



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Arizona **AHEC**

Area Health Education Centers

*Celebrating 40 Years of Enhancing Access to Quality Health Care  
for Arizona's Rural and Urban Medically Underserved Communities  
1984-2024*

ANNUAL REPORT 2024









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## Arizona AHEC Program Mission Statement:

*To enhance access to quality health care, particularly primary and preventive care, by improving the supply and distribution of health care professionals through academic community educational partnerships in rural and urban medically underserved areas.*

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We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O’odham and the Yaqui. Committed to diversity and inclusion, the University strives to build sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service.

*Congress authorized the Federal Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program in 1971 (PL III-148 § 751 PHSA). There are now 56 AHEC Programs and 235 Regional Centers in 48 U.S. states and territories. In 1984, Andy Nichols, MD, founded the Arizona Area Health Education Center (AzaAHEC) Program in Tucson with the first AzaAHEC Regional Center opening in Nogales. Today, six AzaAHEC Regional Centers support health professions education through Community Based Experiential Training (CBET) rotations, provide continuing education for health professionals, address health disparities, and support local health workforce development.*

*I congratulate Arizona AHEC in celebration of their 40 year anniversary. The AzaAHEC Program has expanded remarkably since the program began in 1984. In 2023-24, AzaAHEC Program Office, the six AzaAHEC Regional Centers, nine Rural Health Professional Programs at U of A, NAU, and ASU; and South Campus Medical Residency have continued to provide community-based interprofessional education in new and innovative ways. I applaud their unwavering commitment to rural and urban underserved communities across Arizona.*



**Michael D. Dake, MD**  
*Senior Vice President for Health Sciences*

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# Arizona AzAHEC Program Highlights FY 2023–24

## 13,082 individuals participated in the following activities:

### 1,945 unique trainees participated in 4,028 Rural and Urban Underserved Health Professions Community Based Experiential Training (CBET) Rotations.

From July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024, the Arizona AHEC Program supported 4,028 CBET Rotations in AzAHEC Regional Centers, Rural Health Professions Programs, and South Campus Medical Residency Program for 570,351 contact hours as follows:

Trainee Academic Discipline/Program	# of Unique Trainees*	# of Field Experiences
Dental Resident	17	119
Medical Resident	103	373
Pharmacy Resident	2	2
Other Undergraduate Health - Related Disciplines	44	102
Nursing or Medical Assistant	125	126
Registered Nurse, Nurse Anesthetist or Other Nurse	147	186
Dentistry, Dental Hygiene or Dental Assistant	122	181
Other Graduate Health - Related Disciplines	9	10
Public Health	185	199
Medical School	449	1190
Nurse Practitioner	319	641
Optometry School	1	1
Pharmacy School	200	388
Physical Therapy	34	34
Physician Assistant	157	445
Undergraduate - Radiological Technician	31	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,945</b>	<b>4,028</b>

\*Unique health professional trainees receiving AzAHEC field experience support through AzAHEC Regional Center, RHPP or South Campus Medical Residency.

### Youth (K–16) Health Career Preparation Programs in Rural and Urban Underserved Areas: 3,849 Participants

Participants in Health Career Preparation Programs included 1,791 Grade 9-16 students in health career structured programs, inclusive of students sponsored or co-sponsored by AzAHEC Regional Centers, Flowing Wells Unified School District, and UAHS Summer Programs.

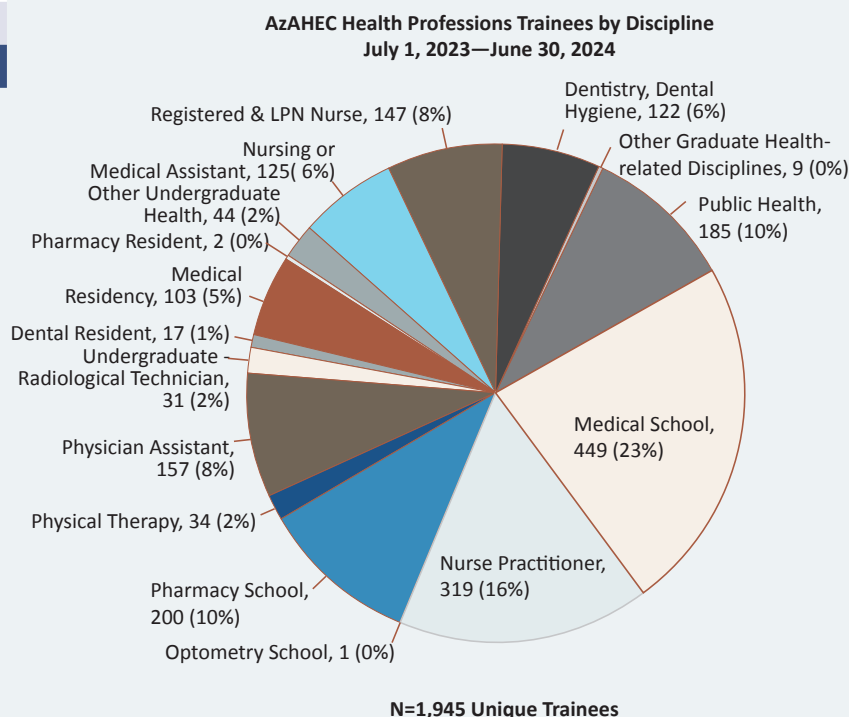
Health Career Preparation Programs have an established curriculum and meet a minimum of 20 hours with the same participants who learn about health career opportunities. Participants in Health Career Events included 2,058 students and adults (parents, teachers and others) who participated in short-term events, including health career informational sessions sponsored or co-sponsored by AzAHEC Regional Centers.

### Continuing Education Events for Health Professionals: 4,926 Participants

Participants at 154 continuing education and professional development events included 4,926 physicians, dentists, public health and allied health professionals, pharmacists, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and physician assistants. Nearly 3,900 (78%) of these events resulted in the issuance of Continuing Medical Education, Continuing Nursing Education, or other required continuing education credits for health professionals toward licensure.

### Community Health Education Events: 2,362 Participants

Regional Centers coordinated and supported health information activities and events for 2,362 local community members throughout Arizona's rural and urban underserved communities.





## AzAHEC Program Executive Summary FY 2023–24

Since 1984, the Arizona Area Health Education Center (AzAHEC) Program has served Arizona through health professions workforce recruitment, training and retention in its rural and urban underserved communities. As we celebrate our 40th anniversary in 2024, we thank our many community and academic partners who have joined us in our journey. We appreciate the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the State of Arizona Lottery Fund for their continued support of our programs.

The 2023-24 AzAHEC Annual report highlights progress and achievements over the last 12 months. A total of 1,945 health profession trainees from over 40 universities and residency programs completed 570,351 training hours. Trainees participated in 4,028 Community Based Experiential Training (CBET) rotations in collaboration with Arizona's six AHEC Regional Centers, nine Rural Health Professions Programs (RHPPs) from the state's three public universities, and graduate medical education residency programs at Banner University Medical Center South and North Country HealthCare (also known as the Colorado Plateau Center for Health Professions).

The AHEC Scholars Program (ASP), a two-year inter-professional education program that selects RHPP students for additional community experiential learning, congratulated 74 AHEC Scholars from the 2022-24 cohort who completed the program in May 2024. In Fall 2024, 100 AHEC Scholars from the 2023-25 cohort will begin their second year of the program and are scheduled for completion in May 2025. Recruitment for AzAHEC's seventh cohort (2024-26) of Scholars resulted in 125 Scholars anticipated to complete the ASP in May 2026. Each cohort gained knowledge through interprofessional curricula with specific didactic and community-based training activities offered at Arizona AHEC Regional Centers and in rural and/or urban underserved communities.

Sincerely,

**Leila Barraza, JD, MPH**

*Director and PI, AzAHEC Program*

*Associate Professor, Zuckerman College of Public Health*

*The University of Arizona Health Sciences*



*Center for Excellence in Rural Education (CERE) finished its inaugural year by hosting three week-long SCRUBS Camps, each designed to provide 21 hours of immersive healthcare career exploration for students in Grades 9-12.*

Continuing education for working health professionals remains a core AzAHEC activity. Each Regional Center identifies and addresses this need, resulting in 154 continuing education and continuing professional development events to 4,926 health professionals across Arizona.

The AzAHEC Regional Centers hosted health career programs with a structured curriculum for 1,791 students in Grades 9-12. The AzAHEC Regional Centers provided health education information to 2,058 elementary through high school students, and to nearly 2,400 community members on health-related topics.

AzAHEC ended FY24 by receiving exciting news that the American Indian Health AHEC (AIH-AHEC) received approval for funding from HRSA for FY25. Previously, AIH-AHEC was supported by State of Arizona Lottery Funds only.

On behalf of the Arizona AHEC Program, we thank our federal and state partners, providers and collaborators and educators from across the state in carrying out our mission “To enhance access to quality health care, particularly primary and preventive care, by improving the supply and distribution of health care professionals through academic community educational partnerships in rural and urban medically underserved areas.”

**Daniel Derksen, MD**

*Senior Advisor, AzAHEC Program*

*Associate Vice President*

*Office of the Senior VP for Health Sciences*

*The University of Arizona*



## About the Arizona AHEC Program (AzAHEC)

- Initiated in 1984 with the first AzAHEC Regional Center in Nogales, in the ensuing 40 years, the number of AzAHEC Regional Centers has grown to six, serving all 15 Arizona counties and 22 American Indian Tribes in carrying out its mission.
- Housed in the U of A Health Sciences Office of the Senior Vice President as a Sponsored Project.
- Enacted by Arizona Revised Statutes (ARS) §§ 5-572(C), 15-1643, 15-1644, and 15-1645.
- Funded by federal and required non-federal matching funds.
- Continued to meet the required non-federal match with State of Arizona lottery funds resulting from a citizen ballot initiative directing support to the AzAHEC Program and Regional Centers.

## Structure

The University of Arizona (U of A) administers the AzAHEC Program and has formal contracts with the AzAHEC Regional Centers located strategically statewide. The AzAHEC Program and Regional Centers conduct the mission, goals, objectives, and work plan by creating, coordinating, and implementing a scope of work designed to address the health professions education and training needs within each Regional Center service area, updated each year. Following federal guidelines and as required by state procurement guidelines, the Regional Centers undergo a periodic formal competing continuation Request for Proposal process staggered such that one or two RFPs are evaluated per year.

The AzAHEC Program Director (Leila Barraza, JD, MPH) consults regularly with the AzAHEC Advisory Commission, who represent health educators, health professionals, and community members serving and/or living in rural and urban medically underserved Arizona communities. Other committees involve faculty, staff, and students at participating health professions colleges at Arizona's three public universities under the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) authority: Arizona State University (ASU), Northern Arizona University (NAU), and U of A. Formal reports are submitted regularly to the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA), and annually to ABOR and the Arizona State Legislature.

## AzAHEC Focus Areas 2023–24

The AzAHEC Program and Regional Centers expanded statewide efforts to strengthen Arizona's health professions workforce pathways to practice including students in Grades K-16, post-secondary health professions students, and health professionals from many disciplines. Regional Centers supported activities to promote health awareness in their communities.

**Health Professions Trainee Education:** The AzAHEC Program, Rural Health Profession Programs (RHPPs), Regional Centers, and Graduate Medical Education (GME, aka residency training), supported clinical rotations throughout Arizona. Dedicated, experienced preceptors and strong academic partnerships with colleges and universities provided high quality community-based education. Some trainees received housing, travel, and related expense support for rural experiences.

**AzAHEC Scholars:** The 2022-24 Scholar cohort completed their two-year program; a 2023-25 Scholar cohort was accepted and had community immersion experiences at their assigned AzAHEC Regional Center. In addition to their health profession trainee education, Scholars get advanced, interprofessional community-based experiences in AHEC Regional Center communities and Rural Health Professions Programs. Faculty mentors nominated by AzAHEC Regional Centers provided AzAHEC Scholars with continuity and guidance throughout the two-year program.

**Youth (K-16) Health Career Programs:** The AzAHEC Program and Regional Centers supported structured activities to introduce Arizona's youth to health professions, collaborating with local high schools and community organizations to support health career structured programs (e.g., Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) chapters). Summer programs included Med-Start Health Careers and Flowing Wells Unified School District. Regional Centers participated in information events that introduced students in Grades K-16 to health careers.

**Continuing Education (CE/CME) for Health Professionals:** Regional Centers provided CE/CME events that supported licensure requirements for health professionals. Regional Centers sponsored professional development events that increased the knowledge of health professionals.

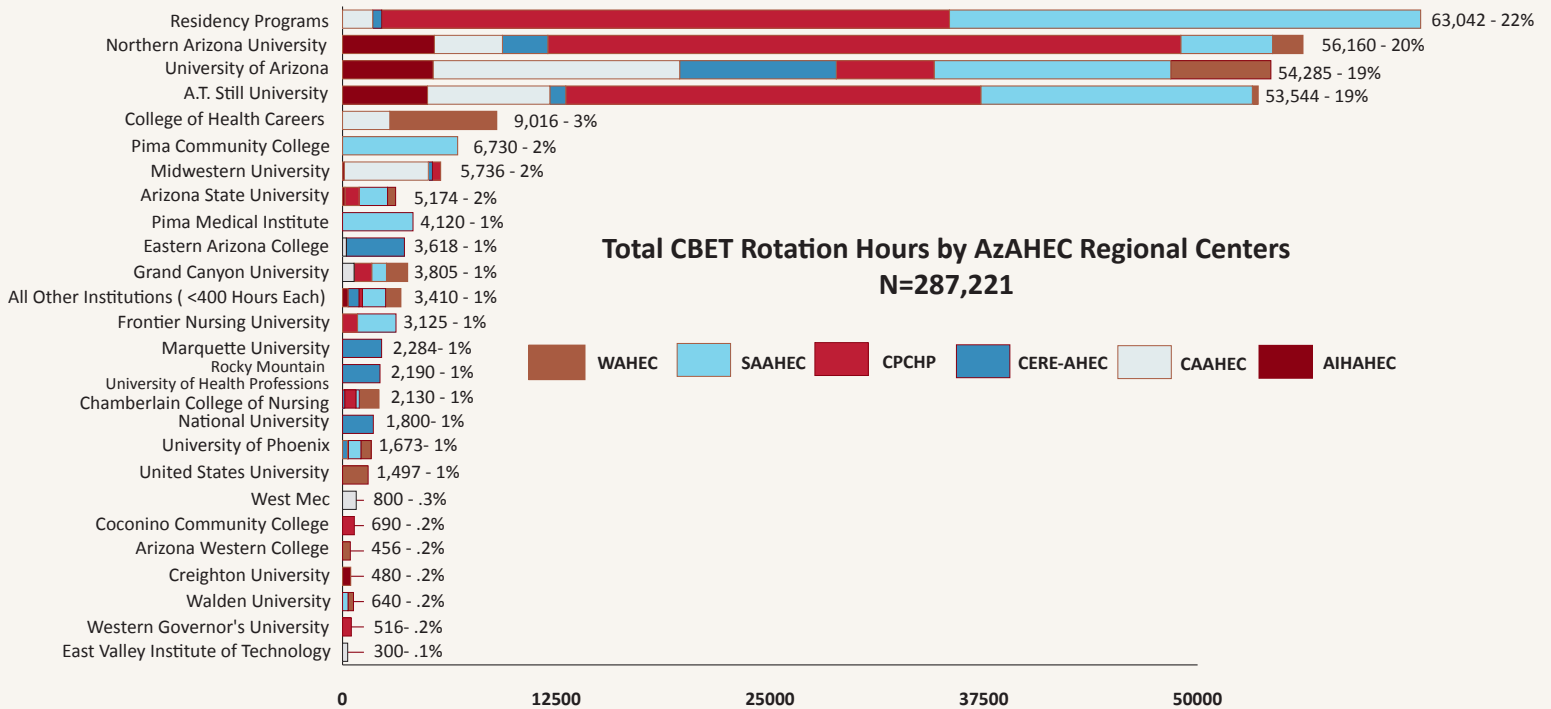
**Community Health Promotion:** Regional Centers coordinated and supported health education activities and events for local community members throughout Arizona's rural and urban underserved areas.



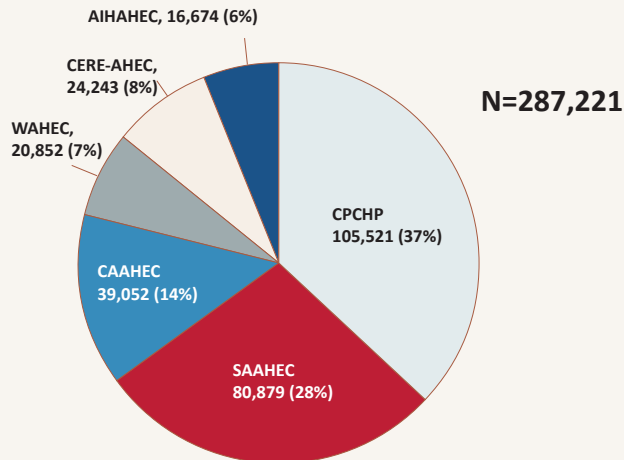
# Education and Training of Arizona's Healthcare Workforce

## AzAHEC Regional Centers Overview

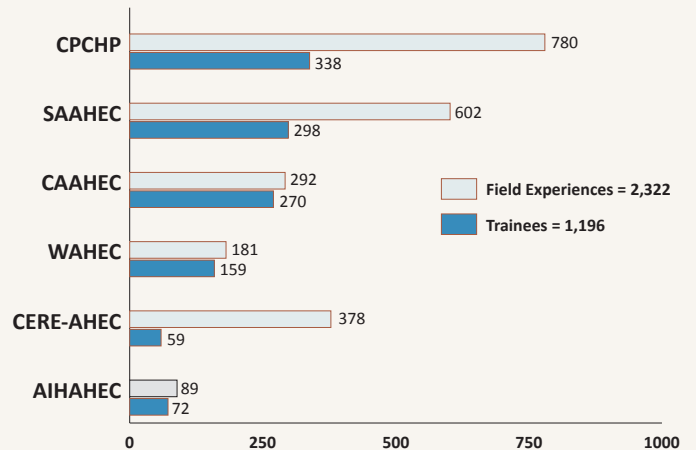
Beginning in 1984 and for forty years, Arizona AHEC has served the healthcare needs of underserved Arizonans. Today, there are six AHEC Regional Centers serving all 15 Arizona counties and 22 American Indian Tribes. The six regional centers are: American Indian Health AHEC (AIH-AHEC); Center for Excellence in Rural Education AHEC (CERE); Central Arizona AHEC (CAAHEC); Colorado Plateau Center for Health Professionals (CPCHP); Southern Arizona AHEC (SAAHEC); and Western Arizona AHEC (WAHEC). The following charts highlight work across all AHEC Regional Centers in 2023-24; Center-specific narratives are provided beginning on page 25.



## Field Experiences Hours by AzAHEC Regional Center July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024



## AzAHEC Trainees and Field Experiences by AzAHEC Regional Center July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024



RHPP trainees rotating at an AHEC Regional Center may receive a portion of support from both their RHPP and the supporting center. RHPP trainee support is reflected on the Center reports, Pages 25-36.



The AzaHEC Rural Health Profession Program (RHPP) Overview

The Arizona State Legislature authorized the Rural Health Professions Program in 2007 by state statute (ARS § 15-1754). It is now a core component of the AzaHEC Program to address shortages of health professionals in rural and urban underserved Arizona communities. In FY24, 899 unique RHPP students at U of A, ASU and NAU RHPPs received a total of 1,779 rural and underserved community based experiential training (CBET) experiences for a total of 334,649 hours.

RHPPs provide rural training experiences for health professions students in the public universities under the Arizona Board of Regents: University of Arizona Health Sciences Colleges of Nursing, Pharmacy, Medicine (COM-Tucson and COM-Phoenix), and Public Health; the Arizona State University (ASU) Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation, and the Northern Arizona University (NAU) School of Nursing, Department of Physical Therapy, and Department of Physician Assistant Studies.

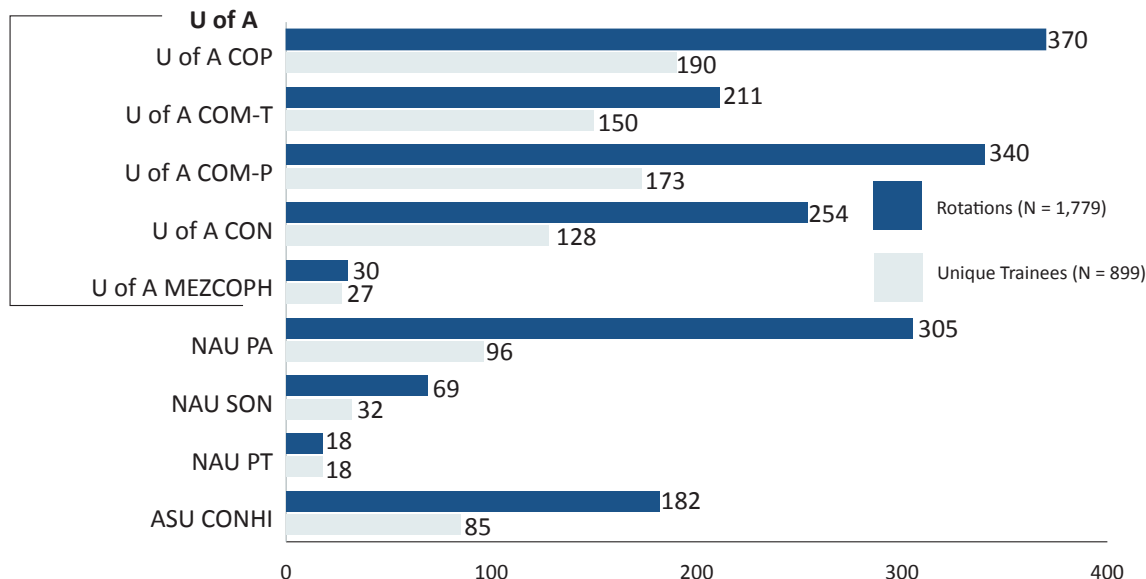
The AzaHEC Program supports urban, medically underserved training experiences to address primary care provider shortages. RHPPs prepare health professions students for practice in Arizona’s rural communities. While RHPP student participation is voluntary, statutorily, U of A selects 15 medical, four

pharmacy and ten nurse practitioner students; ASU selects four, and NAU selects two nurse practitioner students for RHPP. The number of participating RHPP students and programs has grown significantly above these statutory requirements.

*“The rural health rotation increased my understanding of the social determinants of health. As I was on rotation, living in a rural environment, I saw first-hand the impact of limited work availability, a lack of healthy food choices, and minimal healthy community programs and how these greatly impact the health of rural residents. These social determinants are pivotal in increasing the chronic health problems that affect rural communities. It is important for me as a future healthcare provider to understand health care barriers for people in rural communities and provide patient-centered care that will positively impact rural patients, helping them to achieve their version of optimal health.”*

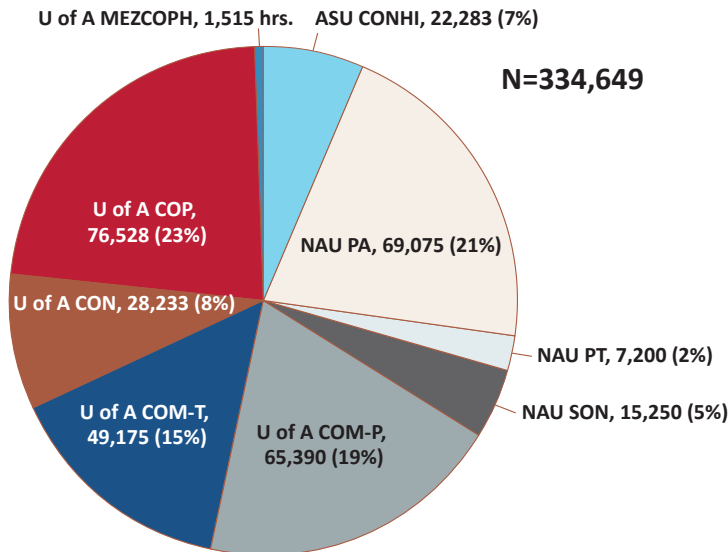
*Leah Cole, FNP Student, RHPP*

AzaHEC Trainees and Rotations by Rural Health Professions Program  
July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

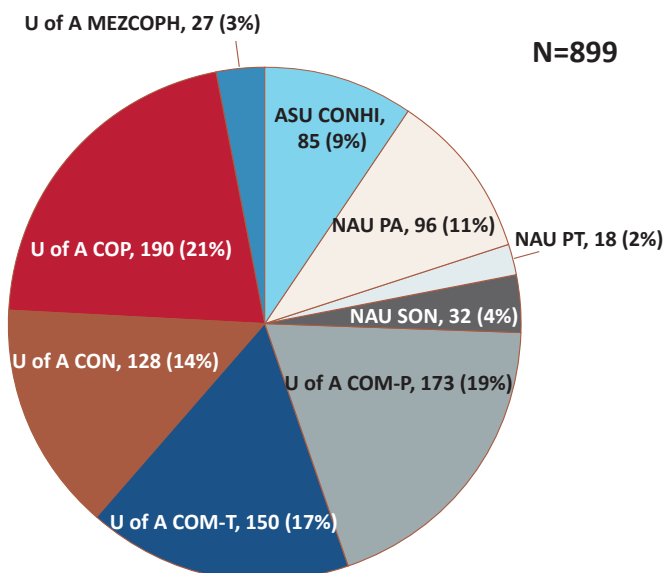




### Rotation Hours by Rural Health Professions Program (RHPP) July 1, 2023–June 30, 2024



### Unique Trainees by Rural Health Professions Program (RHPP) July 1, 2023–June 30, 2024



*“First, I would like to thank you for allowing me to be part of AHEC. The learning experience I gained gave me an immense appreciation for the great need to serve Arizona’s rural and medically underserved communities. I am looking forward to year two of the program! The community experience I had with CERE-AHEC made me appreciate the many different factors that influence the health and well-being of an individual in the rural health setting. Being able to assess and engage in speaking with the many other stakeholders in the community and having the opportunity to work with an interdisciplinary team of scholars, I have grown to appreciate the need to serve the rural communities in Arizona and focus my learning and goals into serving rural/medically underserved communities in the future. Again, thank you for the opportunity to have an immersive experience that completely enriched my doctoral learning. I look forward to year two of AHEC.”*

*Paul Carpena, AGNP Student, RHPP & AHEC Scholar*

### Collaboration Between RHPPs and AHEC Regional Centers

In 2023-24, 58,127 (17%) of trainee hours reported by the Rural Health Professions Programs were supported within an AHEC Regional Center with a preceptor, housing and/or a stipend.

Tables and charts above reflect hours and rotations for unique trainees within RHPPs.



## AzaHEC Scholars Program

The Arizona Area Health Education Center (AzaHEC) Scholars Program (ASP) is a two-year interprofessional program providing health profession students with advanced community-based experiences in rural and underserved settings in the AzaHEC Regional Center services areas.

Graduate-level participants are selected from the AzaHEC Rural Health Professions Programs (RHPPs). To qualify, scholars must be enrolled in an RHPP and meet all academic and didactic training requirements of their graduate-level health professional program. Scholars are matched into interprofessional groups at one of the AHEC Regional Centers where they have 80 hours annually of community-based experiences in rural and underserved settings in addition to academic requirements. For the 2022-24 cohort, 74 RHPP graduate level students completed the ASP in Spring 2024. For the 2023-25 cohort, 100 students will continue with the ASP and are expected to complete in Spring 2025. Faculty Mentors who are practicing health professionals support and direct interprofessional cohorts at each Regional Center. Approximately 20% of RHPP students apply to the ASP.

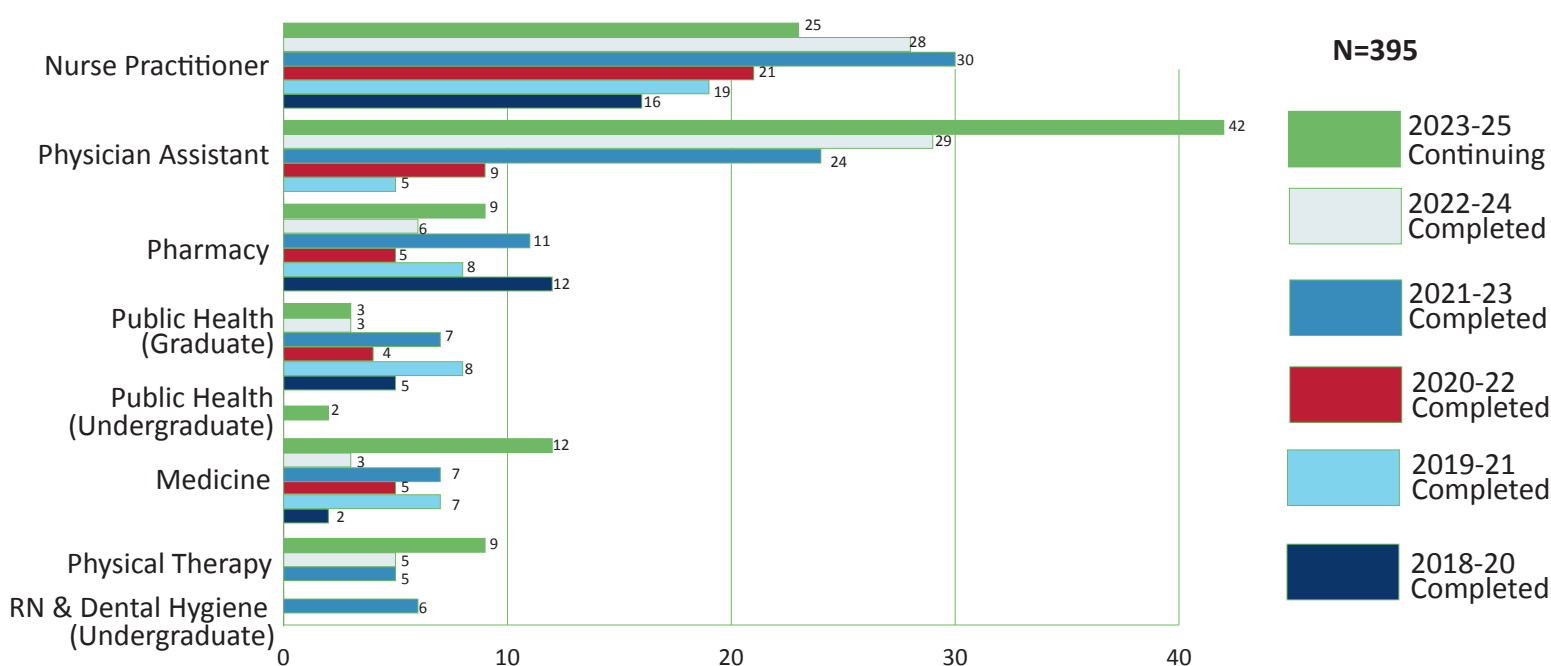
Further expansion of the ASP at all Regional Centers continues. Beginning with the 2023-25 Cohort,

American Indian Health AHEC ASP program became available to undergraduate students from the NAU Nursing and Public Health Colleges, in addition to RHPP graduate programs.

Since inception of the ASP a total of 520 scholars have either completed the program or are currently enrolled in the program as follows:

- Thirty-five (35) scholars completed the first (2018-20) cohort.
- Forty-seven (47) scholars completed the second (2019-21) cohort.
- Forty-four (44) scholars completed the third (2020-22) cohort.
- Ninety-five (95) scholars completed the fourth (2021-23) cohort.
- Seventy-four (74) scholars completed the fifth (2022-24) cohort.
- One hundred (100) scholars are in the sixth (2023-25) cohort and expected to complete the program in May 2025.
- One hundred and twenty-five (125) scholars are newly enrolled in the seventh (2024-26) cohort and are expected to complete the program in May 2026. The 2024-26 Cohort is not reflected in the chart below.

**AzaHEC Scholars 2018–24 Cohorts by Health Profession Discipline**



## Tuba City Housing

Tuba City, Arizona, is located within the Navajo Nation in northern Arizona. AzaHEC leases a modular home in Tuba City that can accommodate up to eight simultaneous trainees completing clinical rotations in the area. These trainees have the opportunity to provide essential health profession services and to play a critical role in one of Arizona's underserved communities. In FY24, trainees stayed at the AzaHEC house a total of 533 nights, an increase of almost 70% from the previous year. Trainees included medical residents as well as graduate students from medical, nurse anesthetist, pharmacy, and nurse practitioner programs at the U of A and North Country HealthCare in association with the AHEC Regional Center CPCHP.



## Evaluations

**AzaHEC evaluates programs based on activity participation reported by partners and through surveys collected from participants in four activity types:**

1. Health profession trainees (students and residents) who participated in rotations.
2. Health profession students who participated in the AHEC Scholars Program (ASP).
3. Licensed and other health professionals who received Continuing Education (CE) or Continuing Medical Education (CME).
4. High school and undergraduate students who participated in structured pipeline programs.

**Evaluation indicates that AzaHEC programming reaches diverse populations and leads to positive outcomes.**

**Highlights of 2023–24 survey responses include:**

- ▶ The majority of respondents to the Post-Rotation Survey (77%) indicated that the rotation increased their likelihood of selecting practice in a rural or medically underserved area.
- ▶ Of the AHEC Scholars who completed the two-year program in 2023 and responded to the Post-Program Survey, a good majority reported increases in confidence in interprofessional collaborative competencies (e.g., in their ability to demonstrate how the skills and knowledge of interprofessional team members complement and overlap (84%). The large majority (98%) reported that they intend to become employed or pursue further training in a medically underserved setting, and (70%) also reported that they intend to become employed or pursue further training in a rural setting. Analysis of surveys from 19 respondents to the One-Year Post Graduation Surveys for AHEC Scholars who were working in a health discipline at the time of the survey, indicated that four were working in rural Arizona, and six were working with an Arizona medically-underserved community.
- ▶ The large majority of respondents to the Continuing Education (CE) survey indicated they were “likely” or “very likely” to implement the CE material into their practice (89%).
- ▶ Grades 9–16 respondents to the Post-Pipeline Program Survey reported that they had increased their knowledge of health careers “very much” (62%) or “pretty much” (27%), and by program end 90% were able to specifically identify one or more health careers they were interested in pursuing.



## Twelfth Annual Interprofessional Rural Health Professions (RHPP) Conference

Arizona AHEC is dedicated to supporting the success of health professional trainees throughout Arizona, especially as they engage with rural and underserved communities. As part of their educational experience, Arizona AHEC, in collaboration with AzAHEC Regional Centers and Rural Health Professions Programs, hosts an annual two-day Interprofessional Rural Health Professions Conference. A total of 225 participants, including Arizona AHEC Scholars, attended the twelfth consecutive conference on April 12-13, 2024. The conference serves as a platform for health professionals to share best practices and provides trainees with the opportunity to present their scholarly work.

## Satellite Locations

Since 2020, this event has been conducted online to accommodate participants on clinical rotations across the state; however, satellite viewing locations, facilitated by RHPPs and AHEC Centers, enable in-person engagement during the Rural Health Professions Conference. This year, Northern Arizona University's School of Nursing and Arizona State University's Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation hosted satellite viewing of the conference in Phoenix, Arizona. A total of 53 students and faculty attended from ASU, NAU, and U of A health professions.

## Friday, April 12th – Poster Showcase

The first day of the conference featured a Poster Showcase presented by health professional students and faculty. AHEC Scholar groups who



*Students viewing the RHPP conference's opening blessing provided by Dr. Carlos Gonzales at the satellite viewing location in Phoenix.*

were completing their first year in the program were invited to present posters. Several awards supplemented by state funded prizes were given, including the “Dr. Ronald Weinstein Excellence in Video Engagement Award,” named in honor of the telehealth pioneer and former Arizona AHEC Commissioner. The winning video poster, “A Community Assessment of Payson, Arizona,” was created by the AHEC Scholars Group from the newly formed CERE-AHEC Regional Center. Additionally, awards were given for Outstanding Poster and Excellent Poster winners, recognizing the high quality of the students’ scholarly presentations.

### **Saturday, April 13th— Main Session**

The second day of the conference included a series of presentations by health professionals, focusing on topics relevant to the Arizona populations served. Presentations such as “Harnessing the Power of Food as Medicine from the Kitchen to the Community” and “Traditional Healing Modalities” highlighted the integration of traditional and modern approaches to health. A panel discussion featured Physician Assistant and Doctor of Nursing Practice graduates, along with AHEC Scholar completers, who shared how training influenced their successful career paths. AHEC Scholar groups completing their second year were also invited to make podium presentations on their scholarly work, covering topics like “Creating a Culturally Adaptive Cookbook for the Cocopah Reservation” and “Breathe Free: Empowering Youth Against Vaping in Sierra Vista, AZ.” Feedback from attendees reflected high satisfaction, particularly with the diverse and engaging content, and many appreciated the opportunity to connect with peers and professionals.

Presentations were given on Saturday, April 13, by the AHEC Scholars 2022 – 24 Cohort groups on the following topics:

- SAAHEC Group 1 – Benson Food Project
- WAHEC Group – Creating a Culturally Adaptive Cookbook for the Cocopah Reservation
- SAAHEC Group 2 – Health Resource Education in Nogales Arizona
- CPCHP Group- Falls in Focus: Evaluating Fall

Risk Assessments within Independent Living Environments in Show Low, AZ

- SAAHEC Group 3 – Breathe Free: Empowering Youth Against Vaping in Sierra Vista, AZ
- CAAHEC Group – Integrating a Marketing Approach to Enhance Community Resource Awareness in North Yavapai County
- SAAHEC Group 4 – Health and Wealth Resources for Vail, AZ

The judges, comprised of Regional Center and RHPP Directors, awarded three prizes:

### **1. Ronald Weinstein Award for Excellence in Video**

Presentation: *A Community Assessment of Payson, AZ*

Authors: Manuel Acosta, Lilyanna Avalos, Victor Paul Carpena, Marin Carter, Leslie Diaz-Martin, Katharine Eakin, Laura Eells, Jenna Glovsky, Kristina Lott, Emily Kissel, Maranda Koch, Jenny Larson, Samantha Milewski, Leanne Neu, Farnoush Sarikhani, Jami Smith, Sara Wienke.

### **2. Outstanding Poster (1st Place):**

*Coccidioidomycosis (Valley Fever) in Southern*

*Arizona: Building Capacity for Rural Health*

*Management.* Authors: Rebecca Foley, Alexandra McLafferty, Olivia Chavez, and Angel Tarrango.

### **3. Excellent Poster (2nd Place): Yuma, Arizona:**

*Community Needs Assessment.* Authors: Brad Wieland, Victor Gonzalez, Isabelle Azar, America Becerra, Shanti Ryan, Monzerrat Espericueta, Haley Moore, McKenna Warner, Meghan Leunen, Yeny Contreras, Chalita Tepsing, Cong Wang, Carter Moskowitz, Amanda Wallace, Kimberly Swinson-Mollica, Victoria Rubio, Keely Nash, Ricardo Armenta, Kayleen Tubbs.

### **Preceptor Recognition**

Preceptors from the community play an essential role in ensuring successful trainee experiences in both rural and underserved urban regions of Arizona. AzAHEC sincerely appreciates the dedication of the 934 preceptors who collectively provided 400,483 hours of clinical rotations between January 1, 2023, and December 31, 2023. Preceptors were recognized at the 12th Annual Interprofessional RHPP Conference.



## University of Arizona (U of A) College of Medicine-Phoenix (COM-P) Rural Health Professions Program (RHPP) And AHEC Scholars Program (ASP)

**Jonathan Cartsonis, MD, RHPP Director**

### 2023–24 Program Highlights

RHPP Students supported	173
RHPP Rotations supported	340
RHPP Rotation Hours supported	65,390
2022–24 AHEC Scholars supported	3
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	6

Arizona’s rural communities are subject to severe and intractable physician shortages. The U of A land grant mission means the COM-P has responsibilities to create medical education opportunities for Arizonans and train a physician workforce that meets the needs of all Arizonans, including where disparities are greatest - in rural, tribal, border, and urban underserved areas.

The pathway to physician practice is long – 4 years of college, 4 years of medical school (undergraduate medical education aka UME), then 4 or more years of residency training (graduate medical education aka GME). AzaAHEC funding helps the COM-P advance its comprehensive plan to train and graduate physicians who practice in high need communities.



LIC Medical Students Participate in a “Farm to Table” Event at U of A -Yuma teaching kitchen.

Effective strategies include admitting more rural students, appointing an RHPP Director to the admissions committee, redesigning the admissions process, obtaining Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) permission to create a new admissions pathway for rural students, develop and implement an accelerated 3-year UME path to the MD degree.

AzaAHEC funding expanded primary care (PC) GME options for our COM-P medical student graduates by:

- Establishing a new rural family medicine (FM) residency in Payson (July 2024) and one in San Luis (to start July 2025). These sites sponsor Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship (LIC) for our medical students.
- Ensuring rural family medicine residencies host medical students in LICs. Graduates can apply for residency training in the same place. Doing both UME and GME in one rural site greatly increases the likelihood they will practice there upon graduation.

In FY24 we set COM-P program records by:

- Expanding from 8 to 15 LIC students in: rural Payson (for 12-mo.), a US-Mexico border community San Luis, AZ (5-mo.), with the Gila River Indian Community (6-mo.) in Sacaton, and in Flagstaff (5-mo.).
- Supporting 173 unique students in at least one rural or urban underserved rotation.
- Recording 65,390 clinical training hours in rural, tribal, and urban underserved clinical training sites.
- Enabling 9 medical students to participate in the AHEC Scholars Program; matching each with a faculty mentor, conducting rural community health needs assessments, creatively addressing unmet needs, measuring impacts, and sharing their scholarly work results.

The COM-P looks forward to expanding student participation and reducing rural physician shortages. Working with the AzaAHEC Program, the 6 AHEC Regional Centers, and 9 RHPPS, we uphold our duty to the state and build a health workforce that aims to meet the health needs of every Arizonan.

## University of Arizona (U of A) College of Medicine-Tucson (COM-T) Rural Health Professions Program (RHPP) And AHEC Scholars Program (ASP)

**Anna Landeau, MD, MPH, DTM&H**

*RHPP Director*

*Clinical Assistant Professor,*

*Department of Family and Community Medicine*

### 2023–24 Program Highlights

RHPP Students supported	150
RHPP Rotations supported	211
RHPP Rotation Hours supported	49,175
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	6

The **COM-T RHPP** provides robust community-based education to medical students, exposes them to rural life and health care delivery, and aims to build the rural health workforce.

Each year, 20-30 first year COM-T students participate in our RHPP. In the spring semester they participate in the Issues in Rural Health noon seminar series on rural health policy, ethics, cultural humility, and generational trauma. They are assigned to preceptors for summer rotations, compile community profiles, and teach each other about their assigned rural communities. Students submit rural rotation reflections. Students often report that these shape their career trajectory, establish life-long mentors and influence decisions to return for required clerkship rotations years 3 and 4.

Our RHPP Certificate Program requires a 10-week rural Arizona rotation. In FY24, 19 students completed the Rural Health Distinction Track (RHDT) by spending 16 weeks in rural rotations and completing a capstone project. Capstones included: Strategies to Increase Access to Rural Obstetric Care in AZ and The Syphilis Epidemic and its Disproportionate Burden on Rural America.

COM-T offers all students the opportunity to do rural and underserved rotations, providing housing, travel, and stipend support. Rural rotations emphasize primary care specialties - family medicine, pediatrics, and internal medicine. Rural rotations in obstetrics/gynecology, general surgery, and emergency medicine

are available. Students develop rural clinical skills and get to know their communities in terms of benefits, attractions, socioeconomic and demographic attributes.

COM-T pathway programs include the Pre-Medical Admissions Pathway (P-MAP), a post-baccalaureate program for underserved students, the Honors Early Admission Program (HEAP) for honors students, and a Primary Care Scholarship Program (PCSP), that pays for tuition for students who go on to complete primary care residencies then return to practice in an Arizona HPSA.

**COM-T AHEC Scholars Program** - had 6 Scholars this year, including on the Tohono O'odham Reservation in Southern Arizona with the new AIH-AHEC.

**Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship (LIC)** - is a continuity-based clinical medical education where students stay in one place, with one set of faculty members and a panel of patients, for an extended period (i.e., nine months). COM-T is working with the COM-P to jointly expand this program, and start LIC programs in places such as Safford, AZ.





University of Arizona (U of A)  
College of Nursing (CON)  
Rural Health Professions Program (RHPP)  
AHEC Scholars Program (ASP)

Christy Pacheco, DNP, FNP-BC  
RHPP Director, Clinical Assistant Professor

2023–24 Program Highlights	
RHPP Students supported	128
RHPP Rotations supported	254
RHPP Rotation Hours supported	28,233
2022–24 AHEC Scholars supported	4
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	11

The U of A CON RHPP aims to improve the development and recruitment of an interprofessional healthcare workforce to practice in Arizona’s rural and underserved areas. Our Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) students encompass a range from family practice to behavioral health specialties.

**Clinical Education:** DNP students completed a variety of primary care clinical rotations from FQHCs to private practices. RHPP travel stipends supported 37 FNP students for rural rotations and 30 more for Spring and Summer clinical training. Students received clinical supervision, evaluation, telehealth training, Objective Structured Clinical Exams (OSCEs), and on-campus clinical intensives focused on primary care clinical skills and assessment. Collaboration with Native American communities included workforce development, clinical placements, INCATS on-campus networking and a partner summit.

**IPE Events:** The Annual Interprofessional RHPP Health Fair was held in collaboration with North Country HealthCare’s CPCHP Regional Center, Coconino County Health Department, and others. An IPE event at a local soup kitchen involved 29 health professions students from dental hygiene, medicine, pharmacy, and FNP. Students did health screenings, gave immunizations and made referrals for underserved community members. In June, 22 IPE students participated in CPCHP’s Mock Code Event under the supervision of community and faculty clinicians and facilitators.

**Didactic Opportunities:** Coursework, seminars and community health needs assessments provided 36 students with an evidence-based foundation to understand rural and medically underserved population needs and resources. They attended the Annual Interprofessional RHPP Conference, developed posters and presented community assessment and intervention findings.

**ASP:** In collaboration with our RHPP, AHEC Regional Center directors, and the AzaAHEC Program, 15 of our FNP students participated in the ASP: 4 in the 2022-24 Cohort and 11 in the 2023-25 Cohort. Interprofessional groups of Scholars participated in community immersions for community assessments and community-based interventions, shared findings and made recommendations at the Annual Interprofessional RHPP Conference in poster and podium presentations.

**Outcomes:** In FY24, 14 RHPP students, including AHEC Scholars, graduated; six completed our Post-Graduation Survey. All (100%) indicated intention to work in underserved areas, two-thirds plan to work in rural and underserved areas - at an FQHC, in the NHSC, in an outpatient and mobile unit for those experiencing homelessness, serving a rural Hispanic/Latinx population, doing a VA Residency Program, and working at an urban pulmonary clinic with rural outreach. One of our RHPP graduates from the Navajo Nation presented at the Spring 2024 AANP Health Policy Conference in D.C.

Our RHPP and ASP provide critical clinical and didactic support for DNP students interested in caring for rural, tribal and underserved populations, made possible in collaboration with our statewide partners.

*“The AHEC Program increased my awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge about social determinants of health and how they impact the health, well-being, and over-all quality of life of people. The AHEC program helped me find a new purpose and goal as I finish my degree. After the program, I am sure about my commitment to working in primary care to serve people who are underserved and most vulnerable.”*

– RHPP Student

## University of Arizona (U of A) R. Ken Coit College of Pharmacy (RKC COP) Rural Health Professions Program (RHPP) And AHEC Scholars Program (ASP)

**Elizabeth A. Hall-Lipsy, JD, MPH**

*RHPP Director*

*Assistant Dean, Academic Affairs and Assessment*

*Associate Professor of Practice,*

*Director PharmD Forward Programs*

### 2023–24 Program Highlights

RHPP Students supported	190
RHPP Rotations supported	370
RHPP Rotation Hours supported	76,528
2022–24 AHEC Scholars supported	6
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	9

Pharmacists protect patient safety by ensuring medications and dosages are correct, compounding meds to meet specific needs, collaborating to select optimal treatments, providing education on meds and health conditions, and administering vaccines. Just 7% of Arizona’s pharmacists practice in rural areas, where 15% of Arizona’s population lives. Through its RHPP and Professional Certificate in Pharmacy-Related Health Disparities, the RKC COP ensures access to pharmacists and dramatically impacts student decisions to practice in Arizona’s rural and underserved communities.

Our RHPP/Certificate students are placed in rural communities three times in their pharmacy education: the summers between Year 1 and 2 and Year 2 and 3 for 4-week community or institutional rotations, and during Year 4 for a 6-week advanced pharmacy practice rotation. With AzaHEC funding over the last 10 years, our RHPP expanded from 4 to 32 first-year students per year and now represents 26% of the RKC COP Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) student body. In FY24 AzaHEC funding also supported our 15 AHEC Scholars.

The COP RHPP recruited 35 students from the class of 2027 and 33 students completed their first rural rotation during this summer. In FY24, we placed 159 unique students into 370 rotations for almost 77,000 hours of pharmacy training in rural and urban

underserved Arizona communities. All of our RHPP students are in the Professional Certificate track (n=134), 54% represent a racial minority group, 5% identify as Hispanic/Latinx, 41% are from a rural community (pop. < 50,000) and 68% are from an underserved background defined as one or more of the following: (1) first in their family to attend college, (2) received a scholarship or loan for disadvantaged students, (3) relied on federal or state assistance programs, or (4) lived in an area where there were few medical providers.

In FY24, 37 students earned their RHPP Professional Certificate in Pharmacy-Related Health Disparities for a total of 306 since its inception in 2010. The Certificate requires rural clinical rotations, two classroom-based courses taught by college faculty: Health Disparities in the U.S. and Community Assessment for Pharmacy where 350 students conducted community assessments of their RHPP rotation sites, gave written and oral reports to their peers and AzaHEC Regional Center colleagues, and presented at the Annual Interprofessional RHPP Conference. Students participate in community programs and events coordinated by Regional Centers - PharmCamp, health fairs, vaccination campaigns, and others.

Of our 37 graduates, 14 were selected for competitive post-graduate pharmacy residencies, 3 of these residencies provide care in rural communities and 2 are in underserved communities; 12 work at community pharmacies in Tucson and Phoenix; 3 are pursuing IHS/Tribal Health Care employment; 2 were undecided at the time of the survey; and one student each in: the American Society of Health System Pharmacists fellowship, a PhD program, the Air Force as a commissioned officer, a rural Arizona pharmacy. In our graduates survey, 89% reported intent to pursue employment in an underserved community and 56% plan rural employment. Since AzaHEC funding started, 28% of our graduates have been employed in a rural setting, 56% treat underserved patients, 27% of RHPP alumni practice in rural Arizona, and 18% are rural preceptors for current pharmacy students.



## University of Arizona (U of A) Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health (MEZCOPH) Rural Health Professions Program (RHPP) And AHEC Scholars Program (ASP)

**Marc Verhougstraete, PhD**

*RHPP Director, Associate Professor*

### 2023–24 Program Highlights

RHPP Students supported	27
RHPP Rotations supported	30
RHPP Rotation Hours supported	1,515
2022–24 AHEC Scholars supported	3
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	3

The MEZCOPH RHPP is housed in the Arizona Center for Rural Health (AzCRH) whose mission is to improve the health and wellness of Arizona’s rural and underserved populations. Partnerships with Arizona’s AHEC Program, the 6 Regional Centers and 9 RHPPs serve as a multidisciplinary platform for active, collaborative student learning and reflection, emphasize health care and work to reduce Arizona’s health workforce shortages.

The MEZCOPH RHPP team includes Dr. Verhougstraete, Jennifer Peters (State Office of Rural Health Program Manager), Dr. Mona Arora (Assistant Research Professor), and Natasha Rapp. Our service-learning courses support community-engaged experiences to help students understand the assets, challenges, and issues facing Arizona’s rural underserved communities.

In FY24, 27 MEZCOPH students participated in our graduate-level service-learning courses, AHEC Scholars Program, or RHPP internships. Courses include a 16 week 2-unit (PHPM 597C), a 16-week 1-unit (PHP 595), 7-week offerings (PHPM 497D, PHPM 597D, HPS 597A), and a flexible 10-week (HSD 496/596) MILAGRO course. Course formats maximize community connection via readings, lectures, group discussions, course themes, learning objectives, and competencies. Evaluation data is used to continuously improve course offerings, and adapted to include new content on emerging rural public health concerns and emergencies such as

excessive heat and responding to emergencies.

Since 2018, our RHPP service-learning courses and activities involved more than 220 students in approximately 10,445 contact hours. Participants reflect Arizona’s diversity with 40% Hispanic, >15% mixed race, 4% Black or African American, and 4% Asian. Student participants were >80% female, >40% grew up in a rural area, and 56% grew up in Arizona.

**AHEC Scholars Program (ASP)** – is a 2-year interprofessional, community-based experiential training program in rural or underserved Arizona communities. In FY24 our MEZCOPH RHPP had 3 Scholars from the 2022-24 cohort graduate, and the 3 Scholars in the 2023-25 cohort engaged with Arizona communities in ASP Year 1.

**Internships** – 3 students completed internships in FY24 on rural environmental health disparities measuring exposures, defining interventions, and developing education materials.

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*“I enjoyed working with students in different graduate health professions programs, while having an opportunity to share my public health knowledge, as the AHEC Scholars Program is heavy on using public health topics, but not many public health students.”*

*- Public Health AHEC Scholar & RHPP Student*

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## Arizona State University (ASU) Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation (CONHI) Rural Health Professions Program (RHPP) And AHEC Scholars Program (ASP)

**Diane E. Nuñez, DNP, RN, ANP-BC, FNAP**

*RHPP Director, DNP Program Director,  
Clinical Professor*

### 2023–24 Program Highlights

RHPP Students supported	85
RHPP Rotations supported	182
RHPP Rotation Hours supported	22,283
2022–24 AHEC Scholars supported	18
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	10

The ASU CONHI RHPP & ASP provide Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) students clinical rotations in underserved Arizona sites, foster interprofessional community-based experience, and nurture student interest to practice in underserved settings. These contribute to the AzAHEC mission to develop a culturally-competent, diverse healthcare workforce, reduce health disparities and improve outcomes.

### Clinical Placements, Interprofessional Education (IPE), Preceptor Support:

Experiences include networking, outreach, social determinants of health, cultural humility, community assessment, and the challenges of working in underserved communities. Longitudinal clinical rotations foster deeper community engagement and care continuity. The Center for the Advancement of Interprofessional Practice, Education & Research (CAIPER) provides resources for students and preceptors. Dr. Barret Michalec presented on ways to engage humility to improve interprofessional practice.

### Orientation, Networking, and

**Clinical Placement:** Orientation included site descriptions, information on travel, rotation, and housing support. RHPP and ASP

students participated in networking events to share experiences. CAIPER provided free modules using IPEC® national interprofessional education competencies, interactive case studies, and reflection. Participants received Certificates of Completion.

**AHEC Scholars Program (ASP):** 18 Scholars in the 2022-24 cohort graduated and honored at a luncheon with ASP medallions; 10 Scholars in the 2023-25 cohort finish in May 2025. The 2022-24 cohort has 5 graduates employed in rural or underserved areas. The curriculum includes community immersions, monthly seminars, ongoing community assessment and intervention project teamwork.

RHPP and ASP students participated in the 12th Annual Interprofessional Rural Health Professions Conference with RHPP directors, faculty, and preceptors. Students reported enjoying the networking, participating in the interactive conference, seeing posters and hearing guest presenters.

**Outcomes:** The ASU RHPP supported 182 rotations and 21 DNP projects in rural and urban HPSAs in the 6 AHEC regions, exceeding our project targets. RHPP FNP student demographics indicate: 52% grew up in a rural area, 61% reported a disadvantaged background, 22% live in an area with few providers; 56% grew up in Arizona, 26% are minority, and 8% reported being bilingual in Spanish.

**Evaluation:** RHPP and ASP students describe how their experiences met the project requirements, impact their professional development and desire for employment in rural and underserved areas. Students were able to explain interprofessional models of health care and how social determinants of health affect these populations. Dr. Nuñez met regularly with directors, preceptors and staff on increasing sites and preceptors and enhancing student RHPP and ASP experiences.



*Eight of the students from the 22-24 ASU CONHI's ASP Cohort. Pictured: Molly Ament, Heather Muench, Kimani Odina-Hebert, Alexis Hale, Maddy Binz, Jill Quillman, Allison Leung, Alicia Garcia*



## Northern Arizona University (NAU) Department of Physician Assistant (PA) Studies Rural Health Professions Program (RHPP) AHEC Scholars Program (ASP)

**Bettie Coplan, PhD, PA-C**

*RHPP Director, Associate Professor*

**Jacob Gubler, MMS, PA-C**

*RHPP Co-Director, Associate Clinical Professor*

### 2023–24 Program Highlights

RHPP Students supported	96
RHPP Rotations supported	305
RHPP Rotation Hours supported	69,075
2022–24 AHEC Scholars supported	29
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	42

The NAU PA RHPP plays a crucial role in our goal to prepare graduates for practice in Arizona, with a focus on primary care in medically underserved communities (MUCs). Promoting MUC practice starts by admitting students who grew up in these settings. Of our 2023-24 PA students, 41% grew up in rural communities (pop. <50,000). The AHEC Program and Regional Center partnership significantly strengthens our PA clinical rotations in rural and MUC settings and promotes future practice in these areas.

All PA students participate in the RHPP for the didactic and clinical phases (12-months each) and benefit from the RHPP-funded education technology that helps prepare them for future practice. In the clinical phase, students average five, four-week clinical rotations in rural or MUCs and spend 24 weeks in primary care clinics.

**Interprofessional Education (IPE) Activities:** The Community Health Mentor Program (CHMP) involves interprofessional teams of U of A medical and NAU PA, PT, and OT students. They regularly meet with a person who has a chronic medical condition or disability. In FY24, all didactic phase PA students participated in an IPE workshop on preventing burnout with NAU athletic training, OT, and PT students. All went to the NAU NP Evidence-Based Practice Symposium, in downtown Phoenix.

**Outreach:** NAU PA students and faculty engage in outreach all year – in presentations and hands-on activities such as suturing – to introduce high school and college students to the PA profession. In FY24, faculty and RHPP students participated in four events with undergraduate college students and eight with high school students – including one each with Gila River Indian Community, Hopi, and Navajo students.

**ASP:** The NAU PA Scholars grew from a graduating cohort of 9 (19%) in 2022 to 42 (74%) in the 2025 class. Scholars are overwhelmingly satisfied with the program.

### Outcomes (most recent data):

Class of 2024 (n = 58): 82% felt confident in their ability to practice in a rural area (88% of Scholars); 88% felt confident in their ability to practice in a non-rural MUC setting; 38% have already accepted a PA position (48% of Scholars). In the 38% who accepted positions: 83% are in AZ, 56% are in primary care, 42% are in rural or MUC settings.

Class of 2022 (n = 48): 27% NAU PA grads work in primary care (vs. 24% AZ; 23% U.S.) Classes of 2022 + 2023 (n = 103): 81% working in AZ; 60% in AZ HPSA/MUA (vs. 24% U.S.)



## Northern Arizona University (NAU) Physical Therapy Program (PT) Rural Health Professions Program (RHPP) AHEC Scholars Program (ASP)

**Andrea Trujillo Lerner, PT, DPT**

*RHPP Director, Director of Clinical Education*

### 2023–24 Program Highlights

RHPP Students supported	18
RHPP Rotations supported	18
RHPP Rotation Hours supported	7,200
2022–24 AHEC Scholars supported	5
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	9

The NAU-PT RHPP helps meet the needs of rural and medically underserved areas (MUAs) by preparing our students to practice in diverse Arizona settings. PT students are offered clinical experiences in rural and MUAs to foster interprofessional collaboration, promote student interest and graduate more PT professionals who practice in areas of need. These efforts contribute to the AzaAHEC mission to develop a culturally competent and diverse healthcare workforce that will reduce health disparities and improve outcomes for vulnerable Arizona populations.

Since our RHPP began in 2021, we increased student rural clinical rotations by > 200%. In the Summer and Fall of 2023, the NAU PT program graduated

15 RHPP students who now work across Arizona in Prescott, Yuma, Williams, Sierra Vista, Safford, Fort Defiance, and Cottonwood. In May 2024 there were 8 NAU PT RHPP students in rural/MUA clinical rotations in Cottonwood, Prescott, and Douglas with some students doing more than one rural/MUA rotation. There are 17 clinical experiences scheduled in rural/MUA sites in 2025. We accepted 9 Scholars in the Class of 2025. These students matriculate at both the Flagstaff Mountain and Phoenix BioScience Core Campuses.

NAU DPT students complete 10 weeks of clinical experience in rural or MUAs, and receive a financial stipend to offset the costs of travel and housing. NAU PT is in discussions with a rural site to host multiple students per year. Challenges include staffing and capacity in rural healthcare facilities.

The NAU strategic plan “elevating excellence” aligns well with the mission and goals of AzaAHEC Program and our NAU PT RHPP. The NAU DPT program is undergoing a complete curricular revision and shifting to a competency-based education model. This new effort is groundbreaking in DPT higher education and aspires to produce students that are 100% workforce ready. We look forward to continuing our collaboration to assure access to health care throughout Arizona in partnership with the AzaAHEC Program and Regional Centers.





## Northern Arizona University School of Nursing (NAU-SON) Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) Rural Health Professions Program (RHPP) AHEC Scholars Program (ASP)

**Shelley Vaughn, DNP, FNP-BC,**  
*RHPP Director, Assistant Clinical Professor*

### 2023–24 Program Highlights

RHPP Students supported	32
RHPP Rotations supported	69
RHPP Rotation Hours supported	15,250
2022–24 AHEC Scholars supported	6
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	2

In FY24, the NAU-SON RHPP proudly graduated 30 FNP's. AzAHEC supported rural and medically underserved area (MUA) clinical rotations for 32 RHPP and 8 AHEC Scholars. Students completed a total of 15,250 clinical hours in rural and MUA sites. The community immersions and clinical rotations occurred at three Regional Centers:

The six graduating AHEC/RHPP Scholars were from the 2022-24 Cohort and they had their community immersion and clinical rotations as follows:

- **SAAHEC AHEC:**
  - El Rio and Marana Community Health Centers.
  - Kaplan Family Care, Sierra Vista.
  - Gila Valley Clinic, Safford.
- **CPCHP AHEC:**
  - White Mountain Regional Medical, Springerville.
- **WAHEC AHEC:**
  - Remedy Health, Flagstaff.

The AzAHEC Program and AHEC Regional Centers supported these 6 students throughout their 2-year ASP program, leading to the successful retention of all students from Fall 2022 to Spring 2024.

**RHPP Conference:** All NAU-SON RHPP students attended the 12th Annual Interprofessional Rural Health Professions Conference in April at the NAU Phoenix BioMed campus, where they joined NAU Physician Assistant RHPP students. The Central Arizona AHEC (CAAHEC) Regional Center provided support for meals.

All 32 NAU-SON FNP students presented posters. The event welcomed incoming ASP applicants and offered an excellent recruitment opportunity. Participation in the NAU-SON RHPP and ASP is a privilege for our FNP students. They consistently report significant learning experiences, how the program enhanced their understanding of rural communities and improved healthcare delivery. We are grateful for this opportunity to continue our collaboration and share our successes.



NAU SON 22-24 ASP Cohort: Jessica Walker, Frank Rosenberg, Paul Badger, Dinajawan Balderas, Kristine McCabe, Elisa Loya Gil (not pictured)

## Arizona Health Workforce Data System: Pathways to Practice

**Bryna Koch, DrPH, Susan Coates, MBA and Charles Drake, MS, MA**

University of Arizona (U of A) Center for Rural Health (AzCRH)

Education, training, retention, and support for the health workforce in rural and underserved Arizona are essential to carrying out the AHEC mission. Health workforce research and analysis help to inform decisions on policies and programs aimed at supporting health workforce pathways from education to practice.

With support from the Arizona Area Health Education Center Program in FY24, the Arizona Center for Rural Health workforce team sustains the Arizona Health Workforce Data System (AzHWDS) project. The data warehouse serves as the foundation for our core report, the Arizona Health Workforce Profile Report. The data warehouse is the backbone of the team's ability to develop workforce reports and briefs, create interactive reports and maps, and respond to requests for technical assistance.

### **Some of the products created or updated by the health workforce team in FY 2024 include:**

- Arizona Rural Maternity Care
- Quantifying Arizona's Mental Health Professional Shortages
- Quantifying Arizona's Dental Health Shortages

The AzCRH workforce team maintains the Geographic Information System Hub where we provide interactive maps including the Arizona Rural and Safety Net Health Facilities map and more. The team also maintains an interactive reports page on the AzCRH website. In FY 24, we updated the following interactive reports: Poverty in Rural Arizona, Arizona Healthcare Employment, Projections, and Wage Report, Arizona Marketplace and Medicaid Enrollment, and the Arizona Graduate Medical Education Funding reports.

Throughout FY 24, the team provided mapping and data support for other AzCRH projects. We responded to internal U of A requests for technical assistance,

data and analysis from the Office of the Senior Vice President for Health Sciences, AzAHEC primary care GME initiative, Center on Aging, Comprehensive Center for Pain and Addiction, and externally from the Arizona Governor's Office and other healthcare delivery systems and workforce stakeholders.

### **Bryna Koch, DrPH also represented the AzCRH workforce team's efforts through presentations at the following conferences and meetings:**

AACHC Workforce Recruitment and Retention Conference, September 2023

Rural and Public Health Policy Forum  
February 2024

ASU Maternal and Child Health Conference  
April 2024

Rural Women's Health Network Quarterly Meeting  
April 2024

Arizona Public Health Association Coffee and Conversations Webinar, April 2024

### **Additional Resources:**

AzCRH Health Workforce Data and Analysis

AzCRH Workforce Reports and Briefs

AzCRH Interactive Visualizations

AzCRH ArcGIS Hub





### University of Arizona College of Medicine- Tucson (COM-T) South Campus Family Medicine Residency

**Sommer Aldulaimi, MD, FAAFP**

*Director, Rural Health Program*

Although 20% of the US population lives in rural areas, only 11% of physicians work there. Residency training – also known as graduate medical education (GME) - in rural areas increases **by five-fold** the rate of graduates practicing in a rural area.

The U of A COM-T South Campus Family Medicine (FM) residency track mission is to train physicians to work in Arizona's rural and underserved areas. AzAHEC Program funding supports FM resident training and travel to rural sites for a minimum of 22 weeks during residency.

Spending significant time in rural areas allows our FM residents to experience the profound professional and personal benefits of living and working in these communities. The rural rotations attract some of our best residents, and why many stay to practice in the rural sites where they rotated as residents. South Campus FM and internal medicine (IM) residents see their rural rotations as a key to their training and preparation to practice in these sites after graduation.

In FY24, we sent first-, second- and third-year FM residents to rural rotations in family medicine, obstetrics, gynecology, pediatrics, emergency medicine and community medicine at Fort Defiance, Polacca, Safford, Tuba City, Whiteriver, Payson, Douglas, Casa Grande, Bisbee and Nogales. FM residents rotate in Sells and San Xavier for part of their musculoskeletal experience. We are excited about developing new rotations with the new American Indian Health AHEC Regional Center (AIH-AHEC). FM residents completed 71 rural rotations in 12 rural sites during 13 block rotations. IM residents completed three rural rotations at two sites.

The AzAHEC Program supports courses that prepare FM residents for rural practice, including Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS), Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS), Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS), Neonatal Resuscitation Program,

Advanced Obstetrical Life Support (ALSO), medical Spanish and the highly rated Point of Care Ultrasound curriculum.

The quality of rural preceptor training is one of the most valued parts of the rural rotations. IM and FM resident evaluations are very positive. Residents selected Dr. Clayton Hargis, DO, from Mt. Graham Regional Medical Center in Safford, AZ as the 2023 Rural Preceptor of the Year.

**Outcomes - South Campus FM Graduate Practice over the last three years:** Eighty-nine percent work in Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) with 60% in Arizona; 58% practice in rural areas in the U.S.; 30% work in an AzAHEC Regional Center service area and are now training our residents, with 45% of those practicing in rural Arizona. Three graduates from last year are doing fellowships this year and one graduate joined our Safford rural training site to practice full-spectrum family medicine including surgical obstetrics.

Our South Campus program has been on the National Rural Training Track Collaborative Rural Recognition List for three of the last four years!

#### University of Arizona South Campus Family Medicine Resident Feedback:

*“My rural experience in Tuba City was eye opening for me in the setting of patient resources and provider resources. We served patients there who didn't have running water or electricity. Specialties/ medications/ and services at our disposal in Tucson simply didn't exist. I also felt that the doctor patient relationship was different, and it was more difficult to gain the trust of patients providing yet another learning opportunity.”*

*-Bryce Hunsaker (FM PGY3) who will now be practicing in a rural border town (Nogales, AZ)*

### South Campus Mobile Health Program Obstetrics (continued from page 21)

AzaHEC also supports part of the South Campus mobile health prenatal program, which is an incredible service for our patients and provides great learning for our residents. The Mobile Health Program Obstetrics (MHP OB) continues to provide prenatal, postpartum and family planning services to uninsured patients in Tucson. Dr. Nicole Person-Rennell MD MPH (Medical Director, Mobile Health Program) says, “The prenatal care provided by the Mobile Health Program and supported by AHEC over the years has provided a rich educational experience for learners at the University of Arizona, including family medicine residents and medical students. This incredible program has filled critical gaps in access to quality prenatal care in Southern Arizona, meeting community needs while providing excellent, compassionate prenatal care to patients. The value to the families served is significantly impactful, providing care for many patients who would have severely limited care otherwise.”

### North Country HealthCare/Colorado Plateau Center for Health Professions (CPCHP) Family & Community Medicine Residency

**Marica Martinic, MPH, Director, (CPCHP)**

The NARBHA Institute Family & Community Medicine Residency Program at North Country HealthCare (NCHC) CPCHP graduated its second class of family medicine (FM) physicians in June 2024: Drs. Rachel Christopherson, Erinn Gallagher, Tyler Hanny, and Jeff Quick. Drs. Quick and Gallagher stayed on with NCHC and joined our teams at the Williams and Grand Canyon Clinics, respectively. It is such a joy to see these graduates come full circle and join the northern Arizona healthcare community as practicing physicians.

We also welcomed our new FM interns in July: Drs. Marli Dunn, Cambria LaCasse, Octavio Olivas, and Anthony Paolucci. Two completed their medical school training in northern Arizona.

NCHC participates in a Competency Based Medical Education (CBME) pilot with the American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM) comprised of direct observation, frequent assessment using a mobile app in New Innovations, structured resident coaching, individualized learning plans, and aligning assessment tools with the ABFM Core Outcomes.

Our residency program leads the Future Faces of Family Medicine (FFFM) program developed for high school students interested in health professions and includes resident-led after school

programming, clinical shadowing, and mentoring. The residents enjoy getting to know the high school students and seeing them open their minds to the possibilities of a healthcare career. Many graduates of the program express a strong interest in pursuing medicine as a career.

NCHC is developing an innovative curriculum to equip NCHC family medicine, pharmacy, and dental residents with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to address health inequities. The curriculum will encompass historical context, anti-racism training, advocacy skills, and immersive service-learning experiences via weekly didactic sessions.

The Family Medicine Residency maintained ACGME accreditation with no citations. We added new pediatric emergency medicine and longitudinal radiology rotations this year. We implemented the new accreditation requirements in quality improvement and to improve patient empanelment with the same primary care physician consistently. We added a call answering service, medication-assisted treatment (MAT) training, and night obstetric rotations to provide residents more comprehensive learning experiences.

Our residents and faculty enjoy fostering connections and staffing medical first aid stations at local community events including: the Pickin' in the Pines music festival; Girls on the Run 5K; the Flagstaff Marathon; and NAU football games volunteering with the team physicians and athletic trainers.

We look forward to another successful year!



### Flowing Wells School District

**Anna Hayer M.Ed.**

*District Science Specialist, Mentor Coordinator*

AzAHEC supported a one-week Health Professions Summer immersive experience for 21 Flowing Wells High School students. Students participated in daily experiences that included field trips, professional discussions, and hands-on activities. Highlights included: emergency medicine, where paramedics showcased medical equipment and discussed professional certifications; nursing, where a nurse midwife shared her experiences and students visited the U of A ASTEC simulation floor; sports medicine, where students observed how physical therapy is used to treat an athlete; and veterinary medicine, where students learned suturing techniques.

Post-survey results showed a significant increase in student understanding of the educational pathways to various health professions. Initially, only 24% of the students felt they understood the education and training required for these careers, compared to 90% after participating in the program.



*Flowing Wells Students toured the University of Arizona Medical Center, including the ASTEC simulation floor.*



*Flowing Wells Student learns mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. The program included an opportunity to build knowledge capacity beyond one grade level.*



*Instructor demonstrates physical therapy techniques. One student noted, "It really showed me different careers in healthcare and what they actually do."*



### Med-Start Health Careers Program

**Francisco Moreno, M.D.**

*Associate VP for Diversity & Inclusion  
University of Arizona Health Sciences (UAHS)  
Professor of Psychiatry, U of A, COM-T*

**Eliza Yellow Bird, M.D.**

*Office of Diversity and Inclusion*

Since 1969, the Med-Start Health Careers Program has provided this summer enrichment and health careers exploration program. It is now offered in partnership with the AzaAHEC Program. Med-Start students completed college courses for English, Math, Chemistry, College 101 and received up to 5 college credits. The courses prepare students to succeed in college and foster interest in health careers.

Rural and tribal Arizona high school juniors were invited to apply. A selection committee with representatives from the six AzaAHEC Regional Centers and OEDI reviewed 167 applications; ranked them based on interest in pursuing a health career, top academic performance, leadership and community involvement; interviewed the top 50; selected 48 students; with 47 completing the program.

AzaAHEC funded all 47 students; 10 students received stipends from the HRSA AZ-HOPE grant.

Of the 47 completing Med-Start in 2024, 37 identified as female (79%), 10 male (21%), 33 (70%) Latinx/Hispanic students of all races; and 12 (26%) American Indian; 24 (51%) were from rural AZ communities; 37 (79%) were from disadvantaged backgrounds. Med-Start students represented 36 high schools from all regions of the state and the Navajo Nation.

The students learned about a variety of health professional careers with weekly career chats from health professionals. Students learned from Med-Start Alumni how the program prepared them for their chosen health career. In a financial literacy lectures, they learned about spending plans, savings, ways to invest in themselves, how to create and use a budget, the value of money and reaching financial goals.

In July 2024, students presented their English and Math projects at the Academic Conference on How Ultrasounds Are Used for injuries in Athletes, How Cancer Affects Arizonans, Rural Health Barriers, and other topics, and attended by U of A faculty and staff, community and family members. A final evaluation indicated that 78% of students rated Med-Start 2024 above average or excellent.



MedStart participants and counselors



## American Indian Health–AHEC (AIH-AHEC)

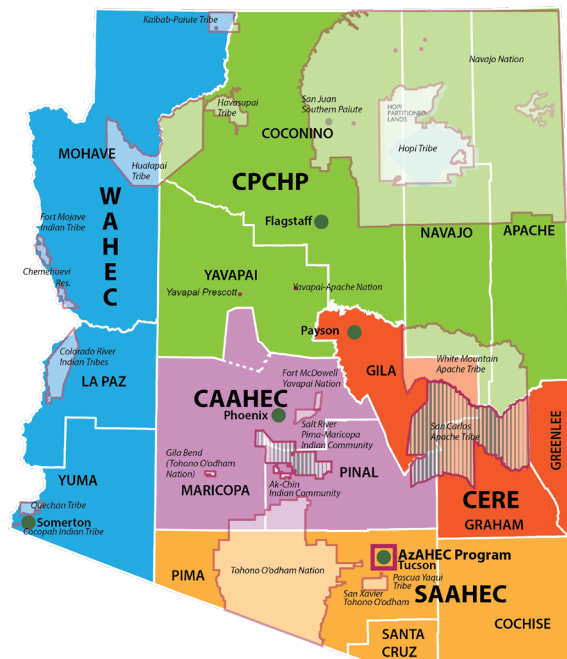
**Jeff Axtell, M.Ed., Director**

The AIH-AHEC is housed in the Arizona Advisory Council on Indian Health Care (AACIHC), was established in 2022 and serves Arizona’s 22 Federally Recognized Tribal communities. The AIH-AHEC is focused on developing an American Indian health system and workforce to meet the health needs of our Tribal communities. The AIH-AHEC, in close collaboration with its FY24 Tribal partners, San Carlos Apache Healthcare Corporation (SCAHC), Gila River Health Care (GRHC) and Native Health, implemented the AHEC essential services to improve the supply and distribution of healthcare professionals in their communities.

### 2023–24 AIH-AHEC Program Highlights

Health Professions Unique Trainees	72
Health Professions Training Experiences	89
Health Profession Trainee Hours	16,674
2023-25 AHEC Scholars supported	15
Structured Pipeline Participants	165
Community Health Education Participants	162
Health Career Event Participants	1,017

**Pathways Programs:** In FY24, the AIH-AHEC’s tribal partner programs welcomed 165 Indigenous students in Grades 9-16 to structured pipeline programs, and 1,017 Indigenous students in Grades K-16 to health career events. One health career event was conducted by Gila River Health Care (GRHC)’s "Medical Health Career Education Summer School Program. The program welcomed 400 K–8 students from five Gila River community schools to a four-week health careers summer program. GRHC developed the new “Elev8 Health Career Exploration” program introducing participants to allied health, public health and other health careers presented by doctors and medical students in their own health facility. Our Native SCOPE program completed its summer pilot with 15 participants. Highlights included CPR, First Aid, and Sun Safety training and a tour of a military medical training compound. GRHC will initiate after-school



clubs for urban Native youth interested in health careers starting in September 2024.

The San Carlos Apache Healthcare facility conducted two 4-week Summer Student Program for student and young adult community members ages 14-22. Participants learned about health care careers, knowledge and skills to better help their community!

**AHEC Scholars Program (ASP):** The AIH-AHEC welcomed their inaugural ASP cohort for Immersion Day on the Tohono O’odham Nation. Students visited the Tohono O’odham Cultural Center, did a deep dive into the tribal dynamics on the US/Mexico border and attended a session at Tohono O’odham Nation Health Care. The spring immersion included Cultural Humility Training on understanding, respect, and appreciation for diverse health perspectives. Scholars went to Sells for the 85th Annual Tohono O’odham Rodeo and Fair, were mesmerized by the O’odham youth cultural dances and attended the women’s annual Toka tournament.

**AIH-AHEC Strategic Plan:** was published in November last year. Many first year infrastructure objectives were met. The AIH-AHEC established its Advisory Council comprised of members from

academics, tribal facilities and organizations representing Tribal communities. AIH-AHEC hired two staff to assist with program development, outreach to Tribal communities and creation of its website [americanindianhealth-ahec.az.gov](http://americanindianhealth-ahec.az.gov).

**Growth:** AIH-AHEC is preparing for an impactful year now that the resources, staffing and program infrastructure are in place. We are working with Gila River Health Care to open a simulation lab this fall. FY25 will see more programs and opportunities for Indigenous youth and Tribal health care workers to advance Arizona’s American Indian health workforce.



*American Indian Health AHEC Scholars Spring 2024 Immersion*

Each Arizona AHEC Regional Center identifies a Faculty Mentor for each two-year AHEC Scholars Cohort. Arizona AHEC thanks the following Faculty Mentors for their important participation in the Arizona AHEC Scholars Program during FY24.

Regional Center Name	2022–24 Faculty Mentor	2023–25 Faculty Mentor
American Indian Health AHEC	N/A	Timian Godfrey, DNP
Central Arizona AHEC	Suganya Karuppana, MD	Carol Moffett, PhD
Center for Excellence in Rural Education AHEC	N/A	Alan Michels, MD
Colorado Plateau Center for Health Professions	Brian Goodman, DO	Victoria Noack, PT
Southern Arizona AHEC	Lane Johnson, MD & Nancy Johnson, PhD	Miriam Morales, MPH
Western Arizona AHEC	Gustavo Alvarez, MPH	Jake Schwarz, PharmD



## Central Arizona Area Health Education Center (CAAHEC) Regional Center Arizona Alliance for Community Health Centers (AACHC)

Shelli Stewart, MA, *Center Director*

Housed in the AACHC, CAAHEC is based in Phoenix and serves Maricopa and Pinal Counties, and the community of Prescott in Yavapai County. CAAHEC supports all aspects of the health professions pipeline, from K-16, health profession trainees (students and residents), and practicing providers. AACHC is Arizona's Primary Care Association with 25 federally qualified health center (FQHC) systems operating in 185 sites and serving one in nine Arizonans.

### 2023–24 Program Highlights

Health Professions Unique Trainees	270
Health Professions Training Experiences	292
Health Profession Trainee Hours	39,052
2022–24 AHEC Scholars supported	16
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	16
Structured Pipeline Participants	282
Continuing Education/Professional Development Participants	2,037
Health Career Event Participants	427

**Community Based Education and Training (CBET) Activities:** In FY24, our CBET program supported 270 students in clinical rotations from the following professions: dentistry, nursing, public health, medical assisting, medicine, family medicine residency, nurse practitioner, and physician assistant. CAAHEC support included travel, meals, and housing. CAAHEC supported nursing students from the U of A College of Nursing at multiple Sexual Assault Nurse Examination (SANE) Training events.

A Letter of Commitment process was instituted this year to help AzAHEC Regional Centers and RHPPs plan for student rotations and allocate funding at the beginning of the program year.

**AHEC Scholars Program (ASP) Activities:** 2022-24 ASP Cohort: 16 scholars participated in the September 2023 and the January 2024 immersion weekends in Prescott. Presentations included: Dental Programs & Needs, Population Health, Health

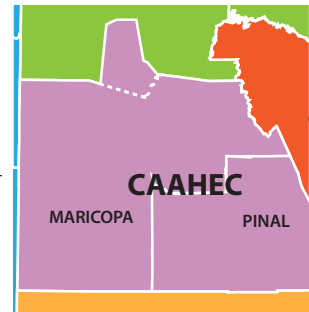
Center Response to Community Healthcare Needs, and others. Scholars interacted with community members and participated in team building activities. Dr. Suganya Karuppana and Willa Miller helped plan the immersion weekends. Scholars presented their scholarly project titled “Navigating the Insurance Structure” at the RHPP Conference in April 2024.

2023-25 ASP Cohort: 16 scholars participated in the October 2023 and the February 2024 immersion weekends in Apache Junction. Presentations included a virtual AzAHEC Program orientation, an overview of the ASP, Community Immersions, Team Building Activities & a Facilitated Community Tour and Windshield Survey. The CAAHEC Mentor, Dr. Carol Moffett, assisted in immersion weekend planning, presented on Social Determinants of Health, and led the Windshield Survey Review. CAAHEC Community Liaisons from Horizon Health and Wellness, Cheri DeBree, Director of Community Initiatives and Melanie Dunn, Workforce Specialist also provided support.

**Pathways Program Activities:** in FY24 we placed a greater focus on “self-selection” rather than individual clubs. While exceeding the club’s requirement, students participated in experiential learning opportunities and a medical career exploration hosted by CAAHEC’s academic partners.

Pathways Program events included: Diversity in Dentistry, Stop the Bleed Training, Narcan Training, Medical School Exposure, Black Men in White Coats and others.

**Continuing Education (CE) Activities:** we hired a new CE Coordinator in May 2024. In FY24 we held 30 events with 2,037 attendees. CAAHEC received 464 evaluation surveys from these events and issued 394 Certificates of Attendance with CE credits. This year we automated CE certificates. Participants scan



a QR Code at the end of their CE event, complete the evaluation survey, and instantly receive their personalized Certificate of Attendance with their CE credits.

We shared the process with AHEC Centers and partners across the state.



CAAHEC AHEC Scholar 23-25 Cohort visits the Horizon Health and Wellness Community Garden during the Spring Community Immersion in Apache Junction.

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*"This semester I had the opportunity to engage in an outstanding level of growth through caring for an under-served population at Perryville Women's Corrections. Additionally, I was able to travel to and work with the community of Yavapai County via the AHEC Scholars program. Both of these experiences enriched my understanding and appreciation for how much access to quality healthcare determines the course of chronic disease and addiction, which was very prevalent in both of these populations. I found education level, health literacy, community support, and reliable transportation to be four of the greatest determinants of health and involvement in their own self management of disease. I am grateful for all I have learned. Thank you again for offering this amazing opportunity."*

*-Madeline Binz, WHNP Student, RHPP & AHEC Scholar*

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## Center for Excellence in Rural Education (CERE) Mogollon Health Alliance (MHA) Foundation

**Jennifer Smith, MBA, MS, C.Ped,** *Executive Director*

CERE is a subsidiary of MHA Foundation. Since MHA was founded in 1958, it has contributed tens of millions of dollars to promote health and education in the Payson region. The CERE AHEC Regional Center supports the Gila, Graham, and Greenlee County regions.

### 2023–24 Program Highlights

Health Professions Unique Trainees	59
Health Professions Training Experiences	378
Health Profession Trainee Hours	24,243
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	15
Structured Pipeline Participants	97
Continuing Education/Professional Development Participants	121
Community Health Education Participants	875

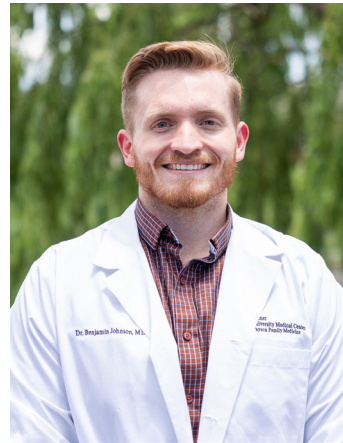
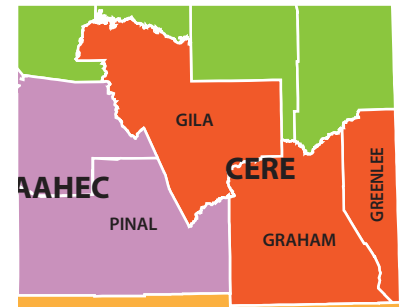
Since it became the eastern Arizona AHEC Regional Center in July 2023, CERE has made remarkable strides in advancing all areas of the AHEC mission.

**Housing** for our health profession students and resident trainees is a key focus; we added 2 housing units to now total 11 units with space for 20 learners. This helps us accommodate two residents in the U of A College of Medicine-Phoenix Family Medicine Residency Program in Payson that started in June, the 7 Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship (LIC) students from 3 universities, and other learners. We anticipate high occupancy rates this academic year!

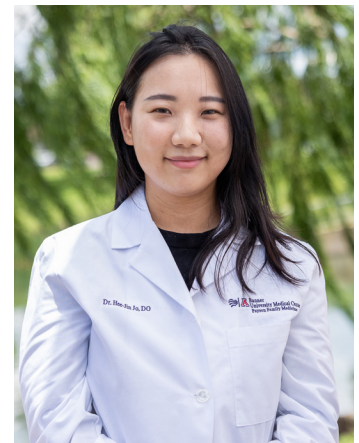
### AHEC Scholars Program (ASP):

Our 2023-25 ASP cohort received the Dr. Ronald Weinstein

Award at the April 2024 RHPP Conference for their exemplary poster presentation. We welcome Lura Ryden, MSN, RNC, Chief Nursing Officer at Banner Payson Medical Center, as the Faculty Mentor for our 2024-26 CERE ASP cohort.



**Ben Johnson, MD** U of A COM-P  
Payson Family Medicine Resident



**Hui-Jin Jo, DO** U of A COM-P  
Payson Family Medicine Resident

Stephen Taylor, LIC Medical Student, U of A College of Medicine-Phoenix reflects on the benefits of being part of the Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship (LIC) Program in Payson, Arizona. The LIC integrates traditional medical clerkship blocks into a continuous experience over nine months:

*I've really loved the one-on-one time to learn from physicians and the long-term relationships I've developed with patients. In busier places it's difficult to have the kind of mentorship we get while we're here. We may learn the same things, but it feels more personal and rewarding when we get to stay and grow in one place. I feel a deeper connection with the physicians, nurses, and other staff, and I want to do my best to help where I can. I've also had the privilege of getting to know many patients in different settings. It's such a pleasure to see them again. I learn so much from them, and I appreciate their patience and friendship.*

**Pathways Program:** CERE awarded grants to the Payson and Globe HOSA Clubs funding a service-learning project with seniors in assisted living in Payson and in Globe a trip to the Arizona State HOSA Conference. Our Healthcare Careers Enrichment Class completed its first cohort and will continue. We developed a Fitness and Health Education Class in collaboration with Rim Country CrossFit for volleyball, soccer and basketball teams. In June, CERE hosted 3 weeklong SCRUBS Camps, each provided 21 hours of immersive health career exploration with tours of a hospital, helicopter, ambulance, fire truck, and trauma bay; disaster preparedness drills; CPR training; a college campus tour; nursing skills lab tour; vital sign training; a Healthy Eating 101 class; simulation lab training on IV starts, injections, and blood draws.

**Continuing Education (CE):** the California State Board of Registered Nursing approved CERE to offer CE hours. We also support weekly Banner Payson Medical Center CME events and will soon launch new CE programming. Our CE reached 875 community members since June 2023. We supported the Women's Wellness Forum, Health & Care Fair, CPR classes, and plant-based nutrition which provide community health education and contribute to community well-being.

CERE's initiatives and achievements in FY24 underscore our commitment to advancing healthcare education, community health, and professional development. Our focus on innovation and excellence will drive our success and impact in the coming year!



*Scrubs Camp Helicopter Tour, Curtis Perry, Madeline Mullahy and Paisley Deaton*



## The Colorado Plateau Center for Health Professions (CPCHP) North Country HealthCare (NCHC)

**Mariça Martinic, MPH, Director, NCHC CPCHP**

The CPCHP is housed in NCHC and based in Flagstaff, Arizona serving Apache, Coconino, Navajo, and Yavapai Counties. CPCHP supports all aspects of the health professions pipeline to practice including K-16, health professions students, resident trainees, and practicing health professionals.

### 2023–24 Program Highlights

Health Professions Unique Trainees	338
Health Professions Training Experiences	780
Health Profession Trainee Hours	105,521
2022–24 AHEC Scholars supported	16
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	18
Structured Pipeline Participants	126
Continuing Education/Professional Development Participants	1,125
Community Health Education Participants	1,301
Health Career Event Participants	341

The CPCHP at NCHC is a leader in building, training, and strengthening the healthcare workforce in northern Arizona. We met or exceeded our scope of work as an AzaHEC Regional Center. Other notable accomplishments include the successful completion of the first Camp Verde 5K by Girls on the Run of Northern Arizona, a NCHC mock code IPE event, and sponsoring a career panel with local healthcare providers at NAU for undergraduates interested in a health career.

**Preceptor Development:** CPCHP supports over 300 trainees per year with community based experiential training (CBET) in northern Arizona, relying heavily on the wonderful preceptors who teach and train them. CPCHP focused on supporting these valuable community partners.

**Preceptor Toolkit** - teaching is a significant commitment for clinicians and staff, we provide resources and

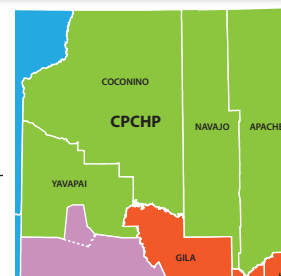
opportunities to make teaching easier with a Preceptor Toolkit.

The 12-component toolkit includes Preceptor Best Practices, Preceptor Role Description, Teaching Health Centers, Student Rotation Orientation Guide, Types of Learners Preceptors Encounter, and a Student Chart Documentation Guide. This toolkit was demonstrated by the CPCHP Director at the 50th Annual Rural Health Conference in June. The Preceptor Toolkit can be downloaded at [cpchp.org](http://cpchp.org) under Continuing Education.

**Preceptor Training** - CPCHP created a new Preceptor Development CE module, piloted at a two-hour session before the 50th Annual Rural Health Conference in June in Flagstaff and marketed to academic partners and healthcare organizations across Arizona. It covers the fundamentals of precepting health career students, created by Dr. Sarah Coles, the NARBHA Institute Family & Community Medicine Residency Program Director and presented by residency core faculty member Dr. Julia Forberg. The event was offered in person and via Zoom, had 35 attendees, and was recorded and posted for future use by community partners.

**Future Faces of Family Medicine Expansion:** CPCHP launched the Future Faces of Family Medicine (FFFM) program in 2023. This after-school program brings together high school students from underrepresented, minority, and/or first-generation backgrounds with our CPCHP Family and Community Medicine residents. This year, in addition to hands-on workshops, the program included a 9-week experience shadowing residents in a clinical setting and receiving CPR certification.

**Psychiatry Residency Program Development:** CPCHC is addressing the psychiatrist workforce shortage by “growing our own.” In



Preceptor Toolkit developed by CPCHP



January of 2023, the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) awarded CPCHP a Teaching Health Center Planning and Development (THCPD) grant to develop a psychiatry residency program in northern Arizona. NCHC is the sponsoring institution and Dr. J. Kurt Mueller was hired as the interim Program Director. We plan to seek accreditation from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) in the fall of 2025. We are working on sustained financing for this residency program and faculty recruitment. The AzaHEC Program awarded CPCHP funding to support the development process and start-up costs.

### Medical Assistant Accelerator Curriculum

**Development:** CPCHP participated in the Northern Arizona Good Job Network (NAGJN) project led by Local First Arizona for the past year. We serve as its healthcare sector expert. Through the network, we are leading the development of a pilot medical assistant accelerator training model with local community colleges. The goal is to align medical assistant training with employer needs in northern Arizona.



Nicholas Rastas, ATSU-SOMA medical student, and Imelda Rodriguez Soto, medical assistant student, practicing “running a code” during an interprofessional educational event held at North Country HealthCare



Campers and CPCHP staff learning about NAU health majors during the Indigenous Pride Health Workers – High School Exploration Camp



2024 Camp Verde 5k Girls on the Run participant finishing strong!



## Southern Arizona Area Health Education Center (SAAHEC) Regional Center El Rio Healthcare

**Yolanda Perez, MPH, Director**

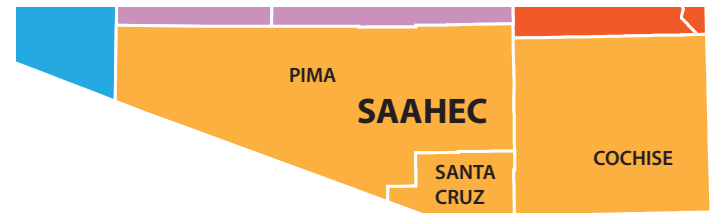
SAAHEC at El Rio Health was established in 2021 and serves Santa Cruz, Cochise, and Pima Counties. Our mission is to improve access to comprehensive, affordable, quality, and compassionate healthcare in Southern Arizona’s rural and medically underserved communities by increasing the supply, diversity, distribution, and training of healthcare professionals. SAAHEC supports all aspects of the health professions pipeline to practice including K-16, health professions learners, and practicing health professionals, and supports new initiatives to advance the AHEC mission.

### 2023–24 Program Highlights

Health Professions Unique Trainees	298
Health Professions Training Experiences	602
Health Profession Trainee Hours	80,879
2022–24 AHEC Scholars supported	29
2023–25 AHEC Scholars supported	17
Structured Pipeline Participants	265
Continuing Education/Professional Development Participants	1,552
Health Career Event Participants	237

**Clinical Based Experiential Learning:** SAAHEC facilitated 602 field experiences for 298 unique trainees, including family medicine, pediatrics, internal medicine, and dental residents, and students in medical, osteopathic, nurse practitioner, medical assistant, dental and pharmacy programs.

**AHEC Scholars Program (ASP):** SAAHEC’s ASP enhances graduate student interprofessional learning via community engagement in Santa Cruz, Cochise and Pima Counties. The 2022-24 Scholar cohort worked in Benson, Sierra Vista, Vail, and Nogales; the 2023-25 cohort focused on Rio Rico. Scholar teams conduct needs assessments, implement interventions and evaluate impact by leveraging community assets and building strong local partnerships to effect



meaningful, sustainable change.

In the 2024 Interprofessional RHPP Conference, the 2023-25 Scholars showcased their work in a poster titled “A Community Assessment of Rio Rico.” The 2022-24 cohort delivered podium presentations on community projects, including: “Benson Food Project,” “Health Resource Education in Nogales,” “Breathe Free: Empowering Youth Against Vaping in Sierra Vista.” In FY24, 29 scholars from the 2022-24 cohort graduated; 17 scholars from the 2023-25 cohort will complete the program in 2025.



*SOCHEA students visiting U of A College of Public Health.*

*In the picture: Christopher Ortiz, Sophie Gao, Bhagavati Yeddulla, Vivianne Valencia, Mylena Amezcua, Ghazaul Dickson, Anyssa Valenzuela, Jayden Johnson, Susanna Montano, Alyssa Arechiga, Maya Balina, Trivene Magar, Naliah Salvador, Natalee Almand, Danitza Martinez, Carlos Garcia*

**Pathway Programs:** SAAHEC prepares and empowers the next generation of healthcare professionals through pathway programs for K-16 students fostering their interest in health careers. Key partners include Pima JTED, Pima Community College, Pima Medical Institute, Kino College, and PipelineAZ who facilitate externships, shadowing opportunities, and El Rio Health placements, for hands-on field experiences. SAAHEC and the U of A Med Start program offer community health

projects, presentations, and networking opportunities with healthcare professionals in the region. The Summer of Community Health Exploration Academy is a week-long program where high school students interact with healthcare professionals, focusing on post high school preparation and skill-building with peers who share their interests. SAAHEC supported 265 grades 9-12 students in structured pathway programs and engaged 237 students from K-16 in health career and community outreach events.

**Continuing Medical Education and Professional Development:** SAAHEC is an accredited CME provider in Arizona recognized by the Arizona Medical Association for meeting the elevated level of quality established by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education. SAAHEC actively supports, plans, and delivers CME to Southern Arizona's health workforce, targeting the educational needs of primary care physicians and others serving rural and medically underserved populations. In FY24, SAAHEC accredited 88.75 CME credits

for over 800 learners. Feedback is consistently strong. SAAHEC helped with El Rio's 1st Annual Southwestern Primary Care Research & Innovation Summit - a dynamic two-day event. It brought together over 100 clinicians, researchers, patients, public health professionals, students, and academics to share their passion for transforming patient care. Featuring 60 poster projects, 5 accredited CME sessions, and a celebration of outstanding research, the Summit was among SAAHEC's distinguished achievements.



*SOCHEA students participating in Tucson Village Farm Ropes Course team building activity. In the picture: Izahi Mendez, Carlos Garcia, Natalee Almand, Sophie Gao, Bhagavati Yeddulla, Jayden Johnson*



*SOCHEA students volunteering at the Diaper Bank in Tucson, AZ. In the picture: Christopher Ortiz, Anyssa Valenzuela, Izahi Mendez, Ghazaul Dickson, Jayden Johnson, Alyssa Arechiga, Susanna Montano, Mylena Amezcuita*



## Western Arizona Area Health Education Center (WAHEC)

### At the Regional Center for Border Health (RCBH)

Ana Montoya, BS, MS, *Director*

WAHEC is based in Somerton, Arizona and serves Yuma, La Paz and Mojave Counties. WAHEC collaborates with community partners in the delivery of health professional training and supports and promotes the health professions pipeline including K-16 students.

#### 2023–24 Program Highlights

Health Professions Unique Trainees	159
Health Professions Training Experiences	181
Health Profession Trainee Hours	20,852
2022–24 AHEC Scholars supported	13
2023–24 AHEC Scholars supported	19
Structured Pipeline Participants	835
Continuing Education/Professional Development Participants	91
Community Health Education Participants	24
Health Career Event Participants	36

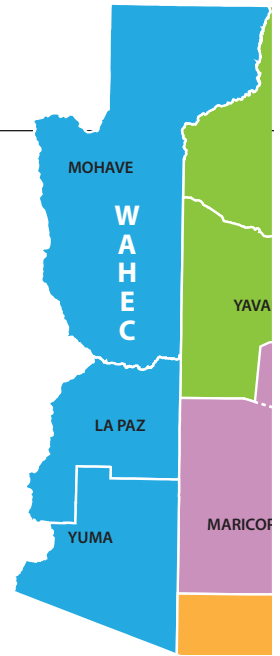
#### Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship (LIC) with U of A College of Medicine- Phoenix (COM-P)

WAHEC at the RCBH partners with the U of A COM-P clerkship for third-year medical students in the LIC program. LIC clerkship directors regularly meet with our faculty preceptors to conduct

professional development and review student responsibilities and progress. LIC preceptors participate in the U of A Faculty Development Fellowship. LIC students participated in a one-week immersion to learn about the region and programs, including the Refugee Center, nutrition and culinary medicine, chronic care management, and pediatric behavioral health referrals. The students gave positive feedback about their learning experiences.

#### Pipeline Program: “Nuestros Niños, Nuestra Comunidad” Direct Care Worker Training:

The RCBH San Luis Walk-In Clinic celebrated its 26th annual “Nuestros Niños, Nuestra Comunidad” Outreach Youth Program focusing on leadership, skills, and career readiness in different fields (medical, nursing, law enforcement, community services and advocacy). In FY24, 23 high school students participated in the summer program. Students are certified as a Direct Care Worker by the College of



WAHEC Scholars with Faculty Mentors

Health Careers at program completion.

**AHEC Scholars Program (ASP):** The WAHEC 2024 Spring Immersion consisted of a Health and Nutrition Outreach Fair at the Cocopah Reservation Community Center. AHEC Scholars taught community members about nutrition and mobility. Scholars learned about Cocopah's nutrition resources and recreational activities provided at the community center. Scholars visited the U of A Cooperative Extension office in Yuma, learned about culinary medicine by preparing recipes, cooking, and attended professional development workshops. They visited the Crossroads Mission to learn about health disparities in the unhoused population, challenges in providing healthy

meals for those with chronic conditions, and helped prepare a meal. RCBH-WAHEC collaborated with the U of A Nutrition College in Yuma for Scholar projects. Faculty mentors facilitated project planning for both 2022-24 and 2023-25 AHEC Scholar cohorts.



*Nuestros Niños Program Presentation*



## AzaHEC Financial Review for FY24

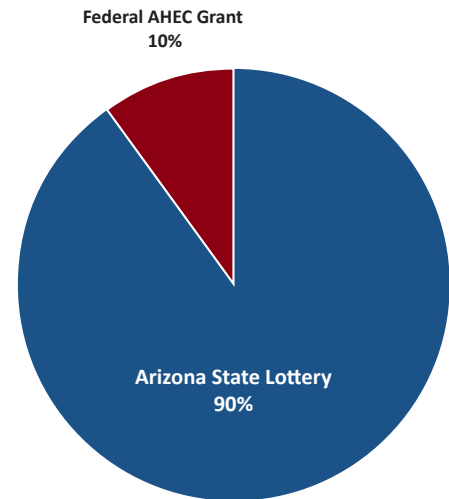
The AzaHEC Program earns Federal funding from Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Bureau of Health Professions through a competitive Model AHEC grant. It requires 1:1 matching non-federal funds. Statutory state funding is from the Arizona State Lottery for the AzaHEC Program (ARS § 5-572C) under the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR). It is in year three of its five-year federal funding cycle.

The AzaHEC Program is administered through the University of Arizona Health Sciences (UAHS) Office of the Senior Vice President for Health Sciences (OSVPHS), Michael D. Dake, MD. Leila Barraza, JD, MPH, is the Director of the AzaHEC Program, and serves as Principal Investigator (PI) of the HRSA Model AHEC grant. Daniel Derksen, MD, serves as the AzaHEC Program Senior Advisor as part of his role as the OSVPHS Associate Vice President (VP)

for Rural Health Workforce Development Initiatives. He served as Principal Investigator (PI) of the HRSA Model AHEC grant from 7/1/2020 through 9/30/23. Jennifer Zúñiga is the AzaHEC Program Associate Director.

Federal and state funding supports AzaHEC Regional Centers (AIH-AHEC, CERE-AHEC, CAAHEC, CPCHP, SAAHEC, and WAHEC) via annual reimbursement subcontracts administered through the AzaHEC Program Office following University of Arizona, state, and federal requirements. AzaHEC supports the Arizona statute-required (ARS § 15-1754) Rural Health Professions Programs (RHPPs) at Arizona State University (ASU), Northern Arizona University (NAU) and University of Arizona (U of A).

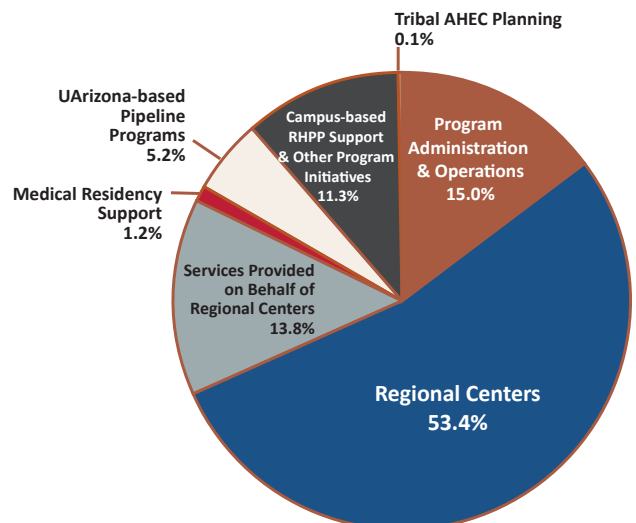
### AzaHEC Funding Sources 2023–24



### AzaHEC Employment Data 2023–24: Arizona AHEC Programs employ 119 people statewide, operating as important economic forces in their communities.

Item / Initiative	FTEs	"Person Count"
AzaHEC Program Office	9.27	15
AIH-AHEC	2.15	3
CERE-AHEC	2.88	5
CAAHEC	4.07	19
CPCHP	4.63	8
SAAHEC	4.25	6
WAHEC	4.93	8
RHPP COM-PHX	0.90	3
RHPP COM-TUS	0.50	2
RHPP CON	0.50	3
RHPP CPH	0.80	10
RHPP COP	0.55	2
RHPP ASU Nursing	0.65	4
RHPP NAU Nursing	0.26	2
RHPP NAU Physical Therapy	0.08	1
RHPP NAU Physician Assistant	0.56	5
North Country Residency Program	0.40	1
South Campus Primary Care Residencies	0.48	4
Med-Start Program	1.39	13
Establishing an Arizona Health Workforce Data System	2.36	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41.61</b>	<b>119</b>

### Expenditures 2023–24









# Arizona AHEC Regional Centers

## American Indian Health AHEC (AIH-AHEC)

801 E. Jefferson Ave  
Phoenix, AZ 85034  
928-714-6925  
Jeffrey Axtell, Director  
jeffrey.axtell@aacihc.az.gov  
**Service Region:** Tribal Communities across Arizona

## Central Arizona AHEC (CAAHEC)

c/o Arizona Alliance for Community Health Centers (AACHC)  
700 E. Jefferson  
Suite 100  
Phoenix, Arizona 85034  
602-253-0090  
Shelli Stewart, Center Director  
shellis@aachc.org  
<https://aachc.org/workforce-caahec/>  
**Service Region:** Maricopa and Pinal counties, and south-central Yavapai county

## Southern Arizona AHEC (SAAHEC)

c/o El Rio Health  
1230 S. Cherrybell Strav  
Tucson, AZ 85713  
520-309-4019  
Yolanda Perez, Center Director  
Yolanda.Perez@elrio.org  
[www.southernazahec.org](http://www.southernazahec.org)  
**Service Region:** Cochise, Pima, Santa Cruz Counties

## Center for Excellence in Rural Education AHEC (CERE)

431 S. Beeline Highway Ste. 1  
Payson, AZ 85541  
928-472-2588  
Jennifer Smith, Executive Director  
jennifer@ruraled.org  
**Service Region:** Gila, Graham, Greenlee Counties

## Colorado Plateau Center for Health Professions (CPCHP)

c/o North Country HealthCare  
2920 North Fourth Street  
Flagstaff, AZ 86004-1816  
(Mailing) PO Box 3630, ZIP: 86003  
928-522-9855  
Marica Martinic, Director  
mmartinic@nchcaz.org  
<https://coloradoplataauchp.org/>  
**Service Region:** Apache, Coconino, Navajo Counties and eastern portions of Yavapai County

## Western Arizona AHEC (WAHEC)

Regional Center for Border Health, Inc.  
950 East Main Street, Bldg A  
Somerton, AZ 85350-0617  
PO Box 617  
928-315-7910  
Ana Montoya, Center Director  
amontoya@rcbh.edu  
<https://www.rcfbh.org/western-arizona-ahec.html>  
**Service Region:** La Paz, Mohave, Yuma Counties



Dan Derksen

Advisory Commission Members

- Michael Allison**  
*Retired, Native American Liaison, Arizona Department of Health Services Policy and Intergovernmental Affairs*
- Randall Flores**  
*Clinical Pharmacist, Chiricahua Community Health Centers*
- Jessica Madrid**  
*Nurse Practitioner, San Carlos Indian Hospital*
- Lura Ryden**  
*Senior Director, Chief Nursing Officer, Banner Payson Medical Center*

Ex Officio

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*Board Chair, WAHEC*
- Paul Ferris**  
*Board President, Colorado Plateau Center for Health Professionals CPCHP*
- Matthew Bertsch**  
*Board President, CAAHEC*
- Alex Berens**  
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- Daniel Preston**  
*Board President, AIH-AHEC*
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- Leila Barraza**  
*Director, AzAHEC*

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- Edgardo Figueroa, MOL, Program Manager
- James Fulford, BA, Finance Manager
- Nicole Paredes, MEd, Program Manager
- Colleen Reed, BA, Program Coordinator, Sr.
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- Marni Valenzuela, MPH, Program Manager

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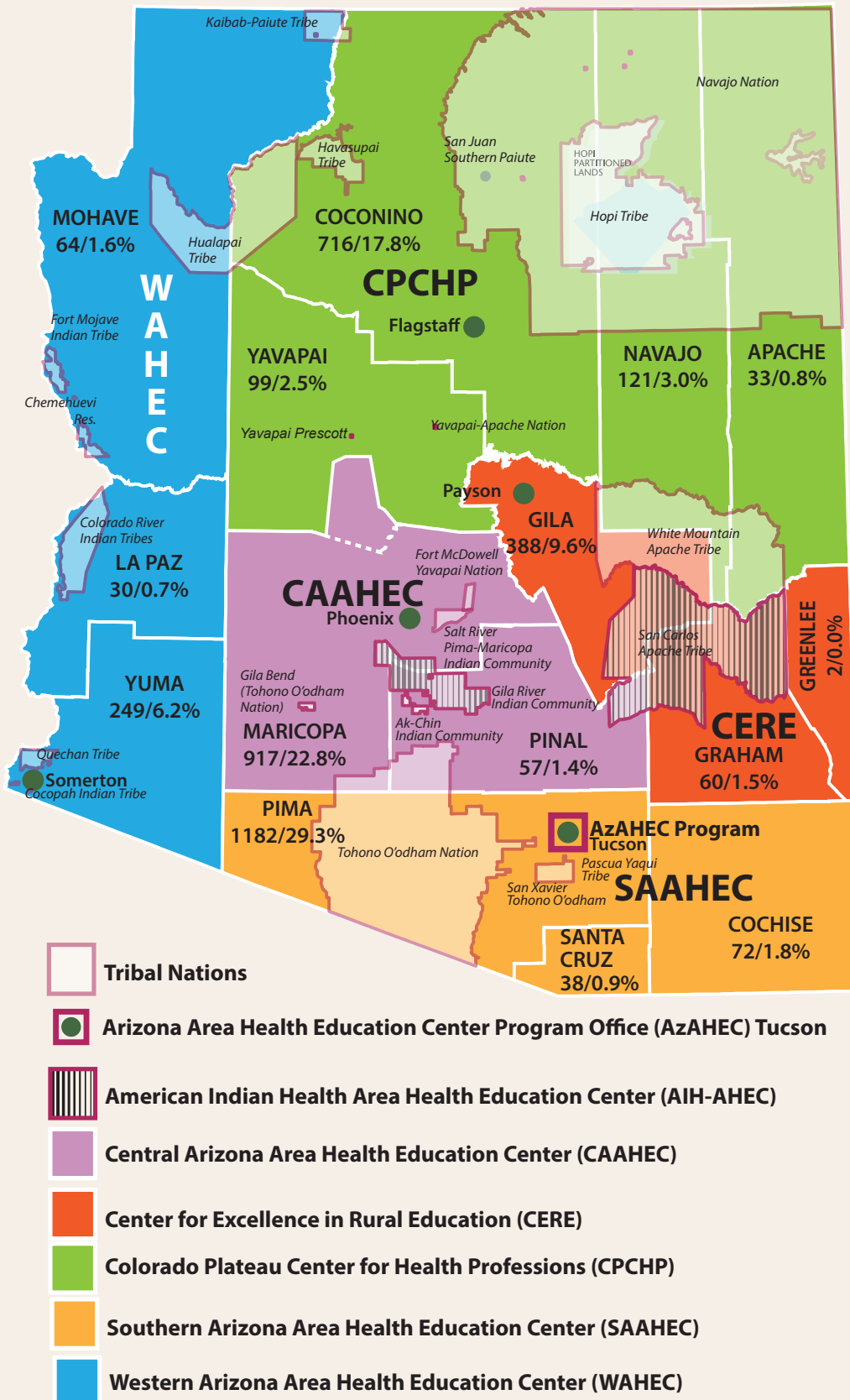
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# AzAHEC Health Professions Field Experiences by County (total 4,028)

Number and percent of field experiences are reflected immediately below the name of each county where these occurred.



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
**Arizona AHEC**  
 Area Health Education Centers

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