San Francisco AHEC Scholars

San Francisco Area Health Education Center (AHEC)

San Francisco’s AHEC Scholars program is run by the San Francisco Community Clinic Consortium (SFCCC). SFCCC represents eleven non-profit community health centers that provide comprehensive, culturally and linguistically appropriate healthcare for all, regardless of ability to pay. San Francisco AHEC Scholars are health professional students who want to supplement their education by partnering with Community Health Centers to improve the health of underserved San Francisco residents. The San Francisco AHEC program enables high-potential students with an interest in social justice to explore primary care provision and the community healthcare model through an interdisciplinary lens.

The Community Health Center (CHC) Model

Born out of a movement in the 1960s, nonprofit community health centers have long been the source of comprehensive care for the low-income communities they serve. CHCs are governed by majority consumer-led boards and are uniquely responsive to the communities they serve. Community health centers also facilitate job training; housing, clothing and food assistance; transportation; and other programs aimed at addressing the social determinants of health. Over time, health centers have become major economic anchors and job creators in the communities they serve.

Physician Shortage in California

California is currently facing a shortage of primary care health professionals. Over the next decade, California expects to see a shortfall of more than 4,000 primary care clinicians – and underserved areas— where Community Health Clinics operate – will likely shoulder the impact. Nearly half of all Californians live in regions with insufficient primary, medical, dental and mental health services. The current Covid-19 pandemic is projected to increase the population of uninsured and Medi-Cal patients seeking care – at a time when healthcare demand is already surpassing provider supply.
Professional Exposure & Impactful Mentorship at SFCCC

SFCCC partners deliver culturally competent care to a number of vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations, including undocumented and homeless residents. SFCCC clinics provide services across multiple health service disciplines, including dental, behavioral health, and primary care. SFCCC serves as the training home for scholars and connects scholars to a diverse range of clinical or research-based projects at one of our member clinics.

The AHEC Scholars Program

The San Francisco AHEC Scholars in Community Health Program provides a 2 year interdisciplinary curriculum designed for students who are currently enrolled in a health professions degree or certificate program and at least two years from program or degree completion. Eligibility extends to but is not limited to students in medical, dental, pharmacy, nurse practitioner, nursing, physician assistant, social work, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and public/population health programs. A one year option is available for community health workers and medical assistants.

Three Components

1. Community-Oriented Web-based Training covers 6 core topic areas: Inter-professional Education; Behavioral Health Integration; Social Determinants of Health; Cultural Competency; Practice Transformation; Current & Emerging Health Issues. Training can be completed during scholars’ free time and is delivered through 11 Modules with carefully selected case studies and online learning tools, e.g., webinars and podcasts.

2. Clinical/Public Health Training provides professional exposure for scholars through team-based volunteer work at an SFCCC member clinic or another approved site. AHEC scholars are welcome to work for an outside health organization working with an underserved population pending SFCCC approval.*

3. Community-Based Health Project is a collaborative effort with an SFCCC Community Health Clinic or other approved site to target and address a specific community health need.

The Community-Based Health Project is facilitated by the San Francisco AHEC Center Director and may take many forms. The SFCCC AHEC Program Director will work with scholars to develop and approve appropriate and enriching community projects based on scholars’ professional interests.

* Covid-19 may pose challenges to clinical training – SFCCC will work with scholars to define their clinical training under these new circumstances

Example Community Projects:

- Designing a patient diabetes education and support program at a health center
- Assisting with mobile outreach with Healthcare for the Homeless
- Developing and conducting patient satisfaction surveys at a health center
- Helping clinics implement QI initiatives and data systems
- Designing, planning and organizing community events such as health fairs for a community-based organization or health center

In addition to building a lasting connection with their Community Health Center partner, AHEC Scholars will be awarded a Certificate in Community Health from the CA Statewide AHEC program endorsed by the California Primary Care Association and the Rural Health Association.