

Housed at OHSU in Portland.



Oregon Healthcare Workforce Institute

Hosted at Pacific University. The Center serves Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties.

Jeff Laune, Director



AHEC of Southwest Oregon

Hosted at Aviva Health in Roseburg. The Center provides services to Coos, Curry, Douglas, Lane, Jackson and Josephine counties.

Tawnie Goetz-Kennedy, Director



Northeast Oregon AHEC

Located on the campus of Eastern Oregon University in La Grande. The Center serves Baker, Gilliam, Hood River, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Wasco and Wheeler counties.

Meredith Lair, Director



Cascades East AHEC

Hosted at St. Charles Health System in Bend. The Center serves Central and Southeastern Oregon and includes the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Klamath and Lake counties.

Emily Clark, Director



Meet Our New Center Directors

It has been a busy first year for these two new Center Directors. Emily and Tawnie have jumped right in, delivering successful summer camps, providing pre-professional training, and educating elected officials about the important AHEC programs happening across the state. We are fortunate to have them join the AHEC network!



Tawnie Goetz-Kennedy
Director of AHEC South West

Tawnie brings 24 years of experience in the Emergency Medical Services 911 system, four years of high school health education teaching, and three years of teaching and advising in the post-secondary education system. Her goal is to get students excited about health care careers and new pathway options. She enjoys gardening, nature, and being a mom.



Emily Clark, MEd.
Director of Cascades East AHEC

Emily brings 10+ years of experience teaching secondary health sciences, complemented by four years of service as the Education Specialist at CEAHEC. While working as the Education Specialist, she delivered health career pathways programs for high school students across Central and Southern Oregon. Emily enjoys spending time on the trails, where you'll find her hiking, biking, and skiing.

Pathway Programs

Oregon AHEC Pathway programs help build Oregon's future health workforce by offering career exploration summer camps, experiential learning opportunities, academic support, mentorship, and college and career planning. Through a continuum of support from high school to professional training, we encourage and prepare students, particularly those from rural and underserved communities, to pursue health careers.

This year, pathway camps were held across the state of Oregon to support youth exposure to health care careers, hands-on skill development, and access to current health care professionals. Camps were hosted in La Grande, Crane, Hood River, Bend, Klamath Falls, Forest Grove, Coos Bay, White City, Roseburg, Lebanon, Warrenton, and Portland.



A student works on their blood draw skills, Cascades East AHEC MedStars Bend



Students attending MedStars summer camp in Bend

"It made my future seem more real and attainable. Prior to this, I knew I could do it, but I was hesitant. Now I'm fairly certain because of what I have seen. I just want to keep learning."

--Cascades East AHEC MedStars Bend participant, 2026

Pathway Programs



AHEC Academy students carve soap tooth models at OHSU

474

Students participated in Oregon AHEC summer camps, a **78.9% increase** from 2025



High school student uses an ultrasound during MedStars Klamath Falls

"What surprised me the most about my job shadowing experience is seeing several patients while shadowing the med-surg nurse. She really showed me how a day as a med-surg nurse really is and the realistic sides of it. I got to have a better knowledge on what they do and she gave me some good advice. I also enjoyed watching a real time surgery that allowed me to see how a real operating room operates and who operates it."

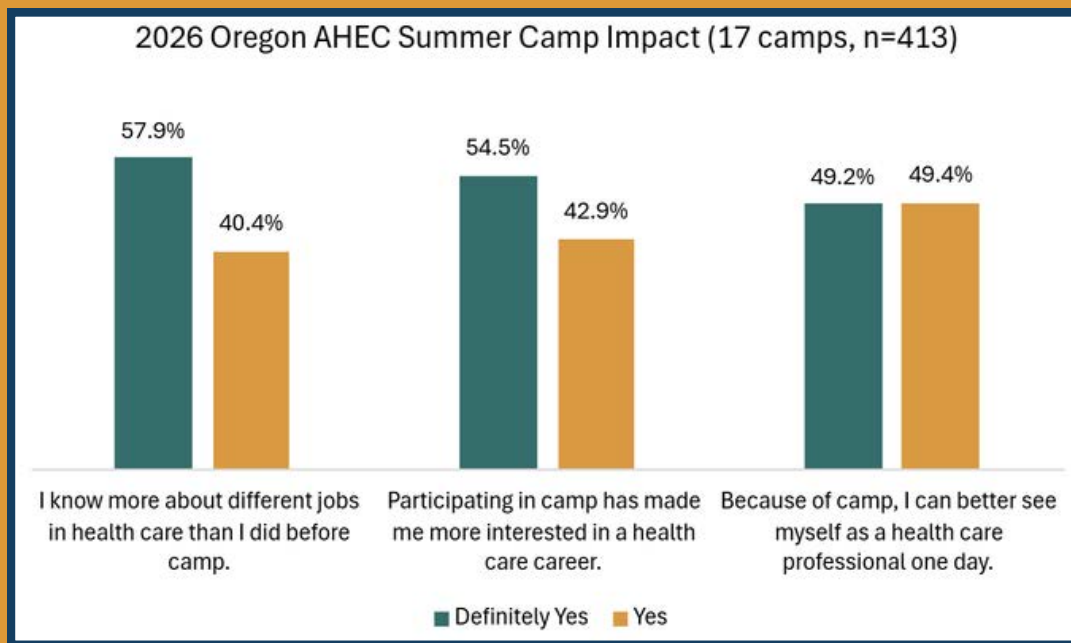
-Gladys, HS student, North East Oregon AHEC Rural MedQuest 2026



Pathway Programs



Vital training for high school students at Western University Medical School, Oregon Pacific AHEC



A high school student learning suturing at AHEC Sout West Camp in Coos County



High school students learn about Life Flight in Warrenton, Oregon Pacific AHEC

Professional Programs

Through pre-professional and professional programming, Oregon AHEC supports learners as they progress from academic training to health care practice. Programs include rural and underserved clinical placements, interprofessional education, cultural responsiveness training, and ongoing mentorship, helping participants build the knowledge, experience, and connections needed to serve communities across Oregon.

"Everything that Rural Ready Nursing Support has provided for my nursing schooling has made me feel more confident in being a nurse and ready to take on my career. I am very grateful for the opportunity to take advantage of such amazing support and knowing that a rural community such as La Grande is getting access to high-fidelity simulations and mental health first aid training."

-OHSU School of Nursing, La Grande Campus Student



Nursing Students in La Grande Participating in North East Oregon AHEC Pediatric Simulation Training, 2026

Professional Programs

Oregon Healthcare Workforce Institute's Pre-Health Professions Mentor Program

The Pre-Health Professions Mentor Program was piloted this year by the Oregon Health Workforce Institute run through Pacific University. It supports students pursuing health care careers, particularly those interested in serving rural and underserved communities. The program helps students develop their professional identity, strengthen interprofessional leadership skills, and build resilience to prevent burnout.

During the 2025-26 pilot year, mentor teams met virtually six times and participated in online sessions with experienced healthcare professionals who shared practical career insights and lessons beyond the classroom.

In 2026-27, the program will expand to additional universities while continuing virtual mentor meetings. Participants will also have the opportunity to attend two in-person conferences focused on networking, professional growth, and mentorship.

In 2025-26,
mentors and
mentees
represented
13 different
programs

Mentors (12 students)

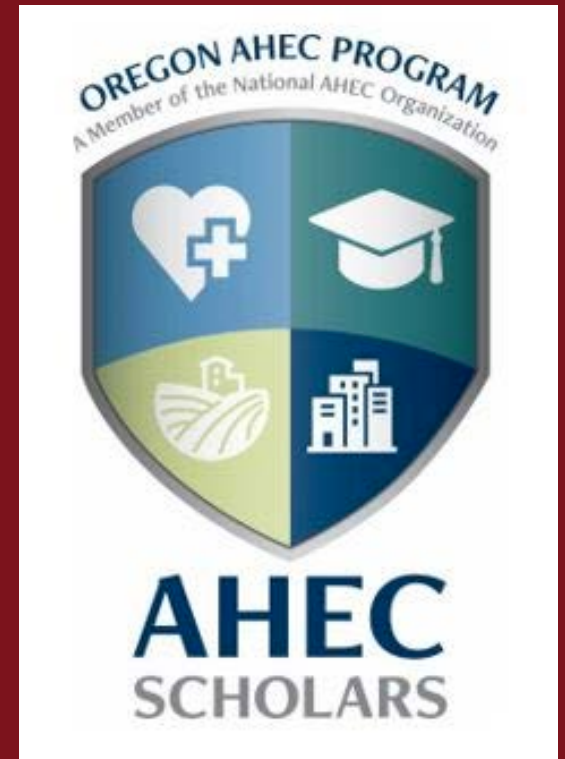
Optometry
Physical Therapy
Physician Associate
Occupational Therapy
Nursing
Athletic Training
Audiology
Pharmacy
Social Work
Psychology

Mentees (22 students)

Optometry
Physical Therapy
Physician Associate
Occupational Therapy
Nursing
Athletic Training
MD
Pharmacy
Public Health
Communication Sciences & Disorders

AHEC Scholars Program

AHEC Scholars is a two-year national program designed to better prepare health profession students for future practice in underserved communities. Scholars gain hands-on experience and skills that prepare them to serve in high-need communities across Oregon.



An AHEC Scholar participating in a *Wilderness Medicine* course

The AHEC Scholars program partners with public and private colleges and universities to support student participation across the state of Oregon. The locations of higher learning include:

- Oregon State University
- Frontier Nursing University
- Pacific University
- Western University of Health Sciences
- Oregon Health & Science University

DID YOU KNOW?

During the 2025-26 school year, AHEC Scholars completed more than **22,000 hours** of clinical rotations in rural and underserved communities across Oregon!

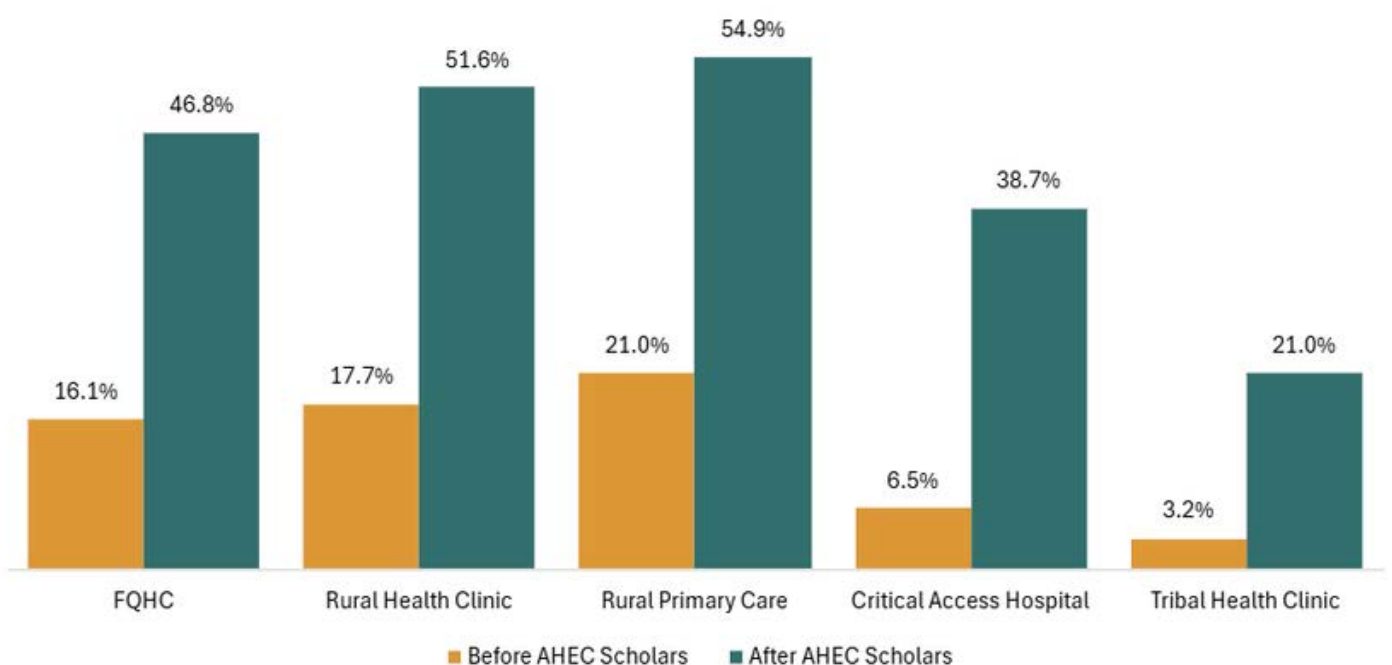
AHEC Scholars Program

Our program is proud to have representation across the following health professions:

- Dentistry
- Nursing (both BSN and NP)
- Physician Assistant
- Doctor of Medicine (MD and DO)
- Pharmacy
- Physical Therapy
- Occupational Therapy

AHEC Scholars go beyond a typical health care student's course load by **completing at least 160 hours** of curated learning and experience in rural, frontier, and medically underserved communities

Percent of AHEC Scholars with High to Full Intent to Practice in Rural/Underserved Locations Before and After Program Participation



"I appreciated the lectures on tribal health. I had not considered tribal health before because I did not know anything about it. Now that I completed the AHEC Scholars program, I am very interested in serving in a rural area with either tribal health or veteran's health. I enjoyed my rotations working with underserved rural populations so I would like this to be the population I serve."

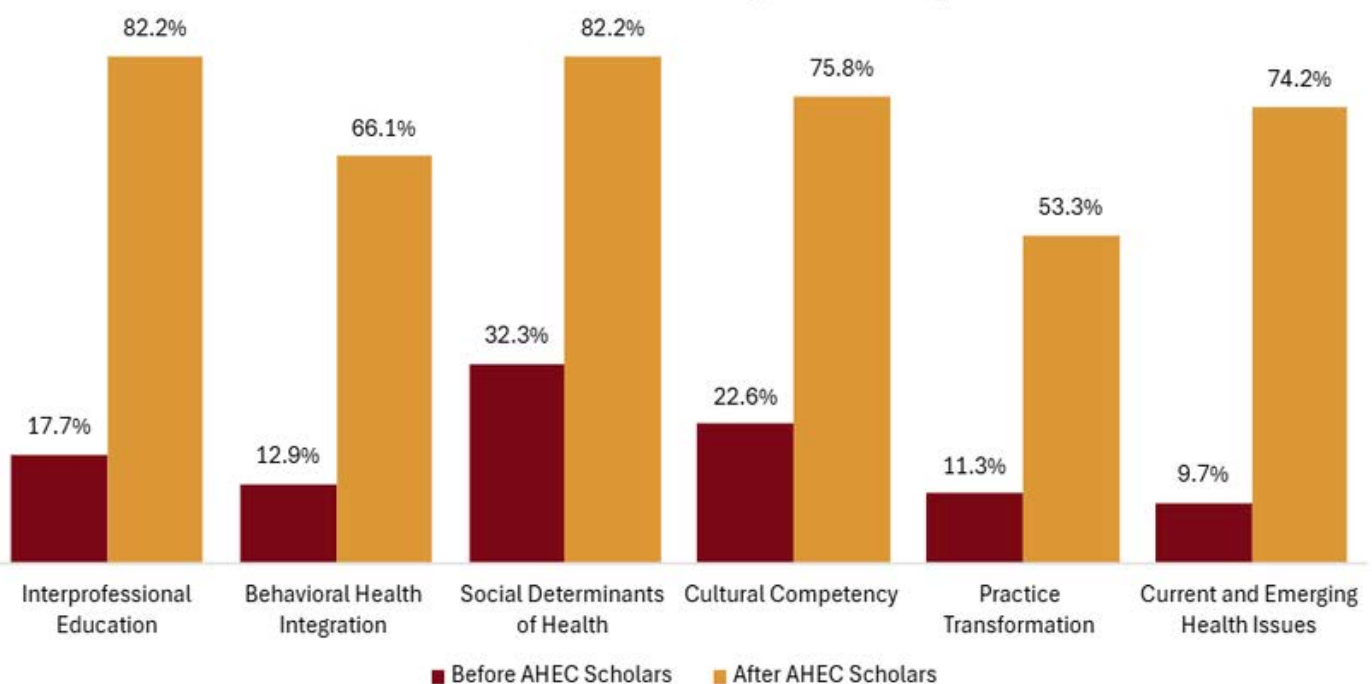
--Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine Grad, Class of 2026

What our AHEC Scholars Are Saying...

"It is such an honor to be in the AHEC Scholars Program. I am endlessly grateful for AHEC; for all of the support and guidance it has provided and for the many doors it has opened that have helped shape my education and strengthen my purpose."

--Physicians Assistant Grad, Class of 2026

Percent of AHEC Scholars Indicating Strong Knowledge in Core Didactic Areas Before and After Program Participation



Continuing Education

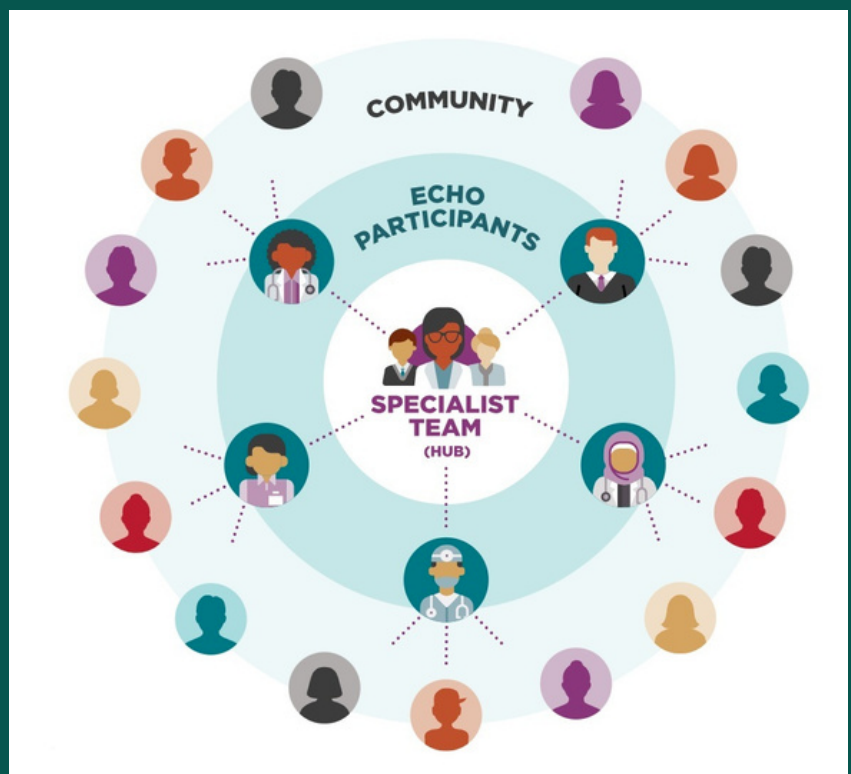
Oregon AHEC's continuing education programming provides health professionals a variety of educational opportunities. These opportunities support health care providers who want to strengthen their skills and expertise in emerging health topics, rural health care, and the use of new medical technologies

Project ECHO

The Program Office offered training to preceptors across the state through a program called Project ECHO. These sessions provided high-quality learning opportunities to maintain licensure, build skills, and support preceptors to stay current with best practices. This year, ECHOs were held covering topics on dental care, diabetes management, and how to be an effective rural preceptor.

79

Oregon health care preceptors trained by Project ECHO



Picture courtesy of University of New Mexico Project ECHO

Our Supporters and Contact Information

Our department receives generous support from a variety of sources, including:

- Federal grants
- State appropriations
- State grants
- Nonprofit grants
- Host site contributions

Thank you to our donors, partners, and sponsors. We could not do this work without your support.

Consider making a gift today!

The Dr. John Saultz AHEC Scholars endowment fund helps remove financial barriers for Oregon health care students by supplementing travel and housing costs during rural rotations and other educational needs.



Keep in touch



Publications by Oregon AHEC in 2026

Oregon AHEC Director, Dr. Eric Wiser, along with the Evaluation Director Cynthia Taylor, AHEC Scholars Director Katie Caba, and Pathways Director Dr. Gabe Andeen published an article in the Journal of BMC Medical Education that looked at the expansion of the Oregon health care workforce with support from the AHEC Scholars program.

Program Manager, Lexie Zimbelman, published an article in the Journal of School Health about a case study she wrote based on a program piloted for high school students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Wiser et al. BMC Medical Education (2026) 26:450
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-026-08788-6>

BMC Medical Education

RESEARCH

Open Access

Building the future healthcare workforce: the impact of Oregon AHEC scholars' program 2018 - 2022

Eric Wiser^{4*}, Gabriel Andeen⁴, Edward Saito¹, Katie Caba², Jeannie Davis³, Patricia A. Carney⁴ and Cynthia Taylor⁴

Abstract

Purpose This study summarizes findings from four cohorts of Oregon Area Health Education Centers Scholars (2018–2022). Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) aim to expand the healthcare workforce, especially in rural and underserved areas likely to experience workforce shortages. The AHEC Scholars Program, a component of all AHECs nationally, supports health professions learners interested in rural/underserved practice through didactic curricula on core topics about rural/underserved populations and clinical training in these settings.

Methods A retrospective pre-post survey was administered assessing changes in self-reported perceptions of knowledge of core topic areas and issues related to health and wellness in specific underserved populations, along with intention to practice in rural or under-resourced settings before and after participation in the AHEC Scholars Program. Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were used to assess pre- and post-participation differences in working knowledge and intent to practice in rural/underserved settings.

Results Participants reported higher ratings following the Oregon AHEC Scholars Program compared to their retrospective pre-program ratings. Differences were found in perceptions of working knowledge ratings for all six core topic areas, and for health and wellness for special populations ($p < 0.001$). Lastly, perceptions of intention to practice in rural or underserved settings were also rated more highly post-program compared to pre-program ratings for all of the assessed practice settings.

Conclusions The Oregon AHEC Scholars Program appears to be effective in training healthcare professions learners in core topics in rural/underserved healthcare and health and wellness for specific populations and is associated with an increase in learners' perceptions of their intent to practice in a variety of rural and underserved settings. These findings have implications for addressing workforce maldistribution and the health of patients living in rural or medically under-resourced areas.

Keywords Area health education centers (AHEC), AHEC scholars, Rural healthcare workforce development, Intent to practice, Workforce disparities, Rural health outcomes

Journal of School Health



PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

Sexual Health Education for Youth With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: A School District Case Study

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Keywords: adolescents | intellectual and developmental disabilities | schools | sex education | sexual health education | youth with disabilities

ABSTRACT

Background: Comprehensive and accessible sexual health education (SHE) can improve knowledge and skills among youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). This case study highlights how a mid-sized school district adapted and delivered SHE in high school special education (SpEd) classrooms.

Contributions to Practice: Using feedback from students, teachers, and I/DD experts, school district staff adapted and piloted a SHE unit for youth with I/DD. Lessons incorporated universal design for learning principles while addressing sexual health topics and teaching strategies for youth with I/DD. Training and technical assistance improved educator comfort and delivery of SHE.

Implications for School Health Policy, Practice, and Equity: Districts creating and piloting a SHE unit should consider providing training and coaching for SpEd teachers, working with SpEd leadership to gain support and access, engaging parents to increase buy-in and reduce opt-outs, and eliciting ongoing feedback from students and teachers.

Conclusions: More practice-based research is needed to advance I/DD-inclusive SHE. Future studies examining how SHE curriculum for special education is developed, adapted, taught, and evaluated are needed while centering student voice.