



AHEC Scholars Community Engagement and Service 2026-2027

Updated July 2026 v3

As an **AHEC Scholars eligible activity**, this program consists of 40 hours of didactic activities and a minimum of 40 hours of field/community-based activities. The goal is to provide a longitudinal service-learning opportunity that allows for meaningful contributions to our community partners. Larner medical students may complete the AHEC Scholars pathway in their second, third or fourth year at LCOM. There is a selective application process; a limited number of students are selected based on the volunteer needs of the partnering community agencies, as well as program capacity and strength of the student application. General program and application questions can be directed to: Patti Smith Urie, Outreach Professional, AHEC Scholars. Patti.smith-urie@med.uvm.edu Service program oversight and agreements are supported by AHEC Faculty: Anne Morris, MD, Mark Pasanen, MD and Kathy Mariani, MPH, MD. The program is guided by these statements from the American College of Physicians.

Obligations of the Physician to Society

"Physicians should help the community and policymakers recognize and address the causes and social and environmental determinants of health, disease, and disability, including human rights concerns, discrimination, poverty, and violence. They should work toward ensuring access to health care for all persons; act to eliminate discrimination in health care; and help correct deficiencies in the availability, accessibility, and quality of health services, including mental health services, in the community.

Physicians should also explore how their own knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes influence their ability to fulfill these obligations."

Cultural Humility and Volunteerism

"Physicians should provide culturally sensitive care. Efficacy in this domain is enhanced by cultural humility, which emphasizes physician self-awareness, reflection, and a relationship centered approach to each patient.

Continuity and sustainability should guide the volunteer physician in working with the community, local physicians, and the health system to understand the health needs of the community and help prioritize them in cultural and economic context to achieve a lasting benefit, with an understanding of short- and long-term impact. The outcomes should be desired by and the interventions acceptable to the affected population."

American College of Physicians Ethics Manual |

Objectives

The broad goals of this AHEC Scholars activity are to provide students with exposure to health care topics not deeply explored in the LCOM curriculum and to support meaningful service to community agencies. Additionally, this initiative aims to provide student exposure to health care topics and societal issues from different viewpoints and perspectives and to step outside the classroom. Course content and activities include exploration of Vermont systems and services related to promoting and maintaining health through direct experiences with community-based organizations and other stakeholders. Service activities may be directly or indirectly related to health and medicine. Students learn ways physicians can partner with community groups and other professions to address issues of availability, accessibility, and quality of health services in the community. Through service, students enhance partnerships with community agencies to further goals agreed upon by the community partner, AHEC and the student volunteer.

Through participation in this program, students will be able to:

1. Discuss the benefits and responsibilities of medical professionals as volunteers within the communities they serve.
2. Discuss the responsibility of physicians to understand and address health disparities, community context, and social drivers of health. (AHEC focus area: social determinants of health)
3. Define a physician's role in advocacy and engage in advocacy strategies on current topics related to healthcare funding, healthcare policies and/or national and state laws.
4. Recognize the value of different expertise and perspectives for health promotion and community benefit. (AHEC focus area: interdisciplinary practice and teamwork)
5. Identify ways that community agencies address the unique cultural, language, and health literacy factors affecting the staff, volunteers and community members. (AHEC focus area: cultural responsiveness)
6. Describe Vermont's strengths and challenges in providing quality, affordable health care that meets the needs of Vermonters. (AHEC focus areas: medical practice transformation; social determinants of health)

AHEC Scholars Core Topic Areas

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

Interprofessional Education/ Interprofessional Practice: team-based care delivery, patient-centered care, effective teamwork

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: economic stability, education, social and community context, health and health care, neighborhood and built environment

Cultural Competency: recognize and address the unique culture and health literacy of consumers

Medical Practice Transformation: quality improvement, care coordination, cost containment, rural health care, primary care, team-based care

Current and Emerging Health Issues: current HRSA-approved topics: opioids and substance use disorders, oral health as part of overall health

Learning Activities

40 Didactic Hours

All students complete core asynchronous training combined with Vermont-focused materials and other learning opportunities. A program orientation session covers principles of community engagement and responsibilities and ethics in volunteer service. Other required didactics include a series of on-line modules from the American College of Physicians (ACP) and assigned readings, videos, films and activities, with reflection activities to make connections between training content and field activities. The ACP modules, *Caring with Compassion*, can be found here: [Caring with Compassion](#). The core 15 hours are required for all participants. The remaining hours

include options for live training, conferences, or events that relate to student interests, field hours, or future career plans. Examples include AHEC Scholars events, select AHEC Spotlight events, the UVM Health Equity Summit, New England Rural Health Conference, advocacy training at the Vermont State House, and other AHEC organized meetings, training, or events that pertain to course content and/or field activities. Students track and submit the 40 didactic hours on a provided hours log.

September 2026 orientations dates will be determined via meeting poll when the cohort is finalized. An in-person opportunity will be scheduled based on the poll. Virtual backup options will be developed with those who cannot make the in-person date.

- In the **M4 year**, students may enroll in a two-week elective block **Monday, February 1-Friday, February 12**. This protected time is an opportunity to participate in synchronous group learning and discussions, and to complete asynchronous course material. Course enrollment follows these steps:
 1. Interested students complete the Community Engagement and Service application.
 2. A meeting between AHEC and the student is scheduled. The meeting purpose is to confirm the timeframe and plan for completing the 40 volunteer hours. (**information about the volunteer commitment is provided below**)
 3. AHEC will enroll the student via Oasis to add the 2-week elective block to their schedule.

IMPORTANT: Students enrolled in the two-week elective course are expected to be in Vermont and available for in-person sessions during the two-week block. In-person training is held in the AHEC Classroom at UHC, at other campus locations, or in the community. Students should plan to complete all didactic assignments and submit end of program deliverables on or before February 12.

- In the **M3 year**, students may opt to use a professional development block to complete some or all didactic hours outlined in the course syllabus. For the 'student choice' hours, students are strongly encouraged to identify in-person learning opportunities and AHEC Scholars events that occur during the given block. But due to the staggered nature of the professional development blocks, some students will have fewer in-person options and will need to rely on pre-recorded training or modules. This makes the M3 year a less appealing option; most students should consider the M4 year instead, if possible. Interested students complete the Community Engagement and Service application and work with AHEC to develop the personalized professional development plan.
- In the **M2 year**, most students start as a cohort in the fall. All didactic and service hours must be completed by your identified end date. Many students choose to complete prior to dedicated study time. You may also choose a spring end date, with May as a firm deadline.
 - There are many in-person learning opportunities and AHEC Scholars events over the course of year and we expect M2s to participate in as many as possible.
 - Monthly progress check-ins with AHEC and/or community partner to ensure things stay on track.

Reflection

Included in the 40 didactic hours, students reflect on connections between the course materials, field activities, and AHEC Scholars priority areas by responding to prompts on an on-line discussion board. When feasible, participating students may opt for periodic in-person or virtual (zoom) discussions rather than written posts to a discussion board. Additional requirements include a one-two page end of program written reflection and an electronic survey.

40 Field Hours

Students complete **at least 40** volunteer service hours with community agency options approved by AHEC. The five agencies we currently partner with are described below. The community agencies are located in Vermont, and the field hours require in-person participation.

Service hours are spread over an identified timeframe that is determined based on the needs of the community agency. Prior to starting the program, a documented agreement is established to ensure all parties have a common understanding of the community agency's goals, the service activities the student will complete, and the timeframe for completion. Students record field hours on a provided hours log. After the 40-field hour requirement is met, many students continue the volunteer relationship beyond the completion of the AHEC Scholars pathway, as their schedule allows.

- In the M4 year, students may enroll in the two-week elective block -- **Monday, February 1-Friday, February 12, 2027**. Students enrolled in the elective will participate in scheduled group field visits in the community and may have additional opportunities for individual shadowing or service at other community agencies, if desired. These activities are in addition to the 40 hours of service to your identified agency. Students may continue to log volunteer service hours into March and April, if that is your identified timeframe. We expect at least 50% of the service hours to occur prior to the February block and completed logs with at least 40 service hours must be submitted by April 16, 2027.

- In the M3 year, students using a professional development block may include field hours in their plan.

IMPORTANT: While some volunteer service hours may be completed during the elective or professional development block, it is not possible to complete the 40 hours during the one- or two-week block. (Keeping the needs of the community agency at the forefront, it is not realistic for such a condensed timeframe to truly suit their interests.)

- In the M2 year, students complete service hours over the fall semester and finish them by the identified end date. Many students choose to complete prior to dedicated study time. You may also choose a spring end date, with May as a firm deadline.

Program Application

After reading the full program description, students should consider schedules, workload, and availability prior to applying. AHEC is available to meet to discuss details related to the didactic requirements and/or choosing the community agency that is the best fit for your schedule and your interests.

Questions can be directed to: Patti Smith Urie, Outreach Professional, AHEC Scholars at Patti.smith-urie@med.uvm.edu or book an appointment via Patti's booking link.

After considering the commitment, students apply to the program using this link.

<https://redcap.link/CommunityEngagementApp26-27>

This program has limited enrollment; decisions are made based on best fit for the program and community partners.

Field Activities – Currently Approved Sites

1. Champlain Valley Head Start

Collaborators: Justine Mee, Health Services Coordinator and Jennifer Fink, Family Services Coordinator
Champlain Valley Head Start

UVM/UVMMC partners: Sujata Singh, MD, Ophthalmologist; Sheila Chamberlin, Orthoptist; Stacey Jordan, Audiologist

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 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.
- CVHS is interested in identifying up to 6 LCOM students each year to continue and possibly expand on the activities described. With the partners listed above, Larner students will assist CVHS with health screening and follow-up events for children and families. As desired by CVHS, additional health and literacy related activities or events may also be developed.

This service opportunity may appeal to students interested in ophthalmology or hearing, early childhood development, and pediatrics or family medicine.

Some planning/coordination meetings may take place over zoom. In-person availability for events and activities is required - students and partners will determine mutually available dates that meet the needs of CVHS staff and families.

2. Feeding Champlain Valley

Collaborators: Samantha Greene, Volunteer Coordinator and Pat Chojnowski, Food Hub Supervisor,
Feeding Champlain Valley

Background

- Access to healthy food is a critical social determinant of health (SDOH). Healthy eating is influenced by many factors, such as transportation, availability, nutrition and food preparation knowledge, cost, cultural background, eating habits, health conditions and specific dietary needs.
- Charitable food programs have a long history of addressing hunger. In recent years many have incorporated additional aims related to overcoming stigma, providing culturally appropriate foods,

reducing food waste, incorporating nutrition education, increasing healthier options, and supporting local farmers and food systems.

- Feeding Champlain Valley is a hunger relief nonprofit based in Burlington, serving four different counties in Vermont: Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle, and Addison. They believe food is a human right, and work to alleviate hunger by providing education and training, grocery distribution, meal production, food rescue, deliveries to homes and food access sites, an online market, food kiosks, and a food truck. [What We Do - Feeding Champlain Valley](#)
- Feeding Champlain Valley serves over 12,000 people a year, including 9,000 each month at the Burlington food shelf alone. There are over 100 volunteers across the different programs, doing tasks like stocking fresh food and dry goods, signing in clients as they shop, packing and delivering grocery boxes for delivery program.
- 40% of the food distributed has been donated or rescued. Rescued food means food saved from going to waste – it includes food picked from local grocery stores or gleaned (harvested) from fields.
- The agency has also developed innovative programs that are responsive to the community. One collaborative project, the Food Access Network, launched an online ordering system called PantrySoft to tailor weekly food boxes that are delivered to homes or picked up by recipients. See [Online ordering system created for Vermonters facing food insecurity - VTDigger](#).

There are many ways for Larner student volunteers to help advance the mission and goals of Feeding Champlain Valley and the various programs. This opportunity is ideally completed in scheduled shifts over a period of time. Programs generally run Mon-Friday during business hours. Students interested in completing 40 field hours of service with Feeding Champlain Valley should list specific interests. Assignments will prioritize the needs of the agency, balanced with student availability. Nearly all service hours are likely to be in-person.

Specific volunteer needs:

Packing & Delivery of Home Deliveries - Commitment of 1 day/week for 4-8 hours. Ideally a consistent day of the week (or a few students who can share a day of the week to aim for consistent coverage).

Gleaning & Delivery of Gleaned Produce in Grand Isle & Franklin Counties - **Summer to Mid-November**. Ideally a consistent day of the week on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday (or share with other students for consistent coverage).

3. Mercy Connections

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

Background

- 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.

- 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.
- Mercy Connections has facilitated Larner student initiatives to bring lifestyle medicine topics to women at the South Burlington women's facility and Mercy Connections community programs. Larner student leaders of the Culinary Medicine course piloted a series for students to provide nutrition, wellness, and hands on cooking instruction.
- Other students may be interested in bringing movement or other types of wellness activities into the facility or to Mercy Connections participants in the community upon re-entry.
- Students must complete a Department of Corrections background check and volunteer training prior to entering the corrections facility.

This service opportunity may appeal to students interested in the intersection of complex social issues and medical care, lifestyle or integrative Medicine, addiction medicine, and community engagement. Students chosen for this program should be able to commit to at least one five session series of events over time (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly). Morning, evening, and Saturday schedules are possible.

4. AALV Youth Program

Collaborators: Samuel Dingba, AALV Youth Program

Background:

- The Association of Africans Living in Vermont is a non-profit organization in Burlington, VT. It started as a group of new Americans assisting other African new Americans resettling in Vermont, primarily through the federal Refugee Resettlement program. AALV has since broadened to support all immigrant groups.
- AALV mission: *"AALV helps new Americans from all parts of the world gain independence in their new communities through a range of integration services, including bridging case management, workforce development, behavioral health awareness, and interpreter services programming. With support from our multicultural, multilingual staff, our clients are able to smoothly transition to living and working in Vermont. Learn more at: [AALV](#)*
- There is a Youth Development program at AALV led by Samuel Dingba [Youth Development Program | aalv](#). Over the past few years, groups of medical students have attended youth program events and brought health and career exploration workshops to the students there.
- Sam and the youth participants are interested in expanding activities with Larner students. One idea is to participate in community service projects together, allowing both the medical student mentors and the youth program participants to contribute to the community.

This service opportunity may appeal to students interested in global health, migration, community responsiveness to newcomers, and working with adolescents or young adults. Students who are multilingual or have experience working with immigrant communities should list this in their application. Students interested in working with the AALV Youth Program will have an opportunity to build relationships with the participants and develop this service opportunity.

AALV's current interest for medical student volunteers is helping students in their late afternoon/early evening tutoring program. Additionally, Thursdays from 4:30-6:30 are a preferred day for monthly workshops or community field trips during the school year. Work with AALV youth will take place in person at the youth center or in the community.

5. The Janet S. Munt Family Room

Collaborators: Sarah Sinnott, Family and Community Engagement Director for the Family Room

UVM/UVMMC partners: LCOM Social Justice Coalition advisors

Background:

- The Janet S. Munt Family Room is a unique parent child center providing programs that are accessible to all and flexible enough to meet the needs of our changing community.
- Programs support connection for parents and families, provide education, promote physical, social, emotional, and linguistic development in children, and nurture a vibrant and diverse community. Learn more at: [Family Room Programs | Burlington VT | The Janet S. Munt Family Room \(thefamilyroomvt.org\)](#)
- Larner students have filled various volunteer roles at the Family Room, including
 - Helping to develop an ongoing “Super Group” for children who are on the autism spectrum or neurodiverse, along with their siblings and families. Super Group meets bi-weekly.
 - Attending monthly ‘paperwork nights’ where multilingual volunteers provide translation of forms and provide information for Spanish-speaking families. This is a collaborative effort with Bridges to Health and other community partners.
 - The LCOM Social Justice Coalition has helped organize and put on collaborative events such as health fairs, with various screenings and wellness focused activities.
 - Students leaders in the Culinary Medicine course have provided nutrition training.

This service opportunity may appeal to students interested in child development, neurodiversity, working with children and families, and partnering with other organizations. Students who are multilingual or have experience working with diverse populations should list this in their application.

A top priority for the Family Room is finding volunteers for Super Group on the 2nd and 4th Monday from 4:30-6:30, the ASD Support Group on the 2nd Saturday of each month, as well as swimming lessons (Super Group and ASD Group) on Sundays. [Calendars FR - Google Sheets](#). Collaborating with the SJC leaders, students could also contribute to other activities or events, as needed.