

## **Colorado Area Health Education Center's National Underserved Scholars**

### **Elective: Developing a Longitudinal Elective for Underserved Care**

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#### **Abstract:**

**Background:** Healthcare inequities in the United States disproportionately affect rural, minority, and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. Traditional undergraduate medical education often provides limited longitudinal and experiential preparation for caring for these communities.

**Objective:** To describe the development, implementation, and early outcomes of the Colorado Area Health Education Center (COAHEC) National Underserved Scholars (NUS) elective at the University of Colorado School of Medicine (CUSOM), a longitudinal, national AHEC Scholars-aligned program designed to enhance medical student preparedness for underserved practice.

**Methods:** A 2024 needs assessment surveyed students and faculty to assess perceived readiness for underserved care and identify curricular gaps. The COAHEC NUS elective integrates didactic instruction, experiential learning in underserved settings, and community engagement. Program structure, recruitment, and operational logistics were aligned with HRSA AHEC Scholars national guidelines. Early outcomes were assessed through post-session and end-of-year surveys.

**Results:** The inaugural 2025 cohort included 12 medical students. Students reported a high educational impact, with 98–100% noting improved understanding of social determinants of health and health disparities. Increased confidence was reported in caring for underserved populations (82.4%), communicating with diverse patients (86.3%), and engaging in advocacy (88.2%). Most students reported strengthened commitment to underserved practice (94–98%).

**Conclusions:** Preliminary findings suggest that a longitudinal, multi-modal curriculum integrating didactic, experiential, and community-based learning can enhance medical students' perceived preparedness, confidence, and commitment to underserved care. Aligned with HRSA's AHEC Scholars competencies, the COAHEC NUS elective represents a feasible and potentially replicable model for strengthening underserved medicine training within undergraduate medical education.