

Colorado AHEC Facts and Figures, 8/31/2024

INTRODUCTION: The Area Health Education Center (AHEC) program was developed by Congress in 1971 to recruit, train, and retain a health professions' workforce committed to rural and underserved populations in the US. The Colorado AHEC system was established in 1977 by Dean Richard Krugman. All AHECs are funded by HRSA AHEC Model grants which are renewed in 5-year grant cycles to attend to the overall mission of AHECs in the US. COAHEC receives additional matched funds as required by HRSA from the CU SOM Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs. The AHEC system in Colorado is organized into six separate regional centers overseen by the COAHEC Program office on the Anschutz Medical Campus (AMC). Our six regions are: Centennial, Front Range, San Luis Valley, Southeastern Colorado, Southwestern Colorado, and Western Colorado. The six regional AHEC offices work under the grant directives in collaboration with the COAHEC Program Office, which provides governance and guidance in meeting all the grant and program deliverables.

MISSION and GOALS: Our goals are defined by HRSA's Triple Aim for AHECs in the US: promoting and enhancing the **diversity** of the healthcare workforce, facilitating the equitable **distribution** of this diverse workforce, and facilitating **practice transformation** among providers and communities to enhance health equity. This then defines our mission: "We work towards ensuring health equity in Colorado. We increase the diversity and distribution of the healthcare workforce to address healthcare disparities in this state. We support practice transformation throughout Colorado to ensure high-quality healthcare delivery for everyone. We serve as the link between Coloradans, state resources, and the resources of Anschutz Medical Campus to help healthy people thrive in healthy communities."

LEADERSHIP: The COAHEC Director is Dr. Josina Romero O'Connell, MD. Her position is housed in the Department of Family Medicine where she is an Assistant Professor. She is also supervised by the Vice-Chancellor of Health Affairs. She is a 2009 graduate of the CU SOM, and now a COMPASS Guide at the CU School of Medicine.

ACTIVE INITIATIVES: COAHEC manages a range of initiatives aligned with HRSA's "Triple Aim" goals. Key pipeline programs aim to enhance opportunities for secondary, college, and health professions students from underrepresented, educationally disadvantaged, and rural backgrounds to pursue careers in the health professions. Two primary high school pipeline programs, H.O.P.E. (Health Occupations Promoting Equity Program) and CADAVERS (COAHEC Anatomy and Discourse on Arts, Values, Ethics, and Respect in Science), saw record participation in 2023-24. The H.O.P.E. program brings URM students from all over Colorado to attend didactics and discourse on select Monday evenings throughout the academic year. This leads these students to participate in the H.O.P.E. Institute, a week-long, free health career exploration camp at UCCS and AMC designed to expose participants to healthcare careers within a university setting. The CADAVERS program offers high school students a unique experience in exploring anatomy, medicine, arts, and ethics through both classroom and hands-on laboratory activities.

The AHEC Scholars Program provides educational opportunities for undergraduate, graduate, and certificate-seeking students across HRSA's eight core focus areas: virtual learning, telehealth, connecting communities and supporting health professionals, interprofessional education, behavioral health integration, social determinants of health, cultural competency, practice transformation, and current and

emerging health issues. The program aims to prepare students for healthcare careers by ensuring a well-rounded education with a focus on underserved populations.

In 2023-24, COAHEC hosted several significant events, including Advisors Day, the Mini Med program, the 2024 NEAR Conference, and several community health screens in remote Colorado. COAHEC continues its long-standing partnership with the National Western Stock Show, providing health screens as part of this large annual event.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: COAHEC does profoundly important work and we have so many top accomplishments. These three only scratch the surface.

- Educated 125 AHEC Scholars, with 93 graduates all receiving specialized instruction in HRSA's 8 core topics. Participants include health professions students from Nursing including CNA's, BSN-RN, and NP students, PHARMD, EMT, PT, PA, and both BPH and MPH programs.
- Provided healthcare career exposure to 125 students across Colorado in the HOPE Program, including 56 students who attended a week-long, free health career camp the HOPE Institute, at AMC and UCCS and engaged 308 students in the CADAVERS Program, with 226 participants from underrepresented minority (URM) communities and schools.
- In 2024, schools submitted 695 away rotations, facilitating 19,556 nights of housing, surpassing the goal of 18,000 nights. Of 340 survey responses, 83% agreed that the housing program enhanced their clinical experience, and 63% expressed a strong likelihood to request another clinical rotation in a rural, frontier, or medically underserved area (MUA).

COLLABORATION: COAHEC is a master partner maker, collaborator, and networker. Our list of partnerships throughout the state of Colorado in our work addressing health inequity would be pages long. To highlight, just a few, we are members and partners in the National AHEC Organization. We partner with AMC schools in providing safe housing for clerkships over 40 miles from CU SOM students home campuses. We partner with AMC and UCCS Faculty and departments, including the State Anatomical Board, in our pathway initiatives. Our PI serves on the Gov Jared Polis HCPF Council, the AHA's Lifesaver Committee, and the ARPA-H Advisory Board. We have decades long enduring partnerships too numerous to mention but include health systems all over Colorado. Other more recent partners include the CU Cancer Center, ARPA-H, Multidisciplinary Center on Aging at the AMC, The AHA, Adams State, UCCS, Clifton Library, the Center for Bioethics and Humanities, CDPHE, the Colorado School of Public Health, the Patient Navigator Training Center, ECHO Colorado, ODEI, and many others.