The University of Minnesota’s historic mission as a land grant institution inspires the Academic Health Center’s (AHC) commitment to preparing the next generation of health professionals that can improve the health and well-being of Minnesota communities and their families. As rural communities and higher education institutions continue to face financial challenges during difficult economic times, the role of partnership in addressing common challenges becomes quite evident to both. Rural communities clearly understand the role of local health care in supporting their economic vitality and caring for their citizens. In return, the AHC understands that partnering with communities translates to future health professionals that are prepared for and interested in providing rural care.

Within the Academic Health Center, the evolving philosophy of creating partnerships with communities at a regional level is our Greater Minnesota Strategy. Through this Strategy, which is supported by President Bruininks, we are committed to focusing the work of rural based educational programs in order to increase program efficiency, reduce costs and share in financial risks and opportunities with community partners. This partnership ensures that the students, the communities and the partners grow together by working together, enjoying the benefits and challenges of true collaboration.

An emerging asset to support the goals of the Greater Minnesota Strategy for the University and Minnesota communities is Minnesota Area Health Education Center (Minnesota AHEC). Minnesota AHEC is a federal-state matching funds cooperative agreement through Health Resources and Services Administration Bureau of Health Professions designed to regionalize the training of health professions students to underserved areas throughout the state. Minnesota AHEC is the platform to support the goals of the Greater Minnesota Strategy through the continued development of strong community-campus partnerships that provide rural disciplinary and interdisciplinary educational opportunities for health professions students and address unique community health and health workforce issues in rural areas of Minnesota.

Minnesota AHEC provides service through regional hubs being developed in Northeastern and Southern Minnesota. The regional hubs work with communities to promote existing rural health programs and bring community and University interests together to address health challenges unique to the region. Through health careers exploration, support of students interested in rural health, health professions training and support of rural health practitioners, communities and the Academic Health Center can be successful in identifying opportunities that meet the needs of rural communities. In addition, new developments in technology further enhance the ability to connect with resources around the world, supporting education and linking students of all ages with experiences and information that were once only accessible in urban centers.

Through the Greater Minnesota Strategy and with community partners, the Academic Health Center is striving to support collaboration and the identification of strategies and solutions to address some of the difficult health related challenges that face rural communities.

For more information about the Greater Minnesota Strategy and Minnesota AHEC, contact Jeny Stumpf Kertz, Deputy Director, Minnesota AHEC at jkertz@umn.edu or (612) 624.1923.