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MONTANA OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH &  
AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER

**2021**  
**ANNUAL**  
**REPORT**



**MONTANA**  
**STATE UNIVERSITY**

Office of Rural Health  
Area Health  
Education Center

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# A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

## REPORT CONTENTS PAGE

Director's Message	02
2021 Report Introduction	03
COVID Support	04
MORH Overview	05
MT AHEC Overview	06
MT AHEC Workforce Pipeline	07
North Eastern MT AHEC	08
Eastern MT AHEC	09
Western MT AHEC	10
North & South Central MT AHECs	11

Hello to you, near and far across the Big Sky State! I am eager to connect with you in my new role as the Director of the Montana Office of Rural Health and Area Health Education Center and share my message of appreciation in this annual report. I transitioned into the Director's role in July 2021, following the retirement of Ms. Kristin Juliar. Ms. Juliar led MORH/AHEC since 2006 and her work to improve the supply and distribution of healthcare professionals through community and academic partnerships will have a lasting impact on rural healthcare in Montana and beyond. Thank you to Kris for her leadership and vision at MORH/AHEC.

I also would like to extend my thanks to our MORH/AHEC Program Office and regional AHEC staff, for all they have done to support our healthcare workforce, communities, and state over the past year. This past year, much like 2020, has challenged us all in ways that we would have never imagined, but we have experienced the growth of partnerships and the development of innovative programs to address our state's current and future healthcare needs. The appreciation for our healthcare workforce, students, academic institutions, healthcare facilities, and supporting partners runs deep in our MORH/AHEC office.

Finally, I would like to thank you for your support and interest in our programs. This report highlights some of our major accomplishments in 2021, and we look forward to expanding our efforts going into 2022. Please reach out to our office if you have any programmatic questions or would like to get to know us better. An open invitation always stands!

Kailyn Mock  
Director, MORH/AHEC



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# 2021 REVIEW

*This report provides programmatic highlights for activities engaged in for the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Grant funding is obtained each year for programs that align with our mission. \$5.5 million in federal, state, and private or foundation funding was received to provide services and resources to Montana's Critical Access Hospitals, clinics, healthcare workforce, and state and local partners.*

# \$5.5M

## TOTAL REVENUE

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MORH/AHEC invested \$5.5 million in grant funding into its programs and services. MORH/AHEC funding supports our mission and provides direct support to rural Montanans. This total does not include ARPA or CARES Act COVID-19 expenditures.



### MORH Mission:

"Dedicated to improving access to quality healthcare for rural Montana by providing collaborative leadership and resources to healthcare and community organizations."

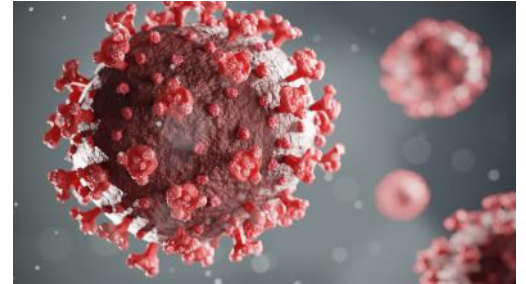
### AHEC Mission:

"To enhance access to quality health care, particularly primary and preventive care, by improving the supply and distribution of healthcare professionals through community and academic educational partnerships."



# COVID SUPPORT

The 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had a significant impact on Montana and healthcare infrastructure. The Montana Office of Rural Health and Area Health Education Center worked with state and federal partners to serve as a conduit of up-to-date information and resources to support Montana's communities. These efforts include, but are not limited to, enhanced outreach and information dissemination, distribution of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, and expanded workforce support.



## Small Rural Hospital Improvement Program (SHIP) COVID-19 Support Funding

**48** Montana SHIP  
eligible hospitals  
(49 beds or less)

The Montana Office of Rural Health was entrusted with distributing over \$15 million in coronavirus support funding to Montana's small rural hospitals. This was made available through the SHIP COVID-19 Relief and Covid Testing and Mitigation funding as a part of the CARES and ARPA federal economic relief efforts. Money was congressionally allocated to support COVID-19 related activities and to provide resources for hospitals responding to this health crisis. These funds supported Montana's rural hospitals which saw increased demands for clinical services and equipment, as well as, short-term financial and workforce challenges related to meeting the needs of patients.

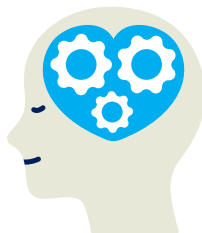
Montana facilities used the funds for efforts related to COVID-19 testing and community mitigation, as well as maintaining hospital operations. Reporting of those expenditures was coordinated by MORH and submitted to HRSA.

**\$15,674,136**  
supporting MT facilities

## Workforce Resiliency

In recognition of the emotional impact of COVID-19 and to enhance Montana's healthcare workforce's wellness and resiliency, the Montana Office of Rural Health, Montana AHEC, and Montana Hospital Association partnered to develop a no-cost Wellness for Healthcare Workers Series. This series was designed to provide all members of the healthcare workforce with resources and tools that could be used immediately in response to sustained stress.

**10** Sessions Offered  
**440** Participants



### Session Themes:

- Self-empathy in the presence of trauma
- Collective grief and its role
- Resiliency through self-compassion
- Weaving positive psychology into your life
- Collaborative communication



# MONTANA OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH

For over 30 years, the Montana Office of Rural Health (MORH) has championed equity in and access to quality health care for Montana's rural residents. One of fifty state offices of rural health in the nation, MORH serves as a source of technical assistance, partnership development, networking, and advocacy to advance rural health access.

MORH was established through a federal-state partnership and is located in Bozeman at Montana State University.

MORH's expertise in rural health, workforce development, health equity, population health, partnership development, and rural health advocacy guides our leadership to serve rural Montana.

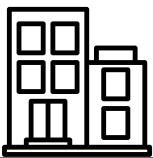
MORH Assistant Director, Natalie Claiborne has the honor of serving as President of the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) 2022-2023.

## Technical Assistance Highlights

The Community Health Services Development (CHSD) Program assists hospitals in assessing, prioritizing, and developing a plan to address issues identified through their community health needs assessments. An updated CHSD Aggregate Report representing 27 CAHs was published in July 2021 highlighting health assessment and implementation plan findings from 2018-2020. Additionally, enhanced secondary data sheets were made available highlighting county-specific health measures for each county in the state.

MORH has been working with Montana's Department of Public Health and Human Services to support hospital and local health departments in enhancing collaboration and aligning efforts and interventions to address needs in their communities.

Together, with the Montana Flex program, MORH expanded its outreach with the State's Rural Health Clinics (RHC). This collaborative enhances RHC networking as well as provides technical assistance focused on enhancing operational and financial performance.



## STATE AT A GLANCE

**1.07 million**

**State Population**

(2020 U.S. Census Bureau)

**65%**

**% of Population Considered to be Rural**

(USDA, Nov 2021)

**49**

**Critical Access Hospitals**

**61**

**Rural Health Clinics**

**57**

**FQHC/CHC Look-alike Sites**



## Montana AHEC Overview

### About MT AHEC

- Founded in 1985 in partnership with WWAMI Regional AHEC
- 2007 a state-based Program Office was established with two regional centers (South Central and Eastern)
- 2008 Western AHEC established
- 2010 North Central AHEC established
- 2014 North Eastern AHEC established
- Operated with Federal and required state matching funds

### Structure

The Mark and Robyn Jones College of Nursing at Montana State University (MSU) in Bozeman administers the Montana AHEC Program and has formal contracts with the five statewide AHEC regional centers. The regional centers carry out the mission, goals, objectives, and work plan by creating, coordinating, and implementing programming that addresses the health professions' education and training needs within each regional service area.

Each Montana AHEC regional center has its own advisory board, comprised of healthcare providers and consumers who reflect the demographics, racial and ethnic diversity of the regional center's geographic service area.

# AHEC Focus Areas 2020-2021

## MT AHEC Scholars



Montana AHEC continues to see success with the Montana AHEC Scholars Program. There are currently 281 health professions students enrolled in the program from 5 colleges/universities and more than 15 different academic programs. Recently, the program has enrolled students from Carroll College (a private institution) and Gallatin College (a two-year college). Students from new academic programs were added this year, including Dietetics (Masters level), Medical Assistant (Certificate level), and Nutrition Sciences (Bachelors level). All Montana WWAMI TRUST medical students participate in the Montana AHEC Scholars Program as well.

## Interprofessional Education



Montana AHEC began the Montana AHEC Scholars Program in 2017, a program to engage health professions students across Montana in interprofessional didactic and experiential education. The Montana University System (MUS) approved a collaborative IPE (Interprofessional Education) Institute in which the AHEC Scholars Program plays a key role. Montana AHEC and MUS IPE Institute merged their advisory boards to support this interprofessional effort. Members represent various health professions organizations and healthcare providers throughout Montana, with joint staff support between the Montana AHEC Program Office and Western MT AHEC.

## Behavioral Health Workforce Development



Montana AHEC Program Office manages four HRSA workforce grants that focus on behavioral health trainings for paraprofessionals, incumbent workers, and professionals. Occupational tracks include Community Health Workers (CHW), Peer Support Specialists (PSS), and Community Paramedics (Community Integrated Health). Examples of trainings offered are Mental First Aid (MHFA), Youth MHFA, Trauma Informed Care, Motivational Interviewing, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), Management of Aggressive Behaviors (MOAB), and Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT). The behavioral health team works closely with the MSU College of Nursing to place more emphasis on telehealth education. A collaborative effort is underway to create a telehealth training course that involves interdisciplinary participation, much like that of an integrated healthcare system.

## Workforce Development



The Montana AHEC Program Office continues to focus on developing and expanding longitudinal rural clinical experiences for the University of Washington Regional Initiatives in Dental Education (RIDE) students and Montana State University College of Nursing undergraduate and graduate students. AHEC offers an online nurse preceptor development program. The regional AHECs continue to share health education-focused resources with teachers and counselors across the state. This summer the regional AHECs offered both virtual and in-person MedStart camps, with a total of 58 high school participants. AHEC also supports HOSA—Future Health Professionals of America.



# MONTANA AHEC WORKFORCE PIPELINE

## Recruitment & Retention

Develop the healthcare workforce and address the maldistribution of clinicians in rural and underserved areas of Montana.



**2113**

Behavioral Health & Community Health Worker training participants

## Continuing Professional Development

Enhance access to quality healthcare, particularly primary and preventative care, by improving the supply and distribution of healthcare professionals.

## Health Professions Student Programs

Provide community-based training to expose students to the potential opportunities working in rural and underserved areas of Montana.



## Graduate Medical Education

Build the state's physician workforce through the identification of approaches to support, advocate and grow GME within Montana.

## Interprofessional Education

Improve the experience and clinical outcomes in Montana by preparing future and current healthcare providers to collaborate effectively in delivering high-quality, patient/community-centered, team-based services.

## Health Careers Programs

Build a more inclusive future workforce by supporting underrepresented minority and disadvantaged students on their paths to becoming health professionals.

**281**

AHEC Scholars Students representing 5 Colleges/Universities across 16 disciplines

# NORTH EASTERN MONTANA AHEC



North Eastern Montana AHEC, located at the Montana Health Network in Miles City, serves a fifteen county region, covering over 42,000 square miles.

North Eastern Montana AHEC spent 2021 largely focused on education and training throughout the healthcare pipeline (high school students, health professions students, and practicing professionals) and partnership development.

Pipeline efforts included co-hosting an online MedStart Camp with Eastern, South Central, and North Central AHECs (**45** participants), distributing In a Box Health Professions Career curriculum, and providing **52** hours of online CNA training. The CNA training was coordinated with **3** Critical Access Hospitals (CAH) for **13** high school students with **25-36** hours of clinical CNA training.

North Eastern Montana AHEC partnered with schools of nursing to provide clinical experiences for **16** ABSN (Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing) students at **10** Montana CAHs.

Additionally, **44** ASN (Associate of Science in Nursing) students participated in an interprofessional education and practice EPIC (Emergency Preparedness in Communities) day with **571** healthcare professions students from Montana, Oklahoma, and Texas.

North Eastern Montana AHEC continues to offer Continuing Education (CE) credits for educational events. **4** programs were offered to **65** healthcare facilities on topics ranging from management skills, HIPAA, and serving on healthcare boards. **918** Basic Life Support, Advanced Cardiac Life Support, Pediatric Advanced Life Support, and Pediatric Emergency Assessment and Response instructor lead courses were provided to healthcare workers with **4,065** CE awarded. Additional trainings were offered for nursing, geriatrics, CNA, EMT, medical coding, and billing.



**Miles City, Montana**



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# EASTERN MONTANA AHEC



Eastern Montana AHEC, located at RiverStone Health in Billings, serves a twelve-county region, covering nearly 30,000 square miles.

Eastern Montana AHEC works closely with both the University of Washington-School of Medicine's WWAMI (Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho) Medical School program and other schools, in placing third and fourth-year medical students into clinical rotations in Billings at St. Vincent Healthcare, Billings Clinic, RiverStone Health, and affiliates. In this reporting year, **148** medical students were placed in rotations.

Eastern Montana AHEC is privileged to work with nursing, dental, physician assistant, medical assistant, pharmacy, dietetic, and undergraduate students. In 2021, **95** practicum/field placements were coordinated for these students.

In support of broadening the health workforce distribution and enhancing health care quality, Eastern Montana AHEC provided **255** hours of educational trainings to **398** students. This included **170** didactic hours with Montana Family Medicine and Billings Clinic Internal Medicine.

Eastern Montana AHEC offered health career pipeline students career exploration opportunities by co-hosting an online MedStart Camp with the North Eastern, South Central, and North Central AHECs with **45** students in attendance.

Additionally, continuing education courses prepared professionals across the region with the necessary tools to further their education and enhance their workforce development. Courses offered by Eastern MT AHEC included: Limited Permit X-Ray workshops, Management of Aggressive Behaviors (MOAB), Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), and Geriatric Teepa Snow. **21** courses were offered with **339** attendees.



**Billings, Montana**



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# WESTERN MONTANA AHEC



Western Montana AHEC, located at the University of Montana in Missoula, serves a seven-county region, covering over 22,500 square miles.

Western AHEC provides robust pipeline programs featuring MedStart and REACH camps, Classroom Chats, and a Rural Health Scholars program.

In 2021, Western AHEC coordinated **21** Pre-Med/Pre-PA job shadowing and **220** Information Interview experiences.

Additionally, **42** career awareness programs were offered, featuring **127** hours of educational trainings. **Eight** students were supported in rural clinical rotations, covering **7,043** miles. **96** WWAMI rotations were offered for **67** medical students.

With staff support from the Western AHEC, the AHEC Scholars program continues to enhance collaboration

across Montana colleges and universities to build clinical and educational trainings.

Western AHEC has been a partner in the AHEC's Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET) program. BHWET emphasizes connecting students with underserved populations who have little access to behavioral health services, while simultaneously training students in integrated behavioral health. BHWET trained **19** students across **4** disciplines through **16** clinical training sites in 2021.

Western AHEC offers continuing education (CE) programs to physicians, healthcare professionals, and healthcare student programs. In 2021, **44.5** hours of training were provided with **1,979** participants. CE programs include the Friday Medical Conference, COVID Update Series, and the Montana Pain Conference.



**Missoula, Montana**



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# NORTH CENTRAL AHEC

# SOUTH CENTRAL AHEC



North Central and South Central Montana AHEC are co-located at the Montana Hospital Association based in Helena. North Central AHEC serves an eleven county region, covering nearly 28,500 square miles and South Central serves an eleven county region, covering over 26,500 square miles.

Behavioral health education and training was a large focus in 2021 for North and South Central AHECs. **569** individuals throughout Montana participated in **5** different training offerings both in person and via virtual format.

Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) trainings were provided to **37** participants and **14** four-week rural clinical rotation sites were developed in partnership with the University of Washington School of Dentistry.

**45** students representing **31** high schools in Montana participated in MedStart

camp, a pipeline program aimed at developing the next generation of healthcare providers.

North Central and South Central AHEC hosted Montana Clinical Connect, a networking event that connects university and college students in healthcare programs with potential employers. **18** students and **9** healthcare facilities participated. Additionally, the AHECs partnered with the Montana Primary Care Office to deliver education on the State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP).

North Central and South Central AHEC collaborated with the Montana Hospital Association Workforce Development Council to develop and deliver a workforce demand survey to better understand current workforce challenges. Over **50** organizations responded representing Prospective Payment Systems, Hospitals, Critical Access Hospitals, Nursing Home/Senior Living facilities, Home Health/Hospice, and Specialized Hospitals.



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