Ways NC AHEC’s 9 Centers Make a Difference in Our State of Health

1. HEALTH CAREERS
   North Carolina must cultivate current and future health professionals to meet supply and demand in the health care workforce.

   NC AHEC’s health careers pipeline provides informative programs that introduce K-12 youth to the wide spectrum of health careers, increasing the number of students who successfully pursue careers in allied health, dentistry, medicine, mental health, nursing, pharmacy, and public health. The NC AHEC Scholars Program targets college-level students, recruiting and training an interprofessional cadre of health professionals committed to community service and to transforming health care in North Carolina.

2. COMMUNITY CLINICAL TRAINING
   Health science students need real-world experience outside academic centers, and health science schools cannot provide all clinical training requirements on-campus.

   NC AHEC supports health science students from North Carolina colleges and universities and helps schools secure community health practitioners—preceptors—to teach the next generation of health professionals. These off-campus rotations, especially those in rural and underserved communities, help keep medical professionals in state and in rural areas.

3. GRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION (GME) SUPPORT
   North Carolina faces shortages and uneven distribution of primary care physicians in the state’s rural areas.

   The Association of American Medical Colleges reports North Carolina–trained residents have a 41.9% chance of remaining in-state to practice. NC AHEC has helped develop 19 new community residency programs, and we support teaching hospitals across the state. NC AHEC’s focus on rural GME expansion is part of the solution, yielding providers more likely to practice in rural areas while providing health care and creating jobs in underserved communities.

4. CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
   To stay abreast of the latest advancements in their fields, health professionals require ever-evolving education and training to maintain state licensure and specialty certification.

   NC AHEC’s continuing professional development programs are often taught by health sciences faculty from the state’s five medical academic centers, bringing university expertise to North Carolina communities. In 2017, more than 215,000 total participants attended more than 9,000 continuing professional development programs provided by NC AHEC.

ABOUT NC AHEC
NC AHEC (North Carolina Area Health Education Centers) weaves through all sectors of health care education and workforce, providing programs and services that bridge academic institutions, health systems, and communities to improve the health of the people of North Carolina. Our nine regional centers reach all 100 North Carolina counties, and the NC AHEC pipeline supports individuals in all stages of professional growth across the continuum of care.
According to a recent Georgetown University report, by 2025, North Carolina is projected to have the second-largest shortage of nurses in the country, a deficit of nearly 13,000!

NC AHEC’s RN Refresher course combines self-study and clinical training, providing a means for nurses with inactive licensure or who are out of practice for five or more years to reactivate their license with the NC Board of Nursing. Since the program’s inception in 1990, 3,269 inactive nurses have completed the program, returning an average of 115 qualified nurses to the workforce each year. NC AHEC also supports nursing baccalaureate programs and nursing clinical site development, mostly in rural areas. Studies affiliated with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation report that hospitals that employ larger numbers of nurses with advanced degrees have lower patient mortality rates and improved patient outcomes. In 2015–16, 272 nurses from rural counties enrolled in AHEC-supported RN to BSN programs at ECU and UNC Greensboro, and after 20-plus years, almost three-fourths of the nursing clinical sites still have learners. These initiatives help alleviate the nursing shortage in the state.

When there’s a nationwide epidemic—from heart disease to diabetes, the Zika virus to the ongoing opioid crisis—North Carolina needs a system in place to ensure our state has every resource on the ground tackling the problem.

In 2017, NC AHEC developed and provided more than 34,000 hours of continuing professional development related to opioids to more than 8,500 health professionals in 99 of the 100 counties in the state.

NC AHEC facilitated a three-year study, Heart Health Now, that shows the promise of primary care to combat chronic disease before patients suffer the consequences of advanced illness. 48% of the 219 participating practices improved their patients’ cardiovascular mortality risk by at least 10%.