



High school students attending an intensive health careers camp, where they tour local hospitals and have opportunities to learn medical procedures, participate in simulation labs and shadow health professionals.

25
YEARS

Texas AHEC East Celebrates 25 Years

Full 2016 marked the 25th anniversary of UTMB's Texas AHEC East program, which serves dozens of communities annually across 111 counties through its nine regional operations.

UTMB's AHEC program was started in 1991 to focus on the desperate needs of communities across East Texas that often had poorer health indicators and less access to health care than the Rio Grande border region. The acronym, AHEC, stands for Area Health Education Center. However, as is the case for the FFA, YMCA, and many other organizations, the acronym's origin words are not fully descriptive of the organization today. Texas AHEC East (TAE) works to improve the health of individuals and communities it serves through a wide array of programs that support health workforce development, cultivate health literacy and spur health care practice transformation.

A national network of AHECs was established through a federal grant program now under the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. With funded programs in 49 states and territories, the AHEC network encompasses nearly

250 community-based centers. Programs are headquartered at health science center campuses. TAE's nine regional operations serve almost 75 percent of the state's population including Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, Austin and Houston. If TAE's region were a separate state in the U.S., it would be the fifth largest in population and 10th largest in area.

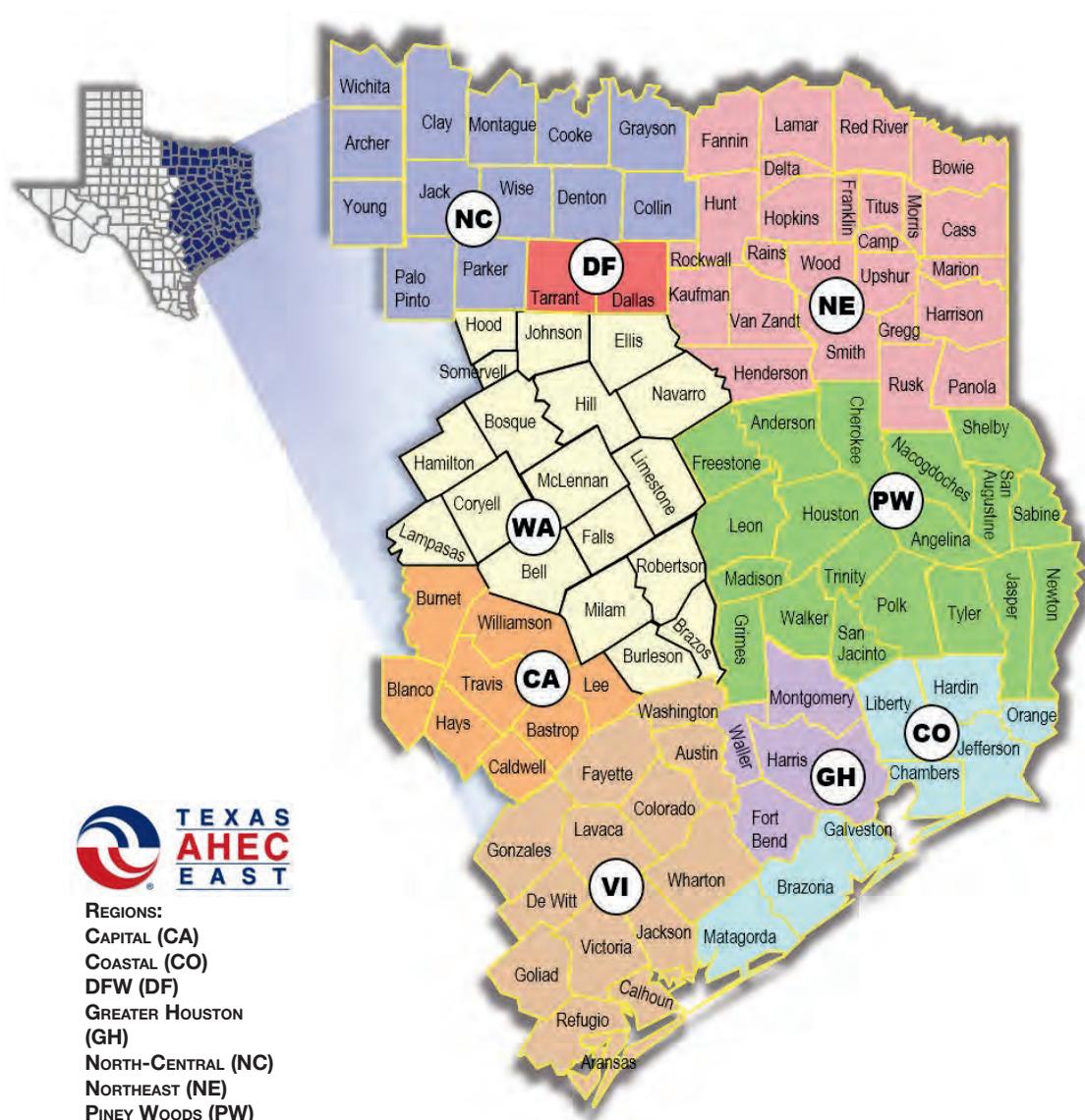
TAE is primarily a state-supported program, with funds directed by the Texas Legislature. Federal and other grant and contract sources have added almost \$40 million in additional funds to the program over the years.

Health Career Exploration

Texas AHEC East provides health career information to tens of thousands of youth through its health careers guide, "Texas H.O.T. Jobs." TAE also provides structured, ongoing learning experiences to approximately 2,000 students per year such as shadowing, mentoring, touring health care facilities and volunteering. TAE also provides academic preparation and application as well as pre-matriculation support for college and health career program enrollment.

Clinical Learning Experiences

UTMB's Texas AHEC East supports 500–700 students per year — primarily medical, nursing and physician assistant — who complete 800–1000 community-based clinical learning experiences with partnering clinicians and community health clinics. AHEC-facilitated rotations are predominantly in primary care, serving rural and medically underserved communities. TAE aims to connect communities with students and residents to help recruit their future health workforce. Staff members also engage students in local events and connect them to organizations and schools where they can become mentors and create ongoing relationships. Each



REGIONS:
CAPITAL (CA)
COASTAL (CO)
DFW (DF)
GREATER HOUSTON (GH)
NORTH-CENTRAL (NC)
NORTHEAST (NE)
PINEY WOODS (PW)
VICTORIA (VI)
WACO (WA)

year, TAE supports student placements from about 15 disciplines and 30 different campuses with approximately 75% of those being for UTMB medical, PA and NP students.

Supporting Health Professionals

Texas AHEC East's regional operations tailor programs and services to the needs of local providers, clinics and health care facilities. Examples of those services include:

- Practice management assistance to more than 40 vulnerable primary care practices and consultation on administration and operations with more than a dozen

new Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) startups.

- Design and maintenance of Texas Health Match, a job-matching website for employers and job seekers (TexasHealthMatch.com).
- Continuing education for health professionals focused on always-in-demand topics, such as domestic violence and CPR, as well as emerging issues including recognizing mental health needs of returning service members, navigating the health insurance marketplace and strategies for increasing HPV vaccination rates among adolescents to prevent cancer.

Making Communities Healthier

Texas AHEC East's health literacy programs and projects range from teaching elementary school children how to brush their teeth to training newly diagnosed diabetic patients to make better food choices. TAE helped a rural school district develop and deliver a program that lowered their teen pregnancy rate. Other initiatives sought to curb flu outbreaks, HIV infection as well as ATV injuries and deaths.

In 2009, the 81st Texas Legislature charged TAE with designing and piloting an Emergency Medical Services Dispatch Resource Center to support rural 911 answering points with no EMS dispatch training. This program saves lives: Rural dispatchers can transfer a call to the EMS Dispatch Resource Center where qualified personnel provide pre-arrival instructions to callers until local first responders arrive on the scene.

UTMB Texas AHEC East has been a leader in developing and training of Community Health Workers (CHWs) in Texas and across the nation. Largely due to TAE's efforts, Texas is one of only six states with established CHW Certification Programs. TAE staff members have served as consultants in more than a dozen other states wanting to establish programs. Seven of TAE's nine regional operations are state-approved training centers. Staff members are also active in local CHW organizations and leading constituency groups of the National AHEC Organization and the American Public Health Association. TAE created and piloted a curriculum to train CHWs to support behavioral health needs in primary care practices. TAE developed CHW programs, including training to support early discharge of stable premature infants for home monitoring; support of families participating in research on childhood obesity prevention; and targeted outreach to veterans.

25 Years of Effort

Responding to urgent and ongoing community needs is a hallmark of Texas AHEC East's regional operations. When



Students practicing proper sterile glove procedure. Each regional AHEC offers high school students an opportunity to explore a wide variety of health careers through a camp experience.

five teen suicides occurred in Victoria in one school year, TAE-Victoria facilitated community dialog among school, health care, church and community organization stakeholders that increased the availability of child and adolescent behavioral health services. When NASA's Challenger shuttle fell out of the sky over East Texas, TAE-Piney Woods was the first community entity to call the sheriff, mayor and county judge to offer assistance and helped set up the initial staging center for recovery operations. After Hurricane Ike in Galveston, TAE partnered with the Texas Methodist Conference Relief Services to distribute hundreds of buckets of cleaning supplies to residents and staff who helped clean up the homes of coworkers, friends and neighbors.

Texas AHEC East's numerous honors include the Eugene S. Mayer, MD, Award, given by the National AHEC Organization to recognize TAE as the outstanding AHEC program in the country in 2006. Both Governor George

Bush and Governor Rick Perry formally acknowledged TAE's contributions to the state. Mary Wainwright (ret.), TAE deputy director, received the Red Koelling Award for Outstanding Service from the National AHEC Organization in 2014. In 2015, Steve Shelton, assistant vice president for community outreach at UTMB and TAE's executive director, received the Louis H. Gorin Award for Outstanding Service in Rural Health from the National Rural Health Association. This award is presented annually to an outstanding individual who has dedicated time and talent to improving the health and well-being of rural Americans. Many TAE staff members serve in a variety of leadership roles at the local, state, regional and national level. Leadership service also has included federal advisory committees and professional accreditation boards. **AE**