

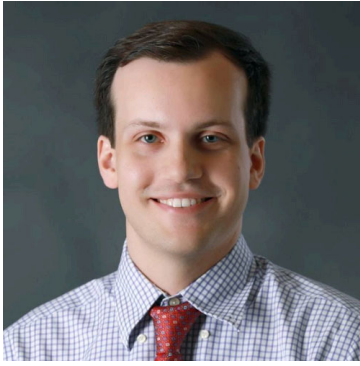


Alabama AHEC Network Updates

Alabama AHEC Scholars Statewide Leadership Team

The **Alabama AHEC Network** is excited to introduce the inaugural **AHEC Scholars** Statewide Leadership Team, composed of six exceptional students. After a rigorous selection process, these highly qualified individuals were chosen to represent diverse regions of Alabama and guide their peers in exploring the state's varied healthcare landscapes.

This team will set the tone for collaboration and innovation within the AHEC Scholars Program, helping to shape its future. We look forward to seeing their leadership in action! Meet these outstanding students and their roles below:



Statewide Chairperson

David Russo

East Central Alabama AHEC

UABHSOM

Born in Mamou, Louisiana, and raised in Springville, Alabama, David discovered his passion for family medicine while shadowing small-town physicians in his community. He earned his bachelor's degree in biochemistry from the [University of Alabama at Birmingham \(UAB\)](#) and is currently a third-year medical student in the [UAB Rural Medicine Program](#).

David is also a [National Health Service Corps Scholar](#) and a second-year participant in the AHEC Scholars Program. David's dedication to rural healthcare aligns with his ultimate goal: to establish a family medicine practice that delivers high-quality care to underserved communities in the Southeast.

In his words, "As the Alabama AHEC Scholars Statewide Chairperson, I hope to help AHEC inspire and empower future healthcare professionals of all ages and backgrounds to serve rural communities with compassion and commitment."

Statewide Secretary

Kina Talton

Wiregrass Alabama AHEC

ACOM

Kina Talton was born in Guanxi Province, China, and adopted by American parents from Alabama. Growing up as part of a military family, Kina moved more than a dozen times, experiencing a wide variety of communities, from large cities to remote areas where the population wasn't even counted. In 2016, her family returned to Dothan, AL, to care for her aging grandparents. During this time, Kina developed a passion for medicine, which was further fueled by her work as a nursing aide caring for older adults.



Currently a first-year medical student at the [Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine](#), Kina has a deep commitment to serving rural populations, giving back to the community that supported her. After graduation, Kina aims to advocate for health equity and improve healthcare access in underserved areas. She also aspires to mentor the next generation of healthcare professionals, particularly those from backgrounds similar to her own.

Kina's leadership role as Statewide Secretary "hopes to guide others, create a lasting impact on the communities [she] serves, and inspire others to do the same. Building trust and relationships through integrity and character is one of the most important things a person can do."



Statewide Community Outreach Coordinator

Jenna Hardin

East Central Alabama AHEC

JSU Nursing

Jenna Hardin is a fourth-year nursing student at [Jacksonville State University](#). As an active member of organizations such as the [Nurses Christian Fellowship](#) and the [National Student Nurses' Association](#), Jenna advocates for a more inclusive and accessible healthcare system.

Her passion for serving rural and underserved communities stems from growing up with limited resources and witnessing healthcare disparities firsthand. These experiences drive her commitment to bridging the gap in access through outreach and education.

After graduation, Jenna plans to pursue a [Doctor of Nursing Practice \(DNP\)](#) at [UAB](#), focusing on emergency and critical care. She also hopes to become a [FEMA instructor](#), training others for emergency situations while continuing to serve underserved populations.

On her leadership goals: *"This year, I aim to lead with purpose and passion, uniting others to create meaningful progress in healthcare access and lasting positive change."*

Community Outreach Coordinator

Tyler Jahraus

Wiregrass Alabama AHEC

ACOM

Tyler Jahraus, originally from rural Talladega County, Alabama and a 2024 graduate of [Messiah University](#) with a [Bachelor of Science in Biology](#), is now an OMS-I student at the [Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine \(ACOM\)](#). His passion for addressing healthcare disparities in rural areas stems from personal experiences witnessing the challenges his family and community face in accessing specialty care.



A second-year AHEC Scholar in the 2026 cohort, Tyler is committed to improving rural health. After graduation, he plans to pursue a residency in Radiation Oncology, with the goal of practicing in underserved areas like Alabama's Black Belt.

In his leadership role, Tyler *"aims to foster collaboration among AHEC Scholars and create opportunities for meaningful engagement with organizations dedicated to improving rural health and serving underserved populations."*



Statewide Advocacy Officer

Jayla Palacio

*East Central Alabama AHEC
Samford Pharmacy*

Jayla Palacio, originally from Atmore, AL, and now residing in Maplesville, AL, has built her academic and professional journey around a dedication to improving healthcare access in underserved areas. She holds a bachelor's degree in chemistry from the [University of Montevallo](#) and a master's in biomedical and health sciences from [UAB](#). Currently, Jayla is a third-year pharmacy student at [Samford University's McWhorter School of Pharmacy](#), Class of 2026.

Motivated by the critical role pharmacists played during the pandemic, Jayla works at a rural pharmacy, where she cherishes the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with patients and their families. Following graduation, she plans to pursue a residency with a focus on pediatric care, aiming to serve rural communities like those in Chilton County.

As an Advocacy Officer, Jayla is eager to lead impactful initiatives to address rural healthcare challenges. She shared, *"It is my hope that we can fill critical gaps in these communities and create a lasting impact."*

Statewide Advocacy Officer

Amanda Neal

*Delta Alabama AHEC
USA Clinical Psychology*

Amanda Neal, from Newbern, TN, witnessed the challenges of accessing behavioral healthcare in rural areas. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus on Neuroscience from the [University of Tennessee at Knoxville](#) and is now a first-year Clinical and Counseling Psychology PhD student at the [University of South Alabama](#).



Driven by her passion for improving healthcare access, Amanda plans to focus on implementation science research to enhance care for rural, autistic populations and influence healthcare policy.

As an Alabama AHEC Statewide Advocacy Officer, Amanda is dedicated to fostering collaboration between scholars and policymakers, saying, *"I hope to connect with both scholars and policy leaders to encourage collaboration and foster a greater understanding of how healthcare and policy work can be integrated for the betterment of rural and other underserved populations."*

AHEC Scholars

Welcome Kristin Boggs to the Alabama AHEC Network

We are excited to welcome **Kristin Boggs** as the new Special Projects Coordinator for the **Alabama AHEC Network**! Kristin brings nearly two decades of experience in higher education, mentoring students, and developing programs dedicated to community service and healthcare equity. She will primarily be focusing on building an Alabama AHEC Scholars Alumni network and providing essential support to the overall function of **AHEC Scholars** programming.

Meet Kristin Boggs, MSW



Kristin Boggs brings 19 years of experience in student engagement, service learning, and community outreach to her role as Special Projects Coordinator at Alabama AHEC. Kristin's career began with her work at **The University of Alabama**, where she helped establish the **Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility**. She later moved to the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) to help launch the **Global and Community Leadership Honors Program**.

Kristin then transitioned to working with graduate and professional students, serving as the Director of the **UAB Heersink School of Medicine's Office of Service Learning** from 2015 to 2018. During this time, she founded the **Alabama chapter of the Albert Schweitzer Fellowship**, which grew into an independent nonprofit, with Kristin serving as its Executive Director from 2018 to 2024. In this role, she advanced the mission of developing a pipeline of health and human service professionals who are committed to addressing health inequities, especially in underserved communities—a mission closely aligned with AHEC's goals.

Kristin is passionate about mentoring students toward careers in service, particularly those that fill critical healthcare gaps in Alabama. She holds a Bachelor's and Master's in Social Work from **The University of Alabama** and is a licensed social worker.

Outside of her professional life, Kristin enjoys spending time with her husband, Brandon, and their two children, Harper and Elijah.



Alabama AHEC
Center
Updates

North Alabama AHEC and the Pri-Med P.A.C.T Project with NAO

North Alabama AHEC has been selected as one of eight AHEC centers across the country to participate in the prestigious **Pri-Med P.A.C.T. (Practical Approaches to Comprehensive Treatment of Pain)** initiative, in collaboration with the **National AHEC Organization** (NAO). The goal of this project is to recruit 30 healthcare providers from under-resourced communities, particularly those serving rural populations, to complete a specialized 4-hour Continuing Medical Education (CME) training series. The course, hosted by Pri-Med, will equip providers with practical, evidence-based strategies to manage and treat chronic pain comprehensively.

This selection underscores **North Alabama AHEC's** ongoing commitment to improving healthcare access and outcomes in underserved regions, where resources are often limited, and pain management can be challenging. By empowering local providers with advanced training in pain treatment, NAAHEC aims to address critical healthcare gaps in these communities.

If you are a **healthcare provider and would like to participate**, please reach out to Karen Leeling at North Alabama AHEC.

Contact NAAHEC

BBAHEC CNA Pathways Program



Black Belt Alabama AHEC - in partnership with UWA's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), UWA Division of Workforce and Economic Development, and WIOA Adult Training Initiatives - has established a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) Training Program to address the urgent need for nursing assistants in Alabama's Black Belt region.

This short-term program, designed for individuals ages 18 and up, provides comprehensive training and certification to prepare participants for healthcare careers while improving community health outcomes. The **Black Belt Alabama AHEC CNA Program** continues to make great strides in developing the healthcare workforce in our region.

- **CNA Clinical Rotations:** 8 participants completed hands-on training at Woodhaven Nursing Home.
- **CPR Certifications:** 7 participants successfully earned their certifications at Woodhaven Manor Nursing Home.

- **CNA Graduation:** 8 graduates were celebrated at the University of West Alabama for completing the program.
- **Credential CNA Licensing Exam:** 12 candidates took their licensing exams at UWA, advancing their path toward certification.
- **CNA Program Orientation:** 16 new students began their journey at UWA on January 21.

These achievements reflect the program's dedication to training and empowering future healthcare professionals to serve in rural and underserved communities.

Eligibility requires being age 18 or up, as well as residing in Bibb, Choctaw, Dallas, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, Marengo, Pickens, Perry, Sumter, Tuscaloosa, or Wilcox counties, and having a barrier to employment.

Contact BBAHEC

DAAHEC Supports Grief Workshop: "Finding Light in Loss"



In December, **Delta Alabama AHEC Scholars** took part in the Finding Light in Loss: Managing Grief Through Holiday Seasons workshop, sponsored by the **Mingo Matters** and The Claudia Leatherwood Legacy Foundations. This impactful event offered participants valuable tools to navigate the challenges of grief, particularly during the holiday season.

The workshop focused on understanding grief triggers, embracing both new and cherished traditions, practicing self-compassion and setting healthy boundaries, and fostering resilience through support networks. **Delta Alabama AHEC Scholars** were honored to support this meaningful initiative, which aligns with our mission to address emotional well-being and promote holistic community health.

Contact DAAHEC

DAAHEC CNA Pathways Program



Delta Alabama AHEC is thrilled to announce that 8 students recently completed the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certification program and have received their certifications. Additionally, **14 students** are currently progressing through the program and are set to complete their certifications on February 19. Meanwhile, **2 students** are enrolled in the Certified Phlebotomy class, continuing their journey toward healthcare excellence.

Contact DAAHEC

BBAHEC New Staff: Welcome Nicole Watson

Black Belt Alabama AHEC is excited to welcome **Nicole Watson** as the new **AHEC Scholars** and Communication Coordinator. Nicole brings enthusiasm and a dedication to supporting **AHEC Scholars** while strengthening communication efforts within the Black Belt region.

In her new role, Nicole will focus on engaging with AHEC Scholars, fostering community connections, and promoting the program's mission to improve healthcare access in underserved areas. We are thrilled to have her on board and look forward to the positive impact she will bring to our team and community!

Meet Nicole Watson



Nicole Watson is a dedicated healthcare professional and registered respiratory therapist with over 12 years of experience delivering exceptional respiratory care. She holds an Associate of Science in Respiratory Care and a Bachelor of Science in Health and Human Services, combining clinical expertise with a strong understanding of healthcare management.

Before joining **Black Belt Alabama AHEC**, Nicole served as a Program Assistant for the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program at the **University of West Alabama** for three years. In this role, she mentored and guided aspiring healthcare professionals, equipping them with the skills and confidence to excel in their careers.

Nicole is deeply passionate about education, professional development, and advancing healthcare access in underserved communities. She is committed

to empowering individuals to achieve their goals and make meaningful contributions to the healthcare workforce.

As the [AHEC Scholars](#) and Communication Coordinator, Nicole brings her expertise, leadership, and passion to inspire the next generation of healthcare professionals in Alabama's Black Belt region.



Resources & Education

Student Rotations Housing Form

The [Alabama AHEC Network](#) frequently receives requests from students seeking housing in rural areas while they complete training rotations. If you know of potential housing availability for learners, please fill out the form below so that we may share this information with interested students.

[Learn More](#)

Alabama AHEC Network Statewide Advisory Board Nominations

The [Alabama AHEC Network](#) is seeking nominations for individuals to serve on its Statewide Advisory Board. We invite our valued stakeholders and partners to recommend individuals who can contribute their expertise and insights to address the critical workforce challenges facing Alabama's healthcare system.

The Alabama AHEC Network Advisory Board plays a vital role in guiding the Alabama AHEC Network by fostering a community-focused, multidisciplinary approach to health care training and service delivery. Board members will help identify barriers and opportunities for expanding clinical training into underserved rural and urban areas, develop strategic partnerships, and enhance the overall impact of the Network. We encourage you to nominate individuals who are committed to improving health care access across Alabama, and who can represent the diverse populations and geography of our state. Your nominations will help us build a strong and effective Advisory Board dedicated to advancing health care for all Alabamians.

Nominate

Learning Opportunities

January AHEC Scholars Webinar: Statewide Leadership Team

When: Friday, January 31, 2025 from 12:00 AM – 1:00 PM CST

Where: Virtual

About This Event

The January AHEC Scholars Webinar will be hosted by the [AHEC Scholars Statewide Leadership Team](#) on January 31st at 12 pm. They will introduce themselves and guide Scholars through their roles and how they can serve the AHEC Scholars student body.

Scholars will earn 1 experiential hour.



ALABAMA AHEC NETWORK

January AHEC Scholars Webinar

Meet the AHEC Scholars Statewide Leadership Team

- Network with other Scholars
- Learn how the Leadership Team can support you!
- Troubleshoot issues with Community Impact Projects

Leadership Team

David Russo, Chairperson
Kina Tilton, Secretary
Jenna Hardin, Community Outreach Coordinator
Tyler Johnson, Community Outreach Coordinator
Hylee Pateale, Advocacy Officer
Amanda Neal, Advocacy Officer

EVENT DETAILS

31 JANUARY ↗

12:00 PM - 1:00 PM CST

[Register here](#)

alhec.org/calendar/event/alhec-scholars-webinar-series-jan25/

Registration

Behavioral Health Integration CEU: Not So Medical Marijuana and The Role of Social Media In Drug Use

When: Wednesday, February 19, 2025 from 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM CST

Where: Virtual

About This Event

Hosted by **Delta Alabama AHEC**, this presentation will provide a comprehensive overview of substance dependence, addiction, and the physiological and psychological mechanisms involved. Gain insights into effective strategies for treatment and prevention, including medication-assisted treatment. Expand your understanding of the complexities of substance use disorders and equip yourself with practical tools to support individuals on their path to recovery.

This event was rescheduled from January 23, 2025.

Registration



AHEC Scholars February Webinar

When: Friday, February 21, 2024 from 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM CST

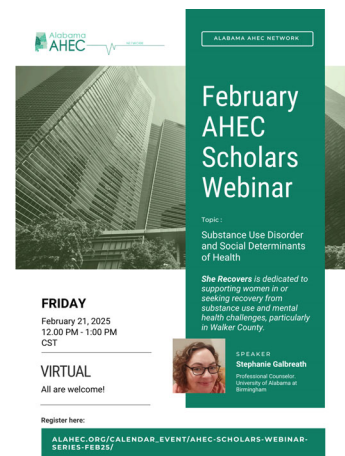
Where: Virtual

About This Event

The February AHEC Scholars Webinar will be led by **Stephanie Galbreath** with **She Recovers** on February 21st at 12 pm. **She Recovers** is an organization dedicated to supporting women in or seeking recovery from substance use and mental health challenges.

Stephanie will provide an overview of **She Recovers'** mission and highlight the unique needs of patients and communities they serve, particularly in Walker County. She will discuss local substance use rates, patient demographics, and the social determinants of health—such as economic stability, education access, and social context—that influence health outcomes in the region. The session will emphasize the importance of community-focused approaches to addressing these challenges and fostering long-term recovery.

Registration



When: Friday, February 21 to Saturday, February 22
Where: Elyton Hotel, Autograph Collection, 1928 1st Ave North Birmingham, AL 35203

About This Event

Join the [Medical Association of the State of Alabama \(MASA\)](#) for a brand new event geared towards Emerging Physician Leaders sponsored by their Young Physician Section. The conference hopes to educate and engage our next generation of physician leaders to grow and strengthen the house of medicine.



Registration

AHEC Scholars: Poverty Simulation Debrief

When: Tuesday, February 25 at 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM
Where: Virtual

About This Event

The [Alabama AHEC Network](#) is hosting a Poverty Simulation Debrief for the AHEC Scholars Program on February 25 from 5-6 pm, led by Dr. Kala Dixon. This immersive and eye-opening experience is designed to deepen your understanding of the challenges faced by individuals and families living in poverty. Through this simulation, participants will navigate the complex realities of limited resources, difficult decisions, and systemic barriers that impact healthcare access and overall well-being.

Scholars will gain 1 experiential hour.

Non-AHEC Scholars are welcome, however you must complete the [poverty simulator](#) beforehand.

Registration

2025 Infection Prevention Bootcamp for Nursing Homes and Long-Term Care Facilities

When: Wednesday, February 26 (9:45 AM – 4:30 PM CST) and Thursday, February 27 (8:00 AM – 2:30 PM CST)
Where: Hyatt Regency Birmingham – The Wynfrey Hotel; 1000 Riverchase Galleria, Birmingham, AL 35244

About This Event

The [Alabama Regional Center for Infection Prevention and Control Training and Technical Assistance Center](#) is hosting an Infection Prevention Bootcamp for Nursing Homes and Long-Term Care Facilities. This is an in-person boot camp that will be held over the course of two days. Open to anyone working in or with infection prevention and control programs in nursing homes or long-term care facilities across the state of Alabama.

The [Alabama AHEC Network](#) is co-sponsoring this event.

CEUs will be offered.

Cost: Free, but registration is required by February 11, 2025.

[Registration](#)

HOSA State Leadership Conference

When: Wednesday, February 27 - Thursday, February 28

Where: Renaissance Hotel, Montgomery, AL

About This Event

[Alabama HOSA's](#) biggest event of the year is the annual [State Leadership Conference](#). Held each February or March, SLC includes nearly 2,000 of Alabama's best Future Health Professionals for two-days of competitive events, networking, the latest industry exhibits, and the election of the State Officer Team.

HOSA is looking for judges for several of the competitive events. If you are interested, and willing the travel to Montgomery, please fill out the [Intent to Judge Form](#).



[Learn More & Register](#)

Save the Date

**AHEC Scholars Pre-Conference Event:
2025 Alabama Rural Health Conference**

When: Thursday, April 3
Where: Embassy Suites, Hoover, AL

About This Event

The [Alabama AHEC Network](#) is excited to host a special [AHEC Scholars](#) Pre-Conference Event ahead of the [2025 Alabama Rural Health Conference](#)! This exclusive session will take place on Thursday, April 3, 2025, from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM at the Embassy Suites in Hoover, Alabama.



Designed specifically for our AHEC Scholars, this event will provide an enriching morning of learning and connection. Scholars will engage in interactive workshops, network with healthcare professionals, and explore strategies to address rural health challenges. The session will also highlight ways to integrate interdisciplinary collaboration and leadership into your healthcare practice.

Don't miss this unique opportunity to connect with your peers and enhance your knowledge as an AHEC Scholar before the full conference kicks off! Stay tuned for further details about the agenda and guest speakers.

2025 Alabama Rural Health Conference

When: April 3-4
Where: Embassy Suites, Hoover, AL

About This Event

The [Alabama Rural Health Association](#) will host its 2025 Alabama Rural Health Conference on April 3-4, 2025 at the Embassy Suites in Hoover.



Attendees can look forward to engaging presentations, panel discussions, and networking opportunities aimed at improving healthcare access and outcomes for rural and underserved communities. Mark your calendars and join us as we work together to shape the future of rural healthcare in Alabama.

[Registration](#)

2025 NAO Biennial Conference

When: June 17-20, 2025
Where: Lexington, Kentucky

About This Event

The 2025 **NAO** Biennial Conference just got announced. It will be hosted in Lexington Kentucky on June 17-20th.

Submit your conference proposals and award nominations today!

NAO invites you to share your work and expertise with colleagues by participating in the 2025 NAO Biennial Conference. Submit an abstract to present as a speaker in an oral session or to display a poster during a scheduled viewing session.

This is a fantastic opportunity to shine a light on the great work that your AHEC is doing.

Registration opens Feb 1.

Registration

Narcan Training

When: Open Enrollment
Where: Online

About This Program

Sign up for the free online Naloxone training program, provided by the **Jefferson County Department of Health**. By gaining the necessary knowledge and abilities to administer Naloxone, you'll be equipped to reverse opioid overdoses and potentially make a life-saving difference.



Registration



VISIT OUR WEBSITE



Visit Our Website

About Alabama AHEC Network



The Alabama AHEC Network is dedicated to recruiting, training, and retaining the Alabama healthcare workforce while expanding variety among health professionals, broadening the distribution of the health workforce, enhancing the quality of care, and improving health care delivery to rural and underserved populations in Alabama.

The following centers are members of the Alabama AHEC Network and are federally funded HRSA AHEC Programs and nationally recognized Area Health Education Centers: Alabama Statewide Network Program Office, North Alabama AHEC (NAAHEC), East Central Alabama AHEC (ECAAHEC), Black Belt Alabama AHEC (BBAAHEC), Wiregrass Alabama AHEC (WAAHEC), and Delta Alabama AHEC (DAAHEC).