

AHEC Pathway Programs: Building Oregon's Health Care Workforce

A strategic approach to health care career readiness

Oregon AHEC Program Manager **Melissent Zumwalt** and Administrative Coordinator **Nicole Bales**

Agenda

1. Introduction & context
2. Oregon AHEC's community-based model
3. Why pathway programs matter
4. AHEC & CTE: Filling the gaps
5. Impact & success stories
6. Looking forward
7. Q&A

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Introduction & Context

- **The National AHEC network (300+ centers) serves over 85% of U.S. counties,** bringing workforce support to rural and underserved areas.
- Created by Congress in 1971 to strengthen the health care workforce in **rural and underserved areas.**
- Oregon AHEC was established in 1990 through the state's first rural health bill.
- **Federally funded** by the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA), **with a 1:1 state match,** administered through OHSU.
- **HRSA Mission:** To improve health outcomes through access to quality services, a skilled health workforce, and innovative, high-value programs.
- **Five regional centers** deliver statewide services using a hub-and-spoke model.

Oregon Area Health Education Center

Connecting students to careers, professionals to communities and communities to better health

Oregon Pacific AHEC

Hosted by Samaritan Lebanon Community Hospital. The Center serves communities along the Oregon Coast and I-5 Corridor including the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians and the counties of Benton, Clatsop, Columbia, Lincoln, Linn, Marion, Polk, Tillamook and Yamhill.



AHEC of Southwest Oregon

Hosted by Aviva Health in Roseburg. The Center provides services to Coos, Curry, Douglas, Lane, Jackson and Josephine counties.



Oregon AHEC Program Office

Hosted by OHSU in Portland.



Oregon Healthcare Workforce Institute

Hosted by Pacific University. The Center serves Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties.



Northeast Oregon AHEC

Located on the campus of Eastern Oregon University in La Grande. The Center serves Baker, Gilliam, Hood River, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Wasco and Wheeler counties.



Cascades East AHEC

Hosted by St. Charles Health System in Bend. The Center serves Central and Southeastern Oregon and includes the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Klamath and Lake counties.



Scan each region to learn more!

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COMMUNITY-BASED MODEL

- Regional centers are embedded in local communities across Oregon
- Programs are tailored to meet specific regional health workforce needs
- Local partnerships with schools, clinics and hospitals drive programming
- Strengthens rural pathways by building on existing community resources



COMMUNITY-BASED MODEL

- Our regional centers and program office work with foundations and community partners who give support through grants, donations and time.
- OHA funding allowed Oregon AHEC to grow summer camp offerings statewide and offer full scholarships for every camper, eliminating financial barriers.



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WHY PATHWAY PROGRAMS MATTER

- Inspire students early to health careers, especially those from rural and underserved communities
- Build local pathways, making it more likely students will stay and serve their communities
- Provide hands-on experiences, mentorship and support



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CTE & AHEC: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

- AHEC offers flexible, community-driven programs; CTE is tied to district structures
- Many rural schools lack CTE health programs
- AHEC brings opportunities to students, not just schools
- AHEC supports students beyond high school



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IMPACT & SUCCESS STORIES



"I credit the confidence I have in my decision to pursue a career as a Physician Associate to [AHEC of Southwest Oregon]. AHEC opened doors I didn't even know existed and gave me the tools and mentorship I needed to succeed."

— Emily Sabins, PA



*"AHEC taught me essential skills like writing a resume, crafting a cover letter, filling out applications and navigating the college and financial aid process. I also had the opportunity to job shadow and interview many nurses across different departments, which **solidified my decision to pursue nursing.**"*

— Janet Hernandez, RN



*"Having that kind of corner of AHEC where I got to see people and go to lectures and go on the didactics and learn from people who were also passionate about rural health care was very inspiring to me, and I really appreciated that, and it **helped kind of fuel me a little bit through the program.**"*

— Lauren March, PA

IMPACT & SUCCESS STORIES

- AHEC has impacted even more people – 85% of MedQuest survey respondents have ended up in a health professions career.
- NEOAHEC spearheaded a pilot of a new Salesforce system to streamline student registration and strengthen data collection on demographics, participation and outcomes.



IMPACT & SUCCESS STORIES

- Summer camps expanded this year, and all students offered scholarships thanks to an OHA grant.
 - 265 summer campers in 2025, a 26% increase from 2024.
 - 97% of summer camp participants report increased interest in health careers.
 - Camps were recognized in the Oregon Health Care Workforce Needs Assessment as an exemplary pathway program that must be expanded.



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LOOKING FORWARD

- Proposed elimination of federal AHEC funding, combined with ongoing state budget pressures, threatens the future of programming
- We need additional funding to expand camps, mentorship and workforce pathways that support rural and underserved communities.
- We want to collaborate with you!



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OHSU EXPERIENCE CAMPS

- We welcomed 100 students from across Oregon in our first year.
- Activities included a tour of the Casey Eye Institute Mobile Clinic, a research activity and talk with the Knight Cancer Research Institute and a Tram Ride up to Marquam Hill.
- We are planning for next summer — applications for the 2026 day camps will open in spring!



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THANK YOU!

Q&A

STAY CONNECTED WITH US!

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