

2020 Annual Report



WESTERN NEW YORK

WNY R-AHEC

RURAL AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER

Western New York Rural AHEC

In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy. - William Blake

Letter from the Executive Director



A Season of Change...

As for many organizations, the year 2020 has been marked with unknowns and unprecedented challenges. For Western NY Rural AHEC, the year was also a season of change: in executive leadership, staffing, and funding strategies.

I have the privilege of serving this organization as Executive Director, following in the footsteps of two prolific leaders, Kenneth Oakley, PhD, the organization's first Chief Executive Officer from 2001 to 2014 and Catherine Huff from 2014 to 2020. I have worked directly with both and have grown under their leadership styles. It is my intention to continue the incredible work that they have begun while striving to ensure that the organization is able to adapt to the healthcare landscape changes.

In addition to the change in executive leadership, the organization said farewell to two staff members as they enter the next season of life. Cheryl Young, Administrative Assistant, retired as the longest tenured staff member with over twenty years of service and Nate Coogan, the Western NY Rural Broadband Network Program Coordinator, retired after leading the program for over 3 years. The staff wishes them both an abundance of health and joy as they pursue their passions.

COVID-19 took its toll on the organization through funding cuts at the state level. Due to the conscientious leadership of Catherine Huff, the organization was in the best position financially to withstand the effects. R-AHEC, along with the NYS AHEC System, is in advocacy mode, appealing to legislators to support the NYS AHEC System and reinstate funding at the state level. While we remain optimistic that funding will be restored in the future, renewed emphasis is placed on sustainability, developing innovative programs, and being creative in searching for funding opportunities that strengthen our mission.

The staffing and funding level changes mentioned above required an organizational restructuring. With the support of Valerie Putney, Associate Director, the responsibilities of the staff have been realigned and streamlined. The core staff, who are truly the heart of the organization, have continued to provide excellent quality programming and service to our communities. Because of the dedication of our staff, R-AHEC is well equipped to weather the storms and remain strong and versatile for seasons to come...

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melanie Rhodes'.

Melanie Rhodes
Executive Director

About WNY R-AHEC

R-AHEC is a non-profit organization headquartered in Warsaw, New York. Our mission is “to improve health and healthcare through education.” Counties in our catchment include Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Steuben, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates. We work to achieve our mission by focusing on:

Pipeline Programming: Health career education and career path development for youth in grades 9-12 and college students. Activities include classroom presentations, field trips, and shadowing experiences with local healthcare providers, all designed to encourage youth to consider health careers and encourage diversity. AHEC Scholars and AHEC Champions are innovative programs that give college students with a healthcare major an opportunity to work together on an interdisciplinary team with emphasis on community-learning opportunities in underserved and medically disadvantaged areas.

Preceptor Development/Student Housing: Eligible medical and other health profession students are offered support to encourage clinical rotations through short-term housing and/or housing scholarships.

Health Workforce Development: Through various initiatives, the current healthcare workforce is offered a variety of on-going skills training, career ladder development, and professional skills development programs. Projects have continually changing components and are designed to build and retain a skilled healthcare workforce.

Rural Healthcare Technology Infrastructure Development: R-AHEC is the administrator of the Western New York Rural Broadband Healthcare Network (WNY RBHN). The WNY RBHN is a consortium of partners in rural, urban, and medically underserved areas of Western New York and surrounding regions, which focuses on increasing the utilization of Health Information Technology (HIT) among public and non-profit health care providers - making it easier for health care providers to connect with each other, access online educational programs, and expand their telemedicine initiatives.



Programming Initiatives

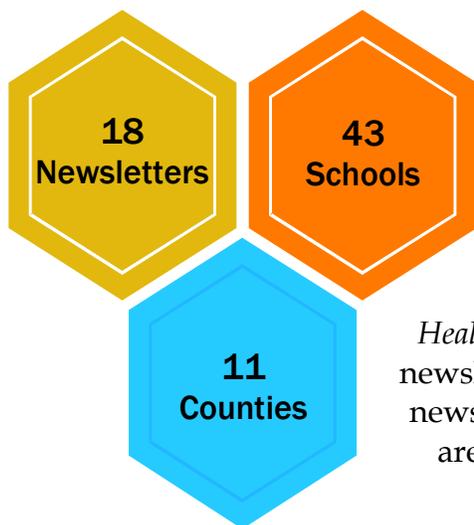
Scholars and Champions

These two-year academic programs are designed to provide current health professional students from various disciplines with community-based learning opportunities in underserved and medically disadvantaged areas. In 2020, two students at SUNY Fredonia completed the Scholars Program and received NYS AHEC certificates for that accomplishment. From July 20th through August 7th, Rural AHEC hosted three students from SUNY Geneseo as part of our Rural AHEC Scholars and Champions Program. Two students completed the original Scholars curriculum, while one other participated in the newly developed Rural AHEC Champions program.

Students completed experiential activities with the Wyoming County's Office for the Aging, the Warsaw Food Pantry, and with Spectrum Human Services. A SUNY Fredonia Scholar's student has opted to join the SUNY Geneseo students who will be returning to participate in the Rural AHEC Scholars Summer Program in 2021.



Career Newsletters



This year COVID-19 prevented us from visiting schools and sharing in-person presentations on healthcare careers such as optician, care coordinator, and epidemiologist. To overcome this barrier, programming staff relied on their partnerships with local school counselors and distributed new and back issues of the *Healthcare Highlights: The Rural AHEC Student Newsletter*. The newsletter was in high demand and we were able to deliver 18 newsletters to 43 schools in 11 engaged counties. Newsletters are shared with students, colleagues and the community.

SEPA (Science Education Partnership Award)



SEPA made possible The Western New York Genetics in Research and Health Care Partnership, which provided 207 students in 9th – 12th grades in several districts with opportunities to explore bioinformatics and genetics through a hands-on cyber learning program. Through activities led by the University of Buffalo and R-AHEC Genetics in Research partners, students learned about the impact of genetic research on cancer treatments, medicines that target

specific genes, bio-ethical issues, and career opportunities in biotechnology. Students completed learning modules in the GENI-ACT program that took them through a gene annotation process using investigative techniques and genuine on-line technical research tools.

OPEP (Opioid Prevention Education Project)

773
high school/
college
students

197
professionals
and
community
members

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, R-AHEC was able to reach 773 high school and college students through 15 “tabling”

events or informative sessions focusing on opioid

misuse and abuse, stigma, prevention, and treatment.

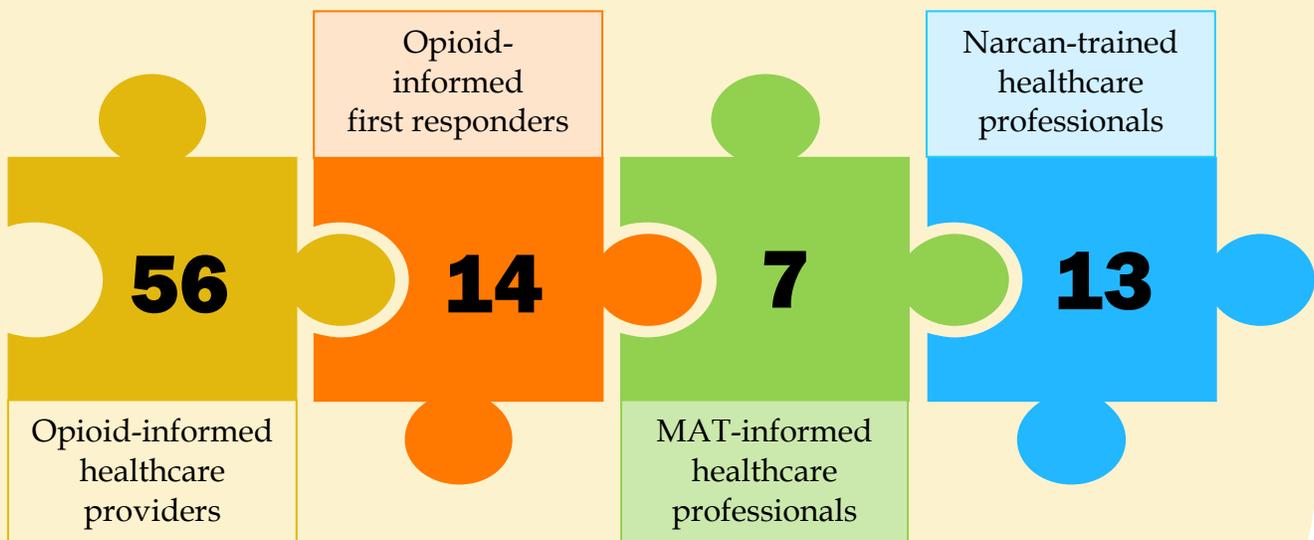
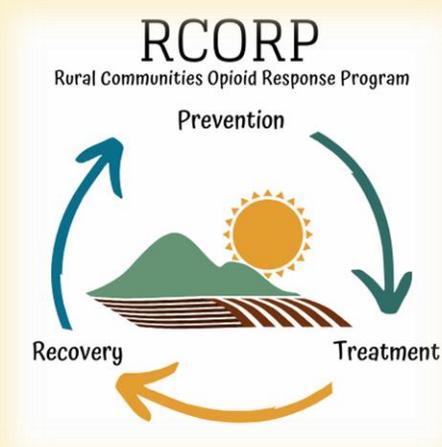
These sessions were designed to increase awareness about the opioid epidemic and to educate participants on current prevention efforts as well as available treatment services in their community. Staff had to be creative in how they were reaching out to students. One of those creative projects included posting information along the meal pick-up lines at schools. In addition, we were able to reach 197 healthcare professionals and community members through a six-session webinar series.



RCORP (Rural Communities Opioid Response Program)

This program aims to strengthen and expand SUD/ODU prevention, treatment, and recovery service delivery within Wyoming County. R-AHEC partnered with NYS AHEC and Spectrum Human Services to meet the objectives of this initiative. Activities in 2020 included Naloxone trainings as well as trainings relating to SUD/ODU prevention, treatment, recovery, destigmatization, local related resources, and information regarding Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT).

R-AHEC staff in conjunction with Spectrum Human Services developed *Choosing Hope*, a five-session webinar series which ran on Tuesdays from July 14 to August 11. Topics included Opioid Crisis Statistics and Impacts in Wyoming County, Resources for Treatment and Recovery, Counseling – Hope in Recovery, Best Practices for Identifying and Treating Opioid Use Disorder, Overcoming Stigma Associated with OUD, and Mental Health and Addictions. If you missed attending the live sessions, check out our website for the recordings at www.r-ahec.org.



COVID-19 Programs



Funding supported a six-session, no-cost webinar series for healthcare professionals, human services providers, and first responders during this stressful time of COVID-19. Topics included *Trauma Informed Responses to the Dual Pandemics*, *Legal and Ethical Issues Associated with Providing Telehealth Services*, *How to Counsel Parents on Parenting During a Pandemic*, *Outbreak Prevention in Long-Term Care Facilities*, *Treatment of COVID-19 and Other Infectious Diseases*

of Public Health Importance, and *Self-Care of Healthcare Professionals*. If you missed the series, check out the recordings at our website: www.r-ahec.org.

Health Workforce Development

ATHOS (Advancement Training for Healthcare Occupations)

Care Coordinator Certificate Program:

Over the past year, staff have been delivering a learning event for care coordinators which includes nine educational modules in the following areas: new trends in healthcare, cultural competency and health literacy, professionalism, quality improvement, person-centered care, chronic diseases, interdisciplinary teams, health technology, and community orientation. Although the modules were designed for instructor-led presentations, hybrid classes, and on-line learning, restrictions due to the pandemic have resulted in all distance-learning cohorts. In 2020, 83 students from 7 counties completed the course.



Other trainings offered through ATHOS include Professionalism in the Healthcare Workforce, Motivational Interviewing, Cultural Competency, Health Literacy, LGBTQ Cultural Competence, Body Mechanics, Infectious Disease Control, Sexual Harassment, Resume Writing, and Cover Letter Writing. Please contact our office for prices and class availability.

Rural Healthcare Technology Infrastructure Development



R-AHEC, as the consortium lead and administrator of the Western NY Rural Broadband Healthcare

Network (WNY RBHN), has worked on behalf of network members since 2009 to obtain subsidies through the FCC's Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) and to identify and develop other network member benefits such as online education opportunities. This program subsidizes broadband services, equipment, and installation for eligible facilities. Through access to high speed broadband, members are able to utilize clinical mentoring, collaboration, education, and training over secure, high speed networks with scalable bandwidth to support communication, telemedicine, and distance-learning applications. The Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) offers up to a 65% subsidy and allows administrative offices and data centers to participate.

3 states We continue to expand our network of 162 active sites across Upstate New York, Northern Pennsylvania, and Eastern Massachusetts to strengthen healthcare facilities and organizations by reducing their telecommunications costs. The network currently supports 218 facilities of which 115 are rural and 74 are urban. The remaining 29 facilities are either data centers or administrative sites. The program requires that the network must maintain a rurality percentage of 50% or greater. Currently the WNY RBHN rural percentage is at a healthy 60.84%. From FY2015 through FY2019 we have secured \$7.5 million in funding commitments. Additionally, FY2020 saw an additional \$2.4 million in funding requests submitted.

28 counties

162 active sites

\$7.5 million in committed funds

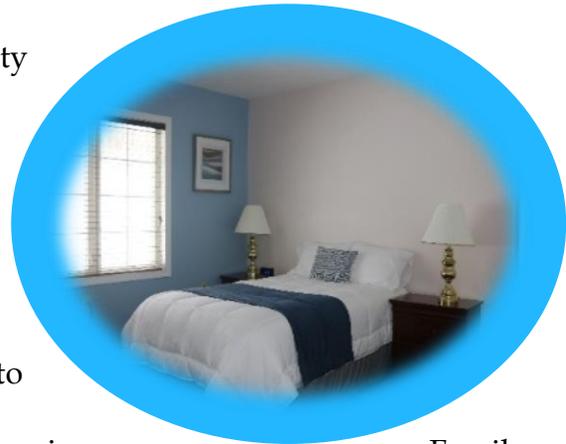


Preceptor Development and Student Housing



R-AHEC worked collaboratively with colleges and academic institutions to identify preceptor sites for their health professions students in rural communities throughout Western New York. R-AHEC's efforts included providing housing for health professional students at the William F. Thiel Hospitality House. We were able to provide housing

for 12 medical students serving in clinical rotations in our twelve-county catchment area. R-AHEC worked collaboratively with WCCHS, Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM) and University of Buffalo to provide supportive housing to students



completing rotations in Family Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Physical Therapy, and Occupational Therapy. We are very grateful that the William F. Thiel Trust, a fund held by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, was able to make this project possible.



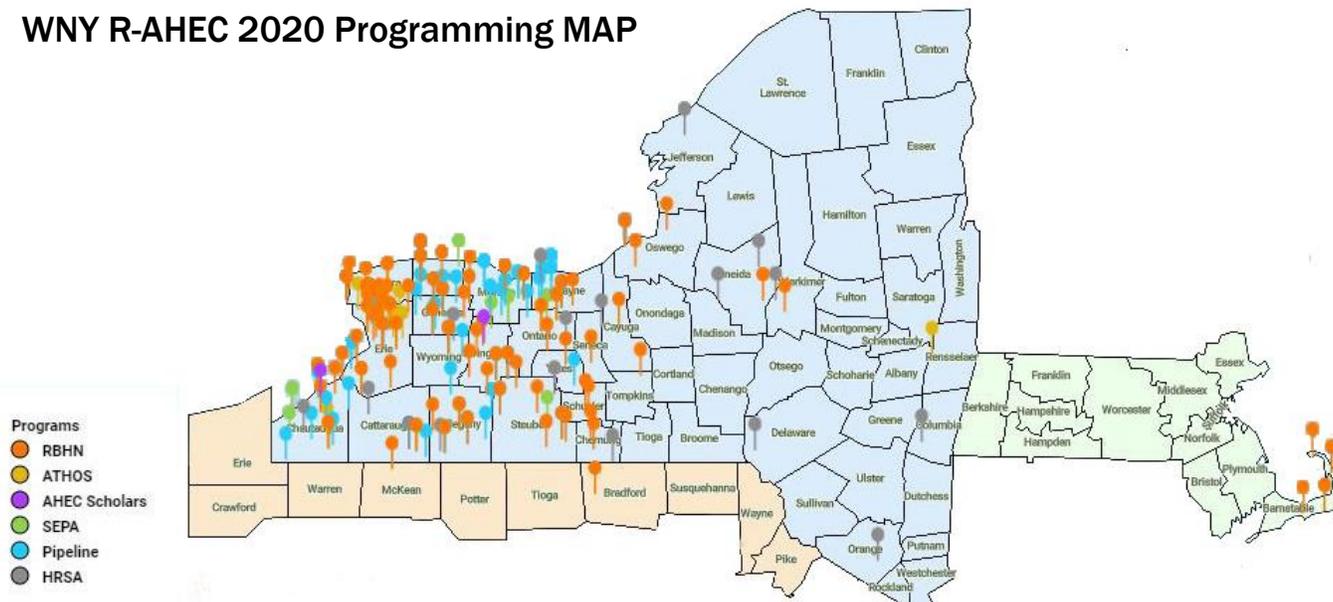
In addition to housing health professions students, 12 community members were able to take advantage of the accommodations and several frontline medical professionals

serving at Wyoming County Community Health System (WCCHS) were able to stay during the battle against COVID.

Finally, we were able to support the education of 3 veterinary students doing internships in the area by providing housing for them as well.



WNY R-AHEC 2020 Programming MAP



Current Staff

Melanie Rhodes – Executive Director
 Valerie Putney – Associate Director
 Larry Hoyt – Staff Accountant
 Christine Chappel – Administrative Specialist
 Lisa Green – Program Coordinator
 Kathleen Wood – Program Coordinator
 Peter Appleton – Program Coordinator
 Joelle Evans – Operations Coordinator
 Mark Massing – Web Developer

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This organization is supported in part by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under Grant number U77HP16459 and project title New York State Area Health Education Center System. The information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.

R-AHEC is an equal opportunity employer and provider