

The Connection NEWSLETTER

Winter/Spring 2026

AREA L AHEC

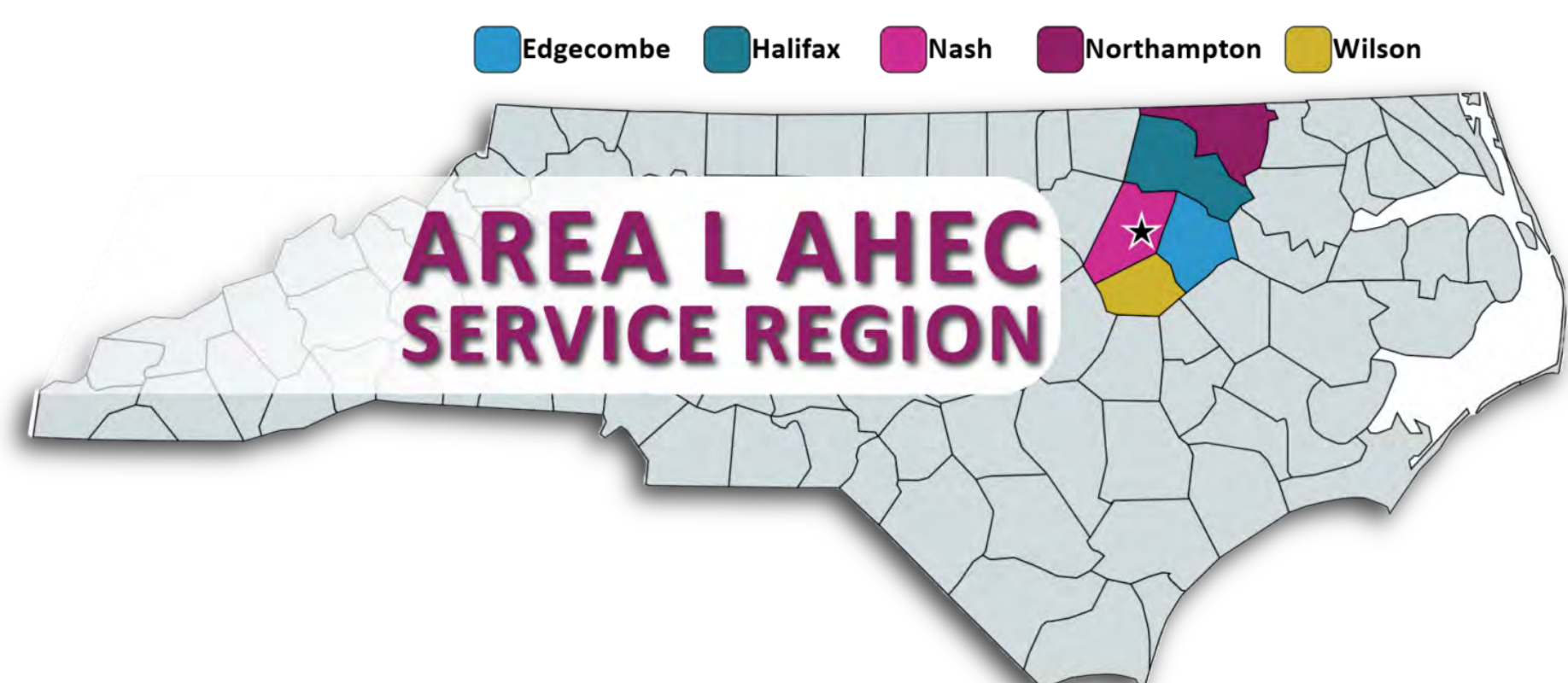
PART OF NC AHEC

**RECRUIT
TRAIN
RETAIN**

Regional Healthcare Workforce Development Meeting - Launch of the Regional Health Talent Alliance Collaborative



Last November, Area L AHEC brought together employers, educators, and stakeholders from across the five-county region to discuss a critical need: the healthcare workforce. This convening marked the launch of the regional **Health Talent Alliance Collaborative**, an initiative of the NC Center on the Workforce for Health, NC Chamber Foundation, and NC AHEC regions, designed to address pervasive healthcare worker shortages in North Carolina. The group reviewed the **Health Talent Alliance (HTA) 2025 Report** on educational supply and employer needs for registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, certified nursing assistants, and medical assistants and shared insights as to how the data reflects organizational level needs. Moving forward, the collaborative will work together to discuss the most critical challenges for the region and develop targeted actions to address them.



The 2025 Annual Report is here!
Take a look at our regional impact this past year!



Welcome to the Board

Andrew Pernesky

*Chief
Financial
Officer -
Rural Health
Group, Inc.*



Practice Support Services

Elevate Your Leadership: Join the Practice Management Academy

Whether you are a seasoned administrator, a provider looking to sharpen your business acumen, or an aspiring manager, the NC AHEC Practice Management Academy is your go-to resource. Membership is free and provides you with:

- **Educational Excellence:** Access to specialized training and free courses
- **Strategic Networking:** Connect with a community of peer managers across the state
- **Timely Updates:** Stay informed on industry news and upcoming registration deadlines

Click [Here](#) to Join the Academy Community Today

CY 2026 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule: Key Updates

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has finalized the Physician Fee Schedule (PFS) for 2026. This year marks a significant shift as CMS implements a dual conversion factor system and new adjustments designed to reflect modern practice efficiencies.

New Two-Tiered Conversion Factor:

As of January 1, 2026, reimbursement rates **differ based on participation in Advanced Alternative Payment Models (APMs):**

- **Qualifying APM Participants (QPs):** Providers meeting quality and cost thresholds in Advanced APMs
- **Non-Qualifying Participants:** All other physicians and practitioners

Policy Update: 2026 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (PFS)

Provider Category	Final 2026 Conversion Factor	Projected Increase
Qualifying APM (QP)	\$33.57	+3.77%
Non-Qualifying	\$33.40	+3.26%

The Final Rule for CY 2026 introduces significant statutory changes to reimbursement structures. Most notably, **CMS is implementing two distinct conversion factors based on participation in Advanced Alternative Payment Models (APMs).**

At a quick glance: Conversion Factor Changes

Metric	Qualifying APM Participants (QP)	Non-Qualifying Participants
Statutory Update	+0.75%	+0.25%
Final 2026 Conversion Factor	\$33.57 (+ 3.77%)	\$33.40 (+ 3.26%)

Note: These figures include the mandated 2.50% one-year increase and RVU adjustments. Updates to Geographic Practice Cost Indices (GPCIs) and malpractice RVUs have also been finalized.

Deep Dive: For a detailed breakdown of these changes, download the **2026 Quality Payment Program Final Rule Fact Sheet & Policy Comparison Table (PDF)**.

How NC AHEC Practice Support Can Help

In an era of shifting payment models and increasing operational demands, our Practice Support (PS) team offers expert coaching to help your clinic thrive. Our core services include:

- Financial & Operational Health: Practice Management best practices and operational assessments
- Value-Based Care: Performance optimization and Advanced Medical Home (AMH) support
- Clinical Integration: Behavioral Health Collaborative Care Model (CoCM) and clinical workflow redesign
- Technology & Workflow: EHR optimization, Telehealth integration, and HIE training
- Navigation: Medicaid Managed Care education and issue resolution

Let's Tackle Stuff Together. Whatever your practice needs to thrive, we're ready to support you. Contact us for tailored support and technical assistance designed to focus on what matters most to your practice.

Email Becky.Dixon@arealahec.org.

Continuing Professional Development: UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Coming Soon!

Mind & Body: Addressing Adolescent Substance Use and Mental Health
April 29, 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM, Hybrid

Offering ACPE Credit

OSHA Laws: Annual Spring Bloodborne Pathogens and Hazcom Update
April 17, 9:00 AM - 12:15 PM

Pharmacy Law Update 2026
June 11, 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM

35th Annual Pharmacy Symposium
Nov. 11-12, 9:00 AM - 4:15 PM

Offering CME and Nursing Education Contact Hours:

Dates and/or Times TBD

- **Common Clinical Scenarios: Patient Centered Care on MOUD Therapy and The Peer Support Specialist: A Bridge to Stigma Reduction in the Healthcare Setting**
- **Demystifying OUD and MOUD During and After Incarceration**
- **Medication Management Collaborations**
- **Perinatal Substance Use Disorder with a Focus on Infectious Disease (May 1)**
- **Psychostimulant Considerations for the Medical Provider**
- **The One-Liner MOUD: Prescribing and Management Best Practices for Long-Term Success**
- **Women's Health Conference**

Online, Self-Paced

CGWEP: Falls Prevention Awareness: Advanced Training for Home Health Aides

New CE Opportunities: Partnering for Resilience

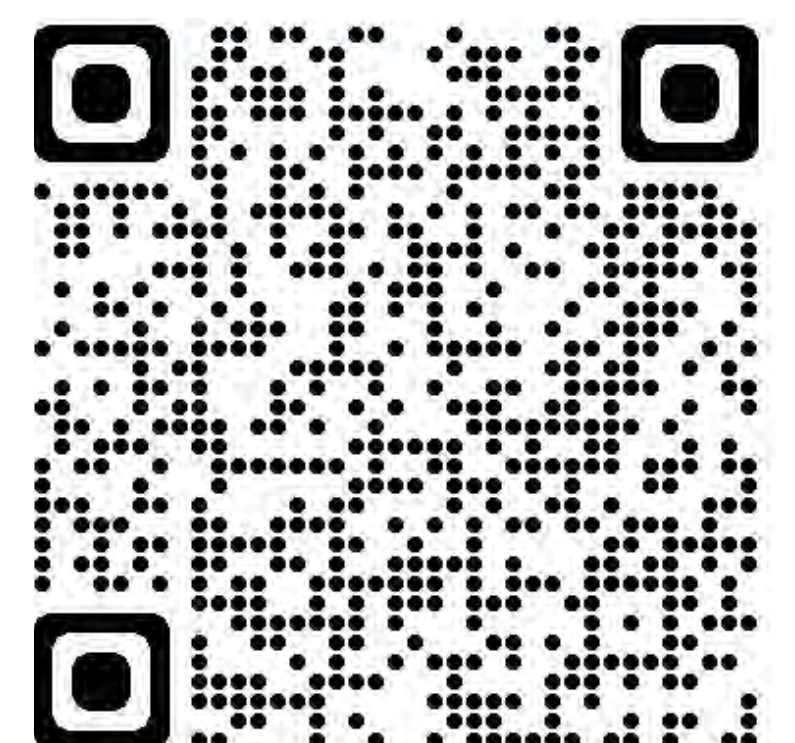
We've partnered with Resources for Resilience to bring you a full slate of CE-eligible courses in 2026. From "Recharging" to "Leading Through Hard Times," these sessions are designed to help you build a robust resiliency skill set.

Featured Courses: Recharging for Resilience, Reconnecting Through Hard Times, Resiliency Champions, Resiliency Ambassadors, and Reconnect for Resilience

RN Refresher Program:

Ready to Return to Nursing? Healthcare needs your expertise! If you've been out of the field for five years or more, or if you're an active nurse looking for a comprehensive knowledge update, our RN Refresher Program is designed for you. Gain the confidence and updated training required to excel in today's healthcare environment. For more information, contact Lisa.Renfrow@arealahec.org.

Continuing Education Calendar



Stay Connected



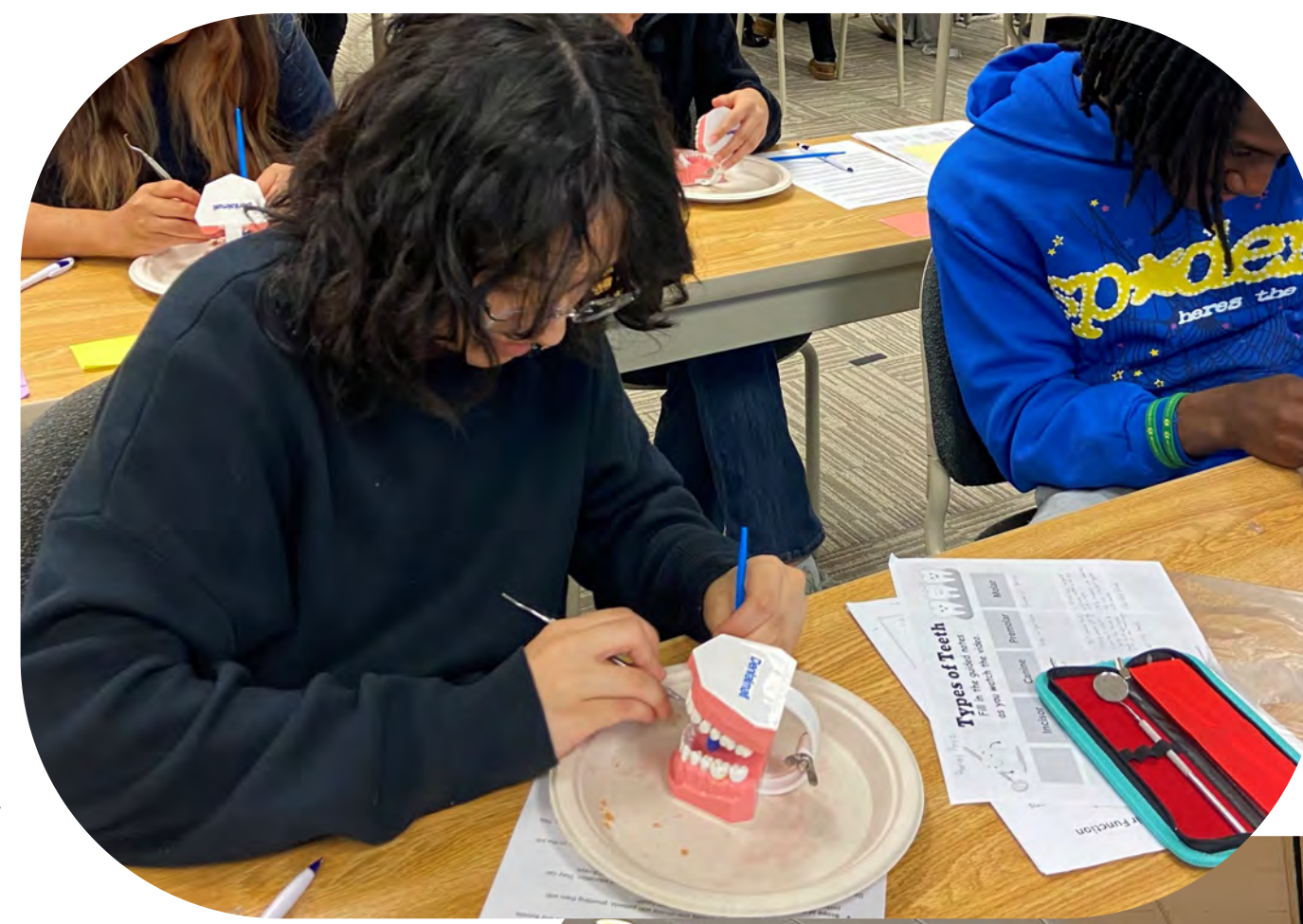
Coming Soon:

Annual Regional Advisory Council Meeting

We're gearing up for our annual meeting to discuss the evolving needs of our region. Check your inbox in the coming weeks for your official invitation and event details.

Health Careers

Thanks to a grant received from the **American Dental Education Association**, we were able to offer two full days of learning focused on oral health careers to high school students from across the region, including Edgecombe County Public Schools, KIPP Pride High, Northeast Carolina Prep, Rocky Mount Prep, Sallie B. Howard, and Wilson County Schools. Students were introduced to the history of the dental profession, types of teeth and their functions, built clay teeth models, practiced dental scaling, learned proper flossing and brushing techniques, and examined the connections between oral and whole body health.



Pathways

ACT Exam Prep Course

March 7, 2026
9:00 AM - 3:00 PM
Live Webinar
Free!

Are you taking the ACT soon? Need to brush up on your test-taking strategies? This one-day workshop will help you prepare through a virtual group session facilitated by CCE Tutoring. Each participant will receive a practice test book that will be used throughout the training. Space is limited! Open to any high school student in Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash, Northampton, and Wilson County.

NC AHEC Future Health Professionals Week March 8-14, 2026

New and Upcoming! NC AHEC is excited to launch this statewide initiative designed to inspire high school students and families to explore health career pathways and opportunities across North Carolina. This week will offer a mix of asynchronous resources for educators and students, statewide social media features, spotlight videos, and virtual sessions. [Learn more!](#)

AHEC Scholars

Applications open in February for Cohort 9 of the [NC AHEC Scholars Program](#)! Join a national network, meet leaders in health care, and develop the skills you need to make a difference in rural and underserved communities!



Resource Highlight: Facilities and Educational Spaces

Area L AHEC offers dedicated training spaces for healthcare professionals in Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash, Northampton, and Wilson counties. Our rooms provide a focused environment for specialized skill development and rural workforce excellence.

How You Can Use Our Spaces:

- **Professional Development:** Seminars, workshops, and consultations
- **Student Growth:** Clinical training and health science development
- **Professional Meetings:** Approved gatherings and events
- **Community Impact:** Public health education and outreach

Ready to book? Just **complete this form** and we'll be in touch!

Your Support Makes a Difference!

Thank you for being a vital part of our mission. Your financial contributions ensure that Area L AHEC remains a cornerstone of support for healthcare professionals and students throughout our region. We truly couldn't do this work without you.

To make a gift, please mail checks to: Area L AHEC
PO Drawer 7368 Rocky Mount, NC 27804-0368.