The Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) are federally-funded, state administered offices that work on improving healthcare services across their respective states. Every state and most territories have at least one AHEC. Alaska’s AHEC Program Office is located in Anchorage. There are also regional AHEC centers in Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau and Nome.

The Alaska AHEC program office (at University of Alaska Anchorage) contracts with six regional Centers to implement educational activities involving health professions. AHEC’s Southwest Region Office is hosted by Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, Inc., the federally recognized tribal organization with a mission to provide self-sufficiency and independence of the Unangax; to assist in meeting the health, safety and well-being needs of each community; to promote, strengthen and ensure unity; and to strengthen and preserve cultural heritage.

**WHAT WE DO & WHO WE SERVE**

The Alaska AHEC addresses its mission by working in the following areas:
- Engaging Alaskans into health careers to grow our own health workforce
- Training health profession students by supporting experimental learning that occurs in rural communities or with underserved populations
- Retaining Alaska’s health workforce by increasing access to and providing continuing education/continuing medical education (CE/CME)opportunities statewide

Southwest Alaska AHEC serves all high school-age youth living in the Aleutian Pribilof Islands and Bristol Bay Regions.
Southwest Alaska AHEC offers an Allied Health Career Camp and Behavioral Health Career Camp. The purpose of AHEC Health Career Camps is to introduce high school students to the wide variety of careers available in the sector by leveraging the expertise of health professionals in the community. The Health Career Camps inspire and nurture students’ curiosity to learn about the field through various hands-on activities, learning simulations, daily career speakers and lecture series. Career planning resources are also available to students throughout the duration of the camp via VirtualJobShadow, a powerful career exploration platform with interest assessments, professional development lessons, college search and over 1,000 professionally-produced job shadowing and career advice videos. These interactive tools help students and job seekers develop career paths based on choice, not chance. Students will leave with a better understanding of how to find a career path and the steps required to succeed.
This camp is for high school students who are interested in exploring the allied health field. Allied health professions are a distinct group of health professionals who apply their expertise to prevent disease transmission, diagnose, treat and rehabilitate people of all ages and all specialities. Careers include respiratory therapist, midwifery, physical therapy, nursing, imaging specialist, nutrition, dentistry, exercise science and much more. Students will hear from leaders in the allied health field and will learn about the steps necessary to reach their dream careers. Participants will earn 1-2 college credits from the University of Alaska for actively participating in the camp, as well as certifications in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) for Basic Life Support, First Aid, Bloodborne Pathogens and training in opioid overdose response.

“My thoughts about the quality of this activity is very positive, I learned a lot about CPR BLS and more about the career I’m interested in.”
- Alexandra Esnardo

“I really liked this camp. I would have loved to go more in-depth about health careers.”
- Elizabeth Esquivel
Allied Health Camp Final Report  
By Aaron Richard II

A dental hygienist is the first person to check a person's oral health when they sit in the chair at the dentist's office. For this reason, it's important for the dental hygienist to have good social skills and welcome the patient in a friendly manner, since many people can find visiting the dentist to be a scary experience. Especially for younger kids, who have a record for subpar or poor dental health, to them the dentist is just a place of torture for their mouth.

The next step for the dental hygienist is to check and clean the patient's mouth. Usually the patient is brushing well, the dental hygienist will only need to do minor cleaning like scraping off the plaque. However, in more severe cases they could find cavities, which is especially important for the hygienist to be able to catch those cavities early, so they can treated as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the dental hygienist wouldn't do this themselves but they might support the dentist in treating the cavity. Another task that the dental hygienist will do is take x-rays of the patient's teeth and then document in their dental record.

For an individual to become a dental hygienist, that person will need an associate degree in dental hygiene and a state licensure. In order to advance beyond a dental hygienist, they would need to work for a bachelor's and/or a master's degree in dental hygiene. A dental hygienist can earn anywhere from $65,000 to $110,000 a year.

The more I learn about this career, the more I believe that this might be a very fun and engaging career. This specific career would require meeting with all sorts of patients of varying ages. Personally, I enjoy meeting new people and learning about them. I love being able to comfort people, it makes me feel that I'm contributing something to someone else's life. While this is a career that can feel like a tasking job, it actually has many benefits that can last for a person's lifetime, and shouldn't be taken lightly.
This camp is for high school students who are interested in exploring the behavioral health field. As a discipline, behavioral health refers to mental health, psychiatric, marriage and family counseling and addictions treatment, and it includes services provided by social workers, counselors, psychiatrists, neurologists and physicians. Students will hear from leaders in the field about how they got to be where they are. Students will learn about key topics in behavioral health including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), addiction, stress, mental health and wellness techniques. Participants will earn 1-2 college credits from the University of Alaska for actively participating in camp, as well as certifications in Question Persuade Refer (QPR) Suicide Gatekeeper, teen Mental Health First Aid and training in opioid overdose response.

"Learning about social workers and counseling were my favorites. But all the presentations were very informative and helpful.
- Carly Eldridge

“They were all very good so I don’t have a strong topic personally, other than Dustin’s presentation [on Unangax̂ values]. That one I especially liked.”
- Makarius Swetzof
Substance Abuse Counselor

I think the career path of a substance abuse counselor would suit me because I grew up around people who struggled with substance abuse and I want to help people as much as I can. Many children grow up with peers and family members who depend on substances such as drugs and alcohol. I want to help people deal with their problems in a healthy way as an alternative to dependence on drugs and alcohol, because it is harmful and destructive. I know what it is like to grow up around loved ones who struggle with substance abuse so I can relate to people who are trying to help their loved ones overcome their addiction. Children learn from the people around them, so by helping users overcome their addictions we are helping the children break the cycle of substance abuse. Counselors help people with a wide range of substance abuse issues. It could either be the user or the users family and friends. For this job counselors help their clients with their problems and listen to what causes them to resort to drugs and alcohol. Counselors provide their clients with different ways to cope with whatever they're dealing with instead of turning to drugs and alcohol. Counselors are a safe space for their clients who struggle with a wide variety of behavioral issues, they teach their clients ways to improve their behavior with intention to full recovery. Though clients are still susceptible to relapses so keep meeting them on a regular basis. Counselors have to be compassionate, a good problem solver, and an active listener. These are just a few of the traits needed to be a good counselor.
The potential benefits of a partnership between Southwest Alaska AHEC and Southwest Alaska Regional School Districts for students can include improving academic outcomes, providing continuous health education and professional development across multiple years and exposing them to more diverse learning opportunities and to community resources. Both Health Career Camps have a curriculum that is highly adaptable to fit within the school schedule or as an after-school program, either in-person or virtual for 1-2 weeks.

Interested in learning more? Please contact Olivia Bridges at oliviab@apiai.org or (732) 543-3265 to talk about logistics, planning and pricing.