



ALASKA AHEC PROGRAM 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



UAA Alaska Center for
Rural Health and Health Workforce
UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE



GLORIA BURNETT

LETTER FROM OUR **DIRECTOR**

In 2025, Alaska AHEC marked a momentous 20th anniversary, a milestone celebrated with a special legislative citation from the Alaska State Legislature. This recognition honors two decades of dedication to strengthening Alaska's health workforce and improving access to care in our rural and underserved communities. As we reflect on this journey, our work remains grounded in a shared commitment to building a locally rooted healthcare workforce that reflects the diverse needs of our state.

This year, we remained focused on our core mission: creating and supporting pathways into health careers. From the Ninilchik career fair, where over 100 students explored medical concepts through hands-on workshops, to our regional programs in Nome that provide dual-credit health classes to village youth, we continue to engage Alaskans early and often. Our AHEC Scholars program also reached new heights, with alumni like Darrel Foister Jr. transitioning from UAA Nursing to practicing as a family nurse practitioner in rural Alaska—a perfect example of the “grow-our-own” success we strive for.

Innovation in provider support took center stage this year with the pilot of our Academic Detailing project. This initiative, funded by the Alaska Department of Health, equips healthcare professionals with one-on-one, evidence-based training for Medication-Assisted Treatment (MOUD). We were also awarded a HRSA funded Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) grant to strengthen and expand these efforts. By reducing stigma and providing high-level education on substance use disorders, we are positioning AHEC as a key partner to support the state's response to the opioid crisis.

As we look ahead, we recognize that the healthcare landscape continues to evolve. Challenges like workforce shortages and geographic barriers persist, but milestones such as our newly approved Joint Accreditation for Interprofessional Continuing Education ensure we are prepared to meet them. New opportunities are also on the horizon as Alaska embarks on our journey to implement the federally funded Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP). Alaska AHEC remains committed to adapting thoughtfully while staying focused on our purpose: engaging Alaskans in healthcare pathways, providing meaningful training experiences, and supporting a resilient workforce statewide.

We are deeply grateful to our partners, tribal health organizations, and regional center staff whose dedication makes this work possible. Together, we are strengthening Alaska's health workforce today while building a foundation for the next twenty years.

Sincerely,

Gloria Burnett, MS

Director, Alaska Center for Rural Health & Health Workforce
Director, Alaska AHEC Program
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MISSION AND ORGANIZATION

Together, we build
Alaska's Health Workforce.



Students participate in interactive healthcare demonstrations, gaining early exposure to medical tools and potential career paths in Alaska's rural health workforce.

The Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) program, created by Congress in 1971, is dedicated to recruiting, training, and retaining a health professions workforce committed to serving underserved populations. The mission of AHEC is to enhance access to high-quality healthcare, particularly in primary and preventive care, by improving the supply and distribution of healthcare professionals through strategic partnerships with academic institutions, communities, and professional organizations.



Alaska AHEC
Area Health Education Centers

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), under the direction of the Bureau of Health Workforce (BHW), provides funding to support AHEC programs across the country.

The Alaska AHEC Program supports the BHW with three main goals:

ENGAGE:

Engaging youth and adults by providing educational hands-on activities, camps, and events exploring and preparing for health care careers and opportunities in Alaska.

TRAIN:

Training health profession students for practice in rural and underserved communities by targeting all disciplines from certificate to doctoral programs and working with health facilities and providers across the state to provide community based experiential learning opportunities.

RETAIN:

Retaining a high quality health care workforce in Alaska by providing access to continuing education, resiliency, and loan repayment opportunities. The ultimate goal is to stabilize the health workforce to better meet the health care needs of Alaska.



Alaska AHEC History

The Alaska Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program was established in 2005 when the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) received its first funding as an independent program, and no longer served as an AHEC Center of the WWAMI AHEC Program. Notably, it became the first AHEC program in the nation to be housed within a School of Nursing rather than a School of Medicine, a testament to Alaska's unique healthcare landscape and its emphasis on community-based training.

Since its inception, the Alaska AHEC has expanded its reach through a network of regional centers, each strategically positioned to address the healthcare workforce needs of Alaska's diverse and often remote communities. These centers play a critical role in strengthening the state's healthcare system by implementing programs that recruit, train, and retain health professionals.

One of Alaska AHEC's core missions is to inspire and support students interested in health careers. Through hands-on learning experiences, career exposure programs, and academic support, AHEC helps guide students toward pathways in healthcare. Additionally, AHEC facilitates clinical rotations and immersive experiences in rural and underserved areas, ensuring that future healthcare providers understand the challenges and rewards of practicing in these settings.

Beyond student engagement, Alaska AHEC also plays a vital role in professional development, offering continuing education opportunities for healthcare workers and community members. These programs help providers stay up to date on best practices, address emerging health concerns, and adapt to the evolving demands of Alaska's healthcare system.

As Alaska continues to face workforce shortages and healthcare disparities, AHEC remains committed to its mission of building a well-trained, resilient, and community-focused healthcare workforce. Through collaboration with academic institutions, healthcare organizations, and local communities, Alaska AHEC continues to serve as a driving force in improving healthcare access and quality across the state.

Achievements: 20 Years of AHEC Impact in Alaska



Alaska AHEC Director Gloria Burnett and the statewide team proudly display the 2025 Legislative Citation honoring two decades of vital healthcare workforce development across Alaska.

20 Years of Impact. A Future of Action.

In 2025, the Alaska Area Health Education Center (AHEC) marked a pivotal milestone: two decades of building Alaska's healthcare workforce from the ground up. To commemorate this achievement, the Alaska State Legislature awarded AHEC a formal Legislative Citation, honoring 20 years of relentless dedication to improving healthcare access in our rural and underserved communities.

Since our founding in 2005, Alaska AHEC has evolved from a nascent program into a vital, statewide network. By building powerful partnerships with hospitals, school districts, Tribal organizations, and local leaders, we have created proven, sustainable pathways for students and professionals entering the medical field.

Operating in the largest and most geographically challenging state in the country requires a unique approach. Over the last two decades, our regional centers have become deeply embedded in the distinct communities they serve. From the Southeast panhandle to the North Slope, we bridge the gap between urban training hubs and remote frontier clinics. This grassroots presence ensures that youth outreach, clinical rotations, and continuing education happen exactly where they are needed most—training healthcare workers who are culturally and geographically prepared for the realities of Alaskan medicine.

But this 20th anniversary is more than a look back—it is a critical call to action.

As Alaska continues to face severe healthcare workforce shortages, the work we do is more urgent than ever. Relying on federal and state support, AHEC remains the driving force connecting local talent to local needs. We aren't just celebrating our history; we are fiercely committed to securing the next generation of Alaskan healthcare providers so that every community, no matter how remote, has access to quality care.



CACHE Program Updates

The Clearinghouse for Alaska’s Continuing Health Education (CACHE) is more than just a catalog—it’s the central hub for continuing education (CE) at the Alaska Center for Rural Health and Health Workforce (ACRH-HW) and the Alaska AHEC Program Office. While the catalog remains a vital resource, CACHE has expanded to house all CE activities at ACRH-HW, strengthening our role in supporting healthcare providers across Alaska.



Our Mission: Elevating Healthcare Through Education

CACHE is dedicated to strengthening Alaska’s healthcare workforce by providing comprehensive interprofessional continuing education and professional development that enhances provider knowledge and integrates evidence-based learning into practice.

Introducing the CACHE Collection: Alaska’s Hub for Healthcare Excellence

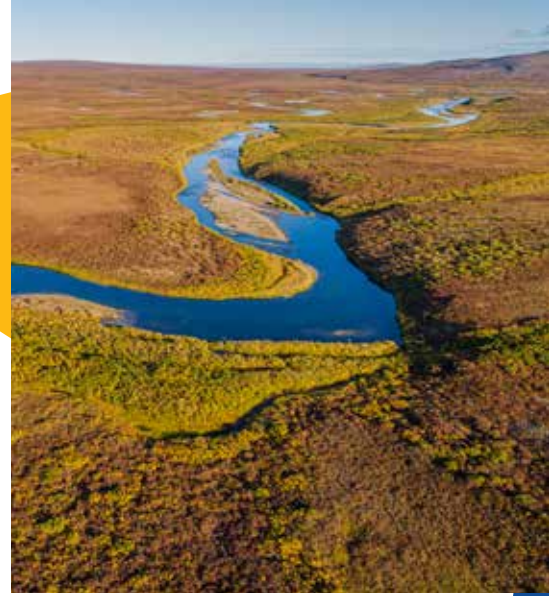
The CACHE Collection is our premier, curated library of evidence-based training designed specifically for the unique challenges of Alaska’s healthcare landscape. By bringing together Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) from across the state, we have created a centralized home for clinical skill-building and professional development.

This collection is more than a resource; it is an engine for workforce empowerment, ensuring that Alaska’s health professionals have the tools they need to provide exceptional care in every community.



EXPLORE OUR COURSES

Achievements: CACHE Continues to Grow in 2025



In 2025, CACHE saw record-breaking expansion across key metrics:



Meet the Continuing Education Team

Karina Gonzales-Smith, Associate Director of Health Professions Continuing Studies

Karina has worked in higher education for over 16 years, spanning roles in communications, teaching, faculty coordination, student success, and leadership support. She holds a master's in public health and a bachelor's in biological sciences and psychology. Before joining ACRH-HW, Karina worked for the Alaska Department of Health managing health initiatives.

Dustin Muse, Learning Experience Technologist

Dustin holds a degree in Psychology from the University of Alaska and has spent his career supporting mental health and health education initiatives ever since. He joined the University of Alaska during the COVID-19 pandemic while contributing to contact tracing efforts, and has since focused on developing and supporting health education courses and managing the data systems that power them.

Aaron Walbrecher, Clinical Education Training Coordinator

Serving as Clinical Training Coordinator/Nurse Planner, Aaron Walbrecher, MSN, RN, brings 12+ years of experience in psychiatric, public health, and educational nursing. Guided by needs assessment, workflow analysis, and quality improvement, he supports the mission through instructional design, CE development, IPCE accreditation guidance, and AI-informed systems development.

We're dedicated to supporting Alaska's health workforce. For inquiries about educational programming, please connect with us at uaa_cache@alaska.edu.



Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP)

A Partnership with Project HOPE

The Center's commitment to addressing the unique behavioral health needs of rural Alaska remains a top priority. In 2025, our collaborative work through the Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) and Project HOPE allowed us to expand critical resources, training, and support networks across the state.

Through these initiatives, we focused on building local capacity to prevent, treat, and support recovery for substance use disorders.

Key efforts included:

- Equipping rural healthcare professionals with specialized behavioral health training
- Expanding community-based prevention and harm-reduction resources
- Strengthening networks between local partners and statewide support systems

By empowering communities with the tools and education they need, RCORP and Project HOPE continue to make a profound, life-saving impact on rural healthcare systems.

“Building resilience in rural Alaska by equipping local providers and communities with the resources to drive meaningful change.” ●

Staff Spotlight:

Mary Mahon: Event Planning Extraordinaire



Spearheading UAA College of Health Major Events

This past year, the College of Health (COH) celebrated transformative milestones with the highly anticipated reopening of Sally Monserud Hall (SMH) and the debut of the state-of-the-art John E. Havelock Trial Simulation Courtroom. Together, these distinct facilities represent a massive leap forward in experiential training, providing immersive, real-world environments that elevate healthcare education, public service and justice training.

The successful launch of these new COH facilities was a monumental undertaking—one that was flawlessly navigated by our Center’s own Mary Mahon. Through her leadership and cross-departmental collaboration, Mary played a critical role in bringing this college-wide vision to life.

In recognition of her exceptional contributions, Mary was awarded the **2025 College of Health (COH) Award for Excellence in Project Management.**

“Mary demonstrated outstanding project management in organizing and executing the SMH Ribbon Cutting Ceremony, ensuring every detail was handled with precision and professionalism... Her ability to implement efficient processes and foster collaboration among departments resulted in a seamless, well-attended event that reflected organizational excellence and community engagement.”

Mary’s dedication not only ensured spectacular openings for both Sally Monserud Hall and the Havelock Courtroom, but also perfectly reflects the Center’s standard of excellence as we step into a new era of hands-on, community-focused training.

A Milestone in Team-Based Care: ACRH-HW Achieves Joint Accreditation

The Alaska Center for Rural Health & Health Workforce (ACRH-HW) at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) is proud to announce a historic milestone in our 2025 annual report: receiving Joint Accreditation for Interprofessional Continuing Education (IPCE). This prestigious designation marks a new era for our Center, authorizing us to plan, approve, and provide unified continuing education for the entire healthcare team under a single, rigorous standard.



JOINTLY ACCREDITED PROVIDER™
INTERPROFESSIONAL CONTINUING EDUCATION

For over 20 years, ACRH-HW has been a cornerstone of Alaska's health workforce development, reaching more than 68,000 professionals across the state. This achievement represents a strategic shift toward "by the team, for the team" education. By breaking down professional silos, we are now better equipped to address the complex health needs of Alaska's rural and underserved populations through integrated training.

The impact of this collaborative approach is already evident. In 2024, 97% of our learners reported increased knowledge and a direct intent to implement practice changes. Our long-term follow-up data is equally compelling: over 93% of participants report sustained practice improvements months after their training, and 92.4% agree that the education improved their ability to work within interprofessional teams. Whether through our Project ECHO series connecting rural providers with specialists or immersive training in critical areas like Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), our programs are fostering stronger, more collaborative healthcare teams.

Joint Accreditation is more than just a credential; it is a commitment to the future of Alaskan healthcare. It empowers us to continue strengthening the workforce by ensuring that high-quality, evidence-based education is accessible to every provider, regardless of their discipline or location. Together, we are building a more resilient, integrated health system for all Alaskans.

Finally, we extend our sincere gratitude to the State of Alaska Department of Health and the Alaska Native Medical Center. Their collaborative partnership in joint providership over the past three years provided the essential foundation and mentorship that enabled ACRH-HW to achieve our own independent Joint Accreditation.

Achievements: Expanding Interprofessional CE



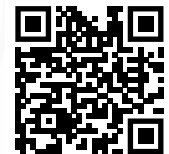
Powering CE with an Interprofessional Review Team

Our Interprofessional Continuing Education Review team ensures high-quality, accredited learning by reviewing and approving activities that meet Joint Accreditation standards. The team includes:

Name	Profession	Credentials
Barb Doty	Physician	MD
Angelia Trujillio	Nursing	APRN, DNP, WHNP-BC
Patrick Campaign	Optometry	OD
Steffi Kim	Psychology	PhD, Licensed Clinical Psychologist
Niki Knowlton	Social Work	LCSW, MPH
Courtney Schwartz	Dental	DDS
Teresa Lowe	Physician Assistant - Certified	PA-C
Coleman Cutchings	Pharmacy	PharmD, BCPS
Becca Kirian	Dietetics and Nutrition	MFN, RDN-AP

Get Involved with CE and UAA CACHE!

Want to partner with us, co-provide an activity, explore our CE catalog, or submit an event to the CACHE? Visit us at uaa.alaska.edu/CACHE to see how we can support your CE needs!



Accreditations held by ACRH–HW:

Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME)
Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE)
American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC)
American Academy of PAs (AAPA)
American Psychological Association (APA)
Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB)
Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR)



AHEC SCHOLARS: CURATING EXPERIENCES WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The AHEC Scholars Program is a nationwide training initiative for students in health professions programs aimed at increasing the quality and distribution of health care providers in rural and underserved areas. Participants complete didactic learning and community-based practice as part of their annual training requirements.

2025 was a year of visioning and program refinement for the Alaska AHEC Scholars program. A key advancement was the development of a Community-Based Experiential Learning (CBEL) menu—a curated collection of learning opportunities with community partners across Alaska. These experiences were developed in collaboration with host organizations of our regional centers, including Norton Sound Health Corporation and Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, as well as valued partners such as Alaska Health Fair Network and Bartlett Regional Hospital.

The program has expanded through new collaborative initiatives, including participation in the Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). These partnerships created additional opportunities for Scholars to engage in community-driven projects that address priority health needs across rural Alaska.

Throughout the year, the program also examined barriers to participation and program access. Key considerations included aligning minimum didactic requirements with travel support eligibility, improving the timing of CBEL experiences to better accommodate student academic schedules, and expanding opportunities for Scholars who already reside in rural Alaska communities.

As the program moves forward, the AHEC Scholars Program remains committed to expanding high-quality experiential learning opportunities, strengthening partnerships across the state, and preparing a future health workforce rooted in community connection, service, and rural engagement.

Get Involved with Alaska AHEC Scholars!

Interested in becoming a community partner? Complete our intake form:



REGIONAL AHEC CENTERS



Northwest AHEC (Nome)

Norton Sound Health Corporation (NSHC) delivers comprehensive medical services to Alaska Native communities across the Bering Strait region, ensuring culturally responsive care and training for rural healthcare professionals.



Interior AHEC (Fairbanks)

Foundation Health Partners (FHP) operates key medical facilities in Fairbanks, providing hospital-based education, workforce development, and clinical training for Interior Alaska.



Yukon-Kuskokwim AHEC (Bethel)

Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) supports over 50 remote villages with hospital care, village clinics, and training programs that build a strong, locally rooted healthcare workforce.



South Central AHEC (Anchorage)

Alaska Pacific University (APU) strengthens Alaska's healthcare system by supporting community health centers with workforce training, policy advocacy, and professional development.



Southeast AHEC (Juneau)

Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRC) expands access to healthcare education through workforce training and career development initiatives for students and professionals in Southeast Alaska.



Southwest AHEC (Office in Anchorage)

Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association (APIA) delivers healthcare and educational services to Alaska Native communities in the Aleutians and Pribilofs, helping to build the region's healthcare workforce.

REGIONAL DIRECTORS - ALASKA AHEC CENTERS

NORTHWEST AHEC

Vince Villella, Center Director
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INTERIOR AHEC

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AHEC STATEWIDE REACH

In 2025, Alaska AHEC ran programs in 25 Alaskan communities—from Utqiagvik to Ketchikan, and Nome to Dillingham—delivering vital training, mentorship, and continuing education. AHEC’s reach extended even beyond these communities, as students from remote areas sometimes traveled to participate in AHEC programs.

These programs included:

Student Outreach & Training

Hands-on experiences, mentorship programs, and career pathways for youth interested in healthcare.

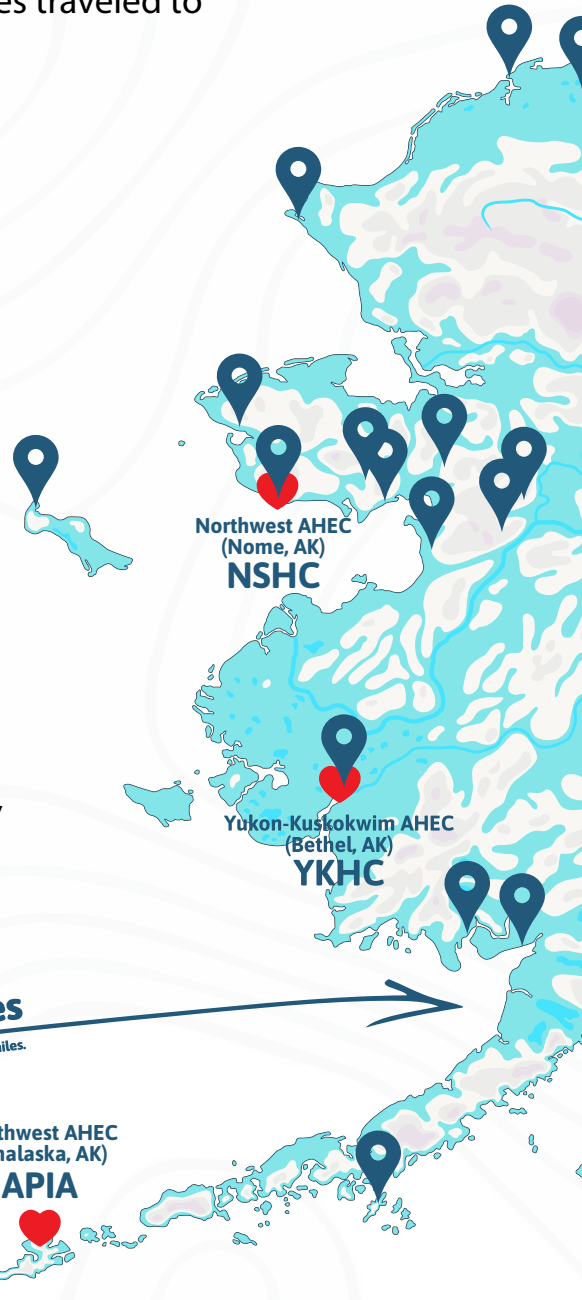
Rural Community Based Learning Opportunities

Opportunities for healthcare students to train in real-world settings, building connections with rural communities.

Continuing Education (CE)

Specialized training for professionals, ensuring they stay equipped with essential skills and knowledge.

By building strong connections between students, healthcare providers, and community organizations, AHEC is helping ensure long-term healthcare access in every region of Alaska.



Building Alaska's Healthcare Workforce

Alaska AHEC serves communities large and small, with a special focus on rural and underserved areas. Through its regional centers and statewide partnerships, AHEC connects students, professionals, and employers to education, clinical experiences, and career development resources.

By offering career exploration, community-based training, and continuing education, AHEC helps build a diverse and resilient healthcare workforce. These programs reduce barriers, support local hiring, and retain providers where they are needed most.

Whether inspiring future healthcare workers or equipping current professionals with new skills, AHEC's work ensures that quality care reaches every corner of Alaska.



ALASKA AHEC CENTERS:

- ♥ Northwest (Nome) is hosted by Norton Sound Health Corporation (NSHC)
- ♥ Interior (Fairbanks) is hosted by Foundation Health Partners (FHP)
- ♥ Yukon-Kuskokwim (Bethel) is hosted by Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC)
- ♥ Southcentral (Anchorage) is hosted by Alaska Pacific University (APU)
- ♥ Southeast (Juneau) is hosted by Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRC)
- ♥ Southwest (Office in Anchorage) is hosted by Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association (APIA)



NORTHWEST AHEC

NOME, ALASKA

Hosted by Norton Sound Health Corporation (NSHC), this center serves the health education and workforce development needs of the communities in Alaska's northwest region.



Northwest AHEC Region

Vince Vilella

Northwest AHEC Director

Nome, Alaska

Vince Vilella is the Northwest AHEC Director in Nome, Alaska, in partnership with Norton Sound Health Corporation (NSHC). Over the past five years, he has been teaching American Red Cross First Aid and Mental Health First Aid, along with providing local pathways into more advanced training, such as Emergency Trauma Technician (ETT) and Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA).

For years, Vince has been asked whether anyone he's taught has ever saved someone. Since most of his students are bystanders, rather than medical professionals, the answer had always been no. While he understood that emergencies can happen at any time, he began to view the training mainly as a stepping stone toward future medical careers.

However, in the past few months, four former students reached out to share how they had used their training in real-life emergency situations. They were able to make a significant difference in someone's life and even help save a life.

Vince's reminder to himself—and to others involved in similar training programs—is this: **They are not only providing pathways into medical careers, but they are also equipping people with lifesaving skills that have an immediate and lasting impact on others' lives.**



Student Pathways in Behavioral Health

Behavioral Health is still an alarming need in rural Alaska. One can be reminded of this by taking a quick look at any vacancy listing and seeing the mass of openings in Behavioral Health.

This year not only is NW AHEC running a Dual Credit 'Introduction to Psychology' at the local Nome High School, but we are also hosting village students (*pictured right*) to come in for a dual credit 2-week experience to explore behavioral health careers.

We are seeing high interest from young people in this space, but there often exist disconnects when it comes to turning this dream into a career. We hope that running dual credit programs for Nome and village students helps these students connect the dots between an idea and getting on a health career path.



A behavioral health professional and village students share pizza while discussing the realities of a career in behavioral health.

In the attached photos we ran an event where Behavioral Health providers came in to have lunch with the students. This provided students and professionals with the ability to have candid conversations about the realities of being a behavioral health professional. This is a critical step to these young students understanding if they want to pursue a health career. It is NW AHEC's goal to connect these student's interests with career pathways.



A student and a behavioral health provider have a candid, one-on-one conversation over lunch.



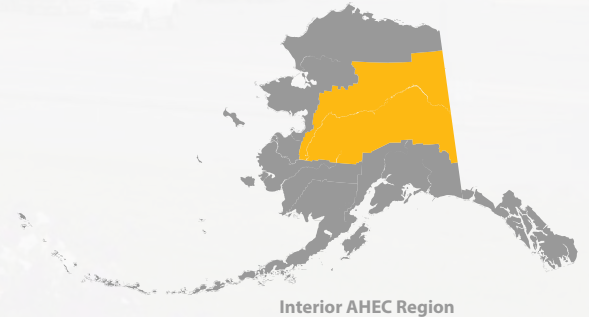
A wider view of the classroom event showing students and a professional connecting and talking together during the dual-credit experience.



INTERIOR AHEC

FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

Hosted by Foundation Health Partners (FHP), this center supports healthcare workforce training and education for the interior region of Alaska, providing access to resources and opportunities for students and professionals.



Karen Lapp
Interior AHEC Director
Circle Hot Springs, Alaska

Karen Lapp is the Talent Development Program Manager for Foundation Health Partners and the Director for Interior AHEC. Born and raised in Fairbanks, she takes pride in creating training and outreach programs that benefit her community.

These programs offer pathways into healthcare that help reduce student debt and the time it takes to enter a career. Under her leadership, the Foundation Health Partners Talent Development team has developed multiple student-focused paid training and professional development opportunities.

These include allied health and medical student clinical rotations, high school and college internships, education sponsorship for employee professional certifications, Federal Registered Apprenticeship Programs (FRAPs), and more.

In the summer, Karen enjoys spending time at her family home near Circle Hot Springs, exploring from the passenger seat of a side-by-side vehicle. In winter, however, she is still looking for something that will entice her outdoors in the cold.



Building Alaska's Healthcare Pipeline:

Fairbanks Youth Access Initiative

With FY24 Community Project funding secured by Senator Lisa Murkowski and distributed by the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, Interior AHEC launched and completed the Foundations of Healthcare Intensive, a week-long program for credit recovery students in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District.

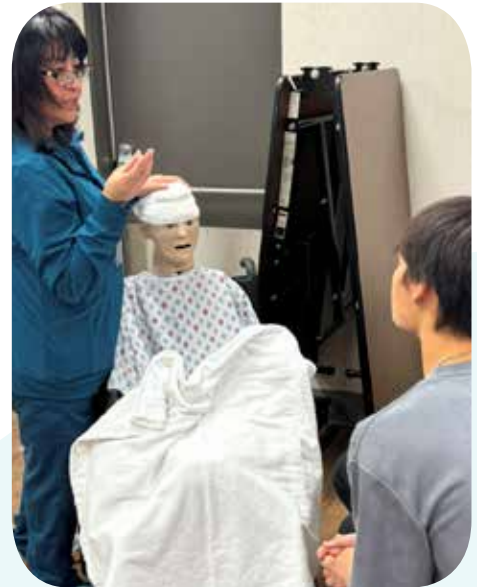
The program expanded access for underserved youth by providing hands-on exposure to high-demand healthcare careers through simulation, career exploration, and direct engagement with healthcare professionals. Students explored certification pathways, industry credentials, and local entry-level opportunities. The initiative aligned with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), supporting career pathway development and pre-employment transition services for youth facing barriers to employment.

Foundations complemented Interior AHEC's Summer High School Internship Program (SHIP) by serving as an early access point for at-risk students who may never have considered healthcare as a career. Together, these programs created a continuum from awareness to immersion.

Participants were connected to entry-level training, apprenticeships, and tuition-supported advancement opportunities at Foundation Health Partners—strengthening Interior Alaska's healthcare workforce pipeline and advancing sustainable rural career pathways.

Program Impact

- Students Participated: **6**
- School Districts Served: **1** (Fairbanks North Star Borough School District)
- Completion Rate: **100%**
- Students Expressing Interest in Healthcare Careers: **100%**
- Students Who Felt Their Confidence In Their Ability to Work in Healthcare: **100%**
- Students Indicated Likely to Participate in another Healthcare Training Opportunity, Apply for a Healthcare Program, or Apply for a Healthcare Job: **83%**
- Students Connected to Next-Step Opportunities: **66.6%**
- Hands-On Training Hours Delivered: **40**



An instructor uses a medical mannequin to guide a student through a simulation activity, providing early, hands-on exposure to clinical skills during the week-long Foundations of Healthcare Intensive.



Fairbanks students participate in a hands-on educational activity, gaining structured guidance and confidence as they explore high-demand healthcare careers.



YUKON-KUSKOKWIM AHEC BETHEL, ALASKA

Hosted by Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC), this center focuses on addressing the healthcare needs of rural communities in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta by offering educational programs and clinical training.



Naomi Digitaki Yukon-Kuskokwim AHEC Director Bethel, Alaska

Naomi Digitaki serves as the Director of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Area Health Education Center (YK AHEC) at the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC). In this role, she is committed to enhancing healthcare education and workforce development across the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, a region encompassing 58 rural communities in southwest Alaska.

YK AHEC, sponsored by YKHC, is one of six regional centers in Alaska. The program's goal is to implement educational activities involving health professions and expose students to primary care delivery in rural and underserved areas.

Under Naomi's leadership, YK AHEC focuses on building partnerships with educational institutions, healthcare organizations, and community stakeholders to create pathways into healthcare careers. By immersing students in diverse healthcare settings within the Yukon-Kuskokwim region, the program aims to cultivate a workforce equipped to address the unique health challenges of the area.

Outside of her professional endeavors, Naomi enjoys spending time outdoors and engaging in community activities. Her diverse background and commitment to education and community health make her a valuable asset to YK AHEC and the broader Yukon-Kuskokwim region.



Summer Programs Inspire Future Healthcare Leaders

Summer Hire Program:

Anna Howard and Flora Prince participated as summer hires with the YKHC program, gaining valuable hands-on experience in patient care and clinical settings. Anna worked in Long Term Care, supporting elderly patients with daily activities while learning how to create a safe and compassionate environment. Flora worked in the lab and assisted with patient registration, building technical and administrative skills. Both students strengthened their work ethic, time management, and problem-solving abilities through real-world experience, helping prepare them for future careers in healthcare.

Healthcare Camp:

In 2025, YK-AHEC expanded opportunities through CNA training and student engagement activities. Multiple cohorts of Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) graduates completed hands-on training, preparing them to enter the healthcare workforce and serve their communities. Students also participated in career exploration opportunities such as hospital tours at Bethel Regional High School, where they gained insight into healthcare roles and daily operations. These experiences provided practical exposure to healthcare environments and helped students better understand potential career pathways.

Both the workforce training initiatives and the Summer Hire Program are vital in inspiring future healthcare professionals in the YK Delta. Through these programs, students gain the skills, knowledge, and connections needed to pursue careers in the medical field. Whether working directly with patients or exploring career pathways, these experiences are shaping the next generation of healthcare leaders and preparing them for success in their communities.



CNA Graduates 2025: Cohort 1
l-r: Lucy Atti, Briana Henry, Anita Lincoln, Helen Joe, Alyssa Andrew



CNA Graduates 2025: Cohort 2
l-r: Amanda Carter, CNA Instructor Joan Green, Dylon Sergie, Darryl Small, Jr., Pearleen Azean, and Laverna James

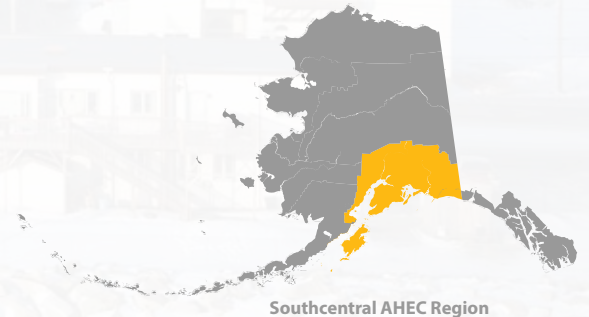


CNA Graduates 2025: Cohort 3
l-r: YKHC VP of Legal and Workforce Christopher Beltzer, CNA Instructor Joan Green, CNA graduates: Jakayla Kassel, Kaitlyn Gregory, Kylie Paul, Atarah Kelila, and YKHC Chief Nurse Executive Markel Stowell

SOUTHCENTRAL AHEC ANCHORAGE, ALASKA



Hosted by Alaska Pacific University (APU), this center provides workforce development and health education services to the communities in the South Central region, including Anchorage and surrounding areas.



Tammy Choromanski South Central AHEC Director Anchorage, Alaska

Tammy Choromanski is the Director of the Southcentral Area Health Education Center (SCAHEC) at Alaska Pacific University (APU). In this role, Tammy leads efforts to strengthen healthcare education and workforce development across Southcentral Alaska, from Talkeetna to Kodiak.

Tammy holds a Master of Public Health, a Bachelor of Science in Natural Science & Medical Technology, and a Bachelor of Medical Technology, all from the University of Alaska Anchorage. She brings a strong background in public health, research, and medical technology to her new role.

Before joining APU, Tammy served for over 14 years at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC), where she focused on community-based research, disease prevention, and culturally responsive care.

At SC AHEC, Tammy partners with healthcare providers, and local organizations to expand access to healthcare careers—especially in rural and underserved areas. Outside of work, Tammy enjoys hiking, fishing, and camping, as well as reading and painting with family and friends.



New Leadership. New Home. Strong Start.

The Southcentral Area Health Education Center (SC AHEC) continues to expand access to health career exploration, workforce development, and community-based training across Alaska. Through robust Career & Technical Education Program Support (CTEPS) partnerships, SC AHEC actively supported students in Utqiagvik, Homer, Seward, and Soldotna in the beginning of the 2025-2026 year, helping rural learners explore healthcare pathways while building practical skills and professional confidence.

A significant milestone this year is the establishment of a new host site at Alaska Pacific University (APU). This partnership strengthens academic alignment, expands access to university-level resources, and creates new opportunities for health profession recruitment and pathway development. The APU host site enhances SC AHEC's regional coordination capacity and supports long-term sustainability of health career programming.

Collectively, these initiatives reflect SC AHEC's commitment to developing Alaska's future health workforce through rural engagement, behavioral health training, and strategic academic partnerships.

Looking ahead, SC AHEC is continuing support with CTEPS programming into additional communities and increasing Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) camps to further support students exploring health careers. A new Nursing Student Recruitment Camp at APU will also launch to strengthen direct pathways into nursing education programs. Together, these initiatives reflect SC AHEC's strategic commitment to developing Alaska's future health workforce through rural engagement, behavioral health training, and academic partnership expansion.



A cohort of future healthcare professionals gaining skills, confidence, and community through SC AHEC programming



SERRRC
ALASKA'S EDUCATIONAL
RESOURCE CENTER

SOUTHEAST AHEC JUNEAU, ALASKA

Hosted by Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRRC), this center provides support for healthcare professionals and students in Southeast Alaska, focusing on improving healthcare access and education in remote areas.



Southeast AHEC Region



Mary McEwen
Southeast AHEC Director
Juneau, Alaska

Mary McEwen is the Southeast AHEC Director at the Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRRC) in Juneau. With over 20 years of experience in health and social services, Mary has built a career dedicated to improving healthcare access in rural and underserved communities.

She holds a BA in Sociology and an MPH in Health Policy, with her graduate work focusing on how healthcare workforce influences global and urban/rural migration. Her early experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in West Africa ignited her passion for developing sustainable healthcare workforce solutions that make a lasting impact.

At Southeast AHEC, Mary leads initiatives that bridge education with practical training, forging partnerships to enhance local health services and build pathways into healthcare careers. Under her leadership, the center has implemented innovative programs that respond directly to community needs, ensuring that rural populations receive both immediate support and long-term benefits. In her free time, Mary enjoys exploring Southeast Alaska's rich natural and cultural landscapes, a passion that mirrors her commitment to fostering resilient, community-focused healthcare systems.



Southeast AHEC works with Metlakatla

SE AHEC's multi-year work in Metlakatla began with a request for Youth Mental Health First Aid to support the community's school- and community-wide campaign for mental health and suicide prevention. In April 2024, 30 teachers and 15 community members participated in a two-day training. During the training, participants engaged in an activity describing what a healthy youth would look like in Metlakatla. The results of this community brainstorm were later used by the school and featured in a poster displayed throughout the school: "What does a healthy youth look like in Metlakatla."

In April 2025, SE AHEC staff returned to teach Teen Mental Health First Aid, certifying 18 secondary students. Students who completed the Teen Mental Health First Aid curriculum and committed to serving as peer "Watchmen" received an incentive from Wil la Mootk Counseling Center. In collaboration with school counselors, Watchmen observe and recognize early signs of mental health challenges, approach peers exhibiting these signs, listen, and encourage self- and professional-help before symptoms escalate.

SE AHEC also facilitated PC CARES, a participatory community planning process for suicide prevention, with 18 community leaders in the Council Chambers in April and again in October 2025. Across all activities, a total of 81 participants—from 8th graders to elders—received mental health training through this partnership, representing approximately 6% of Metlakatla's population.



Photos show the brainstorming process through the "what does a healthy youth look like in our community" exercise during Youth Mental Health First Aid training during a teacher inservice - from ideas to finished poster which is now found all around town!



Mary McEwen and Kendra Besh teaching teen MHFA and completing Naloxone training and distribution in Tuluksak, AK. March 24, 2026





SOUTHWEST AHEC (OFFICE IN ANCHORAGE)

Hosted by Aleutian Pribilof Island Association (APIA), this center offers healthcare workforce training and educational opportunities, particularly for communities in Alaska's Southwest region, including the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands.



Ian McCarthy
Southwest AHEC Director
Anchorage, Alaska

Ian McCarthy serves as the Southwest Area Health Education Center (SW AHEC) Coordinator at Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, Inc. (APIA), where he works to expand healthcare education opportunities in rural communities. Prior to this role, Ian spent three years at the Alaska AHEC Program Office as a Pathway Programming Education Coordinator, delivering dual credit courses and certificate trainings to youth across the state.

Ian holds a Bachelor of Science in chemistry and has hands-on experience as a medical assistant. His passion for healthcare extends into mental health and wildlife medicine, and he is a certified instructor in multiple critical training programs, including Basic Life Support (BLS)/CPR and First Aid; youth, teen, and adult Mental Health First Aid; Question Persuade Refer (QPR) suicide prevention training; and Narcan Administration and Prevention.

Beyond his professional work, Ian enjoys staying active through running, hiking, and cross-country skiing. He also has a keen interest in podcasts, card games, and experimenting with new recipes in the kitchen.



Curiosity to Career: Exploring Healthcare in Bristol Bay

Southwest AHEC's dual credit healthcare course, instructed by Project Coordinator Ian McCarthy, provided students in the Bristol Bay region with hands-on, college-level learning experiences designed to build both practical skills and career insight. Offered in Naknek in partnership with Bristol Bay Region Career and Technical Education (BBRCTE), the course brought together 10 high school students from across the region for an immersive exploration of healthcare fundamentals.

Throughout the course, students engaged in interactive instruction that blended classroom learning with applied skill development. Participants earned two college credits while also completing nationally recognized certifications in Stop the Bleed, CPR, and First Aid. All 10 students successfully passed the course, demonstrating both academic achievement and competency in essential emergency response techniques.

The curriculum emphasized experiential learning. Students toured the C'amai Clinic to gain exposure to local healthcare delivery, dissected sheep hearts to better understand human anatomy, and practiced taking manual blood pressure to develop foundational clinical skills. These activities provided students with meaningful insight into healthcare careers while strengthening their confidence and preparedness.

Student feedback reflected the program's impact. One participant shared, "I really enjoyed this course—it helped me understand my chosen career more deeply and made me appreciate how much dedication it takes to become a surgeon. The instructions were clear, organized, and easy to follow, which made the process fun and engaging." By combining academic rigor, professional certification, and real-world exposure, the dual credit course continues Southwest AHEC's commitment to expanding healthcare career pathways and strengthening the future workforce in the Bristol Bay region.



Students learn how to apply and remove medical grade staples from a patient.



C'amai clinic medical director uses a student as a mock patient to explain the surgical procedures he follows when removing a foreign object from someone's eye.



UAA Alaska Center for
Rural Health and Health Workforce
UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE



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The AHEC program is made possible through support provided by the University of Alaska, Anchorage and Alaska Center for Rural Health and Health Workforce - Alaska's AHEC, and HRSA #U77HP23073.

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