

**Contacts:**

Nancy Sugden, [nasugden@wisc.edu](mailto:nasugden@wisc.edu) / (608) 263-4927  
Director, Wisconsin AHEC statewide program

Keri Robbins, [keri.robbins@wisc.edu](mailto:keri.robbins@wisc.edu) / (608) 265-2442  
Assistant Director, Wisconsin AHEC statewide program

Jordan Gaal, [jgaal@wisc.edu](mailto:jgaal@wisc.edu) / (608) 263-1712  
Communications Intern, Wisconsin AHEC program

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## Wisconsin AHEC wins program of excellence award at national AHEC conference

MADISON - The Wisconsin Area Health Education Center (AHEC) program earned national recognition as the 2016 recipient of the Eugene S. Mayer Program of Excellence Award from National AHEC Organization (NAO).

The Program of Excellence award is given biennially to an AHEC program that exemplifies community and university partnerships, program comprehensiveness, responsiveness to community needs, and has had a significant impact on improving access to health care for citizens in its state. This recognition is the culmination of many smaller awards the Wisconsin AHEC system has received over the years for regional programs and statewide events.

The award was presented on Tuesday, June 28th, 2016 at the NAO biennial conference in Washington DC. Nancy Sugden, Assistant Dean at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health and Program Director for Wisconsin AHEC, accepted the award on behalf of the directors and staff of Wisconsin AHEC's seven regional Centers (Manitowoc, Milwaukee, Beloit, Cashton, Wausau, Superior, and Marinette), their regional governing boards and the statewide AHEC board.

"It is especially gratifying to receive this award as we celebrate Wisconsin AHEC's 25th year," said Nancy Sugden. "We have enjoyed the steadfast support of the UW School of Medicine and Public Health through those 25 years, and many, many individuals, academic programs and partner organizations have contributed to the development of our AHEC System and its signature programs. What I find most remarkable about Wisconsin AHEC, however, is the degree of collaboration among our seven regional AHEC centers for program development and implementation. Shared programming and a cooperative spirit have enabled us to make the most of limited resources and build the program."

### **Health care workforce recruitment, training and retention**

Wisconsin AHEC maintains a full program of activities addressing the recruitment, training and retention of a diverse health care workforce. It assists in supporting the community-based clinical education of over 1,200 health professions students each year, representing over 2,200 student-weeks of health professions education at over 233 community-based practice sites, most in rural or urban underserved areas. All Wisconsin AHEC centers provide health careers promotion programs for K-12 schools in their service areas, reaching nearly 8,500 students from rural and underserved communities. Intensive health careers preparation programs serve over 6,800 middle and high school students each year, with 59% from minority or disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition to linking community providers to the academic medical centers through community precepting activities, Wisconsin AHEC's regional centers and the statewide program office provide professional education and support, including the Informed Caring website with online resources on evidence-based practice. Webinars and local professional development workshops serve approximately 2,300 providers each year. Wisconsin's AHEC program also assists in developing a broad range of community health outreach programs, with over 12,800 participants each year. Wisconsin AHEC also produces original workforce analysis and maps, including the Wisconsin Physician

Workforce Report (2012), which provided for the first time a comprehensive look at the physician workforce in the state, and the Health Service Areas of Wisconsin (2015) mapping project.

### **Community-based interprofessional education**

The statewide programs developed by the Wisconsin AHEC program bridge the gaps between the silos of individual academic degree programs, and bring people together for interprofessional education opportunities and community-based field experiences that otherwise would not be possible. Wisconsin AHEC creates and hosts interprofessional training events, including the weeklong cultural immersion experience “Wisconsin Express” (launched in 1993) and the annual “Interprofessional Healthcare Case Competition” (launched in 2013). Not only do these programs involve an impressive array of university connections, with faculty in roles as instructors, judges, and recruiters; these programs also demonstrate the depth and value of AHEC connections with the countless community partners and hosts who welcome our participants to their local sites for life-changing experiences in population health and public health, as health professions students discover or explore disparities among Wisconsin residents.

### **Ability to identify and address community needs**

Wisconsin AHEC partners with an extensive array of public health departments and community organizations to identify and address community needs. Long range planning efforts include workforce analysis and critical discussion about the future of Wisconsin. Short term program delivery examples include hundreds of 8-week community and public health service projects arranged by AHEC and conducted by undergraduates (through AHEC CHIP – the Community Health Internship Program, launched in 2000) and by medical students (during their third-year primary care clerkship). Projects are proposed by host sites and address local priorities; topics vary widely across a spectrum including nutrition education, oral health, maternal and child health, substance use prevention, beach and well testing, mental health, memory care, health literacy, chronic conditions, and many more. Mutually beneficial outcomes include learning opportunities for students and improved health in local communities.

### **Improved access to health care for Wisconsin residents**

For more than two decades, Wisconsin AHEC has provided foundational infrastructure support to improve access to health care for Wisconsin residents. AHEC has been instrumental in establishing Community Health Centers, including the recent creation of Wisconsin’s newest FQHC located in Sheboygan. Regional AHEC centers aggressively pursue and obtain grants for specific outreach activities related to disease prevention or health education topics (arthritis, tobacco, health insurance, etc.), targeting local constituents. Wisconsin AHEC has played a key role in pipeline programs WARM (Wisconsin Academy for Rural Medicine) and TRIUMPH (Training in Urban Medicine and Public Health) which successfully produce primary care physicians trained to work in underserved areas. Increasing the supply of providers is critically necessary to improving access.

The Wisconsin AHEC staff and board members are delighted to accept the 2016 Eugene S. Mayer Program of Excellence Award from the National AHEC organization. Photos of staff accepting the award are on our website.

For more information about Wisconsin AHEC programs for students and professionals visit [www.ahec.wisc.edu](http://www.ahec.wisc.edu).

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