



Area Health Education Centers Program Health Education and Training Centers Program

Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) and Health Education and Training Centers (HETCs) strive to eliminate disparities in health and health care by linking the resources of academic health centers with local communities and regions. Through AHECs and HETCs, national initiatives are targeted to the areas of greatest need and molded to the particular issues confronting individual communities. Whether the issue is the nursing shortage, bioterrorism preparedness, or access for the uninsured, AHECs and HETCs, where they exist, assemble the appropriate local collaboration and apply federal, state, and local resources in a precise and cost-effective manner. AHECs/HETCs are supported through a combination of state and federal funds. The work that AHECs and HETCs perform will not be possible with the President's proposed elimination of funding for these programs.

AHECs perform four basic functions:

- Develop and support ambulatory training opportunities for health professionals in under-served areas, especially community health centers.
- Provide continuing education, especially for providers to the underserved.
- Recruit minority students into the health professions.
- Distribute information necessary for practitioners and facilities to address critical health issues and threats to public health in a timely and efficient manner.

The mission of the HETC program is to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged, migrant, immigrant and other underrepresented populations, particularly along the US-Mexico border, in Florida, as well as other rural and urban areas with most serious unmet health care needs.

The unique contribution of AHECs/HETCs lies in their ability to flexibly address local health-related needs and combine federal and local resources through collaborative partnerships. These collaborations offer needed services to the community and maximize the investment in the program. In particular, AHECs/HETCs combine their efforts with other Health Professions Training Programs funded through the Public Health Service Act.

The Health Professions Training Programs address the growing shortages of pediatric dentists, pharmacists, medical laboratory personnel, allied health, public health professionals, and others throughout the country. These programs increase the number of providers and enhance the diversity of the health care workforce by recruiting and training underrepresented populations. Graduates of these programs are 3 to 10 times more likely to practice in medically underserved areas than graduates of non-funded programs, and often, they serve as the only source of health care in many disadvantaged communities.

The National AHEC Organization, which represents the nation's AHEC and HETC programs, expresses its appreciation to those members in Congress, including Congresswoman Darlene Hooley, Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, Congressman Gene Green, Congressman Ernie Fletcher, Congressman Ralph Regula, and Senator Arlen Specter, who have been leaders in promoting funding for these programs in the pending FY03 Labor-HHS appropriations bill.

NAO'S FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FY 2004 INCLUDE:

- **A minimum funding level of \$33.4 million for the Area Health Education Centers program.**
- **A minimum funding level of \$4.4 million for Health Education and Training**
- **A minimum funding level of \$550 million for the Health Professions Training Programs. This is consistent with the Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition's (HPNEC) funding recommendation.**