



2021-2023

Impact Report

RECRUIT · TRAIN · RETAIN





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.



RECRUIT. TRAIN. RETAIN.

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to introduce the Nebraska Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program's Impact Report. The Nebraska AHEC Program is an academic and community-based partnership intended to enhance access to quality health care, particularly primary care, by improving the supply and distribution of healthcare professionals via strategic partnerships with academic programs, communities, and professional organizations.

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) funds the AHEC Program hosted at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC).

Established in 2001, the Nebraska AHEC Program is based at UNMC and implemented through partnerships with five regional AHEC centers – four rural centers located in Kearney (Central Nebraska AHEC), Norfolk, (Northern Nebraska AHEC), Scottsbluff (Nebraska Panhandle AHEC), and Lincoln (Southeast Nebraska AHEC) and one urban center located in Omaha (Omaha AHEC). Regional AHEC centers conduct programs and provide statewide services to deliver high-quality, efficient, effective, and flexible services that meet community needs. Collectively, the five regional AHEC centers provide services to all 93 counties in Nebraska.

I had the opportunity to assume the directorship of the Nebraska AHEC Program at the beginning of 2022. Shortly thereafter UNMC competed for and was successfully awarded continued funding support from HRSA to support the Nebraska AHEC Program for another five years (2022 – 2027). At its core, the Nebraska AHEC Program is a connector working to improve access to health care within the state. The Nebraska AHEC Program creates educational opportunities for high school and undergraduate students, engaging, and supporting health professions students through the Nebraska AHEC Scholars Program as well as through clinical training/community-based training experiences, and providing continuing education opportunities for practicing healthcare providers, especially those serving in rural and underserved areas of Nebraska.

This report highlights the Nebraska AHEC Program's achievements from September 2021 – August 2023. 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

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



PROGRAM BASICS

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



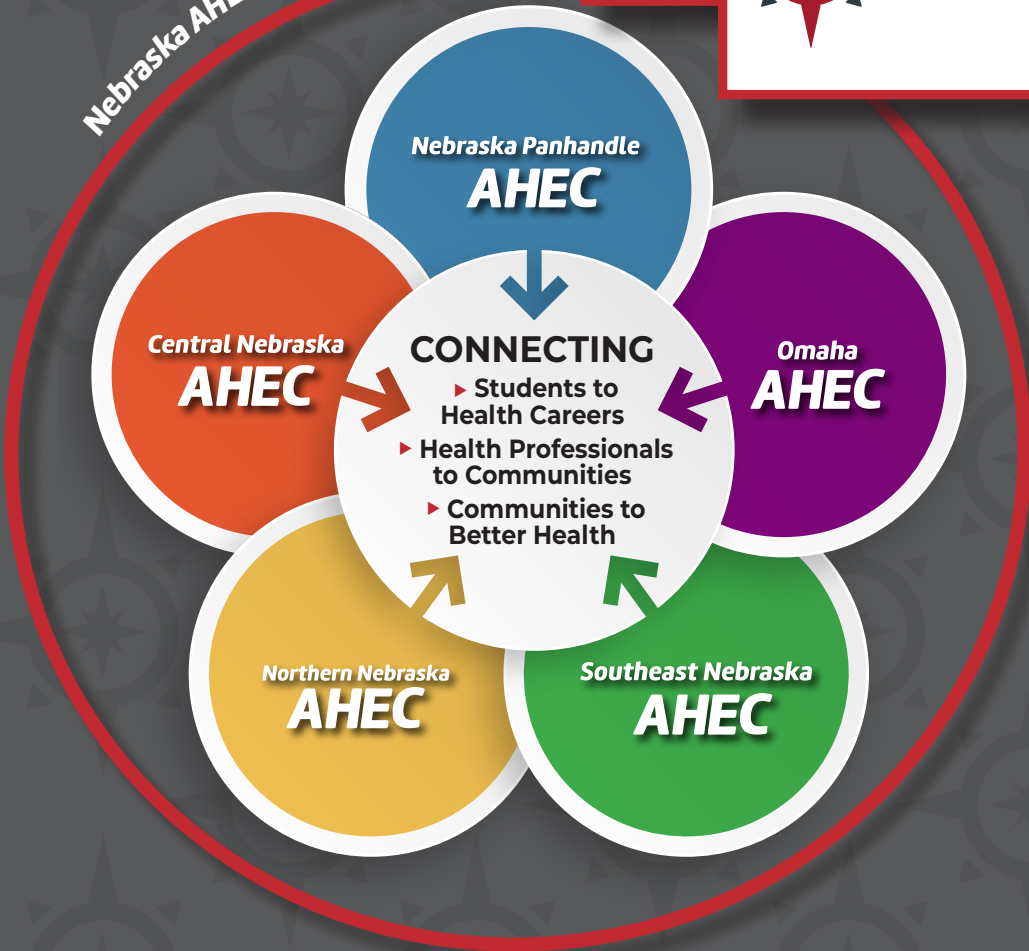
RETAIN

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



CONNECTED STATEWIDE

Nebraska AHEC Program Office



RECRUIT. TRAIN. RETAIN.





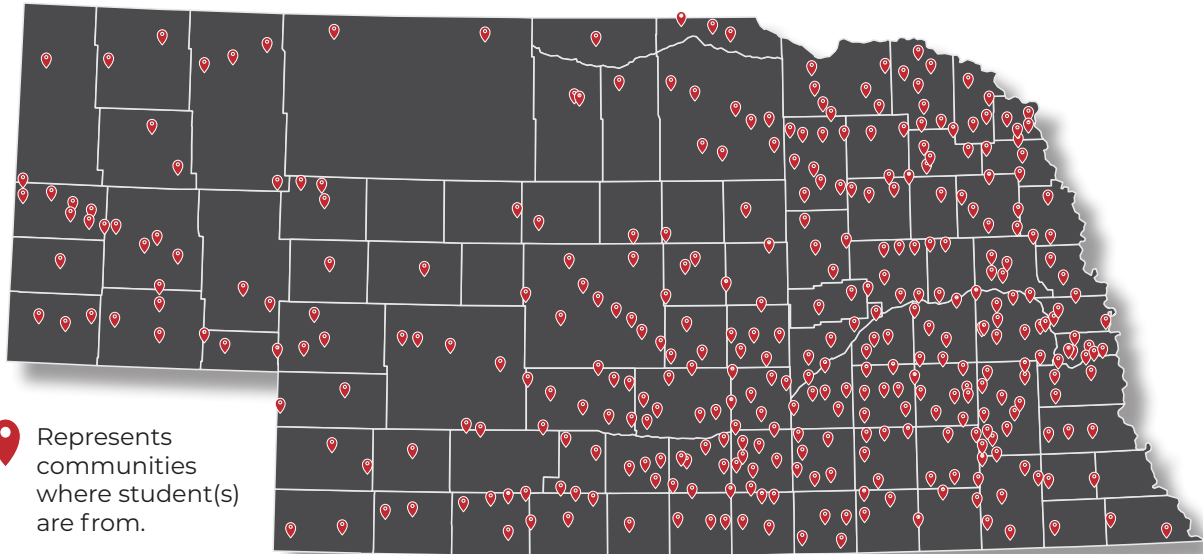
RECRUIT

HEALTH CAREER PIPELINE

Access to information on the variety of healthcare careers is important to growing a future healthcare workforce. The Nebraska AHEC Program enriches opportunities for students in rural and underserved areas.

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.

6,054 Students Exposed To Health Careers Across Nebraska

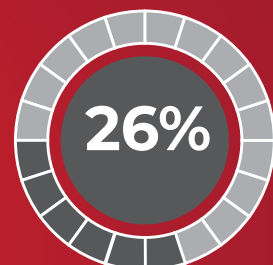


Of Students Who Participated



from disadvantaged educational, economic, or social/cultural environments

whose race or ethnicity is underrepresented in healthcare



RECRUIT. TRAIN. RETAIN.

PARTNERSHIPS

Connecting Education and Healthcare

The Nebraska AHEC Program is a connector between educational systems and the Nebraska healthcare workforce.

Often acting as a bridge, regional AHEC centers enhance current healthcare pipeline programming by engaging healthcare employers and creating experiences for students, enabling them to see themselves as future healthcare professionals.

134

High School Partners



26

College and University Partners



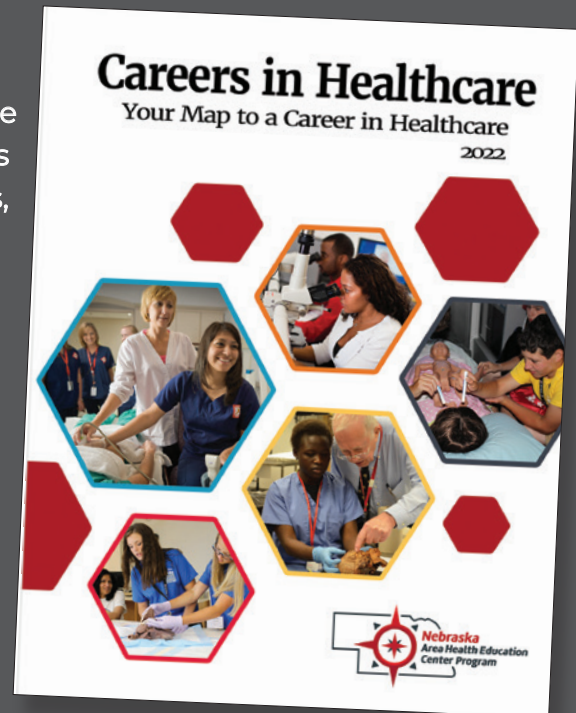
100+

Employer Partners

The Nebraska AHEC Program has published the Careers in Healthcare Book biannually since the early 2000s. These career exploration books outline a wide variety of healthcare professions, including description, aptitudes, required

education, and college and universities where educational programs exist within Nebraska.

A digital copy is also available online on the Nebraska AHEC Program website.



EXPANDING AWARENESS OF HEALTH CAREERS

Scrub Camp in Western Nebraska

In June 2023, students from Cheyenne, Morrill, and Perkins counties, participated in the two-day Scrub Camp at Western Nebraska Community College. This event was hosted by Nebraska Panhandle AHEC, Sidney Regional Medical Center, and the Nebraska



Department of Labor. Students rotated through several hands-on sessions and participated in discussions led by healthcare professionals from Sidney Regional Medical Center, Simulation in Motion-Nebraska (SIM - NE), and Region 21 Emergency Management. Interactive sessions included: radiology, laboratory services, physical therapy, nursing, behavioral health, emergency medical services, nutrition, surgical technology, and SIM Nebraska. Each day, students visited with healthcare professionals to gain valuable individualized career knowledge. After completing the Scrub Camp, students expressed their overwhelming surprise at the multitude of health career options available.

Pre-Health Symposium

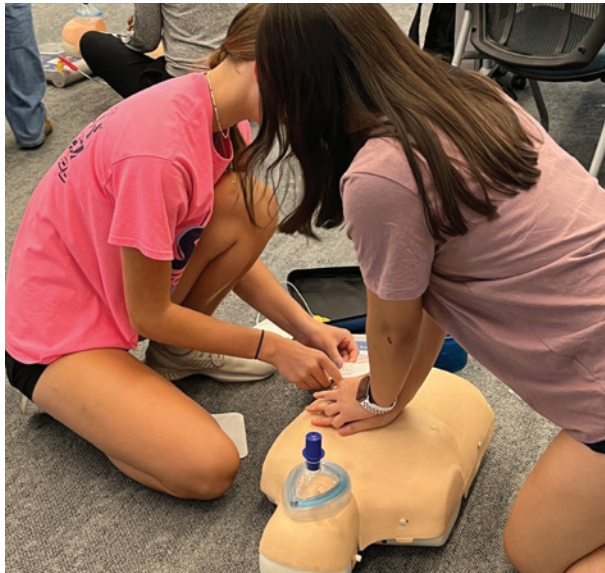
In March 2023, Omaha AHEC partnered with University of Nebraska at Omaha to host the Pre-Health Symposium. Over 700 high school and pre-health college students attended from schools in Cass, Cuming, Douglas, Lancaster, Madison, Sarpy, and Washington counties. While commonly associated with high school students, career exploration is equally important for college students in pre-health tracks. More than half of college students who attended expressed interest in multiple healthcare pathways. Students participated in presentations and panel discussions, such as “Exploring

Healthcare” and “Crafting a Strong Application for Professional School.”

The event offered a college and career fair featuring 11 professional schools, employers in the healthcare field, and a variety of health profession programs such as chiropractic, dentistry, medicine, nursing, osteopathic medicine, pharmacy, physical therapy, public health, and various allied health professions. Students had the opportunity to expand their knowledge of healthcare careers and educational opportunities.



INCREASING INTEREST IN HEALTHCARE

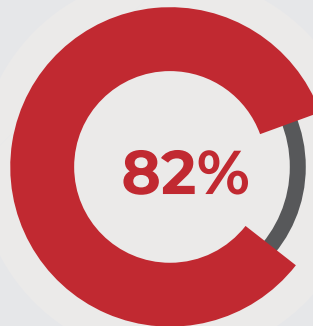


CPR Training for High School Students

Between 2021-2023 Southeast Nebraska AHEC has supported CPR training for 229 high school students in partnership with Waverly Southeast Nebraska Career Academy Partnership (SENCAP), The Career Academy (TCA) of Lincoln Public Schools, and Southeast Community College. The hands-on skills students gain to achieve their CPR certification fosters interest to work in the healthcare field, while building foundational life-saving skills to carry forward, such as patient assessment. CPR certification

also prepares students for the threat of natural disasters or emergencies within their communities, which can save lives. Many healthcare programs require students to be CPR certified prior to enrollment. Completing this requirement while in high school also better prepares students for acceptance into their desired healthcare programs.

Expanding Awareness of Health Careers



of students surveyed increased their awareness of health and public health careers

2023 Pre-Health Symposium



GROWING EXPOSURE AND INTEREST TO PRACTICING IN RURAL AND UNDERSERVED AREAS

Job Shadowing

Job shadowing experiences offer students exposure to skills and daily activities of healthcare workers. To participate in a job shadowing experience, students must pass the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) assessment. This assessment ensures students understand patient privacy and confidentiality. From September 2021 to August 2023, 1,999 HIPAA tests facilitated by regional AHEC centers were completed by students across Nebraska.



470

**STUDENTS COMPLETED
JOB SHADOWING**



4,127

**HOURS OF
JOB SHADOWING**



49

**DIFFERENT HEALTH
PROFESSIONS**

Job Shadowing for High School Students

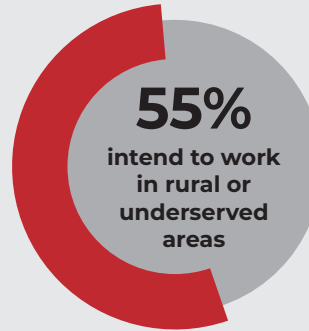
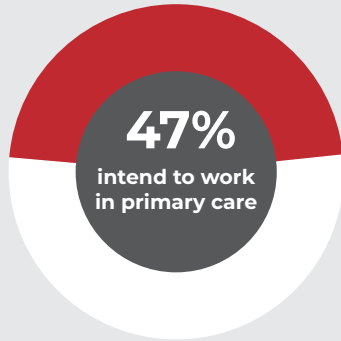
During the 2022-2023 academic year, Northern Nebraska AHEC partnered with Battle Creek High School and various healthcare providers to host unique job shadowing opportunities. Traditional job shadowing experiences connect a student with a specific healthcare professional. However, this job shadowing experience allowed students to gain exposure to multiple healthcare professionals in specific healthcare settings. Students had the opportunity to view healthcare professionals in pre-operation preparation, post-surgery care, and post-surgery therapy both in a hospital and during weekly outpatient appointments. This allowed students to see interprofessional collaboration and how each healthcare provider is essential to patient care.

“This opportunity to see the other aspects of the patient’s care and how everyone works together for the patient was wonderful! Every position was important and key to that patient’s success. I still want to be a surgeon, but any of those other professions would be great to be too!”

- Student Job Shadowing Participant



Of Pre-Health College Students Surveyed



Experiences for Pre-health College Students

Since 2018, Central Nebraska AHEC (CN AHEC) has partnered with Kearney Health Opportunities Program (KHOP), a pathway program in partnership with the University of Nebraska at Kearney and UNMC to educate students from rural Nebraska in needed health professions who want to return to rural Nebraska to practice. CN AHEC enhances programming for first year KHOP students increasing knowledge, skills, and excitement for rural healthcare.

Students received Team Concepts leadership training focused on teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills used in quality patient care. Presentations on public health departments and Federally Qualified Health Centers explained organization roles in the community and how they provide access to care.

Transportation was facilitated to local rural and critical access hospitals at Columbus Community Hospital, McCook Community Hospital, and Valley County Health System. For KHOP students, these experiences built a foundation for rural healthcare in central Nebraska and grew enthusiasm to enter their health profession programs.





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.



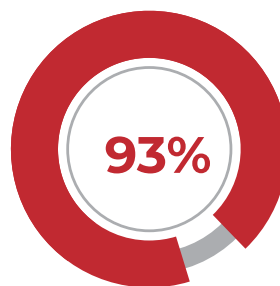
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NEBRASKA AHEC SCHOLARS COMPLETED TO-DATE

82%

AVERAGE RETENTION RATE PER COHORT

Nebraska AHEC Scholars is a two-year program in which students are connected to communities and employment along with understanding Nebraska's health care needs.



EMPLOYMENT RATE*

*Of those where employment was tracked

“

The Nebraska AHEC Scholars program is a program that goes beyond the curriculum and gives students a step above the rest. School, whether it's nursing, medicine, dental, etc., focuses primarily on the science of medicine, but this program concentrates on the people and the patients and better prepares students for the personal side involved in the job.

– Nebraska AHEC Scholar, Medical Student

”



11

RECRUIT. TRAIN. RETAIN.

“

I learned more about the importance of reaching out to other providers, not being afraid to network, and rely on other providers who might know their patient better or might have resources you can utilize.

– **Nebraska AHEC Scholar, Dental Student**

”

The Nebraska AHEC Scholars Program enrolls a multidisciplinary cohort of health professions students from several colleges and universities across Nebraska each year.

This offers our Scholars unique learning and networking opportunities with peers and potential future coworkers. During their two years, AHEC Scholars gain access to exclusive workshops, potential employers, community leaders, and national and state resources on the latest health topics. The program accepted its sixth cohort in September 2023.



NEBRASKA AHEC SCHOLARS



HEALTH PROFESSION PROGRAMS OF NEBRASKA AHEC SCHOLARS

Community Health Worker*
Dental Hygiene
Dentistry*
Diagnostic Medical Sonography
Emergency Medical Technician
Health Information Technician
Medicine*
Pharmacy*
Physical Therapy*
Physical Therapy Assistant
Physician Assistant*
Public Health
Radiological Technician*
Registered Nurse*
Speech Therapy

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

SCHOOLS ATTENDED BY NEBRASKA AHEC SCHOLARS

Bryan College of Health Sciences
Central Community College
Clarkson College
Nebraska Wesleyan University
Northeast Community College
Regional West Medical Center School of Radiologic Technology
Southeast Community College
Union Adventist University
University of Nebraska at Kearney
University of Nebraska Medical Center (All Campuses)
Western Nebraska Community College

Hear more from our Scholars!



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

“

I felt like the Scholars meetings were a little bit more real-life situations than didactic coursework. So, it's similar to being in clinical, and I thought that was very beneficial.

– Nebraska AHEC Scholar, Physical Therapy Student

”



**AHEC SCHOLARS
OBTAINED ADDITIONAL
CERTIFICATIONS**

36

Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS)

40

Mental Health First Aid

9

Basic Certification in Quality and Safety from Institute for Health Improvement

As part of the program, AHEC Scholars are encouraged to pursue additional rotations in rural and underserved areas, outside of their program requirements.

39,358

ROTATION HOURS COMPLETED

142

ROTATION LOCATIONS IN RURAL AND UNDERSERVED AREAS

41%

OF ROTATIONS COMPLETED WERE IN PRIMARY CARE LOCATIONS

“

I have enjoyed my rural clinical experience, that I would not have had without the AHEC Scholars Program. In Beatrice, I was able to observe more patients and expand my knowledge of benefits and obstacles of providing care in a more rural area.

– Nebraska AHEC Scholar, Nursing Student

”



NEBRASKA AHEC SCHOLARS



**Dr. Sydney Armstrong-Grint,
Owner of Radiant Modern Dentistry,
Grand Island, NE**

AHEC SCHOLAR RETURNS TO PRACTICE IN HOMETOWN: DR. SYDNEY ARMSTRONG-GRINT

Dr. Sydney Armstrong-Grint is a fourth-generation graduate from Grand Island Senior High School. She began her focus on rural healthcare while obtaining her bachelor's degree at Wayne State College with 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. Sydney continued her education at UNMC and was accepted into the 2021-2023 Cohort of Nebraska AHEC Scholars Program as a third-year dental student, alongside 72 other health profession students. Sydney expressed her passion to make dental care accessible and encouragement for young professionals to practice in rural communities.

As a Nebraska AHEC Scholar, Sydney attended various workshops and presentations to obtain additional tools and skills for serving patients in rural and underserved areas.

Sydney believes one of the benefits of this program has been becoming a well-rounded dental professional to provide quality healthcare. After attending an AHEC Scholars presentation by the DOVES Program, Sydney began to recognize the potential signs of domestic violence in one of her patients during a clinical experience



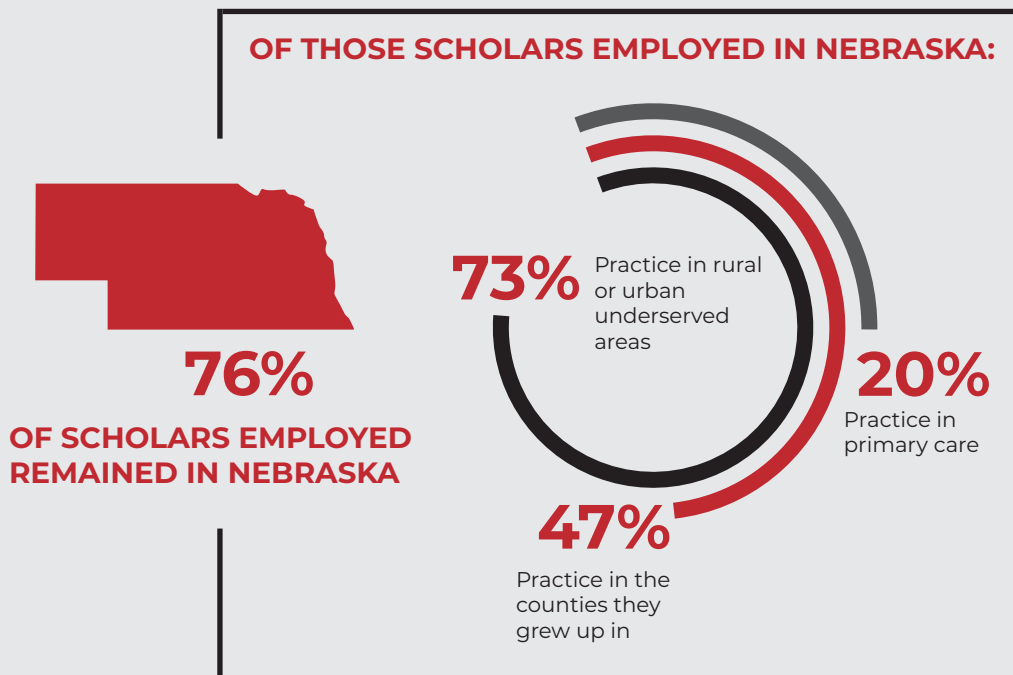
in dental school. She expressed her concern to an observing faculty member, who took action to speak with the patient and collaborated with others to provide community resources. Sydney said the knowledge she gained from the Scholars program helped her to “know the signs that I would not have ordinarily picked up on, [which] ended up being a big deal in that person’s life.”

After graduating in 2023, Sydney returned to Grand Island and opened Radiant Modern Dentistry, a private practice dental clinic. Her mission is to ensure dentistry innovation and technology are accessible to rural Nebraskans. Sydney values her practice and the instant gratification of treating a patient’s toothache in the morning and seeing them at the grocery store in the evening. She believes in treating patients as more than just a number. Through the Nebraska AHEC Scholars Program, Sydney grew her confidence and understanding of other

health professions, remaining in contact with a fellow AHEC Scholar in nursing, to provide mutual patients with the best care possible.

Sydney has greatly impacted her community and was awarded Top 35 Under 35 by the Grand Island Chamber of Commerce in 2024.

Sydney wants dental employers to know, “if their employee is an AHEC Scholar, they are going above and beyond to understand their community. [They bring] passion to providing quality care and investing in our community, because after all, healthcare is about community betterment.”



CLINICAL TRAINING FEATURE: DEVIN WATTS

Northern Nebraska AHEC (NNAHEC) is a connector between academic institutions and clinical training rotation sites, supporting the discovery of employers and work environments best fitting for future practitioners in the region.



Devin Watts is from Hadar and has worked in the nursing field since 2005. After working in various positions, he became a registered nurse in 2016 and worked in the inpatient behavioral health department at Faith Regional Health Services in Norfolk. Devin was drawn to the mental health field after personal experience with family with addiction and mental health challenges.

Devin decided to pursue his master's degree at Mount Marty University in South Dakota as a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP). While in his program, Devin was required to complete clinical training rotations with licensed professionals. Devin found it challenging to find providers in his local area.

NNAHEC supported Devin to complete a clinical rotation at Faith Regional Health Services. Upon graduation, Devin began searching for employment opportunities, knowing he was not interested in private practice. He found a position an hour away, however with a family to consider, he did not want to move his children from their school and friends. Thankfully, Devin found a position close to home and was hired at Midtown Health Center in Norfolk, where he often collaborates with providers at their Madison and West Point clinics. Kathy Nordby, CEO of Midtown Health Center, supports the work that NNAHEC does to connect rural healthcare students with local providers.

“ Devin is a great example of rural Nebraska benefiting from the efforts of keeping professionals in or near their home community while attaining advanced degrees to meet the needs of these same communities. ”

– Kathy Nordby, CEO of Midtown Health Center, Norfolk, NE

Devin feels working in rural Nebraska is a necessity, as many rural areas do not have psychiatric doctors or psychiatric nurse practitioners, often resulting in a patient driving one and a half or two hours to seek care. “[Patients] come in very depressed or anxious and after doing what I do, seeing them get better is probably my favorite thing about my job. And not only that, being able to build rapport with patients in a small town like this is what I like.”



RETAIN

CONTINUING EDUCATION

The Nebraska AHEC Program supports continuing education opportunities for healthcare providers in rural and underserved areas to retain licensure and gain additional knowledge on topics important for the healthcare of Nebraskans. Travel time to access continuing education trainings can be a challenge for healthcare providers. In addition to providing in-person opportunities in Lincoln and Omaha, trainings were also offered in rural areas of Hebron, Scottsbluff, Wayne, and York.

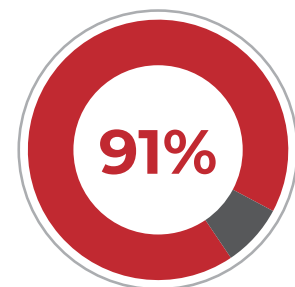
CONTINUING EDUCATION TOPICS OFFERED:

- Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Behavioral Health Supervision Training
- CPR Certification
- Cultural Competency
- Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence
- EMS Mini Conference
- Healthcare Provider Self-Care and Resiliency
- Mental Health First Aid
- Motivational Interviewing
- OR-OB Nurse Training
- Paramedic Training
- Primary Care Provider Training
- Rheumatology Provider Training
- Suicide Prevention
- Trauma Informed Care

62%

of continuing education training was offered in various virtual formats including live, self-paced or hybrid opportunities.

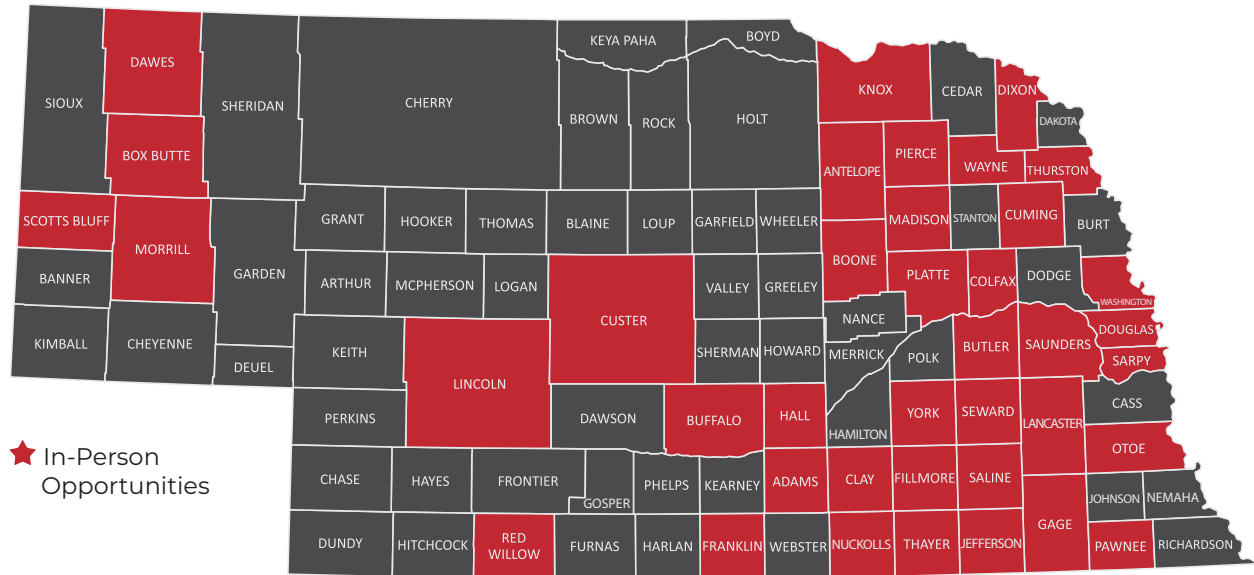
To support the needs of providers, the Nebraska AHEC Program partnered with five healthcare organizations (New West Physical Therapy, OneWorld Community Health Center, Panhandle Public Health Department, Providence Medical Center, and Regional West Medical Center) to provide seven continuing education trainings for staff, with topics focused on the needs of each healthcare facility. The Nebraska AHEC Program collaborated with these healthcare partners to determine the best learning format for providers and support continuing education access systematically.



Of health professionals surveyed gained additional insight and awareness from the training



HEALTH PROFESSIONALS FROM 39 COUNTIES ACROSS NEBRASKA



CONTINUING EDUCATION DEMOGRAPHICS

21 CONTINUING EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

1,290 TOTAL HOURS

287 HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

33 DIFFERENT HEALTH PROFESSIONS



OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS SURVEYED ABOUT CONTINUING EDUCATION



97% are able to implement the knowledge learned into current practice

96% of those, intend to implement one or more elements into their current practice

28% attended training for the topic value, not attending to meet CEU credits



Often, living in rural communities requires a commute to work. For mini-conference attendees who commute to work, this amounts to an averaged 67-mile one-way, daily commute. Therefore, it was important to host this continuing education opportunity in a rural location.

EMS MINI CONFERENCE

In southeast Nebraska, communities and local emergency medical services (EMS) professionals were in great need of continuing education training for EMTs and paramedics. Opportunities to attend in-person conferences in this part of the state do not occur often. Southeast Nebraska AHEC partnered with Southeast Community

College, in collaboration with local hospitals and community donors, to sponsor the EMS Mini-Conference: Rural EMS Changing the Culture, in August 2023 in Hebron. Seventy-nine EMS providers from 18 counties across central and southern Nebraska attended. Choosing to host this conference in Hebron allowed providers to receive updated EMS practices alongside coworkers and units they serve with.

Conference attendees had the opportunity to discuss the unique opportunities and nuanced challenges of working in rural healthcare during a rural EMS/fire panel discussion. Of attendees who completed an evaluation, 85% stated they gained additional awareness of topics discussed, and 97% stated they plan to implement changes into their current practice from the information shared.





RETAIN

LONGITUDINAL PARTICIPANT TRACKING

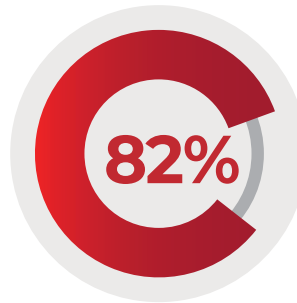
LOADING...

DATA COLLECTION IN PROGRESS

Formalized long-term participant tracking process began in 2021 and has experienced challenges and several redesigns since its start.

(Methods used for tracking include, but not limited to, licensure lookup, national student clearinghouse).

590 A random sample of individuals tracked THUS FAR with **5+ AHEC interactions** (Participated with AHEC between 2014 - current)

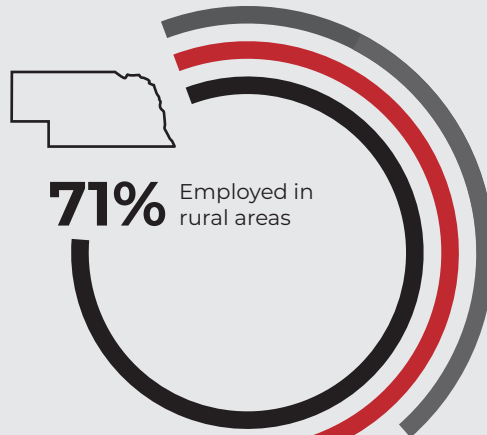


BECAME A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

Graduated from health profession programs and/or became a licensed health professional

OF THOSE WHERE EMPLOYMENT LOCATION WAS IDENTIFIED:

77% Employed in Nebraska

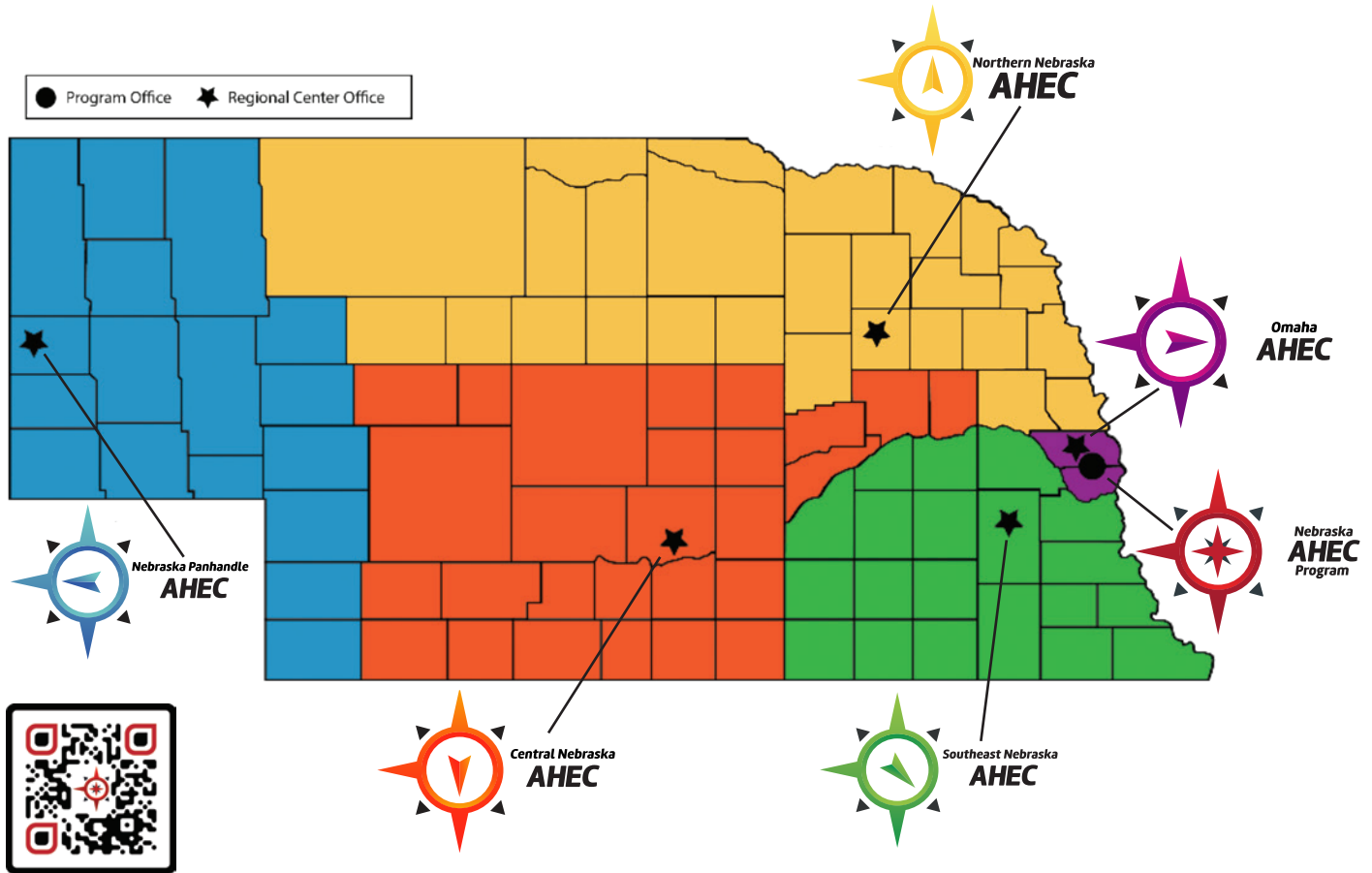


51% Employed in medically underserved area
40% Employed in primary care



NEBRASKA AHEC PROGRAM

Through targeted engagement and activities in recruiting, training, and retaining, Nebraska AHEC Program continues to improve the diversity and quality of the healthcare workforce. Our work is ongoing and remains important to ensure we can address the healthcare workforce needs in rural and underserved areas of Nebraska.



**Interested in Partnering?
Connect with Us!**

PREPARED BY:



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