

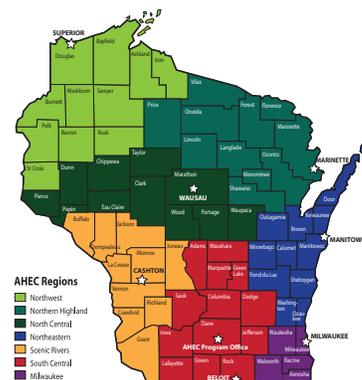
Nomination for NAO 2016 Eugene S. Mayer Program of Excellence Award

Wisconsin AHEC

In celebration of the 25th anniversary of the **Wisconsin Area Health Education Center System**, we are delighted to submit this nomination for your consideration for the NAO 2016 Eugene S. Mayer Program of Excellence Award.

Overview of the Wisconsin AHEC statewide program

Development of the Wisconsin AHEC program started with a small state grant in 1990. The program received federal core AHEC funding from 1991-99 and model AHEC program funding since 1999. Program Director Nancy A. Sugden has served in that role 1999–present (2016). Wisconsin AHEC currently employs 27.7 full-time-equivalent staff positions statewide. The program office is located in Madison at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.



Wisconsin AHEC has seven regional centers: **Northeastern AHEC** (est. 10/1994), **Milwaukee AHEC** (est. 10/1992), **South Central AHEC** (est. 7/1994), **Scenic Rivers AHEC** (est. 12/2007), **North Central AHEC** (est. 9/1992), **Northwest AHEC** (est. 12/2006), and **Northern Highland AHEC** (est. 12/2007).

Reconfiguration of the Wisconsin AHEC system ten years ago in 2006-07, creating three new centers, has enabled the program to develop new partnerships in underserved areas of the state and provide more locally based health careers programming. That change enabled each regional center to become the year-round presence in secondary schools, technical colleges, and undergraduate programs that is needed to really make a difference in developing the pipeline of students from rural and underserved areas into the health professions.

A remarkable strength of the Wisconsin AHEC program is the way these seven regional AHEC centers come together to collaborate on program development and implementation. Shared programming spans multiple centers and in some cases involves the entire statewide system of all 7 AHEC regional centers. For example, the Health Careers Curriculum is a product of multiple AHEC centers that is shared and implemented consistently in multiple regions, rendering regional boundary lines virtually invisible to the students who experience a Wisconsin AHEC presentation in their classroom. These efficiencies are accompanied by the satisfaction and joy of being part of a strong team that creates higher quality materials and achieves better outcomes by working together rather than separately. The quarterly meetings of the Wisconsin AHEC statewide advisory board are another active forum for exchanging ideas, inspiring collaboration, and transferring knowledge across the AHEC regions.

Wisconsin AHEC exemplifies the best qualities of an AHEC program as outlined in the award criteria:

- **Program comprehensiveness.**

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 71% 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 and university partnerships.**

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 the early 1990s) 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.

- **Responsiveness to 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 CHIP – the Community Health Internship Program) 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.

- **Significant impact on improving access to health care for the citizens in its state.**

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.

- **Limited to NAO members.**

Wisconsin AHEC is a member in good standing (NAO member #280, Group #262). For many years, Wisconsin AHEC center directors have provided leadership within NAO, presented sessions at the biennial conference, and participated in NAO campaigns and advocacy efforts. NAO roles include Marty Schaller's service as NAO President/Past President and Communications Committee co-chair; Joel Davidson and Brenda Gray on the Editorial Board; Suzanne Matthew and Laura Pettersen on the Awards Committee. Most importantly, throughout her 17-year tenure as Program Director of Wisconsin AHEC, Nancy Sugden has provided significant leadership and insightful counsel within the NAO Program Directors Constituency Group, including serving as PDCG Chair from 2005-07, and member of the NAO Board 2001-06.

Thank you for consideration of Wisconsin AHEC as a candidate for this prestigious award. We would truly be honored for this program to receive special recognition from peers and colleagues in NAO.