

AHEC Minority Youth Programs

The AHEC programs and activities in the United States
that target minority youth



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The purpose of the AHEC program is to recruit, train and retain a health professions workforce committed to underserved populations. Many of these underserved segments of the population include areas composed mostly of non-Caucasian inhabitants. The nation's population demographic outlook for the future shows the numbers of minorities increasing, and health care issues will remain a concern for those populations. Studies show that underrepresented minority health professionals are more likely to enter primary care and practice in areas of health care workforce shortages. Therefore, it is important for the South Dakota AHEC to focus on targeting minorities with recruitment activities to encourage these individuals to pursue health care careers.

In order to obtain as much input from other AHECs throughout the country, each AHEC listed on the National AHEC Organization website that had a valid email address was contacted. Approximately 270 emails were sent, and more than 100 responded. A search for this information was also performed on websites of AHECs in regions of the United States that have large minority populations.

Youth Programs

Several AHEC programs target programming to underserved areas, and many of these areas have a large number of minority students, so many minority students are targeted by geographic association, rather than by ethnicity or ethnic health issue-related programming. AHEC responses cited that it was easier to target individual schools with high numbers of minorities versus trying to find another vehicle that convenient to present to students. One guideline that some AHECs use to determine underrepresented or underserved populations is the number or percentage of students in a district that are on the free or reduced lunch program. Another is determining which school districts exist in a medically underserved area or health professional shortage area.

Specific Examples of Programs

The Massachusetts AHEC Network (Worcester area) noted that they have offered a couple of programs targeted at minorities. They have offered programming to Latinos to help build a nursing pipeline, and they have also promoted medical interpretation training for bilingual students, which allows their language skill to become an asset and reinforces their understanding of medical terminology in English and their other language.

The Northern Nebraska AHEC (NNAHEC) (Norfolk) used to provide programming for Hispanic and Native American students. For the Hispanic students, NNAHEC hosted a dinner and discussion session for students and their parents. They provided a panel of Hispanic health professionals, a representative from a local college multicultural center and two Hispanic college students – one undergrad and one graduate student enrolled in pharmacy. They provided a meal, translators and had a material pack for students (AHEC bag, career materials, and pens). From the panel, the students learned about careers, heard about the college students' experiences then attended an information session about health care careers. During this session, the parents heard

from a Hispanic medical leader about the importance of education in America to pursue better employment. The program was performed in two communities, and invitations were sent out through schools and churches. A Hispanic leader in the community also personally called key students and talked to their parents. Having the Hispanic leader talk to the parents and contact the kids was crucial in making the event a success.

NNAHEC also has hosted Native American programming, including health careers camps that were hosted on the reservations and an elementary program where students visited health careers booths in a gymnasium, and afterward heard from a panel of high school students discussing about positive work and study habits.

In 2008 and 2009, the East Los Angeles AHEC organized a Youth Health Career Conference where more than 100 high school students from schools in the area, the vast majority of which were Hispanic, who had participated in AHEC programming were invited to listen to speakers from various disciplines in medicine as well as experts on school loans about the various choices available to them.

The West Central Missouri AHEC (Kansas City) specifically collaborates with two high schools to bring a weekly health career club into those schools. Both schools serve a 98 percent population of African American or Hispanic, thus this program targets a large number of minority students at the school.

The Central Colorado AHEC (Denver area) obtained a Health Careers Opportunity Program grant that targets one school district with 75 percent disadvantaged youth. The Colorado AHEC program office works with the Central Colorado AHEC center to lead two programs for these students: the Saturday Academy (10 per year) and the Summer Institute (6-week long) programs. These programs provide health care career exposure, contextual learning, academics and career exploration for these students.

The Catskill Hudson AHEC (southeastern New York) collaborates with the Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP) at the State University of New York at New Paltz and Dutchess County Community College (C-STEP) program. At the high school level, STEP identifies disadvantaged and under-represented students by collaborating with high school guidance offices and enrolls the students in the program. These students participate in two programs:

- Saturday Academies - STEP meets at the New Paltz campus for seven Saturday educational sessions called Academies. There is a general session at each academy where a guest speaker presents a topic of general interest. Students are then divided by grade level and assigned to two modules of small-group instruction during the course of the day. Lunch and a light breakfast are provided onsite.
- Tutoring - Local districts receive funding from STEP to provide group or individual reviews for standardized testing. Some districts receive additional funding to provide STEP participants with tutoring support in their regular coursework or to prepare for ongoing examinations.

The Western Montana AHEC (Missoula) provides a *Hands on Health* program that has proven very successful on its travels to rural communities, including reservations. Hands on Health is an innovative, interactive traveling science exhibition, designed to foster in young students an interest in, awareness of and excitement about a future career in the health professions. School gyms, senior centers, museum spaces and other community sites are transformed into health science learning labs. After outreach events in Fort Belknap and Polson (both located within reservations), a grant from the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation was obtained to adapt the program if necessary and travel specifically to each of Montana's reservations during the next 18 months.

The Northern Arizona AHEC (Flagstaff) in the summer supports an "Indigenous Pride" program for Hopi Indian students who train to provide community health promotion and prevention education and outreach. The organization also supports another program for high school students interested in medicine on the Navajo (Dine') reservation.