



THE VERMONT AHEC NETWORK

AHEC Scholars Summer Projects: 2025

The Vermont AHEC Network offers a variety of opportunities for medical students enrolled in the VT AHEC Scholars Program during the summer between first and second year. AHEC Scholars is a national program guided by AHEC’s Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant requirements. The overarching goal of the AHEC Scholars Program is for students to gain a valuable understanding about the social and cultural factors that influence an individual’s overall health and their ability to access care. We aim to prepare tomorrow’s health professionals to be leaders in interprofessional, transformative practice, especially for those with the greatest needs. Additional goals of the summer projects are to increase students’ knowledge and skills in research and quality improvement, medical education and mentorship, teamwork and collaboration, and to foster a lifelong interest in scholarly activity. The program is designed to be relevant to students interested in any medical specialty. All AHEC projects relate to the national AHEC Scholars Priorities.

The AHEC Scholars Program is a voluntary, nationally recognized program for health professions students. It provides opportunities for students to increase knowledge, strengthen leadership skills, and gain competencies within eight broad topic areas.

The AHEC Scholars Program and all of its activities are part of AHEC’s longitudinal workforce research about influences on specialty selection and future practice—location, type of practice, and the patient population served.

Eight AHEC Scholars Priorities

Topic	Emphasis or examples
Interprofessional Education	-team-based interprofessional engagement, collaboration, and learning, including team-based care and patient-centered care
Behavioral Health Integration	-services that better address the needs of individuals with behavioral, mental health and substance use conditions, including training for health professionals to address burnout and resiliency
Connecting Communities and Supporting Health Professionals/Community Health Workers (CHWs)	-increase training and development of paraprofessionals who serve as connectors between health professionals and the community
Virtual Learning and Telehealth	-leverage technology to improve curricula and community-based experiential training
Social Determinants of Health	-addressing food insecurity, economic inequality, access to education, social and community context, access to health care, neighborhood and built environment, etc.
Cultural Competency	-care that is responsive to the unique culture, language and health literacy of diverse individuals and communities
Medical Practice Transformation	-Improve patient centered care through quality improvement, care coordination, cost containment, rural health care, primary care, care for underserved or disadvantaged populations
Current and Emerging Health Issues	-current HRSA-approved topics: Opioids and Substance Use Disorders, Oral Health as part of Overall Health, COVID-19

Stipends may be available to participants for certain AHEC projects. If a stipend is offered, it is a taxable transaction for income tax purposes and a 1099 Form will be issued.

SUMMER PROJECT TIME COMMITMENT AND EXPECTATIONS

AHEC Scholars Summer Projects are hosted by three organizations: UVM AHEC Program, Northern Vermont AHEC and Southern Vermont AHEC. The AHEC Scholars Summer Projects have two tracks: Education/Mentoring track and Research/Quality Improvement (QI) track.

The time commitment for AHEC Scholars projects is approximately 100 hours: 40 hours of required didactic (reading, online modules, discussions, and self-guided learning) and 60 hours of field work (i.e., the specific project). AHEC summer projects meet the requirements for one year of eligible activities toward the AHEC Scholars Program. Full participation in both didactic and field activities is required.

AHEC Scholars Education/Mentoring track: Didactic learning is primarily asynchronous and is completed earlier in the summer (by the end of July) in preparation for the Governor's Institutes of Vermont (GIV) session dates. Field hours are completed according to a schedule of mandatory GIV training dates and the week-long GIV session. Students are asked to confirm in-person availability for GIV specific dates before applying to this project.

AHEC Scholars Research QI track: Projects typically start the first Monday of summer break with final deliverables submitted on the final Friday before classes resume. Didactic learning is asynchronous, with a recommended weekly schedule spaced over approximately seven weeks. Project teams meet weekly over the summer with the scheduled day and time of day planned by team members at the project onset. The final few weeks of the summer project timeline are often the busiest, as project deliverables are completed and submitted. Some projects lend easily to remote participation, while other projects may require being in the Burlington area.

Many students complete an AHEC Scholars project alongside other summer activities, such as other projects, employment, and travel. Concurrent AHEC Projects and LCOM Research Fellowship or Schwitzer Projects can be considered (see below). Concurrent AHEC and Global Health Projects are rare. After reading the AHEC project descriptions, AHEC is available to talk with students about how an AHEC project might fit with other summer plans.

Please think carefully about your summer goals coupled with your time availability, and plan accordingly. Resist overcommitment of your time. Over commitment of your time can cause unnecessary stress and negatively impact your wellbeing, your project team, and project quality.

When considering more than one LCOM summer project or employment students are strongly encouraged to follow these steps:

- Understand the requirements and expectations of each program.
- Determine whether the time commitment to multiple projects is reasonable for you based on individual factors such as time management abilities, competing priorities, and enthusiasm/motivation to complete each project. Is the time commitment reasonable and achievable for you?
- Communicate with each potential program to ensure that the project sponsor/mentor/advisor is aware of overlapping projects and develop a mutually agreed upon feasibility plan to meet project expectations and ensure that projects are not disruptive to each other (including scheduled work hours, meeting times, team goals, etc.).
- Prior to project start, decide if you can commit to full participation and meet high quality deliverables for both activities. Proceed with forethought.

Stipends for AHEC summer projects are typically \$1,500.

Summer 2025 Education/Mentoring Track

DIDACTIC LEARNING (40 HOURS)

Core curriculum is led by Northern Vermont AHEC. Required components include readings, individual and group activities, discussion posts, and reflections on group mentoring strategies, STEM teaching methods, and best practices for creating effective teams. Students participate in synchronous and asynchronous discussions via zoom and Microsoft Teams.

Learning objectives

Upon completion of this training, AHEC Scholars will:

- i. Understand the role of a mentor in goal-focused groups
- ii. Apply strategies for effective group development in learning teams
- iii. Describe the Learning Zones framework and Tuckman's model of group development as they apply to teaching and learning
- iv. Ask purposeful questions and apply related STEM teaching methods
- v. Apply key concepts and strategies from group mentoring to interprofessional team leadership.

Meeting Dates and Learning Expectations

Education and Mentoring Projects Orientation: **Wednesday, June 4 5:30-7:00 PM In-Person**

Asynchronous learning Part 1 (estimated 22 hours): Recommended to complete by **Monday, June 23**

In-person training date: **Wednesday, June 25, 2025 9:00-3:00**

Virtual GIV Debrief & Check-In Meeting: **Wednesday, July 23, 2025 5:30-7:00 Zoom**

Asynchronous learning Part 2 (estimated 10 hours): Recommended to complete by **Wednesday, August 6**

Virtual End-of-Project meeting: **Wednesday, August 6 5:30-6:30 PM Zoom**

Project-specific dates and expectations are listed in the project descriptions.

Deliverables

Final due date Friday, August 8

1. One-to-two-page (individual) reflection on what you have learned, the skills you have acquired, and how your participation in the summer curriculum relates to the AHEC Scholar priorities.
2. Documentation of required learning module completion.
3. Brief evaluation form completed at the End-of-Project meeting on August 6

FIELD HOURS/PROJECT (ESTIMATED 60 HOURS)

Students work in teams as teachers and mentors for high school students enrolled in the Governor's Institutes of Vermont Institute on Health & Medicine, or other health care pipeline-related projects.

The Governor's Institutes of Vermont (GIV) Institute on Health & Medicine

The Institute on Health & Medicine is a 7-day, 6-night residential science enrichment and career exploration program for high school students. The goals of GIV Health & Medicine Institute are to increase participants' knowledge, skills, and abilities in the following areas: health careers, teamwork, patient care, professionalism, communication, and self-awareness. Website: [Institute on Health & Medicine](#) Mentors are program staff and will help with all aspects of the programming during the day (including leading programming, facilitating community building, and coordination with other staff).

Mentors will be working with minors. A criminal background check and completion of a no-cost online mandated reporter training through the Vermont Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families are required.

There are two GIV sessions – **GIV SOUTH** and **GIV NORTH** – please review the dates and locations carefully.

The Governor's Institutes of Vermont Institute on Health & Medicine SOUTH

Southern Vermont AHEC, led by Jennifer Scott

Project Dates

- Virtual orientation and pre-clinical learning: **Tuesday, July 8 to Thursday, July 10** 9:00 AM-12:00 PM; exact times for Mentors to remotely join this portion to be determined
- Residential Institute:
Required On-site staff training date **Sat, July 12**.
Institute Dates: **Sun, July 13 to Sat, July 19, 2025 (Vermont State University Castleton Campus)**
- Additional pre-program remote planning sessions begin in June (dates/time set by mutual agreement)

Expectations for in-person/virtual field work

This is an 8-day in-person commitment in July (plus some portion of the 3 days of virtual orientation and learning before the institute). Mentors commit to attending the session in full and on-site. Meals and lodging will be provided.

Instructional Mentors will be responsible for designing, leading, and assisting with programming for the 70 high school students primarily from 8am-5pm while the institute is in session. Additionally, Mentors will have the flexibility to create their own active and hands-on learning modules for students. Activities will be centered around a primary and preventative care theme. Mentors will be asked to create programming/content that connects to primary care and prevention.

The Governor's Institutes of Vermont Institute on Health & Medicine NORTH

Northern Vermont AHEC, led by Lanie Billings

Project Dates

- Virtual orientation: **Monday, June 23 from 11 AM to 3 PM (Institute Orientation)**
- Residential Institute Dates:
Required On-site staff training date: **Sat, July 5**
Institute Dates: **Sun, July 6 to Sat, July 12, 2024 (Vermont State University Lyndon Campus)**
- Additional pre-program, remote planning sessions begin in June (scheduled by mutual agreement, as needed)

Expectations for in-person/virtual field work

This is an 8-day in-person commitment in July (plus 1 day of virtual orientation with participants in June). Mentors commit to attending and residing at Vermont State University, Lyndon campus for the full week. Meals and lodging will be provided.

Instructional Mentors will be responsible for designing, leading, assisting with setting up and breaking down educational activities for 70 high school students between the hours of 8 am - 6 pm while the institute is in session. Additional time outside of instruction hours will be required for planning activities. Additionally, Mentors will create their own active and hands-on learning modules for students - inspired by the topics in health and medicine that ignite their passion. Northern Vermont AHEC staff will work with medical students to develop their ideas into interactive workshops and provide fully developed lesson plans to use as-is or adapt.

Quote from 2024 GIV Mentor: *GIV is a great opportunity for folks that enjoy teaching and sharing their love of healthcare/scientific disciplines with others. I'm thankful for the wonderful teammates and coordinators I worked with. The students were incredibly brave and ambitious. I was proud to see students step out of their comfort zone and try new things, like the heart and brain dissections sessions I led. We had the opportunity to provide sessions around topics we felt strongly about. I led a pharmacology session exploring common medications and designing enteric-coated pills, very fun! Truly a great experience. It was nice that GIV was very front-loaded in the summer and left a lot of free time in the second half of the summer.*

Summer 2025 Research/Quality Improvement (QI) Track

DIDACTIC LEARNING (40 HOURS)

Core curriculum is led by UVM Office of Primary Care and AHEC Program. Required components include basic instruction in quality improvement and research methods conducted via asynchronous discussion of weekly assignments on Microsoft Teams. Materials include the textbook *Designing Clinical Research* by Hulley and colleagues, and online modules from the *Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI)*. Students earn an IHI Certificate of Quality Improvement and Patient Safety.

Learning objectives

Upon completion of this training, AHEC Scholars will:

- i. Understand the basic concepts of research project design
- ii. Be prepared to apply concepts of quality improvement in healthcare
- iii. Experience and practice Microsoft Teams as an effective collaboration tool
- iv. Be able to articulate the importance of the national AHEC Scholar Priorities as they relate to quality and equity in healthcare

Meeting dates

Summer Projects Orientation	Tuesday, May 27	5:30-7:00 PM	In-Person
Mid-Summer Check-in	Tuesday, July 15	5:30-7:00 PM	Zoom
Summer Projects Final meeting	Tuesday, August 20	5:30-7:00 PM	In-Person

Didactic instruction and field projects run from **Monday, June 23 - Friday, August 8**. Individual project teams determine the schedule of project-specific meetings.

Deliverables

Due by Friday, August 8

1. One-to-two-page (individual) reflection on what you have learned and how your participation in the summer curriculum relates to AHEC Scholar priority areas.
2. Documentation of required learning module completion (IHI Certificate in Quality and Patient Safety).
3. Project Abstract--Brief (250-300 word) summary of the project (one report for the team).
4. Other deliverables (e.g., poster, data analysis) are project dependent and determined by the team.
5. Brief evaluation form completed at the final meeting on Tuesday, August 20.

FIELD HOURS/PROJECT (ESTIMATED 60 HOURS)

Students typically work on projects in teams of 2-5. The faculty and staff develop several topic areas each year, but there is flexibility for the team to shape the direction of the project. The individual projects may include literature reviews, development or pilot testing of surveys or patient assessment instruments, primary data collection, provider or patient interviews, data analysis, writing up results, and editing. Students planning to be out of state for the summer may be able to participate in some projects remotely, other projects require at least some time in Vermont for in-person activities.

All Research/QI Projects students participate in the core curriculum with UVM AHEC. Projects 1-8 are sponsored and led by UVM AHEC. Project 9 is sponsored and led by Southern Vermont AHEC.

1. Early Childhood Health Screening Project with Champlain Valley Head Start (UVM AHEC)

Faculty: Kathy Mariani, MD, Family Medicine; Sujata Singh, MD, Ophthalmologist; Patti Smith Urie, UVM AHEC
Collaborators: Justine Mee, Health Services Coordinator, Champlain Valley Head Start; Sheila Chamberlin Orthoptist, UVMMC

Background

- Champlain Valley Head Start serves 223 children and their families in programming across four counties in Northwestern Vermont, including programs in rural areas of Franklin and Addison counties.
- CVHS early education and home visiting programs are free to families. Enrollment is based on financial eligibility or enrollment guidelines that prioritize children and families most in need (such as homelessness, child protective services, or refugee/immigrant newcomer status). CVHS families speak 17 languages. About 35% of families speak a language other than English.
- Enrolled children receive hearing, vision, and developmental screening each fall. In a typical year, around 10-15% of children have a need for vision follow-up after screening and on average 20-25% have a need for hearing follow-up.
- Larner students from the class of 2025 have worked on health and literacy projects with CVHS, including developing health follow-up events with providers such as Ophthalmologist Sujata Singh and Orthoptist Sheila Chamberlin at UVMMC to assist families with timely follow-up on concerns resulting from vision screenings. The events address several barriers, such as long waitlists and scheduling/attending appointments. [Closing Gaps: Larner Students Address Literacy and Nutrition in Burlington](#)
- CVHS has a partnership with an audiologist through the state of VT and UVMMC to provide follow-up screening and testing for children who did not pass hearing screening.
- The group identified a need for family-friendly materials that explain the reasons for screening, what to do if your child's screening shows need for referral, and information about vision and hearing conditions. The materials will be translated into the 4 of the most common languages for Head Start families– Nepali, Swahili, Somali and Spanish.

Overall project focus: To develop and test education materials for families that support the CVHS mission and goals for a comprehensive sensory screening program that identifies potential concerns, supports families to seek care, and results in children's health needs being met.

Potential project activities: Interview medical providers/specialists and CVHS staff to identify essential content for parent education materials. Interview or survey CVHS parents about preferences for receiving information. Develop handouts and test them with various audiences, including speakers of other languages and CVHS parents.

This project may appeal to students interested in ophthalmology or hearing, early child development/pediatrics, quality improvement methods, or health literacy and the communication of health information. Previous experience or interest in translation of health information would benefit the project. While parts of the project can be completed remotely, some interviews will likely be in-person in the Burlington area.

2- 4. Clinical Informatics and EHR Projects (UVM AHEC)

Faculty: Rachel McEntee, MD (Hospitalist and CMIO); Alicia Jacobs, MD (Family Medicine and Medical Director of Wellbeing Informatics); Sean Maloney, MD (Family Medicine and Dept of FM Director of Clinical Informatics); Michelle Cangiano, MD (Family Medicine and FM Quality Chair); Marie Sandoval, MD (General Internal Medicine and Medical Director of Digital Health); Yao “Jim” Li, MD (Hospitalist and Dept of Medicine Director of Clinical Informatics); and Mark Pasanen, MD

Background

- “Informaticists accelerate healthcare’s transformation by collecting, analyzing and applying data directly to care decisions. Data produced throughout health and healthcare are the driving force of informatics and its ability to innovate critical advancements that directly benefit people.” (AMIA [Why Informatics? | AMIA - American Medical Informatics Association](#))
- The EHR faculty group has mentored highly successful projects that appeal to students who are interested in workflows, clinical decision support tools, health literacy, electronic communication, and digital health equity. We use a group mentoring model and anticipate supporting three team projects in summer 2025, with specific project topics and goals developed by the project teams. See <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/uvmahhec/> for past projects.
- There are myriad ways in which clinicians document in the medical record. There are ongoing efforts to make medical documentation as efficient, accurate, and understandable as it can be. The effective use of tools, including Artificial Intelligence, is an important area of study.
- The UVM informatics team has a number of initiatives targeted at improving access and quality of care for patients, including vulnerable populations.
- Patient portals allow patients to access to their medical records for bi-directional messaging and review of data and notes generated by the health care team. UVMHN patient portal is called MyChart. To be useful, patients must be able to navigate the MyChart and understand results and notes.

2. EHR - Documentation Project

Potential project areas: Note templates, clinical decision support, and AI-enabled note writing.

3. EHR - Equity Project

Potential project areas: Provider gender impact on workload, patient access to care, and EHR functionality

4. EHR - Communication Project

Potential project areas: Provider-Patient communication, such as patient portal, and Provider-Provider communication, such as eConsults and SecureChat

Overall project focus: To study questions related to the complexity of health care using the EHR. Projects will relate to social determinants of health, health equity, and/or medical practice transformation.

Potential project activities: Qualitative studies, Epic data pulls, surveys, and data analysis

EHR projects offer an opportunity to think about the relevance of medical informatics for physicians from every specialty. EHR projects can be completed by students participating remotely.

5. Medical Debt Project with Office of the Healthcare Advocate (UVM AHEC)

Faculty: Mark Pasanen, MD; Patti S. Urie, UVM AHEC

Collaborators: Emma Zavez, Health Policy Analyst (Vermont Legal Aid); Mike Fisher, VT Chief Health Care Advocate (Vermont Legal Aid)

Background

- The Office of the Health Care Advocate (HCA) at Vermont Legal Aid works to address access to care and health equity across Vermont. A consumer assistance phone line handles about 300 cases a month. Analyzing the content of the calls provides real time information about the problems Vermonters are facing accessing health care.
- The HCA also has a Public Policy and Advocacy team. This team works to identify key healthcare topics, provide recommendations, and advocate in statewide forums such as the Vermont Statehouse.
- Medical debt has been a priority for the HCA. Listen to: [Health care advocates look to lawmakers for help with medical debt | Vermont Public](#). Medical Debt was the focus for a 2023 AHEC project, which noted that health care providers can have limited understanding of the impact of medical debt on patient care.
- During the 2022 Legislative Session, the HCA advocated for legislation that would create minimum standards for Vermont's hospital financial assistance and billing and collections policies and procedures. Their efforts were successful; Act 119 went into effect on July 1, 2024.
- Act 119 sets forth standards for financial assistance policies, specifies the steps the facilities must take to publicize and notify patients about their policies, and prohibits facilities from selling their medical debt.
- The act also requires hospitals to submit a plain language summary of their financial assistance policies to the Green Mountain Care Board.
- The HCA is currently working with hospitals across Vermont to come into compliance with the new law.

Overall project focus: To describe the progress of Vermont hospitals in meeting the educational and outreach requirements in Act 119 and identify ways to gauge patient experience navigating financial assistance programs.

Potential project activities: Collection and review of hospital financial assistance written materials, surveys or interviews with stakeholders such as patient-facing financial assistance staff and health care administrators, analysis of financial data, gathering input from patients and/or community members.

This project may appeal to students interested in advocacy and legislation, plain language communication of health information, or health insurance status and ability to pay for healthcare as a critical social driver of health. While some parts of the project could be completed remotely, at least some project team members should plan to be available for in-person visits to facilities.

6. Immigrant Health Project (UVM AHEC)

Faculty: Ben Clements, MD and Mark Pasanen, MD

Collaborators: Alicia Rodrique, Communications Coordinator (Vermont Legal Aid)

Background

- Several AHEC projects have focused on the intersection between immigration law and health care.
- Summer 2024 projects looked at implementation of the Immigrant Health Insurance Plan (IHIP), a Vermont state-funded health insurance plan for pregnant people and children under age 19 who do not qualify for Dr. Dynasaur (Vermont's Medicaid program for children) due to immigration status.
 - An IHIP Education and Outreach project surveyed primary care providers, social workers, financial assistance and community partners. Survey results indicated a high level of unfamiliarity with IHIP, including 88% of the primary care respondents saying they are not familiar.
 - An IHIP Program Improvement project team explored barriers to participation in IHIP among potentially eligible people. The need to provide residency documentation and hesitancy to disclose immigration status were among the factors noted, but it was unclear how much this impacts individual decisions. They identified gathering information from community members as a next step.
 - A third team looked at potential expansion of coverage to additional groups who remain ineligible for Medicaid or subsidies for health insurance through VT Health Connect due to immigration status.
- Health care insurance and eligibility rules for financial assistance programs can be complex in general. Immigration status adds a layer of complexity. Political climate and policy changes may heighten concern about sharing information.
- The Vermont Department of Health Access (DVHA) provides information online [Immigrant Health Insurance Plan \(IHIP\) | Department of Vermont Health Access](#) and through outreach such as a newsletter and trainings. The Office of the Health Care Advocate at Vermont Legal Aid assists patients and professionals who have questions or problems. Community Health Workers at programs such as Bridges to Health provide direct assistance to people and support them in accessing care [Migrant Health Programs | Agriculture | The University of Vermont](#)

Overall project focus: Determine what information about immigrant health care in Vermont is needed by various groups, such as health care providers, community agencies, and members of immigrant communities, and work with partners to develop strategies for dissemination.

Potential project activities: Survey or interviews with advocates, health care providers, community members and DVHA to understand previous efforts and additional information needs. Development of outreach and education materials, including translations when appropriate. Collaboration meetings with key partners to plan distribution.

This project may appeal to students interested in advocacy, healthcare funding, and social determinants of health such as health insurance status and ability to pay for healthcare. While some parts of the project could be completed remotely, at least some project team members should plan to be available for in-person interviews.

7. Justice, Mentoring and Reentry Program at Mercy Connections (UVM AHEC)

Faculty: Charles MacLean, MD; Patti Smith Urie, UVM AHEC

Collaborators: Kelly Moran, MSW, Justice and Mentoring Coordinator (Mercy Connections)

Background

- Many individuals with substance use disorder are involved with the criminal justice system, often as victims. In order for individuals to achieve their highest potential the intersections between physical health, mental health, social determinants of health, substance use and criminal justice must be acknowledged and addressed.
- Mercy Connections is a community organization that empowers people to make significant life changes through education, mentoring, entrepreneurship, and community. Their view of success is when: adults reach their goals in an inclusive, compassionate community; Vermont's economy is stronger because of new businesses started by Mercy Connections' graduates; people involved in the justice system successfully reenter our community; and Vermonters gain knowledge and connections that lead to healthy and fulfilling lives. [Home — Mercy Connections](#)
- Larner students in our Addiction Medicine and Community Engagement electives have collaborated with Mercy Connections over the past several years to learn about the organization as a whole, and more specifically about the [Justice, Mentoring & Reentry - Effective supports to help people — Mercy Connections](#). This program is focused on justice-involved women and helps with transition from prison, treatment court, addiction, and mental health needs. They have strong collaboration with many other local organizations working to help women rebuild their lives.
- We are seeking to deepen our collaboration with Mercy Connections by making the knowledge, skills, and experience of health professions students available to the staff, volunteers, and clients of this highly effective community organization. There is a possible need for mapping out and evaluation of the Reentry program.
- There is current interest in bringing lifestyle medicine topics to women at the South Burlington women's facility and Mercy Connections community programs. The Corrections Superintendent is envisioning volunteers offering 'Mind, Body, Soul' themed activities, which may be a good fit for Larner students interested in nutrition, movement, and other lifestyle topics.

Overall project focus: Better understand the reentry process, where there are gaps in services, and where there are opportunities for improvement, including lifestyle medicine opportunities.

Potential project activities: Survey or interviews with interviews with staff, volunteers, and clients of the Mercy Connections Reentry program as well as with other important stakeholders in the community. Students must complete a Department of Corrections background check prior to entering the corrections facility.

This project may appeal to students interested in the intersection of complex social issues and medical care, Lifestyle or Integrative Medicine, Addiction Medicine, and community engagement. There is likely to be a combination of in-person and virtual activities.

8. Xylazine Education (UVM AHEC)

Faculty: Elly Riser, MD and Mark Pasanen, MD

Collaborators: Vermont Department of Health Division of Substance Use

Background

- AHEC faculty are involved in projects supporting overdose prevention across the state of Vermont with the support of the Vermont Department of Health. Over the last several years, xylazine is increasingly being identified in forensic samples of the drug supply across the United States, and there is need for ongoing education for various audiences to improve recognition and management of the effects of xylazine.
- Xylazine is a centrally-acting α_2 adrenergic agonist in the same class as clonidine and dexmedetomidine, and is used as a tranquilizer in veterinary medicine. It is an adulterant in the illicit opioid supply, often found along with fentanyl in tested samples. The presence of xylazine creates additional challenges in the care of people using drugs.
- The educational material and delivery method will need to be adapted for various audiences – and potentially include in-person sessions, virtual sessions, asynchronous teaching and handouts.

Overall project focus: To develop, disseminate and deliver educational materials that will improve recognition of the effects of xylazine, including withdrawal symptoms, and lead to improvement in wound care. The target audiences potentially include individuals and teams in EMS, nursing, community agencies and provider offices.

Potential project activities: Background search on the health impacts of xylazine and identification of available resources. Survey or interviews with the identified audiences to assess pre-knowledge and effectiveness of the educational material.

This project may appeal to students interested in the intersection of complex social issues and medical care, Addiction Medicine, and community engagement. There is likely to be a combination of in-person and virtual activities.

9. Water Quality in Rutland City with Southern Vermont AHEC (SVT AHEC)

Faculty: Amanda Richardson, M.A., and Jennifer Scott, PsyD, Southern Vermont AHEC **Collaborators:** Ted Gillen, E.I., Associate Engineer for the City of Rutland and Tom Garofano, Water Division Manager & Chief Operator for the City of Rutland

Background

Since the Flint, Michigan, lead contamination crisis came to public attention in 2014-2015, several drinking water health concerns have sparked widespread debate across the United States. In Vermont, the [City of Rutland](#) has had several drinking water-related issues publicly deliberated in the past several years—notably fluoridation and most recently how to treat [haloacetic acid levels](#).

While municipal water is highly regulated and there is publicly available information about municipal water treatment and testing, the public's understanding of the health-related impacts of drinking water quality and access to safe drinking water are important health equity issues. Students will work with the City of Rutland on a project related to municipal water quality and health. It will appeal to students interested in public health, health equity, health literacy, and communication of health information. While most of the project could be completed remotely, it would be preferred if at least one project member was available for an in-person visit to Rutland facilities.

Potential Research Questions or Areas of Focus

Note: The city is open to working with AHEC Scholars to identify the specific research question for the project. The questions below are some ideas for the types of things that could be explored with the hopes that the project would result in a deliverable that could be sharable with the public.

- Is the level of fluoride present in Rutland City water effective for preventing tooth decay? How does Rutland City compare to other areas of Vermont in terms of oral health?
- What are the differences between bottled water and Rutland City water in terms of quality, and what potential health risks do any contaminants in each pose?
- Haloacetic acid (HAAs) levels in Rutland City water testing sites indicate that the levels vary seasonally and across sample locations with only a few samples and sample site locations exceeding values recommended for water systems. Considering that long-term exposure to high levels of HAAs is concerning, what are the potential health considerations for City tap water consumers with this pattern of HAAs levels?
- Rutland City has two watersheds available as water sources. One of the sources is the primary source and the other is used in emergency situations. What health concerns should be considered when switching water sources? Are there different contaminants or concerns for human health based on the different watersheds?

Overview of AHEC Summer Projects

Project Track	Research & QI	Education & Mentoring
<p>40 Didactic Hours</p>	<p>Research and Quality Improvement instruction led by UVM AHEC</p> <p>Research/QI Track Orientation (In-Person) Tuesday, May 27 5:30-7:00 PM</p> <p>Mid-Summer Check-in (zoom) Tuesday, July 15 5:30-7:00 PM</p> <p>Final meeting (In-Person) Tuesday, August 20 5:30-7:00 PM</p> <p>Didactic instruction and field projects run Monday, June 23 - Friday, August 8</p>	<p>Leading Learning Teams led by Northern Vermont AHEC</p> <p>Education/Mentoring Track Orientation (In-Person) Wed, June 4 5:30-7:00 PM</p> <p>Asynchronous learning Part 1 (estimated 22 hours): Recommended to complete by Mon, June 23</p> <p>Training (In-Person) Wed, June 25 9:00-3:00</p> <p>GIV Debrief & Check-In Meeting (zoom) Wed, July 23 5:30-7:00</p> <p>Asynchronous learning Part 2 (estimated 10 hours): Recommended to complete by Wed, August 6</p> <p>Virtual End-of-Project meeting (zoom) Wed, August 6 5:30-6:30 PM</p>
<p>60 Field/Project Hours</p>	<p><u>Research/QI Projects</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Health Screening with CVHS 2. EHR Documentation 3. EHR Equity 4. EHR Communication 5. Medical Debt with HCA 6. Immigrant Health 7. Justice, Mentoring and Re-entry with Mercy Connections 8. Xylazine Education 9. Water Quality with Rutland City and SVTAHEC <p>Individual project teams determine the schedule of project-specific meetings.</p>	<p><u>The Governor’s Institutes of Vermont</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Institute on Health & Medicine SOUTH VTSU Castleton Campus with SVTAHEC 2. Institute on Health & Medicine NORTH VTSU Lyndon Campus with NVTAHEC <p>8-day residential commitment, plus virtual orientation. Project-specific dates and expectations are listed in the project descriptions.</p>

Please contact Patti Smith Urie at patti.smith-urie@uvm.edu with questions related to the AHEC Network Summer Projects or application process.

Patti is also the contact for the Vermont AHEC Scholars program. Reach out to Patti with questions related to your AHEC transcript or progress toward completing the AHEC Scholars program.