



**Northeast Oregon**  
Area Health Education Center



**2024**

# ANNUAL REPORT

GROWING THE FUTURE OF HEALTHCARE SINCE 1991

# CONTENTS



---

*03*

ABOUT NEOAHEC

---

*05*

MESSAGE FROM  
THE DIRECTOR

---

*06*

PATHWAY PROGRAMS &  
PARTICIPANTS

---

*10*

INTERPROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

---

*12*

GROWING OUR OWN

---

*14*

BECOME INVOLVED

---





**Northeast Oregon**  
*Area Health Education Center*

## **Our Vision**

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

## **Our Mission**

To educate and inspire students and professionals to build a sustainable health care community for Eastern Oregon

## **Proudly Serving 11 Counties in Eastern Oregon**

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



<https://www.neoahec.org>



# NEOAHEC Team

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NEOAHEC staff and board members traveled from 8 counties to meet on the Eastern Oregon University campus for the annual in-person board meeting in July 2024

## Raff Betza

MD | Board Member | Physician | Grande Ronde Hospital Elgin/Union Clinics and Urgent Care

## Dennis Burke

FACHE, MS | Treasurer | Hospital Administration | Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization

## Meghan Chancey

MPH | Board Member | Public Health Administration

## Robin Claudson

MSN, RN | Vice-Chair | Assistant Program Director & Simulation Coordinator | Oregon Health Sciences University

## Seth Deister

Board Member | Human Resources Specialist | One Community Health

## Andrea Flores

Board Member | Juntos/OSU Open Campus | Oregon State University

## Yessenia Garcia-Sanchez

BSN, RN | Member-at-Large | Nursing | Good Shepherd

## Meredith Halling

PhD, MS | Chair | Research/Health Policy | Oregon Health Authority

## Julie Caballa

MBA | Board Member | Admissions Counselor | Eastern Oregon University

## Kyler Malone

BSN, RN | Student Board Member '24 | PMHNP Student | Oregon Health Sciences University

## Torrina McLeod

BSN, RN, CMSRN | Board Member | Nursing Faculty | Treasure Valley Community College

## David Melville

M.A., M.Ed., Ed.D. (ABD) | Board Member | Executive Director | EOU Greater Oregon STEM Hub

## Caitlin Russell

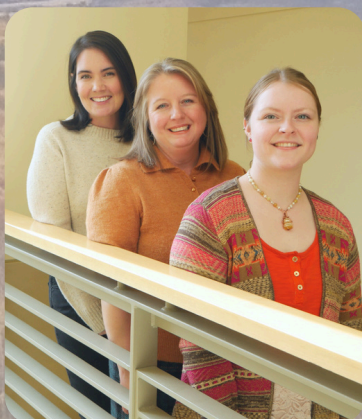
MAT | Secretary | Career Technical Education | InterMountain Education Service District

## Nick West

MD | Board Member | FQHC/Rural Healthcare | Winding Waters

## Eric Wiser

MD | Ex-Officio Board Member | Executive Director | Oregon Area Health Education Center



## Danielle Patton

Educational Support Program Specialist

## Meredith Lair

Executive Director

## Carissa Cummings

Administrative Coordinator

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# A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

In a world where we have become accustomed to instant gratification, instant information, and instant change, there is little about the work of NEOAHEC, that is instant. To quote Tolstoy, "The two most powerful warriors are patience and time."

NEOAHEC's purpose is to develop a pathway for growing our own healthcare professionals and create sustainability in our rural healthcare workforce. This is not easy work because it takes years of investment and consistent dedication to the mission to be considered successful. Pathways are not direct, as many of us can confirm when reflecting on our journeys.

**Pathways are meant to wander, make space for starts and stops, and adapt as we make choices and see new opportunities.**

I am grateful to have been recognized for a decade of service as the Director of NEOAHEC. I was surprised by this anniversary, as I have always marked my time with NEO from when I started as a coordinator in 2012. This is the year that I began learning from the organization and its partners each step of the way by reading old documents to understand the history of NEOAHEC and listening to our communities to make sense of the future of healthcare. By exercising patience, making mistakes, learning from them, and letting time do its job, we have collectively continued to move forward together through times of progress, pause, and uncertainty.

NEOAHEC has been fortunate in its organizational history to have three mission-driven directors, in addition to staff, board members, volunteers, and funders, all equally committed to the integrity of the organization. With few changes to our team over time, we have been able to evolve our legacy programs and collect meaningful data, positioning us to begin to tell our story more completely in 2025. I am proud that NEOAHEC continues to be a visionary group that is deeply committed to the mission of the organization, resolute in our understanding that patience and time are our greatest allies.

With sincere appreciation to all supporters of NEOAHEC for a wonderful year in 2024 and an exciting year ahead in 2025!

A portrait of Meredith Lair, the Executive Director of NEOAHEC. She is a woman with blonde hair, smiling, wearing a dark blue sweater. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting.

*Meredith Lair*

**MEREDITH LAIR**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**



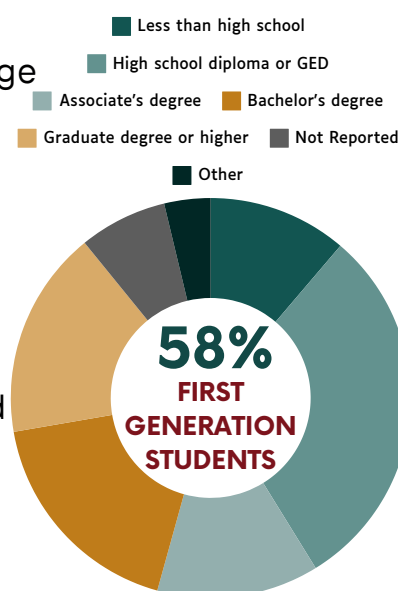
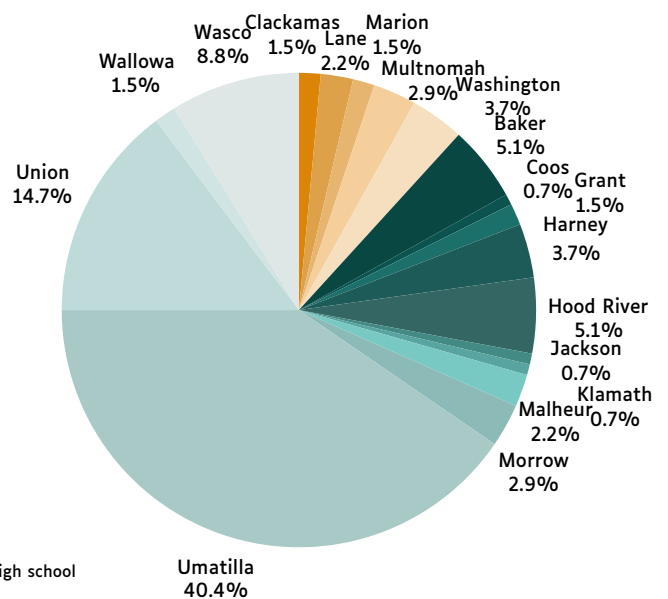


# NEOAHEC PATHWAY PROGRAMS

NEOAHEC Pathway Programs are an important tool for eliminating health disparities in Oregon by 2030, because they provide participants from diverse backgrounds with opportunities to increase interest and awareness of health careers.

NEOAHEC works to address the healthcare workforce shortage in rural and frontier Oregon by developing our own health professionals that reflect the needs of our communities. We respond to the diversity of Eastern Oregon and support those who are underrepresented in healthcare.

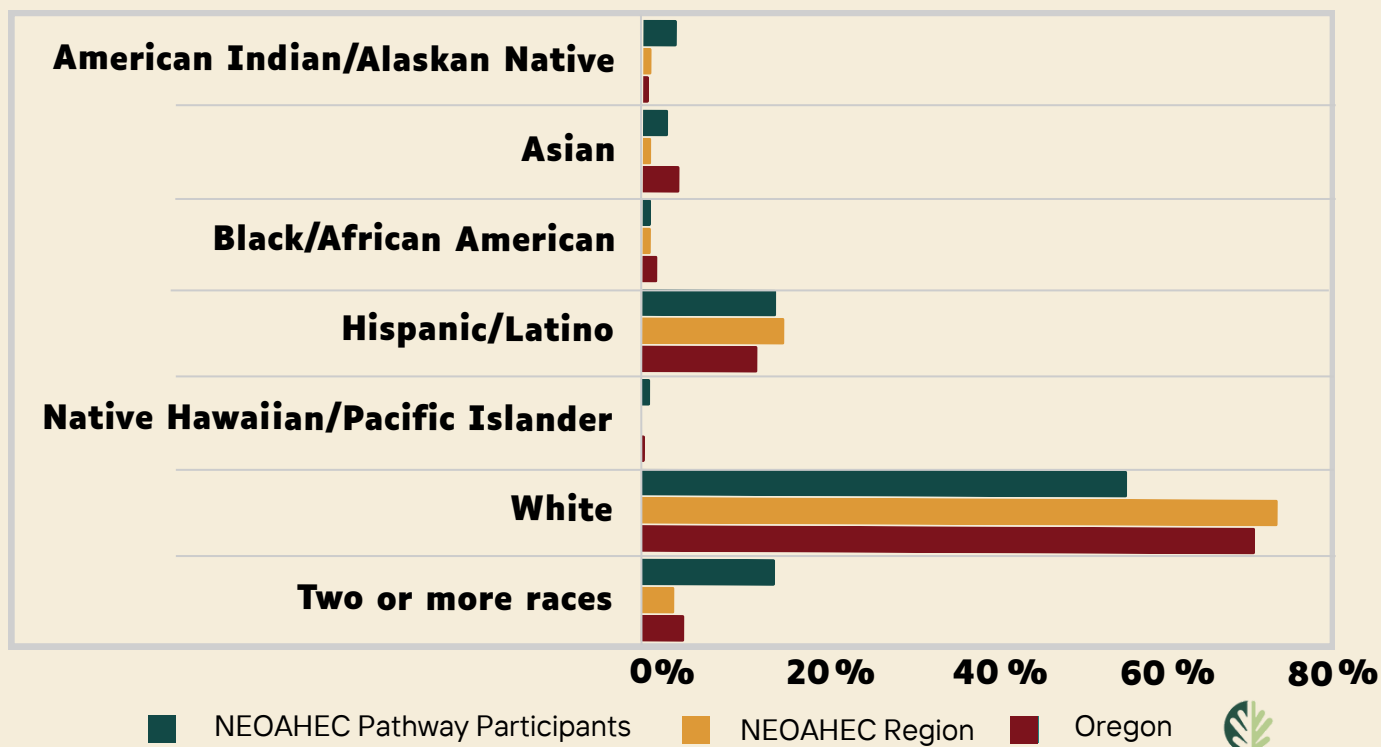
## 86% of Pathway Participants are Rural





# REFLECTING THE COMPOSITION OF OUR COMMUNITIES

Diversifying our  
Health Career Pathway



## 2024 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

### Investigators of Science

*Middle School*



### Northeast Oregon

#### Campus for Rural Health

*Graduate*



### MedQuest Health Career Exploration Camps

*High School*



### High Fidelity Simulation

*Continuing Education*



### Pre-Professional Mentorship

*Undergraduate*



1 person icon = 10 participants



# 30 YEARS OF MEDQUEST

## 2025 Registration Open Soon

### 2025 MedQuest Dates

Juntos	March 24 - 27
Rural	June 16 - 21
Frontier	July 7 - 11

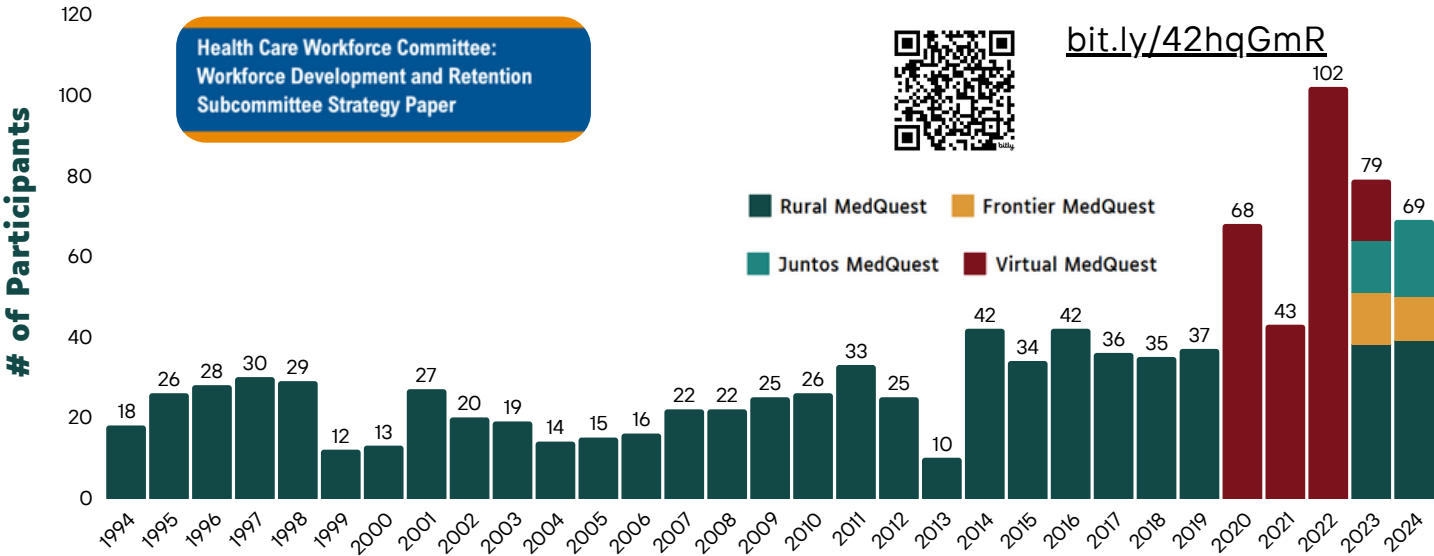


Since 1994, NEOAHEC’s MedQuest Camps have helped **over 1,000 Oregon high school students** explore health careers.

In 2024, MedQuest was cited twice as an example that **should be expanded statewide** to increase recruitment and awareness of health care careers.

NEOAHEC has been awarded a grant from the Oregon Health Authority to provide **scholarships to all students accepted into camp**. Our goal is to make camp more accessible to more students by making free or very low cost.

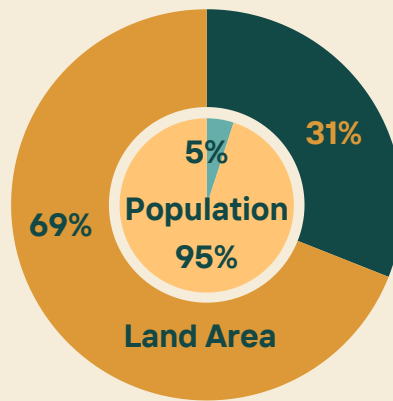
Learn more about MedQuest and watch our 30 Years of MedQuest Video!







# RURAL EASTERN OREGON



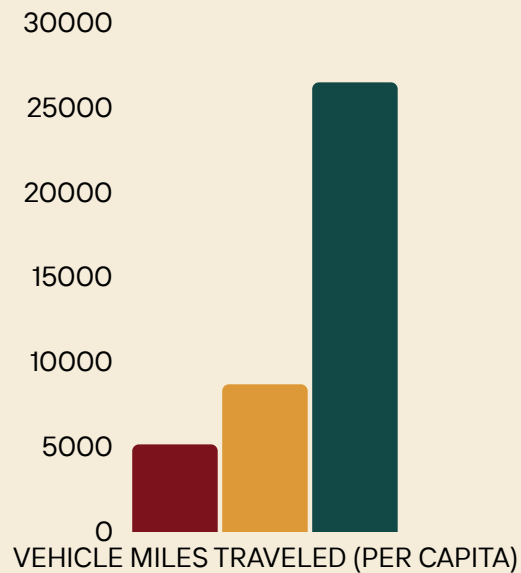
NEOAHEC's region encompasses **31%** of state land area & only **5%** of the population

NEOAHEC Region  
Rest of Oregon

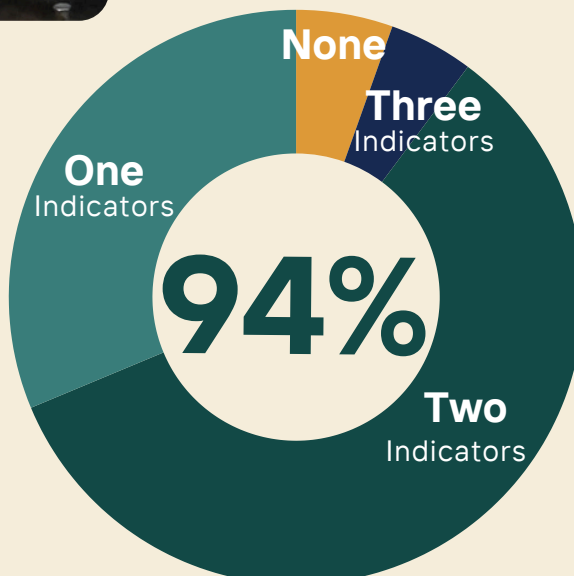


State Average  
Rural Oregon  
NEOAHEC Region

The miles traveled per capita in Eastern Oregon is **3x** that of Rural Oregon



## Disadvantaged Backgrounds



94% of NEOAHEC participants are considered disadvantaged

### Indicators

- First Generation Student
- Rural
- Requested Scholarships

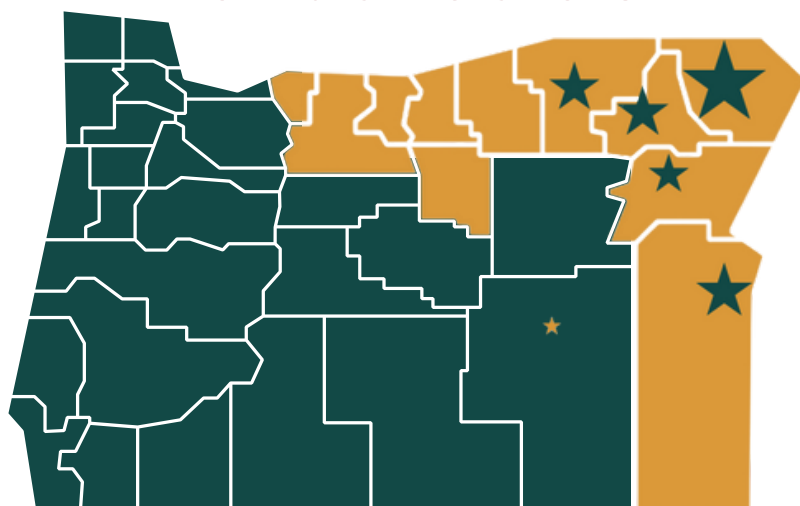
# 68%

NEOAHEC participants received scholarships for program tuition or materials.





## 2024 Housing Utilization for Rural Rotations



**79 Rotations | 6 Cities**

## Learners Rotating in Eastern Oregon



Undergraduate  
Nursing



Graduate  
Nursing



Dental



Pharmacy



Medical



Physician  
Associate

# Interprofessional Community Project

Our ongoing community project highlights an initiative created by the community, for the community, to address critical healthcare challenges in Eastern Oregon. Interprofessional education students from the Campus for Rural Health work together to complete NEOAHEC community projects.

## Projects Completed in 2024



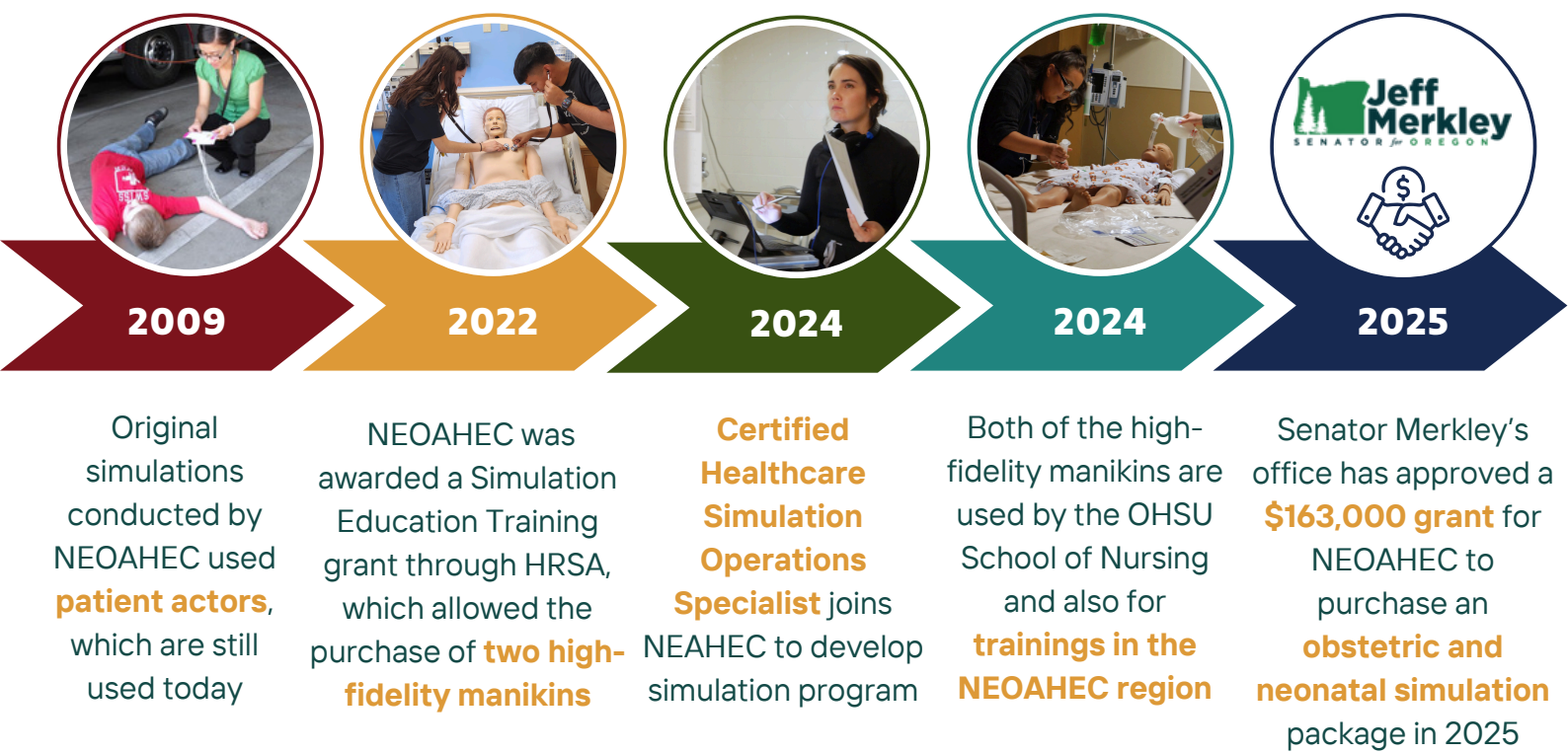
Narcan simulations  
for community  
members and local  
education systems



Dental education  
fliers distributed  
to school districts



# NEOAHEC SIMULATION TRAINING EXPANSION



## Rural OB Solutions: Empowering Eastern Oregon

The closure of the Baker City Obstetrics department has highlighted the urgent need to address maternal healthcare challenges in rural Eastern Oregon. Interprofessional health professions students from the Northeast Oregon Campus for Rural Health, community members, and local healthcare educators and professionals will partner to develop OB simulations tailored to meet the needs of our region.

### 2025 Project Goals



Conduct environmental scans to **identify gaps in OB care** and training needs.

**Review state policies** impacting maternal health to provide actionable insights.

**Establish a Simulation Advisory Committee** to guide training strategies for healthcare providers.

### 2024 Simulations

- Pediatric Drowning
- Pediatric Mock Code
- Pediatric RSV

These trainings focused on sharpening clinical skills and **improving emergency preparedness** for providers and nurse residents at Grand Ronde Hospital.



# LIFE AS A RURAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

## **Nikki Billman, DNP-PMHNP:** ***A Homegrown Rural Mental*** ***Health Nurse Practitioner***

When we talk about growing our own healthcare providers, many think about investing in the next generation of children. But for people like Nikki Billman, DNP-PMHNP, growing our own means investing in healthcare professionals at any stage of their careers.

A La Grande local, Nikki recently earned her Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) as a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) through Oregon Health and Science University's innovative distance program.



Since graduating in June, she has taken on a vital role as an outpatient provider at New Directions Northwest in Baker City, Oregon, serving the mental health needs of her community. Nikki's story is a testament to the power of opportunity, persistence, and the belief that we can build strong healthcare professionals—right here at home.

Read more about Nikki in NEOAHEC's Story of Impact series.

*NEOAHEC has found that the best candidates for rural health leaders are those who were raised in rural areas.*

*In our Stories of Impact, we highlight health professionals engaged with NEOAHEC. Visit our website to read these stories.*



<http://bit.ly/4fDo4T1>



# INVESTING IN OUR STORY

## Developing a Pathway to Practice Data System

Our experiences unite us as advocates for Eastern Oregon. Each of us has a unique story, whether a first-generation college student, from an underrepresented or marginalized group, living in a geographically isolated community, enduring a disability, having a financial hardship, or another circumstance. We all have an individuality that shapes our perspective as people who choose to live in rural places.

Understanding who we are allows us to develop pathways to grow our own healthcare workforce. The vision of NEOAHEC is to address the healthcare workforce shortage in rural and frontier Oregon by developing our own health professionals that reflect the composition and needs of the communities we serve. In direct alignment with our vision, NEOAHEC

is building a system to engage longitudinally with participants along their pathway.

*NEOAHEC will illustrate the positive effects of the lasting investment in healthcare workforce development.*

The opportunity has arrived to inform, create strategy, and expand the ability to advocate for data-driven investments in workforce programs, particularly the importance of a multi-pronged pathway grounded in a grow your own approach. We are thrilled to provide program participants with a gratifying way to engage and update us along their pathway and easily participate in more NEOAHEC programs. Together we are building a bridge between anecdotal evidence and inclusive data to show the success of investing in the future of healthcare.



# Get Involved

Whether you are a student, a healthcare professional, a community member, or a retiree, **there is a place for you at NEOAHEC.**



**Program Participation**



**Event Staffing**



**Update Account Information**



**Story of Impact**



**Precepting & Mentoring**



**Board of Directors**



**Scholarship or Donation**



**Spread the Word**

## Thank You to Our Funders & Partners



We are grateful for the **support, collaboration, and commitment** to NEOAHEC in 2024. View a list of supporters: [bit.ly/4aiGUOf](https://bit.ly/4aiGUOf)

## Find Us Online



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



**Northeast Oregon AHEC**



**neoahec**



**office@neoahec.org**

Subscribe to our mailing list for quarterly newsletters and program updates!



Indicates data in the report from The Ford Family Foundation's Oregon by the Numbers (2024 Edition) <https://www.tff.org/oregon-numbers/>