

2023



**Northeast Oregon**  
Area Health Education Center

# ANNUAL REPORT



*Growing the Future of Healthcare*

**Educating and inspiring students and professionals to build a sustainable healthcare community for eastern Oregon**

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Meredith Lair

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Happy New Year from our team at Northeast Oregon Area Health Education Center (NEOAHEC). Each new year brings about something a little different for all of us. It can be a time of resolution, transformation, reflection, or aspiration.

Many things have changed in a short time at NEOAHEC, and yet our consistent and resolute approach to achieving our mission of growing our own healthcare professionals remains our priority. I believe that anyone acquainted with NEOAHEC during this past year felt the purpose, excitement, and hope for the future radiating from our team.

The NEOAHEC staff team transformed in 2023. Hailey Hulse took her next step in achieving her dream of becoming a doctor as a first-year medical student, right after she delivered multiple MedQuest camps for the first time in our history. Two new employees were hired and jumped in with both feet to learn and grow with NEOAHEC. And in 2024, another member of our team, Sarah Florig, will move onto her program to become a physician-scientist.

Reflecting on the year has come with moments of pinching myself to make sure it wasn't all a dream. In 2023, NEOAHEC was honored with a National Center of Excellence Award by the National AHEC Organization for our health career pathway work that remained uninterrupted during the pandemic, and the Investigators of Science program won a ChemLuminary Award for the Most Creative National Chemistry Week Celebration Using the Yearly Theme. These awards highlight the accumulation of many little things that have been done over and over again for more than three decades to build an enduring organization with a strong connection to our purpose and values.

As I think ahead to the future and what it holds for NEOAHEC, the aspiration to connect our work longitudinally and illustrate the impact of the long-term investment is coming closer to reality. As we continue to persist and enjoy short-term rewards as they come, we also strive to develop data-informed metrics that can move the needle on healthcare workforce development in eastern Oregon.

The best is yet to come!

*Meredith Lair*

# MEET OUR TEAM

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Patty Barfield, PhD, PMHNP | Board Chair | Malheur County

Mike Hetrick, MD | Board Vice Chair | Union County

Liz Sieders, PA-C | Board Secretary | Umatilla County

Lynn Carpenter | Board Member-at-Large | Wasco County

Dennis Burke, FACHE, MS | Board Member | Umatilla County

Andrea Flores | Board Member | Hood River & Wasco Counties

Yessenia Garcia-Sanchez, BSN, RN | Board Member | Umatilla County

Meredith Halling, PhD, MS | Board Member | Union County

Caitlin Russell, MAT | Board Member | Baker, Morrow, Umatilla & Union

Nick West, MD | Board Member | Wallowa County

Eric Wiser, MD | Ex-Officio Board Member | Oregon AHEC

## STAFF



Meredith Lair  
Executive Director



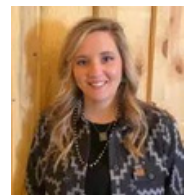
Carissa Cummings  
Administrative  
Coordinator



Sarah Florig, MS  
Research & Evaluation  
Specialist



Michelle Mudder  
Program Coordinator



Nikkita Titus, MSN, RN  
Clinical Education  
Manager



Front Row: Sarah Florig, Dennis Burke, Nick West, Meredith Lair, Patty Barfield, Mike Hetrick, Eric Wiser. Back Row: Carissa Cummings, Liz Sieders, Nikkita Titus, Yessenia Garcia-Sanchez, Andrea Flores; Michelle Mudder. Not Pictured: Lynn Carpenter, Meredith Halling, Caitlin Russell.

# GROWING OUR OWN

## DISCOVERY

Incorporating hands-on activities to explore STEM & health careers



## IMMERSION

Bridging the gap between education & workforce through applied learning



## MENTORSHIP

Increasing confidence & reducing barriers in rural & underserved students



## EXPERIENCE

Supporting rural clinical training sites & engaging learners in our rural communities



## SUPPORT

Providing access to high-fidelity education & encouragement to contribute to the health career pathway



By growing our own healthcare professionals through pathway programming, NEOAHEC is helping to create self-sufficient communities, places where we all take care of each other.

Alix Cooper, MD  
MedQuest Alumni

NEOAHEC impacted my journey providing resources and opening doors for my future as a nurse and as a mentor for others from my community.

Yessenia Garcia Sanchez, BSN, RN  
MedQuest Alumni  
NEOAHEC Board Member

The value of NEOAHEC has been amplified over the years as it has helped so many students learn about careers and get them all the way through to becoming a healthcare professional in their community.

Steve Koza, DMD  
MedQuest Alumni  
Former NEOAHEC  
Board Member

# AHEC's Essential Role in Assuring Future Healthcare Workforce

When most of us remember our first summer camp, or the first time sending our child to one, it is usually not in the context of a health careers camp.

In response to our desperate need for increasing access to healthcare workers that meet the composition of our community, NEOAHEC expanded its long-standing MedQuest Health Career Exploration Camp in 2023 to host three in-person camps throughout eastern Oregon, along with a group of virtual students. Additionally, three other regional AHECs across Oregon hosted camp experiences similar to MedQuest, providing students in nearly every county in the state with access to pathways into health careers.



**2023 AHEC Statewide Camp Reach**

Pathway programming allows youth to explore the vastness and diversity of healthcare careers, and these early opportunities are essential in building a workforce that can care for our state both now and in the future.

Students walk away from MedQuest with more confidence that there is a place for them in healthcare, having met near-peer mentors and friends who have similar interests and goals. MedQuest provides invaluable learning opportunities, essential employment skills, and gives students tools to plan for their future.



**2024 MedQuest Registration is Open  
Register Today!**

In partnership with the Roundhouse Foundation, NEOAHEC will again offer MedQuest camps in The Dalles, Burns, and La Grande this year. Visit our website to learn more.

[www.neoahec.org/pathway-programs](http://www.neoahec.org/pathway-programs)

# NEOAHEC'S HEALTH CAREER PATHWAY



## Pathway Participation

Each  is equal to 10 participants

### Students in Grades 6-8



### Students in Grades 9-12



### Undergraduate & Gap Year Students



### Professional Health Students



### Adult Learners



## Programs Offered in 2023

Investigators of Science

Middle & High School

MedQuest Health Career Exploration Camp

Post High School Undergraduate

Pre-Apprenticeship

Pre-Health Society

Graduate School

Campus for Rural Health

Rural Clinical Education & Housing

Health Professional

High Fidelity Simulated Education

# Growing a Healthcare Team in Frontier Eastern Oregon



Winding Waters Clinic, a federally qualified health center in Enterprise, Oregon, has shared the NEOAHEC vision of hope for the future as a long-time clinical

partner. The clinic welcomes dozens of students each year to experience frontier medicine in Wallowa County.

33 years ago, NEOAHEC was established around the idea that if you educate local people about careers in healthcare and provide training in rural areas, they are more likely to return to rural to practice. With this mindset, Winding Waters has successfully grown their own healthcare team. Six of the current medical and dental providers had at least one rotation at the clinic while in training. Most recently, Nick West, MD, joined the Winding Waters team.

Dr. West is no stranger to NEOAHEC. He participated in the pathway, rotated as a student and resident at Winding Waters Clinic, and is now serving as a

NEOAHEC board member. Dr. West shared that going from his residency to being an attending physician at Winding Waters felt like a big ordeal, but being part of a network of his preceptors and working to support each other made the transition more manageable.



Dr. West is hooked on Winding Waters' passion for teaching. The clinic focuses on weaving a type of learning that synthesizes the humanity and biology of healthcare together for all learner types. By the end of the visit, students and residents have a deep understanding of what a modern rural family doctor is, the scope of practice, and the benefits the

profession brings to the community. The local community embraces students and medical residents taking great pride in showing off northeast Oregon.

To learn more about Winding Waters Clinic visit them at <https://windingwaters.org/>

# Housing Support for Rural Clinical Rotations

## Interprofessional Learning & Housing Locations in Eastern Oregon

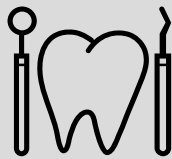
### Learner Types in 2023



Undergraduate  
Nursing



Graduate  
Nursing



Dental



Physical  
Therapy



Medical



Physician  
Assistant



**Baker City**  
4 Learners



**Burns**  
2 Learners

**Enterprise**  
25 Learners



**La Grande**  
10 Learners

**Ontario**  
10 Learners



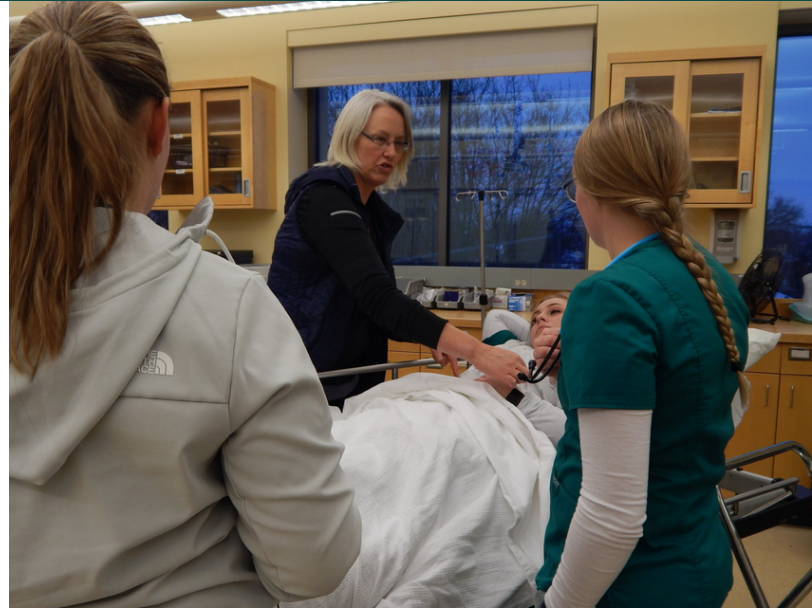
**Pendleton**  
4 Learners



# Partnership Improves Readiness Through Simulated Education

NEOAHEC has been partnering with local partners to provide simulated and interprofessional education throughout the last year. In 2023, 43 health professionals and 86 OHSU nursing students were provided with 5 unique high-fidelity simulations.

“With the new simulation equipment purchased with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Simulation Education Training (SET) grant in the last fiscal year, we have continued with training and education development throughout Union County,” explained Nikkita Titus, MSN, RN, Clinical Education Manager at NEOAHEC.



Working closely with the Grande Ronde Hospital and OHSU School of Nursing Simulation teams, NEOAHEC took its Pediatric HAL on the road. Interprofessional teams that participated in the education included physicians, nurses, and medical assistants. The simulations allowed care teams to practice pediatric advanced life support, bronchiolitis simulations, and even simple simulations that show patient deterioration within the clinic setting.

“I am so thankful to have a community partnership with NEOAHEC where we can work together to bring more educational opportunities to the healthcare staff in eastern Oregon. With the help of NEOAHEC, we have been able to improve our pediatric readiness and bring more simulations to Grande Ronde Hospital and Clinics,” said Bre Rollins, MSN, RN, CEN, Clinical Nurse Educator at Grande Ronde Hospital.

NEOAHEC looks forward to continued collaboration with the simulation teams at Grande Ronde Hospital and the OHSU School of Nursing while adding other community partners and developing systems and education surrounding high-risk situations that are seen in low-volume capacities is essential for rural healthcare workers.

# Thank You to Our Funders & Partners



Healthy Oregon Workforce  
Training Opportunity Grant



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| American Chemical Society                 | La Grande Fire Department                          |
| Apple Eye Care                            | La Grande Rural Fire Protection District           |
| Burns Dental                              | La Grande School District                          |
| Center for Human Development              | Life Flight Network                                |
| Columbia Gorge Community College          | McLean Dental                                      |
| Crane Schools                             | Mid Columbia Fire & Rescue                         |
| Curtis Peters, DMD                        | Mountain Sage Medical                              |
| Eastern Oregon Medical Associates         | Mountain Valley Therapy                            |
| Eastern Oregon University                 | One Community Health                               |
| Grant Ronde Chiropractic Clinic           | Oregon AHEC Program Office                         |
| Grande Ronde Hospital & Clinics           | Pacific Northwest University of Health<br>Sciences |
| Harney County Health Department           | Southern Oregon Workforce Investment<br>Board      |
| Harney District Hospital                  | St. Alphonsus Medical Center Ontario               |
| Harris Family Dental                      | St. Anthony Hospital                               |
| High Desert Partnership                   | Symmetry Care                                      |
| Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine     | Union County Search & Rescue                       |
| Inter Mountain Education Service District | Wallowa Memorial Hospital                          |
| Juntos - OSU Open Campus                  | Winding Waters Clinic                              |
| Kehr Chiropractic                         | Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center                    |
| Koza Family Dental                        |  |
| La Grande Family Eye Care                 |  |



# Northeast Oregon

Area Health Education Center

## ***Our Vision***

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To address the healthcare workforce shortage in rural and frontier Eastern Oregon by developing our own health professionals that reflect the composition and needs of our region.

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### **Proudly serving 11 counties in Eastern Oregon**

Baker, Gilliam, Hood River, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Umatilla,  
Union, Wallowa, Wasco, and Wheeler,  
with extension services to Grant and Harney.



[www.neoahec.org](http://www.neoahec.org)



Northeast Oregon AHEC



neoahec



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