

Creation of a 6th Area Health Education Center that Focuses on the Indian Health System



What is an Area Health Education Center (AHEC)?

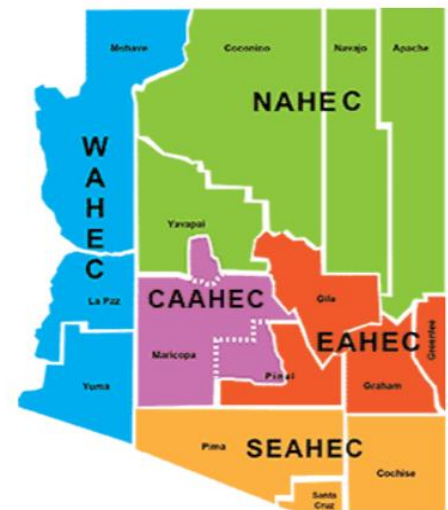
In 1971, Congress created the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program through the Comprehensive Health Manpower Act (P.L. 92-157). The purpose of the AHECs is to enhance access to quality health care, particularly primary and preventative care, by improving the supply and distribution of health care professionals through academic/community educational partnerships in rural and urban medically underserved areas. Each AHEC program is housed in a university's health science center to administer the programs and coordinate the efforts of the state's regional AHEC centers.

In 1984, the AzaAHEC program was established by the Arizona State Legislature, through A.R.S 15-1643. It is administered through the University of Arizona Health Sciences and Office of the Senior Vice President for Health Services. The AzaAHEC focuses on developing integrated, sustainable statewide health professions workforce education programs with emphasis on primary care and increasing access in Arizona's rural and underserved communities by improving the supply, quality, diversity, and distribution of the health professions workforce.

The funding for the AzaAHEC Program comes from two sources: 1) federal funds through the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA), Bureau of Health Professions and 2) State funding from the Arizona State Lottery (A.R.S 5-572C).

Arizona is comprised of five Regional Centers listed below:

1. Central Arizona AHEC (CAAHEC);
2. Eastern Arizona AHEC (EAAHEC);
3. Northern Arizona AHEC (NAAHEC);
4. Western Arizona AHEC (WAAHEC);
5. Southeastern Arizona AHEC (SEAHEC).



Overview of the Indian Health System in Arizona

The Indian Health System can be divided into three main delivery systems also known as the I/T/U System:

- **I**ndian Health Services: Federally run health care clinics and hospitals by the Indian Health Service
- **T**ribal 638 Facilities: Health care clinics and hospitals that Tribes have assumed the responsibility and delivery of health care facilities from the federal government.
- **U**rban Indian Health Programs: Programs in urban centers that provide health care services to the urban Indian population in those cities.

The I/T/U System in Arizona comprises of hospital, health clinics, and health stations, including tribal run health programs.

In Arizona, over 50 various hospital, clinics, and health stations provide care to the American Indian population. The ITU system provides health care to through a network of providers both on and off reservation and many of the facilities are located in rural areas of the state and in metropolitan areas.

Unmet Needs: Expanding a 6th AHEC that Focuses on the Indian Health System

COVID-19 has demonstrated the need for a robust health care system that is fully staffed and prepared to meet the needs of communities, especially in times of crises. While the Indian Health System in Arizona provides health care services to American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/AN), the system is under resourced and understaffed, resulting in care limitations. Today, 39% of American Indian adults in Arizona report not having a personal doctor or health provider, compared to 29% of all Arizonan adults. The chronic vacancy and lack of providers in rural and tribal communities contributes to the ongoing health disparities that impact Arizonans across the state.

HB2494 and SB1301 invests in Arizona's statewide AHEC network that was established in 1984 by the legislature. The 6th AHEC regional center will improve the Indian Health Care Delivery system in Arizona, increase access to care in rural areas, generate economic opportunities, create new jobs while strengthening Arizona's healthcare workforce. Investing in a 6th AHEC takes the necessary steps to ensure that Arizona is recruiting, training, and retaining a quality and diverse healthcare workforce that meets the needs of Arizonans today and in the future.

- In 2013, there were 3,478 AI/AN physicians in the United States representing only 0.4% of the total physicians workforce;
- In 2019, the AI/AN population in Arizona was 5.3% but AI/AN comprised only:
 - 1.1% of Registered Nurses (RN). Just to be on parity with the AI/AN population percentage, there needs to be a 455% increase in RNs;
 - 2.1% of Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN). Just to be on parity with the AI/AN population percentage, there needs to be a 238% increase in LPNs; and
 - 1.0% of Medical Students in Arizona. Just to be on parity with the AI/AN population percentage, there needs to be a 500% increase in medical school enrollment in Arizona.
- In 2019, the state of Arizona high school graduation rate was 79% and the AI/ANs graduation rate was 69%; - Indian Health Facilities and IHS and Tribal Hospitals receive an automatic Facility Health Professional Shortage Areas designation, many of which have the highest HPSA scores in Arizona.
- 95.3% of physicians practice in urban areas in Arizona, compared to 92% of Arizonans that live in urban areas.
- 38.6% of American Indian adults reported not having a personal doctor or health care provider, compared to only 29% of Arizonans.

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Sources:

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Kaiser Family Foundation, Adults Who Report Not Having a Personal Doctor/ Health Care Provider by Race/ Ethnicity,

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