The Florida AHEC Network is a major component of the state’s safety net healthcare system in partnership with other major federal and state initiatives for medically underserved communities. The Network consists of five AHEC Programs, hosted by the medical schools at Florida State University, Nova Southeastern University, University of Florida, University of Miami, and University of South Florida. Affiliated with these AHEC Programs are 10 regional community-based AHEC Centers that focus on rural, underserved, minority and immigrant communities with severe unmet healthcare needs.

The Florida AHEC Network supports the state’s indigent safety net healthcare system by responding to access to care issues, health workforce recruitment and retention, promoting the quality of healthcare, and strengthening the public health infrastructure in high impact medically needy communities.

With funding from the Comprehensive Statewide Tobacco Education and Use Prevention Program, the AHEC Tobacco Training and Cessation Program began in 2007. It provides tobacco cessation and prevention training to current and future health professionals, and cessation programs for all tobacco users in every country in the state.

The Florida AHEC Network is proud of our accomplishments and we invite you to read through this report to see how we are making a difference.

Cynthia S. Selleck, ARNP, DSN  
*Florida AHEC Network President, 2009-2010*
In FY 2009, the Florida AHEC Network received $10.3 million in funds from the legislature to implement local programs and services for rural and medically underserved communities throughout the state.

In turn, the Florida AHEC Network amplified the state’s investment by 100% providing a total return of $20.6 million in the value of actual services delivered. AHEC accomplished this through a variety of activities highlighted in this annual report.

Almost $5 million of state funds supported direct patient care services by AHEC faculty, preceptors, residents, and students to 1,656,094 Floridians. More than 7,100 health professions students and residents provided 1,172,389 hours of healthcare to Floridians last year. AHEC also allocated almost $1.2 million to conduct nearly 36,000 community health screenings.

The dollar amount placed on such care is valued at almost $19 million

Direct patient care services must be linked with recruitment, training and retention programs to produce a lasting impact. AHEC allocated almost $1 million of state funds to conduct community-based programs for health professionals to enhance quality of patient care and safety. For example, AHEC provided almost 71,000 hours of continuing education programs on topics such as cardiovascular health, mental illness, and minority health to more than 14,000 practitioners who care for the underserved.

The dollar amount of these and other services is estimated at over $1.2 million

Finally, AHEC allocated $1.5 million to address the state’s worsening healthcare workforce shortage. Last year, AHEC delivered almost 300,000 hours of health career programs to more than 9,400 primary, community college, technical, and university undergraduate students around the state.
Direct Service Programs

The Florida AHEC Network, through its staff, faculty and service learning programs, provides direct medical services to Florida’s most vulnerable and medically needy citizens. Targeted outreach programs and health fairs deliver critically needed services such as oral health exams, blood work, women’s health exams, mental health evaluations, and skin cancer assessments. In addition, students and residents team up with community-based faculty and preceptors to provide direct primary care in community health centers, “grass-roots” clinics and rural hospitals.

The Florida AHEC Network does not bill Medicaid, Medicare or private insurance sources for its direct service programs.

MIAMI DADE AHEC | UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI AHEC

AHEC Helps Solve Access Problems

Two years ago, the University of Miami was selected as one of five national sites to participate in “The Hispanic Community Health Study – Study of Latinos.” Randomly selected participants received extensive clinical exams to determine baseline risk factors with annual follow-up.

One unexpected consequence of the study was a sizable percentage of participants who were unable to gain access to private physicians or public healthcare facilities for necessary follow-up medical care.

The UM AHEC Program, together with its affiliated Miami-Dade AHEC, quickly tapped into their extensive network of healthcare resources in the region. Utilizing a group of Hispanic physicians looking to give back to the local community, all study participants now have access to necessary care regardless of their ability to pay.
EVERGLADES AHEC | NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY AHEC

Bringing Services to Rural Communities

For eight years, Nova Southeastern University’s AHEC Program and its affiliated Everglades AHEC Center have held the Glades Rural Education Awareness and Community Health (REACH) Fair to bring preventive health services to Western Palm Beach County.

Last February, more than 150 faculty and students from the NSU Health Professions Division worked with a variety of local health providers to transform an elementary school into a primary care clinic. Over 600 residents from the communities of Belle Glade and Pahokee received services including comprehensive medical and dental examinations, school immunizations, vision and hearing screenings, diabetes and osteoporosis testing, HIV testing, and occupational and physical therapy services.

Also in February, a similar health fair was held at Hendry Regional Hospital in Clewiston for the residents of Hendry and Glades counties and drew more than 1,100 area residents.

These annual AHEC health fairs are a primary source of healthcare services for many of the medically needy residents. They also provide an equally important function by giving medical, dental and allied health students an introduction to the rewards and challenges of practicing medicine in a rural underserved community.

FLORIDA KEYS AHEC

Skin Cancer Serious Problem in Florida Keys

Of the 1,100 adults getting free screening from Keys AHEC:
- 35% had at least one notable lesion
- 12% had at least two notable lesions
- 60% of lesions were found on face and/or arms
- 50% reported not wearing sunscreen

Keys AHEC, in partnership with Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute, offered free skin cancer exams at job sites, offices, shops, stores, marinas, churches and health fairs in Monroe County. Examining the arm of a Keys resident for skin cancer is Dr. Les Safer, a volunteer dermatologist with Good Health Clinic and Keys AHEC’s Cora Yoose, RN.

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA AHEC

Economy Adds to Mental Health Woes

Dr. Stephen Anton, Assistant Professor, University of Florida Department of Clinical and Health Psychology, and an advanced-level doctoral student, travel to the rural Dixie County Health Department each week to address some of the pressing psychological problems of local residents exacerbated by the economic downturn. Many present with depression and anxiety, which are now compounded by other factors such as increased financial difficulties, unemployment, and child or spousal abuse.

In addition to counseling patients with psychological problems, Dr. Anton and his students collaborate with other health providers to assist patients who are trying to make behavior changes to improve their overall health.
The Escambia Dental Cooperative (EDC), a community-based dental initiative, is a model example of the impact a clinical dental education partnership can yield for patients, students and the larger community. The West Florida AHEC responded to area safety net providers who were overwhelmed by uninsured patients seeking care for dental pain in primary care clinics and emergency departments.

Since February 2006, EDC has made a difference in the lives of over 3,000 low-income adults in Northwest Florida, and contributed more than $1.8 million in charity dental care to the community.

The Escambia Dental Cooperative’s Dr. Tony Chicola examines a patient.
Clinical Training Career Development

The Florida AHEC Network coordinates clinical training opportunities for health professions students in rural and underserved communities. It inspires underrepresented minorities and disadvantaged youth to explore and choose careers in health through student enrichment and training programs.

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY AHEC

Primary Care Focus of FSU and its AHEC

The nine year old FSU Medical School has a specific goal of addressing problems in primary care, and the AHEC program was a part of this mission from the beginning. AHEC support for community partnerships that replace traditional hospital teaching and abundant clinical training opportunities in rural and medically underserved communities contributes to our success in producing primary care doctors who will care for the state’s most vulnerable populations, including elders. Through five classes of graduates, nearly 60 percent of our students have entered primary care residency programs. Of the first 21 of those graduates to then complete residency training, 57 percent are now practicing in primary care.

Strong pipeline programs like SSTRIDE which receive significant support from the AHEC Program Office, along with mission-based admissions, also contribute to what the Florida Legislature is accomplishing through its mandate for the FSU College of Medicine. This approach to medical education results in primary care physicians who contribute to and advance medical knowledge while caring for the poor, underserved, rural, and elder populations.
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY AHEC

Rural Communities Get More Pediatric Services Through Residency Training

Since the inception of the pediatric residency program at Palms West Hospital in Palm Beach County, the training curriculum has focused on the special needs and challenges of caring for underserved populations. Recognizing the increased area demand for pediatric services, the Nova Southeastern University AHEC Program, in collaboration with Palms West Hospital and Florida Community Health Centers, Inc., led an expansion effort for pediatric residency training beyond a single rural site in Belle Glade. Today, each of Palms West Hospital’s 10 pediatric residents sees patients at clinics not only in Belle Glade, but also at federally qualified community health centers in Clewiston, Pahokee, Indiantown, Ft. Pierce, and Okeechobee on a weekly basis.

WEST FLORIDA AHEC | FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Shown here is the first graduating class of Okaloosa Rural SSTRIDE. It introduces middle school and high school students to the rigors and rewards of advanced health professions education, prepares them for college, and encourages them to return to serve their local communities. The program is a collaboration between West Florida AHEC and the Florida State University College of Medicine.
GULFCOAST SOUTH AHEC

Starting Early on Health Careers

Gulfcoast South AHEC has created two new youth programs for elementary school students to introduce them to the many and varied careers in healthcare — “Health Careers Story Time” and “Health Careers Activity Time”. These programs complement the Recruitment and Educational Assistance for Careers in Health program designed for middle and high school students.

The program gives minority and/or underprivileged students the opportunity to explore a variety of healthcare occupations through internships with local healthcare organizations and academic health centers.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA AHEC

Targeted Pre-Medical Program Presented

Developing a more diverse physician workforce is one of the most pressing healthcare challenges today. In 2003, the University of South Florida AHEC Program and the USF College of Medicine Office of Student Diversity and Enrichment created the Pre-Medical Summer Enrichment Program (PSEP). It targets underrepresented minority or disadvantaged students.

Participants receive six weeks of intensive enrichment in the sciences (biology, chemistry, physics), and sessions on topics such as verbal reasoning, test taking strategies, MCAT preparation, health disparities and social justice, and medical school admissions requirements. They also shadow minority community physicians. Up to 20 students per year are accepted into PSEP and each receives a $1,500 educational grant. Students from USF and other Florida and out of state institutions are eligible.

Now in its seventh year, 122 students have completed PSEP. The program continues to improve the competitiveness of talented underrepresented minority and disadvantaged students for acceptance into medical school.

BY THE NUMBERS

1,170,853: Last year, the Florida AHEC Network provided over 1,170,000 hours of clinical training to health professions students and residents at community-based settings in order to expose them to the needs, challenges and practice opportunities that exist in these locations.

65% of these hours took place in medically underserved sites.
AHEC CME Improves Patient Outcomes

Continuing Medical Education (CME) for physicians is under scrutiny like never before. The Florida AHEC Network is responding to concerns about the value of physician education by creating evidence-based, needs-oriented and outcomes-driven activities for its physician constituents.

The Florida AHEC Network coordinates over 100 unique CME activities annually, and one innovative example is its Performance Improvement (PI) program. PI CME seeks to improve physician performance or patient outcomes in a highly structured personal learning experience comprised of three stages.

In the first and third stages, the physician evaluates some aspect of his or her practice. Evaluation results are used in the second stage to tailor-make an intervention for practice improvement. Although time intensive, results of PI CME activities have been impressive because physicians are afforded quality time necessary to evaluate and document improvement in their systems and habits.

The Florida AHEC Network CME program provides:

- More than 100 CME activities across the state annually
- Evidence-based clinical medicine recommendations in all activities
- Long-term outcome measures
School Nurses Tackle Poisons

Nova Southeastern University’s affiliated Central Florida AHEC partnered with the Florida Poison Information Center in Tampa to present: “Toxicology Update for School Health Nurses” in Lake and Polk Counties.

The program:
- Addressed common health issues associated with exposure to household substances, snakes, spiders, and party drugs.
- Prepared school nurses to more effectively treat younger students who might ingest flowers or leaves from poisonous plants and who might confuse medications with candy.
- Taught recognition of symptoms associated with the misuse or abuse of aerosols, mushrooms, and other substances.
- Instructed nurses on how the Poison Control Center can assist them.

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**Florida AHEC Network Continuing Education Participants from All Sites and Medically Underserved Sites, 2001-09**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All Sites</th>
<th>Underserved Sites</th>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>12,829</td>
<td>4,542</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**BY THE NUMBERS**

71,000: The Florida AHEC Network provided almost 71,000 hours of continuing education.
14,700: The Florida AHEC Network provided 14,727 healthcare professionals with continuing education. 75% of these individuals were from underserved sites.

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**CENTRAL FLORIDA AHEC | NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY AHEC**
Community Health Programs

The Florida AHEC Network delivers culturally appropriate health education, wellness and prevention programs to underserved and at-risk populations. University faculty, health professions students, and community health workers provide programming in local communities.

NORTHEAST FLORIDA AHEC

Journals Help Fight Childhood Obesity

Childhood obesity is on the rise around the country. Among children ages 6 to 11, about one third are overweight or at risk for being overweight.

Northeast Florida AHEC has partnered with local schools and universities to address this problem with its Healthy Choice Alternatives for Tweens (HCAT) program.

During the 12-week program, health professions students visit area elementary schools to teach third graders the importance of eating right and exercising regularly. Some 75 college students have provided over 1,400 hours of instructions to students.

The third graders (and soon second graders) track their daily progress in journals, jotting down what they ate and physical activity completed.

Teachers and cafeteria workers note that students make healthier choices after participating in the program. The HCAT program also has a parental component — Fit Families — where families get guidance on nutrition, healthy grocery shopping and proper cooking techniques.

Florida AHEC Network Information Dissemination:
Number of Units Distributed by Provider Type, 2008-09

BY THE NUMBERS

85,000: Over 85,000 educational resources such as clinical practice guidelines, health education curricula and patient education materials were provided by the Florida AHEC Network to faith-based organizations, social service agencies, primary care clinics and schools.
The Keys to Healthy Aging

Helping Florida Keys adults 55 and older stay healthy and independent is the goal of the “Keys to Healthy Aging” program recently launched by Keys AHEC. The classes are offered in partnership with the Health Foundation of South Florida.

The program consists of three evidence-based classes:

1. **Matter of Balance** – focuses on fall prevention
2. **Living Healthy** – focuses on living with chronic health conditions
3. **Enhance Fitness** – focuses on strength training, flexibility, balance and low-impact aerobics

Classes, at locations from Key West to Key Largo, served some 500 participants in its first year.

Reducing Teen Pregnancy

The “Baby Think it Over” project, implemented by Nova Southeastern University’s affiliated Everglades AHEC, in collaboration with Clewiston High School, teaches high school students that being a parent requires major lifestyle changes and new responsibilities.

Students are given a realistic computerized infant simulator to care for over a weekend. The simulator cries at different intervals requiring attention from the student — feeding, diaper changing, burping or rocking and only stops when proper attention is received. On Monday, students discuss and write about their experience and how it has affected their view of having a baby.

This successful Clewiston initiative was expanded to include Port St. Lucie High School, and adopted by the Central Florida AHEC for Polk, Hardee, DeSoto, and Highlands counties.

“Baby Think It Over” project facilitators receive instruction on the operation of the infant simulators in Central Florida. Teens will use these simulators to learn the major life changes that accompany a baby.
GULFCOAST NORTH AHEC

Veterans Get Mental Health Help

In 2005, retired United States Marine Reservist Gunnery Sergeant José Sanchez was on his second tour of duty in Iraq when a car bomb explosion seriously injured him.

Although he received treatment for his physical injuries, Sgt. Sanchez hid the mental trauma he suffered when he returned home. Fortunately, his wife insisted he seek professional help. The couple recently shared their story at a seminar sponsored by Gulfcoast North Area Health Education Center for mental health professionals working with veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan and their families.

“Almost a third of returning U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan have limited access to Veterans Administration resources after discharge,” said USF AHEC Program Director Dr. Cynthia Selleck. “Most community providers are not well-versed in military culture and don’t know how to ask the right questions about the kinds of incidents that these returning service men and women have encountered.”

The seminar was part of an effort by the FLAHEC Network, the V.A. and the U.S. Department of Defense to help community health providers, particularly those in rural areas, treat returning service members transitioning back to civilian life.

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY AHEC

Checking Out AHEC’s Library without Walls

The Nova Southeastern University AHEC “Library without Walls” program has been providing research services for community health centers, county health departments, rural clinics, and hospitals in the NSU AHEC 19-county service area for 20 years.

With 1,000 library queries annually from over 80 healthcare sites, a major component of this library service has become the provider online training program. This training teaches practitioners how to formulate effective methods to search medical literature for clinical evidence, given that evidence-based practice ensures optimal patient outcomes and improves quality of care.
AHEC Takes Dynamic Steps to Curb Tobacco Use

In its work with healthcare providers, health professions students, and universities, the AHEC Network has created more effective and efficient ways to cut tobacco use by Florida residents. The goals of the Florida AHEC Network Tobacco Initiative include:

- Improving the ability of healthcare providers to treat tobacco dependence.
- Making it easier for tobacco users to get effective and intensive cessation counseling services.
- Sustaining practice environments that support clinician interventions.
- Helping reduce tobacco-related diseases, disabilities and death, thus reducing overall health costs for Florida.

Effective, June 22, 2009, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has the authority to regulate tobacco products. According to the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids: “It represents the strongest action the federal government has ever taken to reduce tobacco use, the leading preventable cause of death in the United States.”
Highlights of AHEC Smoking Cessation Initiative

- Trained more than 8,100 medical, nursing, pharmacy, dentistry, and other health professions students.
- Trained some 4,400 practicing physicians, dentists, physician assistants, pharmacists, nurses, social workers, psychologists, and other allied health professionals.
- Incorporated tobacco education curricula into health professions training programs at 62 colleges and universities in Florida.
- Reached 90,000 youth in 67 Florida counties with tobacco prevention education as part of the community service component of the tobacco training received by health professions students.
- An additional 12,749 youth received tobacco education in stand-alone programs.
- An additional 5,000 received education in conjunction with other health promotion education.
- Over 1,500 healthcare providers received education from two online web-based training programs offering 15 plus courses.
- Approximately 11,000 health professions students are enrolled and have completed nearly 12,500 of the online learning modules.
- Established tobacco cessation services in nearly 300 sites throughout Florida in partnership with county health departments, community health centers, hospitals, and physicians.
- Provided tobacco cessation counseling to more than 7,000 individuals.
- Disseminated over 217,000 posters, brochures, and pocket cards containing tobacco related educational materials to affiliated clinical sites and community partners.

- 2,634 patients were asked about tobacco use
- 2,989 tobacco users were provided with Pharmacotherapy/NRT
- 12,429 patients were provided with cessation materials
- 9,011 tobacco users were advised to quit
- 9,981 tobacco users were referred to AHEC Tobacco Cessation Specialists
- 11,848 tobacco users were referred to the Florida Quit-Line
Professional and Clinical Training

AHEC Network Presents Tobacco Summit

The Florida AHEC Network’s First Annual Tobacco Summit last May drew over 120 participants from across the state. Representatives from county health departments, community health centers, college health professions programs, and other community partners attended. Experts from as far away as Harvard University and many from Florida universities covered topics that included:

- Third-Hand Smoke
- Tobacco Cessation and Health
- Neurobiology of Tobacco Addiction
- Tobacco Induced Oral Lesions
- Spit/Smokeless Tobacco Update
- Tobacco and Pregnant Women

AHECs Work to Change Addictive Behavior

- The NSU AHEC provided tobacco training to over 2,500 students from health professions programs at 10 colleges and universities as well as to nearly 1,500 current healthcare practitioners.
- The FSU College of Medicine offered two hour trainings to all clinical faculty and preceptors at each regional campus on tobacco dependency patient interventions.
- The FSU School of Nursing has integrated tobacco prevention and cessation scientific standards into their curriculum in accordance with CDC best practices.
- The FSU and UF AHEC Programs and their affiliated centers presented a regional tobacco cessation symposium last spring. It was attended by more than 100 physicians, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, mental health professionals, and respiratory therapists.
- At the UM Miller School Of Medicine, faculty champions have worked to blend the tobacco curriculum effectively with the sciences as a preventive health component and students are exposed to CDC best practices.
- At UM, residents from primary care disciplines are trained in tobacco assessment skills as part of their clinical training, and in turn teach the undergraduate medical students.
- The USF AHEC provided tobacco training to over 5,600 health professions students and more than 800 current healthcare practitioners.
Cessation Successes

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI AHEC
Identify and Help Smokers Quit

Jackson Memorial Health System, one of the largest hospitals in the country, and the University of Miami Hospital, have joined UM AHEC to develop an electronic records system to identify all tobacco using patients and refer them for smoking intervention to AHEC tobacco cessation counselors. Because of Miami-Dade County’s diverse population, classes and materials are offered in Spanish, Creole and English.

GULFCOAST SOUTH AHEC | UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA AHEC
Tools to Quit Target Busy Smokers

Gulfcoast South AHEC launched a program for people who wanted face-to-face assistance in quitting but could not commit to a six-week program. Its cessation team created a “Tools to Quit” package with a skills building notebook that highlights the health effects of tobacco use, benefits positive lifestyle changes including quitting tobacco use, and the challenges involved in quitting.

EVERGLADES AHEC | NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY AHEC
Helping Communities Go Tobacco-Free

Working with the Everglades AHEC, the community of Sea Oaks in Indian River County is well on its way to becoming completely tobacco free.

The first step in achieving the community’s zero tobacco use policy was to enroll all Sea Oaks employees who use tobacco in the AHEC’s “Quit Smoking Now” Cessation program. To date, 30 employees have participated. Of these, 10 are completely tobacco free.

In the next phase, tobacco cessation classes and individual counseling will also be provided to Sea Oaks residents as part of the community’s ongoing wellness efforts. As a result, Sea Oaks will be a much healthier place to both work and live.

Some Sea Oaks happy employees who successfully kicked the habit with AHEC’s Quit Smoking Now program.
AHECs Embrace Change to Cut Tobacco Use

**FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY AHEC**

**FSU Improves Tobacco Cessation at Clinics**

The FSU College of Medicine trained 54 physicians and their staff at 21 area clinics on the Clinical Practice Guidelines for Tobacco Use and Dependence. The biggest systems change was that providers began to ask each patient, at every visit, about their tobacco usage and document it in the patient’s medical records.

**NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY AHEC**

**AHEC Critical to Tobacco Prevention Efforts at NSU**

The NSU AHEC Program, working in close partnership with university administration, is training NSU’s on-campus healthcare providers and enhancing cessation counseling to help curb the use of tobacco products among faculty, staff, and students. Through AHEC efforts, campus clinical services will be better equipped to treat tobacco addiction.

**BIG BEND AHEC | UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA AHEC**

**Rural Dentist Gets New Partner**

Laban Bontrager, D.M.D., a member of the Big Bend AHEC Board of Directors, has first-hand knowledge of the difficulties of being a rural healthcare provider. Until recently, he was the only dentist serving Liberty County. But fortunately, his daughter, Monica Bontrager, D.M.D., a graduate of the University of Florida College of Dentistry, recently joined his practice.

The father/daughter dental team recognizes the correlation between tobacco use and oral cancer and have partnered with Big Bend AHEC using a new oral mucosal screening device. The device assists with early detection of oral abnormalities.

“Oral health means much more than just healthy teeth and is integral to a person’s general health and well-being,” Dr. Bontrager says. The pair has recently provided free oral exams, screenings, and education to more than 75 individuals in Gulf and Liberty counties.