

2023-2025

NEBRASKA AHEC PROGRAM IMPACT REPORT

CELEBRATING
OUR

25Th

ANNIVERSARY



RECRUIT



TRAIN



RETAIN



FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dear Partners,

I am pleased to present the Nebraska Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program's Impact Report, highlighting achievements from September 2023 – August 2025. The Nebraska AHEC Program celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2026, marking a milestone since its establishment in 2001. We invite you to explore the special anniversary feature included in this report.

The Nebraska AHEC Program is an academic and community-based partnership dedicated to recruiting, training, and retaining healthcare professionals in rural and underserved communities across Nebraska.

Funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Nebraska AHEC Program is housed at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). Through five regional AHEC centers - Central Nebraska AHEC, Northern Nebraska AHEC, Nebraska Panhandle AHEC, Southeast Nebraska AHEC, and Omaha AHEC – the Nebraska AHEC Program delivers high-quality initiatives that bolster and sustain the healthcare workforce pipeline. Collectively, the four rural centers and one urban center serve all 93 counties in Nebraska.

At its core, the Nebraska AHEC Program is a connector working to strengthen access to healthcare by engaging students and professionals at every stage of the pipeline. This includes outreach to high school and undergraduate students, support for health profession students through the Nebraska AHEC Scholars Program and clinical training experiences, and providing continuing education opportunities for practicing healthcare professionals.

The work of the Nebraska AHEC Program is made possible through strong and enduring partnerships, both throughout the past 25 years and as we look to the future. I am pleased to present this Impact Report for your review.

In partnership,

Jeffrey Harrison, M.D.
Director, Nebraska AHEC Program
Chair, UNMC Department of Family Medicine

983075 Nebraska Medical Center / Omaha, NE 68198-3075 / p. 402-559-0838

Operating in partnership with the University of Nebraska Medical Center, supported in part through HRSA under grant number U77HP21499.



MISSION

To meet the state's health and health workforce needs.

The Nebraska AHEC Program provides educational programs and services that bridge academic institutions and communities to improve the health of Nebraskans with a focus on rural and underserved populations.

WHAT DOES AHEC DO?



RECRUIT

- ▶ Provide programming for grades 9-12 to increase student interest in pursuing a career in healthcare
- ▶ Provide programming for pre-health profession students to increase interest in needed health professions across the state
- ▶ Increase enrollment in health profession programs



TRAIN

- ▶ Develop in-depth training and networking opportunities for Nebraska AHEC Scholars to best prepare them to serve in rural and underserved communities in Nebraska
- ▶ Support clinical training rotations across the state to increase practice interest in rural and urban underserved communities



RETAIN

- ▶ Deliver continuing education for health professionals to increase access to training

2

RECRUIT. TRAIN. RETAIN.



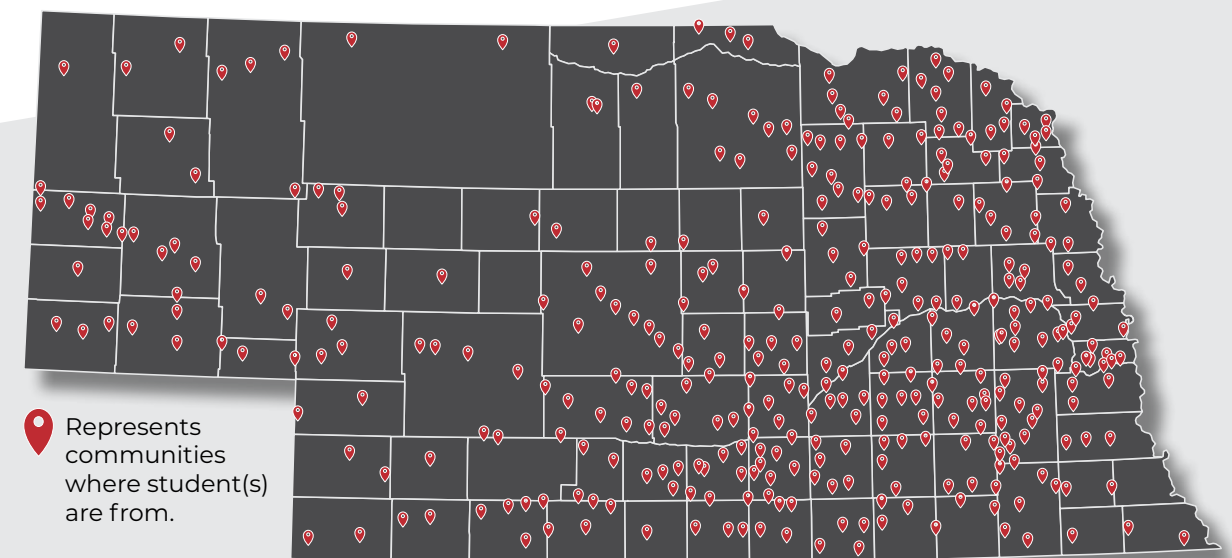
RECRUIT

HEALTH CAREER PIPELINE

The Nebraska AHEC Program connects with students in rural and underserved areas across the state to supplement healthcare career exploration.

Regional AHEC centers across the state collaborate with schools and community partners to expand awareness of healthcare careers, increase interest to work in healthcare, and begin exposing students to the benefits of working in rural and underserved areas.

6,836 Students Exposed To Health Careers Across Nebraska



OF STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED

70%

from disadvantaged educational, economic, or social/cultural environments



31%

whose race or ethnicity is underrepresented in healthcare

3

RECRUIT. TRAIN. RETAIN.

CONNECTING STUDENTS TO HEALTH CAREERS

The five regional AHEC centers collectively serve all 93 counties in Nebraska, tailoring programs to local community and healthcare system needs. Across the state, the Nebraska AHEC Program strengthens the healthcare pipeline, reaching students through multiple programs. These are some specific examples:

1. Expand awareness of health careers

- Career fairs
- College campus tours and activities
- School health careers presentations, including healthcare professional speakers
- Skill development: CNA certification, CPR training, Stop the Bleed training, etc.

2. Increase enrollment in health professions programs

- College healthcare department speakers and tours
- Healthcare program entrance preparation
- Panel discussions with current health profession students and professionals

3. Increase intent to practice in rural and underserved areas

- Interprofessional education activities for pre-health track college students
- Social determinants of health training, including poverty simulations
- Tours of Critical Access Hospitals, Federally Qualified Health Centers and other healthcare facilities

JOB SHADOWING

Job shadowing experiences expose students to skills and daily activities of healthcare professionals. Prior to participating, students must pass the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) assessment. This assessment ensures students understand patient privacy and confidentiality. From September 2023 to August 2025, students completed 1,491 HIPAA tests across Nebraska, facilitated by regional AHEC centers.



348

STUDENTS COMPLETED
JOB SHADOWING



6,013

HOURS OF
JOB SHADOWING

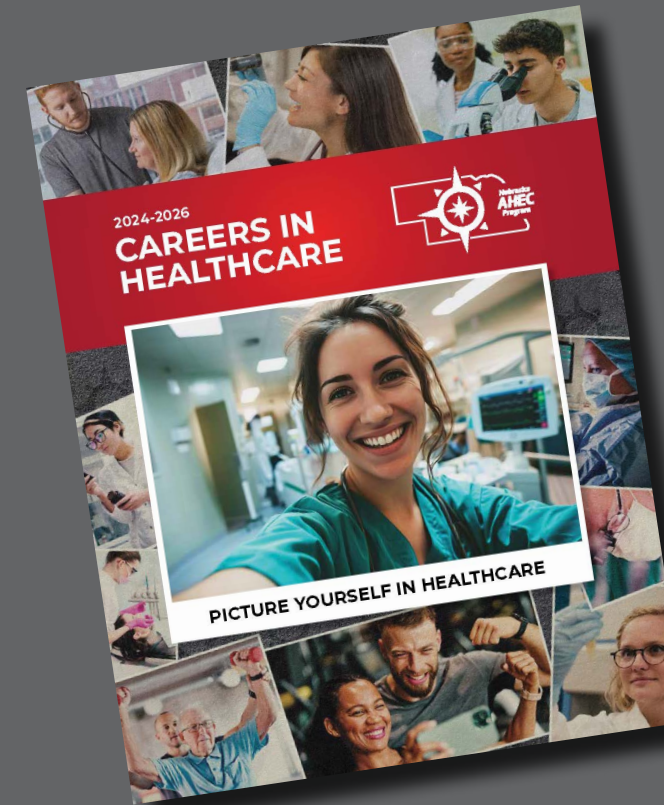


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DIFFERENT HEALTH
PROFESSIONS

4

RECRUIT. TRAIN. RETAIN.



Careers in Healthcare Book

This career guide is updated bi-annually and provided to all rural Nebraska high schools.

Learn about:

- Healthcare profession roles, aptitudes, and required education
- Educational programs at Nebraska colleges and universities

Explore a variety
of careers here!



254
High School Partners



57
College and
University Partners



**MORE THAN
200**
Employer Partners

PARTNERSHIPS

The Nebraska AHEC Program is a connector for educational systems, healthcare systems, and communities. Often acting as a bridge, regional AHEC centers collaborate with partners to create student experiences, engage healthcare professionals and employers, and address healthcare workforce needs.

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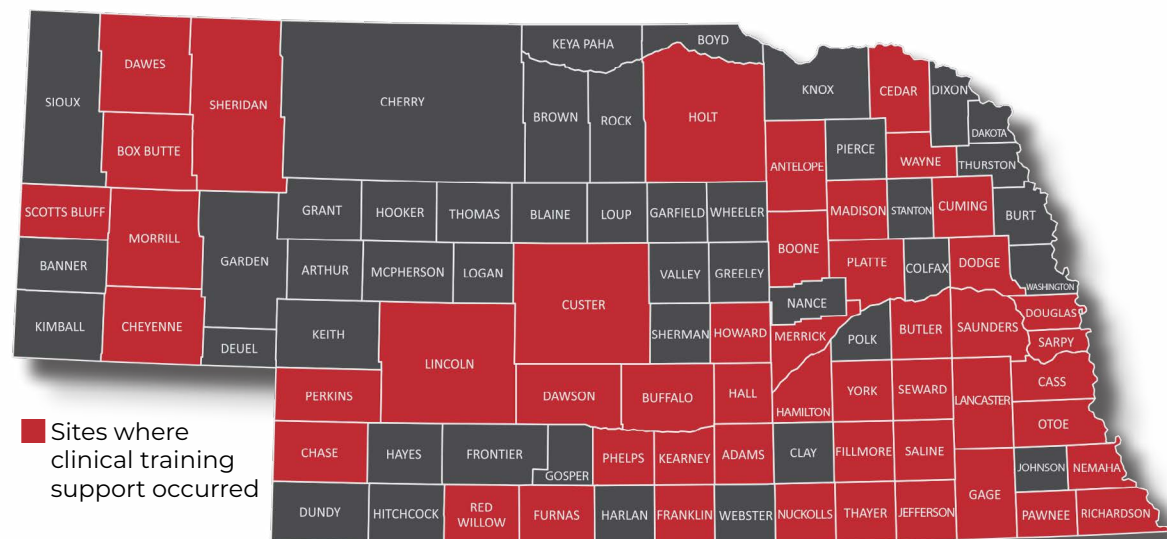


TRAIN

CLINICAL TRAINING

Supporting clinical training rotations, especially in rural and underserved areas is important, as health profession students are more likely to become employed in locations where they experience their clinical training.

STUDENT CLINICAL TRAINING ROTATION PLACEMENTS



Connecting Health Profession Students to Communities

Micaiah and her husband met in rural Nebraska, but their education eventually brought them to urban areas of the state. “As my husband and I were planning our careers and early marriage, we were both passionate about returning to rural Nebraska and establishing within commutable distance to our families.”



After her husband accepted employment in the Kearney area, Micaiah wanted “to learn more about the culture of the providers there and network with future employers.”

Micaiah reached out to Central Nebraska AHEC who helped her find a preceptor and clinical rotation site at Kearney Regional Medical Center.

“I am grateful for all the resources offered through AHEC to help me network in a community I had not previously been established in!”

– Micaiah Uhrmacher

Medical Student, UNMC – Class of 2027
and President of Nebraska Rural Health Outreach

1,117 CLINICAL TRAINING ROTATIONS **374** STUDENTS **48** NEBRASKA COUNTIES



*Medically underserved community



Clinical rotations are more than academic learning. They provide unique opportunities to envision life in that community.

The NE AHEC Program has compiled a list of community resources in towns across Nebraska for local activities, restaurants, and more to showcase the vibrancy of rural communities.



RECRUIT. **TRAIN**. RETAIN.



RECRUIT. **TRAIN**. RETAIN.

See how the Nebraska AHEC Program has supported Abby's Pathway to Pharmacy!

Abby Quadhamer comes from a small school district in rural Hildreth, Nebraska, where she was only one of two students in her high school organic chemistry class. In Spring 2026, Abby graduated with her Doctor of Pharmacy from the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC).

“When your intention is to go back to rural, and you’re in Omaha for school, sometimes it’s easy to lose sight of that. AHEC Scholars was a good resource to ground me. Hearing from rural providers in practice, conveying what they’re experiencing, put things into perspective.”

– Abby Quadhamer



AHEC Regional and State Science Meet

In middle school, Abby competed in a Regional Science Meet in Grand Island. The following summer, she met with other middle school students from across Nebraska in Omaha for various science activities, including a tour of UNMC.



Central Nebraska AHEC Careers Club

During Abby's junior and senior years of high school, she participated in CN AHEC's Careers Clubs, learning more about various health professions.

“I have very vivid memories of being involved with that program. I remember going to Hastings for pharmacy technician and pharmacy to learn what that career path looked like. We went to the Kearney County Hospital and looked at what providers encounter when dealing with emergent situations. It was very impactful, especially being so young to have that exposure.”



RHOP at Wayne State College

As a pre-pharmacy student at Wayne State College, she was accepted into the Rural Health Opportunities Program (RHOP), a pathway program in partnership with UNMC to educate students from rural Nebraska in needed health professions who want to return to rural Nebraska to practice.

Nebraska AHEC Scholars

Abby was accepted into the fifth Nebraska AHEC Scholars cohort as a second-year pharmacy student at UNMC.



Employment at a Critical Access Hospital

Abby accepted employment at Lexington Regional Hospital, where she also completed a clinical rotation as part of the AHEC Scholars Program.

“I just thank AHEC! They’ve been a sandwich in my healthcare journey. I was very fortunate to have them on the front half of my interest in healthcare, and now being a provider. Hopefully I’m able to pass along the importance of this program to all of our future students in Nebraska.”



RECRUIT. TRAIN. RETAIN.



RECRUIT. TRAIN. RETAIN.

OUR STORY

NEBRASKA AHEC TIMELINE

CELEBRATING
OUR
25th
ANNIVERSARY

“

“The Rural Health Education Network (RHEN) was established by UNMC and the Nebraska Legislature through LB652e in 1991 to provide educational opportunities for health professions students. The success of RHEN led to efforts to secure additional funding to further strengthen the network’s health education work through the development and support of rural community partnerships. In discussions with colleagues in other states, the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) model was frequently identified as an effective approach to addressing rural health education needs. As a result, we began pursuing funding and working with rural communities to explore how this model could be implemented.”

– **Roxanna Jokela (Fredrickson),**
Former RHEN Director and
Nebraska AHEC Assistant
Director

SETTING THE STAGE 1971-2001

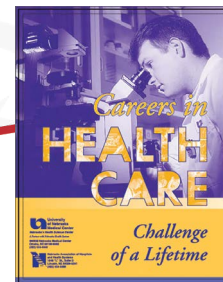
- ▶ **1971** - Congress passes Comprehensive Health Manpower Training Act establishing the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) program
- ▶ **1991** - Rural Health Education Network (RHEN) established to address health professional shortages in rural Nebraska
- ▶ **1999** - UNMC applied for funding from HRSA to carry out the mission of recruiting and retaining rural health care providers



2001 - UNMC awarded dollars from HRSA to establish first AHEC centers



Since 2001, more than \$14 million dollars have been awarded from HRSA



THE EARLY YEARS 2001-2012

- ▶ Within 4 years all five regional centers were established
- ▶ Worked with RHEN to Develop the Careers in Healthcare Book
- ▶ Partnered with RHEN to facilitate ongoing regional and state science meets
- ▶ Partnered and awarded dollars for Student/Resident Experiences and Rotation in Community Health (SEARCH) Program, among others
- ▶ Development of career pathway programs and expanded clinical training sites
- ▶ Expansion of continuing education to rural providers

“

“The strength of the Nebraska AHEC Program lies in its commitment to rural Nebraska. At the time of securing initial federal funding, we were grateful to have early support from then – UNMC Chancellor Dr. Harold Maurer and the rural communities across the state. AHEC has improved and expanded health education—helping communities strengthen their local health workforce recruitment.”

– **Michael Sitorius, M.D.,**
Former Director & Principal
Investigator, Nebraska AHEC
Program



STATEWIDE STANDARDIZATION 2012-2022

- ▶ Continued to evolve career pathway programs and clinical training sites to meet changing Nebraska healthcare needs
- ▶ Established a statewide database
- ▶ Re-branded with development of uniform statewide and regional center logos
- ▶ Established the Nebraska AHEC Scholars Program
- ▶ Developed the first Status of the Healthcare Workforce report for the State of Nebraska, in collaboration with UNMC
- ▶ Partnered and awarded dollars for Advanced Nursing Education Workforce (ANEW) and Opioid Use Disorder/ Substance Use Disorder grants
- ▶ Shift continuing education programming to offer cross-regional and statewide events



“

“Looking back to 2016, it was a defining and pivotal time for Nebraska AHEC. We had the privilege of working alongside dedicated partners across the state to strengthen coordination and bring greater consistency to our statewide network of centers. This work came at a critical moment as we prepared for a national shift toward a more focused, outcomes-driven AHEC model.

The introduction of the AHEC Scholars Program marked an important evolution—placing greater emphasis on students in health professions training.

Strengthening Nebraska’s healthcare workforce begins with investing in people and communities. Nebraska AHEC continues to play a critical role in building pathways, supporting providers, and ensuring that high-quality care is accessible in every corner of our state.”

– **Nikki Carritt,**
Former Nebraska AHEC
Deputy Director



Since 2001, more than 31,700 students and professionals have participated with AHEC



PRESENT & FUTURE 2022 & BEYOND

- ▶ Leverage partnerships for career pathway programming
- ▶ Utilize technology to extend continuing education reach across the state
- ▶ Graduated 251 AHEC Scholars to-date, growing annually with future cohorts
- ▶ Expand clinical training resources to meet growing rural health education needs
- ▶ Continue building partnerships to meet evolving healthcare needs of Nebraska

“

“Nebraska AHEC has built a solid foundation of partnerships, collaborations and successful outcomes over the past 25 years. The renewed interest by both state and federal agencies in creating sustainable models of healthcare to serve rural and underserved communities provide an outstanding opportunity for Nebraska AHEC to grow its role and influence into the future. The need to create innovative and sustainable recruitment, training, and retention models necessitate continued efforts to expand our partnerships to meet the healthcare needs of the state.”

– **Jeffery Harrison, M.D.,**
Current Director and Principal
Investigator, Nebraska AHEC
Program



TRAIN

NEBRASKA AHEC SCHOLARS

The Nebraska AHEC Scholars Program is part of a national initiative focused on preparing health profession students to serve in rural and urban underserved areas.

80%

AVERAGE
RETENTION
RATE PER
COHORT



**EMPLOYMENT
RATE***

*Of those where
employment was
tracked

251

NEBRASKA
AHEC SCHOLARS
GRADUATED
TO-DATE

Nebraska AHEC Scholars experience unique learning and networking opportunities with peers and Nebraska healthcare leaders.

During this two-year program, AHEC Scholars gain access to exclusive workshops, earn a nationally recognized certificate, gain experience serving patients in rural and underserved areas of Nebraska, and receive national and state resources on the latest health topics.

The program began in 2018 and accepted its eighth cohort in September 2025.



HEALTH PROFESSION PROGRAMS OF NEBRASKA AHEC SCHOLARS

Dentistry
Medicine
Pharmacy
Physical Therapy
Physician Assistant
Radiologic Technologist
Registered Nurse

*Health profession programs eligible as of 2023 to participate in the Nebraska AHEC Scholars Program per funder requirements

SCHOOLS ATTENDED BY NEBRASKA AHEC SCHOLARS

Clarkson College
Creighton University
Northeast Community College
Regional West Medical Center School of Radiologic Technology
Union Adventist University
University of Nebraska Medical Center (All Campuses)
Western Nebraska Community College



**NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED
CERTIFICATIONS EARNED
BY AHEC SCHOLARS**

75

Culturally and
Linguistically
Appropriate
Services (CLAS)

127

Mental Health
First Aid

22

Basic Certification
in Quality and Safety
from Institute for
Health Improvement



"The techniques I learned through the Mental Health First Aid certification course have helped me identify patients suffering from mental illness and more readily engage in conversations that led to them receiving necessary care. These skills can help all medical professionals, not just physicians, navigate mental health crisis both in the clinical setting and in the community."

– **Treyvon Bokoskie, MD**
Family Medicine Resident Physician, HO-I

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RECRUIT. **TRAIN.** RETAIN.

13

RECRUIT. **TRAIN.** RETAIN.

Placing Scholars Where They Are Most Needed

A patient walks into the office of Lydia Sitgsell, DDS, at Midtown Health Center – a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in Norfolk. While addressing tooth pain, the patient shares their recent divorce and threat of homelessness. Lydia immediately recognized that the patient could benefit from talking with the behavioral health team and sends a message requesting a warm handoff. Lydia sends an additional message to the medical team for assistance after noting a high blood pressure result.



employment, they even helped Lydia’s husband network to establish their family in the area.

A few months later, the patient is now seeing a physician and mental health professional at Midtown Health Center. “A lot of that is AHEC. In AHEC you learn it’s okay to message the doctor and it’s okay to reach out to ask those questions. AHEC got me excited for working together in integrated care!”

“When patients walk into the office, you’re working on the smiles of people you’re sitting next to at your kids’ games.”

– Lydia Sitgsell, DDS,
Midtown Health Center

Scholars reported the following benefits:

- Skills for working in an interdisciplinary team
- Patient interaction insight and resources
- Supplemental education beyond academic coursework
- Improved understanding of rural healthcare
- Job searching skills and networking opportunities



WATCH NOW

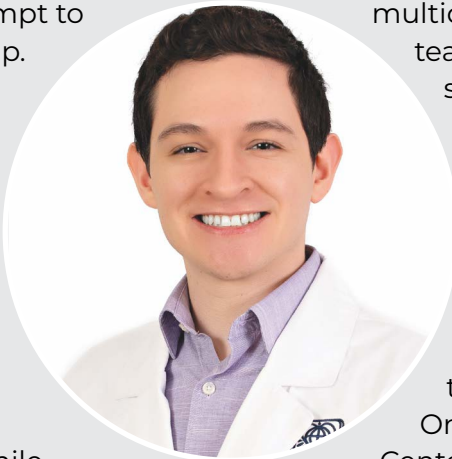
**Hear more from
our Scholars!**

Andrew Olvera began his healthcare career working in the emergency department as a Certified Nurse Assistant. He saw patients receive varying levels of care, often those patients with language barriers. For those who spoke Spanish, Andrew utilized the Spanish he knew to make patients feel more comfortable and attempt to bridge a communication gap. Andrew was inspired from that point to provide care in underserved Omaha communities.

As a first-year physician assistant student at UNMC, Andrew was accepted into the fourth cohort of the Nebraska AHEC Scholars Program. While his professional program prepared him with medical knowledge, the AHEC Scholars program provided Andrew with various topics for how social determinants of health impact patient care in the real world, which he did not find on any of his tests.

Andrew had been introduced to OneWorld Community Health Center (FQHC) in Omaha through previous job shadowing experiences, the Omaha AHEC Fall Year 1

Scholars Workshop, and returned for a clinical training rotation. The preceptor discussed how care is provided at the FQHC in a multidisciplinary team to address social determinants of health and remove language barriers for Spanish-speaking patients, leading to improved patient care. Andrew is now in his second year of practice as a Physician Assistant in the family medicine clinic at OneWorld Community Health Center.



“The AHEC Scholars Program helped keep my goals in mind throughout school. It shaped my understanding of social determinants of health and ensure I address them, when I could. I felt more prepared going into the workforce.”

– Andrew Olvera, PA
OneWorld Community
Health Center

25%

**OF ROTATIONS
OCCURRED IN PRIMARY
CARE LOCATIONS**

264

**LOCATIONS IN RURAL
AND UNDERSERVED
AREAS**

Nebraska AHEC Scholars are required to pursue clinical training rotations in rural and underserved areas, bridging AHEC Scholars knowledge and lived community practice experience.



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RECRUIT. **TRAIN.** RETAIN.



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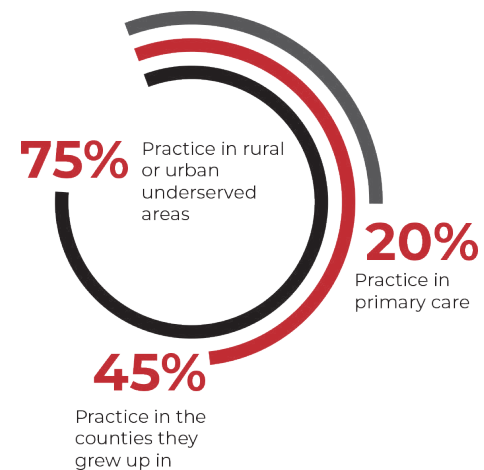
RECRUIT. **TRAIN.** RETAIN.

Nebraska AHEC Scholars identified program benefits through exit interviews and qualitative evaluation:

- 1 Curriculum focused for working in rural and underserved settings
- 2 Understanding patient populations and social determinants of health
- 3 Interprofessional education and networking with peers
- 4 Understanding healthcare needs and specific Nebraska needs
- 5 Connections to resources and tools
- 6 Networking with current Nebraska providers

88%
**OF SCHOLARS EMPLOYED
REMAINED IN NEBRASKA**

**OF THOSE SCHOLARS
EMPLOYED IN NEBRASKA:**



Elevate your team!

Whether it is additional training on tools and practices to improve patient safety, reduce health disparities, or tools to reach out to someone in crisis, AHEC Scholars have workforce-ready skills.

Connect with the next generation of health professionals who want to live and work in your community.

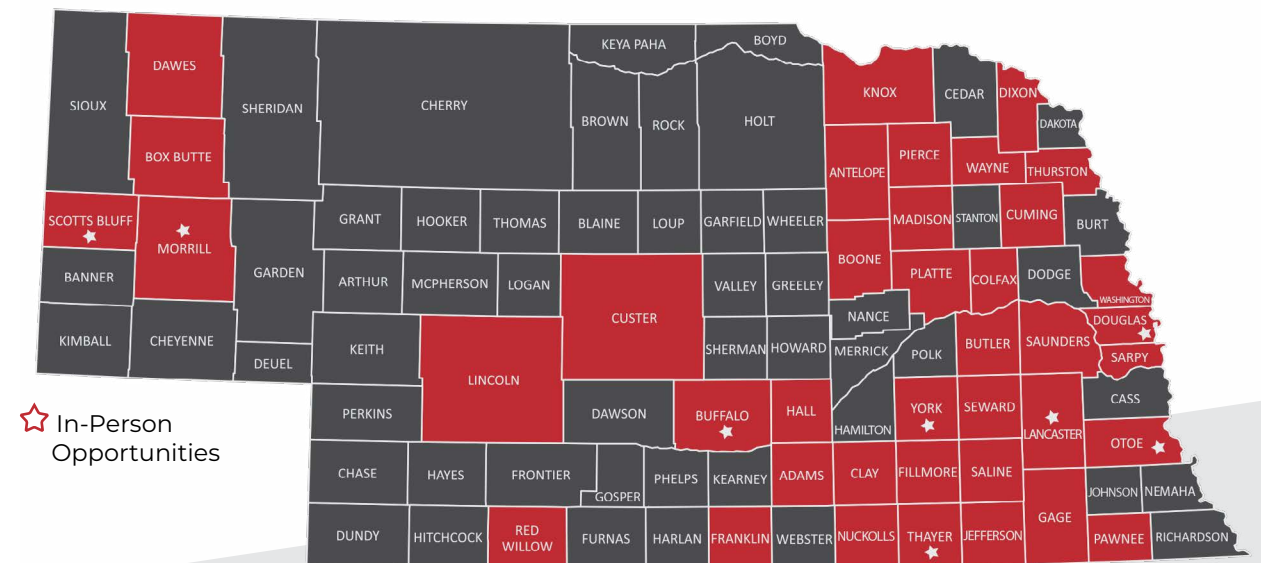
See what Marty Fattig, CEO, Nemaha County Hospital, and others have to say at:



CONTINUING EDUCATION

The Nebraska AHEC Program supports opportunities for continuing education within rural and underserved areas for licensure retention and expands knowledge on topics important for the healthcare of Nebraskans.

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS FROM 55 COUNTIES ACROSS NEBRASKA



CONTINUING EDUCATION DEMOGRAPHICS

26 CONTINUING
EDUCATION
OPPORTUNITIES

1,859 TOTAL
HOURS

501 HEALTH
PROFESSIONALS

42 DIFFERENT HEALTH
PROFESSIONS

Connecting Communities to Better Health

National Recognition for Center of Excellence

Following virtual training as a response to the COVID pandemic, EMS professionals in the Southeast Nebraska AHEC (SE AHEC) region expressed a growing interest for opportunities to engage and problem-solve with colleagues regarding Nebraska rural healthcare delivery. Responding to this call to action, SE AHEC partnered with local EMS professionals, Southeast Community College and other community partners to develop in-person continuing education training through regional EMS mini-conferences. EMS professionals have expanded skills in athlete sporting event injuries, agricultural emergencies, shock in pediatric patients, overdose and pharmacology training, operating in a mass casualty incident, and engaged in panel discussions on the changing landscape of rural EMS healthcare.

As a result of this work and partnerships, SE AHEC received the Center of Excellence Award from the National AHEC Organization (NAO) during the 2025 NAO Biennial Conference. This award is given to programs that “exemplify innovative, community-focused strategies to meet health workforce challenges and improve access to care.”



Vanessa Meinberg, MA (Southeast Nebraska AHEC Center Director) and Jill Sand, MEd, RRT (Dean of Health Sciences, Southeast Community College)

Addressing Emergency Preparedness Needs Across the Panhandle

Over the past several years, the Nebraska Panhandle AHEC (NP AHEC) identified a critical need across the Panhandle region to increase public and professional awareness of life-saving bleed control techniques during everyday emergencies. In response, NP AHEC facilitated Stop the Bleed training for nurses, school personnel, and public health professionals in Gering, Scottsbluff, and Bridgeport. Participants reported fulfillment of continuing education requirements, demonstrating both the professional relevance and community need for these educational opportunities. This training equips healthcare and community professionals with practical emergency response skills that can improve outcomes during traumatic

bleeding events before emergency medical services arrive. Participants were also eligible to become trainers in their own community through the train-the-trainer program feature of the Stop the Bleed Program.



As a result of these successful regional trainings, NP AHEC was invited to provide Stop the Bleed instruction at the Nebraska School Nurses Association Conference in 2024, reaching 89 participants from across the state.

Through these ongoing collaborations, NP AHEC continues to provide relevant training opportunities to support healthcare professionals and school health personnel across rural Nebraska.

CONTINUING EDUCATION TOPICS OFFERED ACROSS NEBRASKA:



- CPR Certification
- EMS Mini Conference
- Healthcare provider retention and workplace satisfaction
- IV administration for EMTs
- Mental Health First Aid
- Motivational interviewing
- Nursing wellbeing and career development
- Paramedic training
- Preceptor best practices for family physicians
- Rural healthcare and workforce innovation
- Stop The Bleed training
- Type 2 diabetes management training



RETAIN

LONGITUDINAL PARTICIPANT TRACKING

STUDENTS WITH 5+ HOURS OF NE AHEC PROGRAMMING ARE:



2.6 times more likely
to enter a health profession
program



1.5 times more likely
to become employed as a
health professional



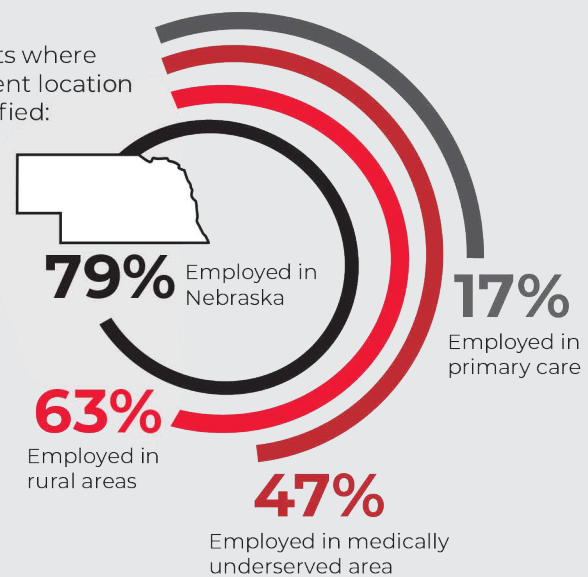
6,287

STUDENTS
TRACKED TO DATE

2,384

STUDENTS GRADUATED
FROM HEALTH PROFESSIONS
PROGRAMS

Of students where
employment location
was identified:



LOADING...

DATA COLLECTION IN PROGRESS

Data collection in progress for more than 3,036
students who have participated with NE AHEC.

Data represents 26% of all recorded individuals with NE AHEC participation through 2023.

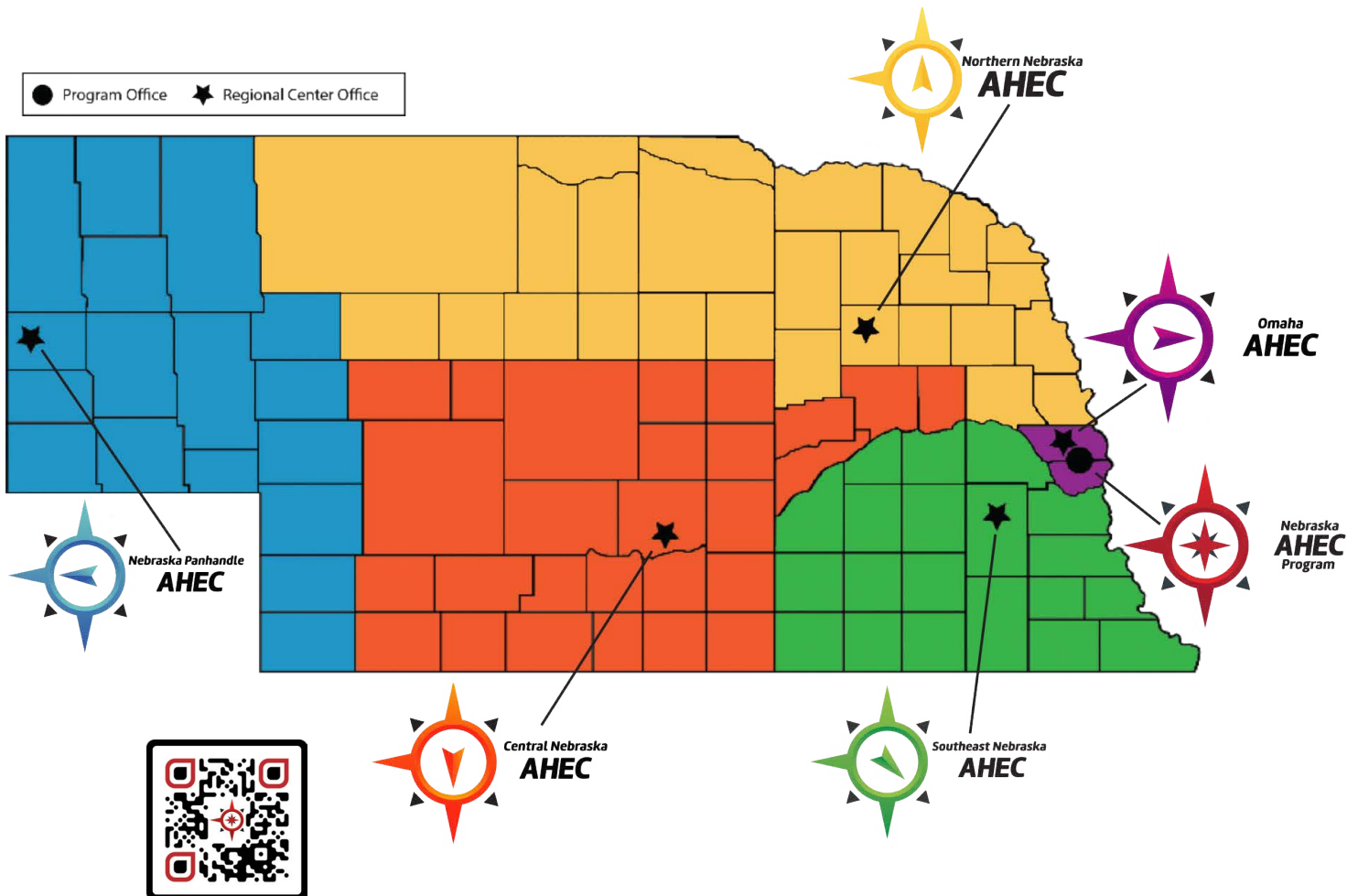
Statistical analysis completed by Jenenne Geske, PhD., Research Director for the UNMC, Department of Family Medicine.

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NEBRASKA AHEC PROGRAM

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Interested in Partnering?
Connect with Us!



983075 Nebraska Medical Center | Omaha, NE 68198
402.559.0838 | Fax: 402.559.6501

Website: <https://www.unmc.edu/familymed/education/ahec/index.html>

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