

2012
Annual Report

Alaska AHEC Program

Strengthening Alaska's health workforce



UAA Alaska Center for Rural Health
- Area Health Education Center
UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE


AlaskaAHEC
Area Health Education Centers

The Alaska AHEC Program is a statewide university-industry partnership focused on strengthening Alaska's health workforce.

www.uaa.alaska.edu/acrh-ahec

Mission & Organization

The federal Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) Program is funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Health Professions. The Program dates back to 1971, though the Alaska AHEC began at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) in 2005. It was the first in the country to be awarded to a School of Nursing, rather than a School of Medicine.

AHECs are academic and community-based partnerships engaged in primary care workforce engagement, training, and recruiting and retaining activities to improve the distribution, diversity, supply, and quality of healthcare personnel. The Alaska AHEC Program Office (at UAA) contracts with five regional Centers to implement educational activities involving several health professions and to expose students to primary care delivery in a rural and/or an underserved setting. In addition, AHECs work closely with state and local workforce investment boards to identify and address healthcare personnel issues.

Program Areas

The Alaska AHEC addresses its mission by working in four activity areas:

- 1) **Engage** Alaskans into health careers to evolve the future health workforce;
- 2) Coordinate required clinical rotations to **train** health professions students in rural communities and with underserved populations to ultimately **recruit** providers to these areas;
- 3) Increase access to and provide CE/CME opportunities statewide to **retain** Alaska's health workforce; and
- 4) Conduct applied health workforce **research** to accurately identify existing workforce needs in the healthcare industry, especially in rural areas.

Host Organizations

The Alaska AHEC Program Office is located at the University of Alaska Anchorage under the School of Nursing and the Office of Health Programs Development. The Program Office partners with five industry hosts to carry out the AHEC mission. Each Center serves a distinct geographic area with unique needs and available resources. Host organizations provide invaluable support to the AHECs that ultimately improve the health status of its people.

Alaska AHECs and their Host Organizations

- 1) Yukon Kuskokwim AHEC – hosted by Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation
- 2) Interior Alaska AHEC – hosted by Fairbanks Memorial Hospital
- 3) South Central AHEC – hosted by Providence Health and Services Alaska
- 4) Southeast Alaska AHEC – hosted by Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium until February 2012; now hosted by Peacehealth Ketchikan Medical Center
- 5) Northwest AHEC – hosted by Ilisagvik College

Alaska AHEC Steering Committee

The Alaska AHEC Steering Committee's role is to advise program activities and advocate for sustainability. Each member plays a vital role in ensuring the Alaska AHEC remains a viable, statewide resource and meets the needs of our diverse healthcare industry.

- **Suzanne Allen**, MD, MPH, Assistant Dean for Regional Affairs and Rural Health, UW School of Medicine
- **Kathleen Barrows**, Director of Mission Services, Providence Health and Services Alaska
- **Barbara Berner**, EdD, APRN, FNP-BC, FAANP, Director, School of Nursing, University of Alaska Anchorage
- **Patricia Carr**, MPH, Director Alaska State Office of Rural Health, State of Alaska, Division of Public Health
- **Paula Easley**, Member, Board of Trustees, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority
- **Gena Edmiston**, RN, Chief Nursing Officer, Fairbanks Memorial Hospital
- **Jan Harris**, MSHA, FACHE, Vice Provost of Health Programs Development, University of Alaska Anchorage
- **Lanetta Lundberg**, PHR, Vice President of Culture and People, Peacehealth Ketchikan Medical Center
- **Birgit Meany**, Dean of Instruction, Ilisagvik College
- **Nancy Merriman**, MPH, MBA, Chair, Executive Director, Alaska Primary Care Association
- **Tom Nighswander**, MD, MPH, Assistant Dean, Alaska WWAMI Regional Affairs, UW School of Medicine
- **Karen Perdue**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Alaska Hospital and Nursing Home Association
- **Julie Serstad**, MSN, Deputy Director of Community Health, Department of Health and Social Services, North Slope Borough
- **Dan Winkelman**, JD, Vice President of Administration and General Counsel, Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation
- **Elizabeth Woodyard**, MEd, MSN, Vice-Chair, Chief Executive Officer, Petersburg Medical Center

Letter from the Director

Greetings,

I am pleased to provide you with the 2011-2012 Alaska AHEC Annual Report. While this report focuses on numbers of students impacted by AHEC activities and their effect on Alaska's health workforce, our goals were achieved through an astounding number of hours and tireless effort from the program office and regional staffs who are the heart and soul of the AHEC. This report highlights our activities and demonstrates the importance of having a thriving and operational AHEC program in Alaska.

Unless otherwise stated, program activities data is from July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012, the reporting period defined by the national AHEC program.

It has been an eventful year for the Alaska Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program. Though our program sustained a significant budget cut (approximately 43%), the regional centers and program office continue to meet the modified goals they set. They demonstrate that the Alaska AHEC is not only a

worthwhile investment for developing and strengthening Alaska's health workforce, it is a smart strategy for an industry expected to increase jobs by 12% in 2020 (Alaska Economic Trends, DOL, October 2012).

The Southeast AHEC transitioned from longtime host organization, Southeast Regional Health Consortium, to Wrangell Medical Center in partnership with the Southeast Hospital Network. Eventually, the AHEC moved to Peacehealth Ketchikan Medical Center in September. Though the journey's been long, the Southeast region overwhelmingly supported maintaining the Center, and its regional involvement is greater now than ever before.

I would like to dedicate this report to AHEC staff and Steering Committee members. Your perseverance and commitment to our mission is the reason we have come such a long way recently. Thank you for your dedication, passion, and energy.

-Katy Branch, Co-Director



Jackie Pflaum, Co-Director - Jackie is Associate Vice Provost of the Office of Health Programs. She provides oversight and leadership of the Alaska AHEC Program, as well as oversight to the UAA School of Nursing's RRANN and Nursing Workforce Diversity programs. (907) 786-4574
jzpflaum@uaa.alaska.edu



Katy Branch, Co-Director - Katy oversees the daily operations of the Alaska AHEC, conducts strategic planning, is liaison to host organizations and Center Directors, and is responsible for advocacy and partnerships in state, regional, and national settings. (907) 786-6705
kebranch@uaa.alaska.edu



Janice Troyer, AHEC Program Manager - Janice coordinates AHEC student rotations with Centers, oversees the AHEC Pipeline Cache database, and manages the Health Careers in Alaska and Clearinghouse for Clinical Rotations websites. (907) 786-6592
jktroyer@uaa.alaska.edu

Alaska AHEC Staff



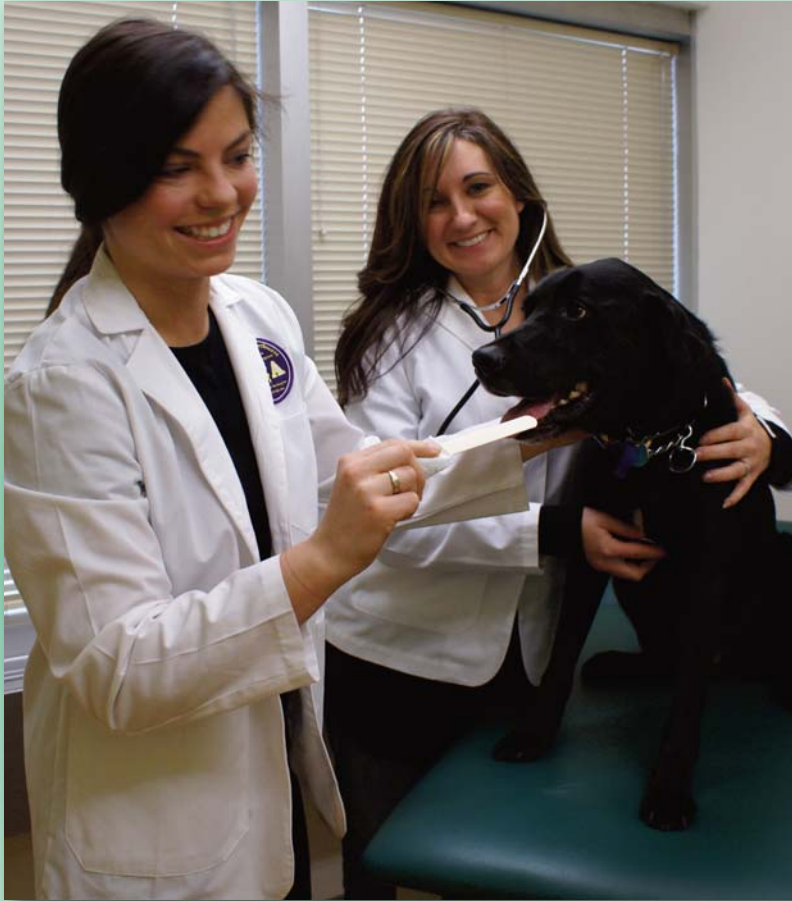
Laura McCrillis, Fiscal Technician - Laura manages the Alaska AHEC's fiscal responsibilities, including sub awards with Centers, contracts, purchase orders, and travel. (907) 786-6579
lfmccrillis@uaa.alaska.edu



Patricia Sammartino, Education Network Manager - Pat oversees CE and professional development, and supports sustainable integration of clinical simulation across Alaska. She manages Alaska CACHE and Rural Veterans Health Access Project. (907) 786-6589
plsammartino@uaa.alaska.edu



Alaska AHEC Centers



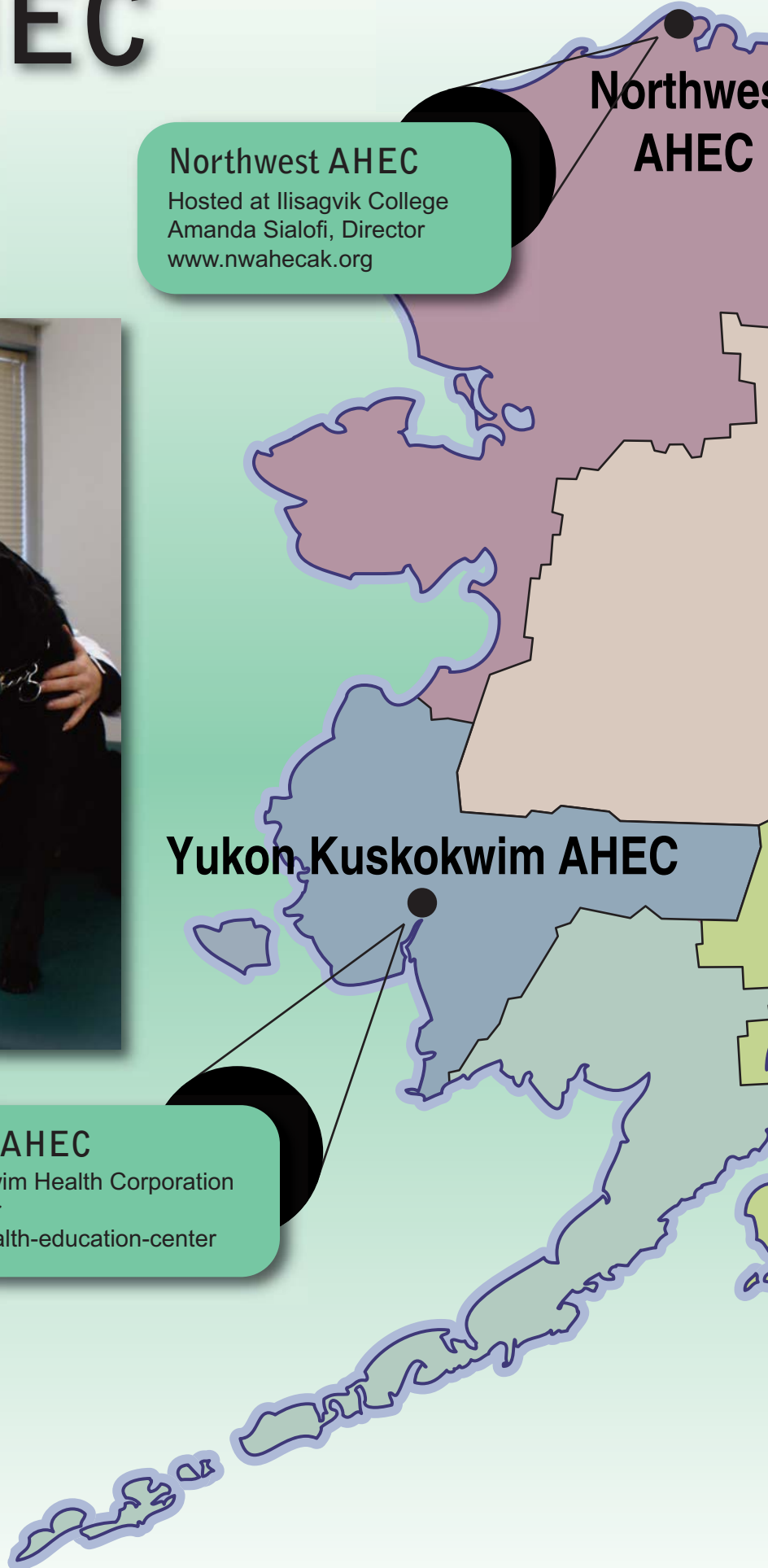
Northwest AHEC

Hosted at Ilisagvik College
Amanda Sialofi, Director
www.nwahecak.org

Yukon Kuskokwim AHEC

Yukon Kuskokwim AHEC

Hosted at Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation
Laurinda O'Brien, Director
www.ykhc.org/careers/health-education-center





Interior AHEC



Interior AHEC

Hosted at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital
 Lillian Ruedrich, Director
www.interiorahec.com

South Central AHEC



South Central AHEC

Hosted at Providence Health and Services Alaska
 Elizabeth Imbo-Walsh, Director
www.scahecak.org

Southeast AHEC

Southeast AHEC

Now hosted by Peacehealth Ketchikan Medical Center
 Carlen Williams, Director
www.seakahec.org

Health Careers Promotion and Preparation

The Alaska AHEC engages Alaskans of all ages into a wide variety of health careers through Health Careers Promotion and Preparation (HCPP) activities. Activities in this area include:

- Providing job shadows ranging from 1 to 40+ hours so students can observe a specific occupation first-hand
- Coordinating intensive health programs, such as the Allied Health Camps in Barrow
- Guiding schools and school districts to incorporate health career information into daily instruction through the Health Program of Study and Teacher Industry Externship (TIE) programs
- Leading statewide Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) chapters

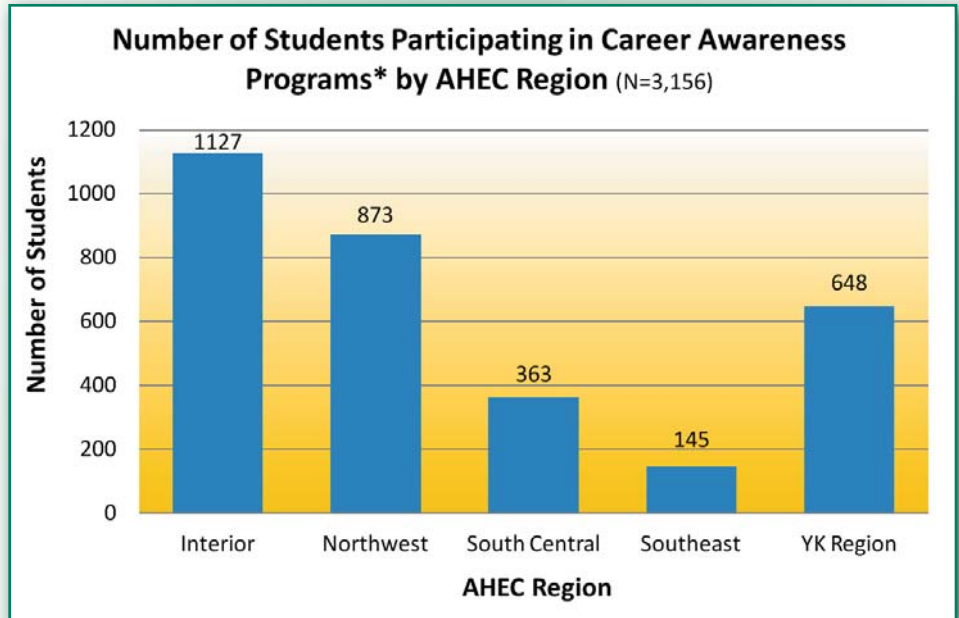
“Working in rural Alaska over the last four months was an invaluable experience I will never forget. Working with this population is one thing, but living with them and having the opportunity to embrace their community and culture is a whole new world. It was an amazing encounter that will forever be engraved in my mind.”

-Riley Bennett (PA student)

Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA)

is a national student organization endorsed by the US Department of Education. HOSA’s two-fold mission is to promote career opportunities in the healthcare industry and to enhance the delivery of quality healthcare to all people. The Statewide Co-Advisory for HOSA is the Senior Education Coordinator at the South Central AHEC, Jan Abbott. The Alaska program continues to expand – there were 201 participants in 2010 and 266 in 2011. Alaska HOSA has chapters in Fairbanks, Ketchikan, Chugiak, Anchorage, Kodiak, and Wasilla.

The Rural Health Program of Study (PoS) is led by Interior AHEC to implement health career curriculum within rural high schools and is funded by the Alaska Department of Labor. In this reporting year, project staff developed a rural-focused Implementation Guide detailing recommended steps for school districts to begin offering a Health PoS. The project successfully initiated a Health PoS in Galena, as well as in Tok. Currently, the Introduction to Health Careers is available for college credit through the Tech Prep Program with the University of Alaska Fairbanks; credit alignment will be sought for additional courses, as well.



*Tours, Pre-med Summits, Presentations, In-a-box Activities



In year 2, the project expands the Galena and Tok programs to include an additional course, and extends to three additional communities: Nenana, Delta Junction and Fort Yukon.

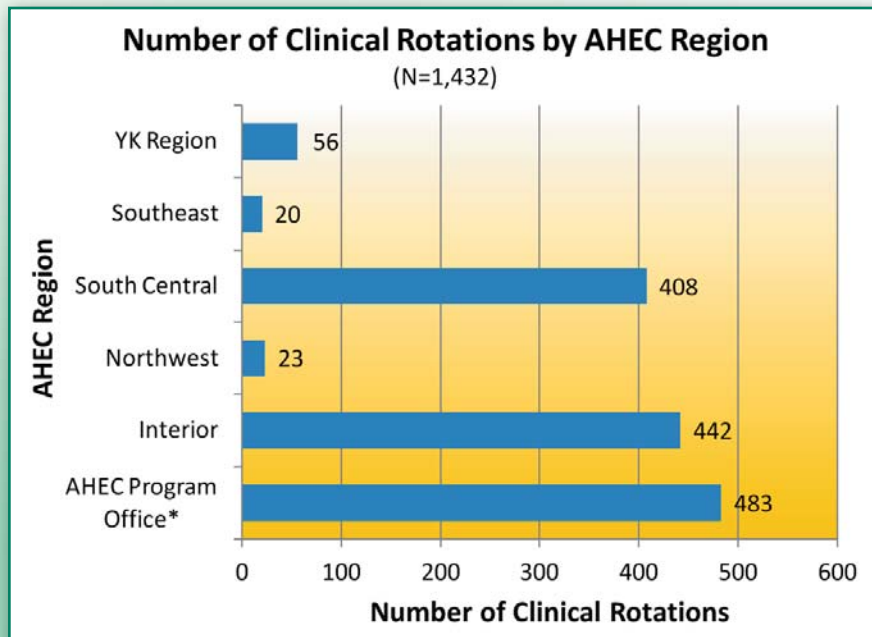
Clinical Rotations

Clinical rotations are typically "required" clinical experiences that health professions students must complete in order to successfully finish the program. They serve as both an intensive educational experience, where students get hands-on training and mentoring from a health professional in their selected field, and an effective, low-cost recruitment strategy, where health facilities can observe the student at work and determine whether employment upon graduation is a good fit.

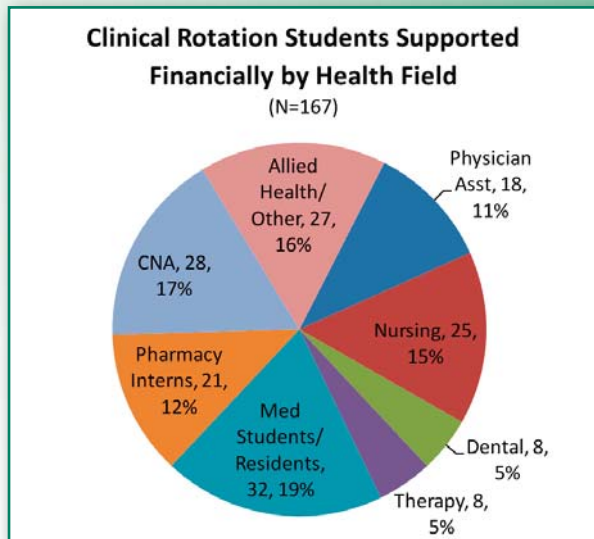
AHEC strives to facilitate rotations at rural and underserved sites to expose students to care delivery in these settings where hard-to-fill vacancies persist. A wide variety of disciplines are sponsored from nursing assistants to medical students. Alaska AHEC strives to target priority professions as identified by the Alaska Workforce Investment Board and in accordance with the Alaska Health Workforce Plan.

"As a first-year medical student in the Alaska WWAMI Program, I had the opportunity to spend one month in Kodiak, Alaska working with a general practitioner...I fell in love with the sense of community that is so unique in rural Alaska. I focused the remainder of my medical education toward additional exposure to rural medicine and eventually chose to pursue the field of family medicine. The Alaska Family Medicine Residency was a natural choice, offering a perfect blend of urban pathology, collaboration alongside our state's subspecialists, and a higher volume of valuable rural experience than any other family medicine residency program in the country. Now as a resident in my third and final year, I am looking forward to practicing medicine within one of the special rural communities in our great state."

-Erin Lester, MD



*These include all UAA nursing underserved rotations



Continuing Education

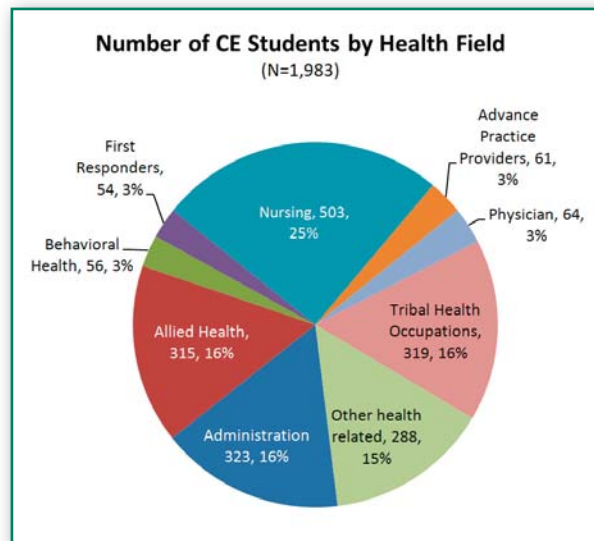
The Alaska AHEC Program supports workforce retention by coordinating and distributing information about continuing education and professional development (CE/PD) opportunities to healthcare workers. Activities in this goal area include:

- Managing the Alaska CACHE: Clearinghouse for Alaska's Continuing Health Education.
- Training health providers to better care for Alaska's Veterans as a part of the Rural Veterans Health Access Project – this project continues through August 2013.
- Creating new CE/PD opportunities, such as the Clinical Coaching curriculum described on page 8.
- Supporting various professional associations and organizations to provide CE/PD in Alaska.

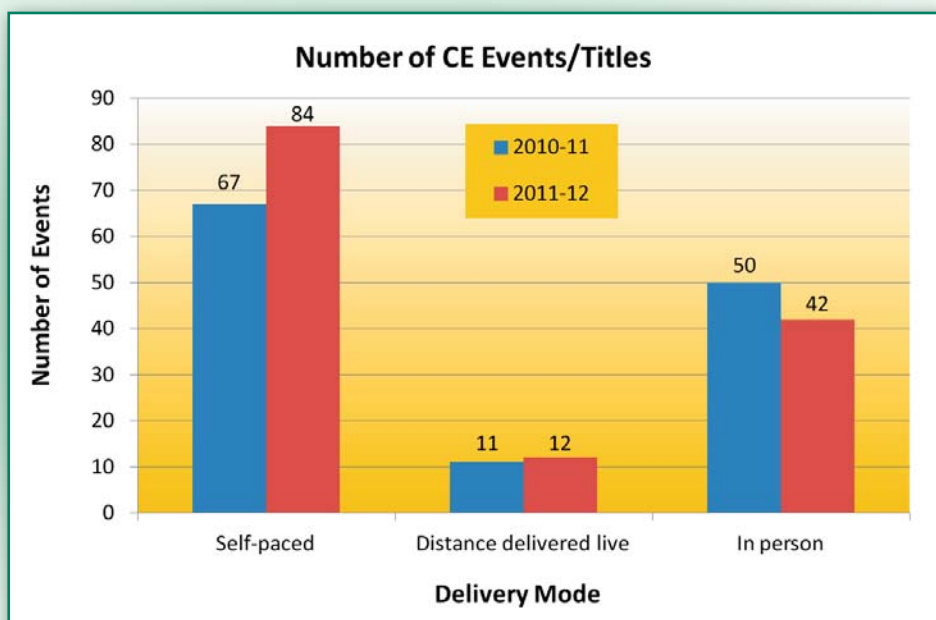
As the AHEC shifts its focus from quantity to quality of activities, we have begun collecting data on the following measures:

- How many contact hours are applied towards licensure/certification retention.
- How many providers planned to implement a change in their practice as a result of the training.
- How many participants increased their knowledge as a result of the training in which they participated.

AHEC began to collect this data in the 2011-2012 reporting year and received 670 completed surveys. The table shows the results for these measures and will serve as the baseline for the future.



Measure	Number	Percent
Number of contact hours applied to license or certification	429	64%
Number of providers planned to implement change in their practice	571	85%
Number of participants who increased their knowledge	552	82%





The **Alaska CACHE: A Clearinghouse for Alaska's Continuing Health Education**

(www.akcache.org) is a web-based system that increases access to ongoing CE/PD for staff working in rural health facilities. It acts as a clearinghouse for CE/PD information and provides a single-access point for healthcare workers and employers. The Alaska CACHE was built on the backbone of the Trust Training Cooperative's Learning Management System (TTC/LMS), making it designed specifically for Alaska's health industry. Both the Alaska CACHE and TTC/LMS work cooperatively and serve distinct audiences. The system allows users to: search for current CE/CME events by profession, topic, or host; manage and track completed CE/CME; receive new training notifications; post upcoming events; track attendance and registration; and download reports.

Clinical Coaching is a distance-based course designed to train and nurture more rural preceptors/clinical coaches across disciplines. The 16-hour course has nine modules and is distance delivered. It was designed in consultation with the Alaska Coalition of Educators and the Vermont Nurses in Partnership. The course will be open and available in the spring of 2013. Interested professionals can find registration information on the Alaska CACHE and the Alaska AHEC website.

The **Geriatric Education Series** is a distance-delivered training series offered by the Northwest Geriatric Education Center and coordinated by the AHEC Program Office. The 10 week series is designed for providers serving an elderly population and covers topics such as dementia, suicide, and specific physical health considerations. The course is delivered from January – March. In 2012, the AHEC averaged 65 participants per week at 17 sites across the state. This course is offered annually and registration information can be found on the Alaska CACHE.

The Impact of AHEC in Alaska

Ultimately, the Alaska AHEC strives to build, strengthen, and diversify the healthcare workforce, especially in rural and underserved areas. Therefore, a successful AHEC program will guide Alaskans interested in a health career through pipeline programs to training and education and, eventually, to employment in Alaska's health industry.

To gauge this impact, the AHEC conducts an annual long-term student tracking project in partnership with the Alaska Department of Labor to determine whether participants are working in Alaska's health workforce and, ideally, where they are employed. Below are the results of the 2012 assessment, which included 2,814 clinical rotations participants. These numbers indicate an overall increase in graduates and an increase in AHEC participants working in rural Alaska. Literature suggests typically between 8-12% of students enrolled in health programs will select a rural environment for practice. Alaska is ahead of the curve.

1) 1433 (51%) students have earned degrees. This is a 10% increase over 2011 (902 out of 2210). Many remaining students are assumed to be working towards degrees. Degrees were in the following areas:

- 80% in a health related field
- 9% in a science related field
- 5% were either unknown or a non-science field

2) 688 were Alaska residents (according to 2010-2011 Permanent Fund Dividend data):

- 4550 (22%) were employed in the 3rd Quarter of 2011
- 91% were in jobs categorized as "healthcare" or "social assistance."
- Of these, at least 16.5% worked in rural areas in Alaska.*

(Note: DOL data does not differentiate those working in facilities with multiple sites, some in rural areas, so this percentage may be higher. Also, data does not differentiate those working with underserved populations in urban areas.)



The AHEC Program Office manages several applied health workforce research projects on an annual or biennial basis. These studies are conducted in partnership with Alaska's health industry and add to the rich data set necessary to ensure adequate potential health workers are in the pipeline and that a strong workforce exists. Below are brief descriptions of current research projects.

Alaska Health Workforce Vacancy Study

The Alaska Center for Rural Health, Alaska's AHEC (ACRH/AHEC) has conducted several health workforce vacancy studies over the past decade, each growing in size and scope of work. In partnership with the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, UAA's Office of Health Programs Development, UAA's School of Nursing, UAA's Allied Health Sciences, the State Office of Rural Health, the Alaska Primary Care Association, and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, ACRH-AHEC began work on the 2012 Alaska Health Workforce Vacancy Study.

Utilizing the Alaska Standardized Health Occupations Taxonomy (AK SHOT) developed by the Alaska AHEC and the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Research and Analysis section, the 2012 study evaluates 157 occupations and will crosswalk the data to the federal Standardized Occupations Classification codes to evaluate trends by occupation category. This new methodology will create a trended data set in the future that will serve workforce planning efforts well.

Specifically, the study asks the following questions by labor market region:

- Number of currently filled positions by occupation
- Number of current vacancies by occupation
- Number of temporary positions by occupation that an employer would prefer having a regular employee fill
- Number of positions requiring additional experience beyond the typical education/training requirements
- Top reasons for recruitment and retention challenges

The final report is expected to be released in spring 2013.



Community APGAR Questionnaire

The Alaska AHEC is entering Year 2 of a dynamic, cross-state rural family physician recruitment and retention study called the Community APGAR Questionnaire (CAQ). Partners in this effort include the State Office of Rural Health, UAA's WWAMI Medical Program, the Alaska Family Practice Residency, and the Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association. The study was originally designed by Boise State University and is currently active in Idaho, North Dakota, Wyoming, and Maine. The CAQ examines 50 variables linked to physician recruitment and retention from a broad community perspective and delivers targeted data back to healthcare facilities. This year, 11 critical access and small rural hospitals participated in the study. They received a facility-specific report back and the option for targeted technical assistance to boost their recruitment and welcome programs. In Year 2, these sites will be reassessed to see if any of the implemented changes have impacted their recruitment efforts.



