

## AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER SYSTEM (AHEC)

*Connecting students to careers, professionals to communities, and communities to better health.*

A key partner for building Wisconsin's healthcare workforce, the Wisconsin AHEC System *works to encourage young people in underserved areas and populations to prepare for careers in healthcare while attracting young physicians, physician assistants and advanced practice nurses to practice in these areas.* AHEC accomplishes this mission through the development of regional organizations, separate from academic health centers and with their own governing boards, to develop and oversee programs focused on the unique needs of each region of the state.

***The AHEC System is an essential component of Wisconsin's efforts to maintain its competitive advantage in providing high quality, high value health care at reasonable cost, and to assure that those benefits are available to all its citizens.*** The program currently supports seven regional organizations. With offices located in Manitowoc, Wausau, Milwaukee, Madison, Cashton, Superior and Marinette, these organizations form a statewide network of community and academic partners providing:

- enrichment programs for high school students interested in health careers,
- community-based training opportunities for health professions students,
- professional development programs for providers, and
- health promotion programming for consumers.

In 2011-12 Wisconsin AHEC programs served over 448 medical students and residents, 997 nursing and other health professions students, 126 pre-professional students, 2345 K-12 students and 2617 practicing health professionals, in addition to providing health education outreach programming for 7350 community participants. Since 2000, the program has provided health careers camp, health careers mentoring and Youth Health Service Corps experiences for 1571 Wisconsin high school students from 45 counties; and community health internships for 613 college students in 53 city and county health departments, 2 tribal health centers and 17 community health centers, free clinics and other healthcare agencies and organizations.

AHEC is designed to *decentralize* health professions training while linking communities with the state's academic health centers to promote cooperative solutions to local health problems. With adequate funding, the AHEC program is poised to support academic programs as they expand enrollment to meet anticipated need, and to assist communities in adjusting to changes in health care delivery systems.

### Funding

Until the 2011-12 fiscal year, state funding for the program was by direct appropriation from the state legislature. In 2010-11, the program was funded at the same level (\$1.14 million) as it was in 1999. In the 2011-13 budget, the AHEC budget line was eliminated. The program's core operations have been sustained at a reduced level for the last two years by funds passing through the UW-Madison block grant, supplemented by federal funds. The federal "model" AHEC funds are tied to specific program deliverables and are contingent on state core funding sufficient to maintain the Centers. In 2012-13, federal funds available to the seven centers totaled about \$480,000. The amount available for 2013-14 will not be known until the current federal budget and appropriations process is concluded. Statewide programs (such as the Community Health Intern Program) have been maintained only through the availability of carryover funds from other contracts and grants to the AHEC program office that will be exhausted at the end of this program year.

**Wisconsin AHEC needs a new line item appropriation of \$1.6 million within the UW System budget.**

This amount will provide a core program staff and operations budget of \$200,000 for each of the seven centers, and an additional \$200,000 to expand services to counties where AHEC has had limited health

careers program activity in recent years (Racine, Kenosha, Walworth and Rock counties in southeast Wisconsin, and several central Wisconsin counties).

This new funding, in combination with funds that continue to be provided through UW-Madison, will enable the AHEC program to

- Develop the pipeline of qualified applicants from rural and underserved communities to the UWSMPH WARM and TRIUMPH programs, the new MCW campuses, as well as physician assistant, advanced practice nurse and other health professions programs. Individuals from rural and underserved communities are most likely to return to these communities for practice.
- Provide support for additional community-based primary care clinical sites to accommodate the increasing number of students enrolled in physician, physician assistant and advanced practice nursing programs.
- Connect health professions programs to the network of community resources essential for integrating community and public health into the health professions curriculum, and providing opportunities for interprofessional team-based education and practice and service learning projects.
- Maintain and expand the Wisconsin Express program, providing community health and cultural immersion experiences for Wisconsin's college students interested in health careers in underserved communities.
- Provide for continuation of the AHEC Community Health Intern Program, serving up to 100 students each summer and providing an important recruitment tool for public health agencies and programs.
- Continue collaborations with local workforce investment boards and other community workforce agencies to recruit and prepare youth and adults (including displaced workers) for health professions training programs at all levels, and placement into a health care field.
- Develop AHEC's capacity to provide comprehensive health workforce data and analysis to assist in academic planning and state health workforce policy development (building on the work done in 2011-12 with relicensure surveys of physicians and physician assistants).
- Maintain the core regional activities and infrastructure that qualify the Wisconsin AHEC program for supplemental federal funding and other grants and contracts.

The following revised language regarding the AHEC program in 36.25 (37) of the state statutes will provide a better description of the program and its value to Wisconsin:

*36.25 (37) AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER PROGRAM. The board shall maintain a statewide area health education center program, consisting of a central office at the UWSMPH and a network of regional centers, that is aligned with the mission of the federal Area Health Education Centers Program. The program shall provide regional support for community-based primary care training programs as well as outreach in the areas of health careers promotion, continuing education for health professionals, and community health education, as determined by community needs.*

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