

# Meet NAO PROGRAM Member, Dr, Steven Zucker



*Dr. Steven Zucker, Program Director of Nova Southeastern University AHEC Program Office*

It is an ongoing respect for and love of the elegance of the AHEC mission, built upon a solid foundation of academic and community partnerships—and its potential to benefit society—that continues to motivate Dr. Zucker after his 40 years of involvement with AHEC.

Dr. Zucker first became involved with AHEC in 1979 at the Eastern Virginia AHEC Program. In 1985, he left Virginia to become the first AHEC Program Director in Florida at Southeastern College of Osteopathic Medicine (now the Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine at Nova Southeastern University), where he continues to serve as Associate Dean for Community Affairs as well as AHEC Program Director.

Over the past four decades, Dr. Zucker's AHEC teams have had numerous outstanding accomplishments.

These include addressing major societal issues pertinent to underserved communities and populations, such as workforce maldistribution in rural and inner city areas, training of providers relative to emerging health priorities such as immigrant and minority health and HIV/AIDS, as well as a major and broad-based program focused on tobacco cessation and training.

Another of Dr. Zucker's proud achievements relates to his leading role, beginning in the early 1990s, in the establishment of the Florida AHEC Network. The initiative unified Florida's now five AHEC participating medical schools and 10 affiliated regional AHEC centers by forming a truly robust statewide system for health professional training and support for underserved communities in one of the nation's largest states.

"I do take great pride in having worked behind the scenes for years in putting together and strengthening this AHEC Network, and helping it gain the widespread recognition it so richly deserves," he said. "As individual AHEC programs and centers, each doing their own thing, we would never have attained the level of success, funding, and community engagement we continue to have today."

Personally, his most rewarding professional accomplishment as AHEC Director has been the fight against tobacco—the leading preventable cause of death, disease, and health care costs in our society. *(continued on page 2)*



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In 2007, Dr. Zucker and several AHEC Network colleagues were successful in advocating that the Florida Legislature include AHEC as a major component of the state's newly developed Tobacco Free Florida Program.

The results of this effort have been truly remarkable with more than 160,000 smokers across Florida having attended cessation services provided by Florida's AHECs, and well over 100,000 health professions students and community practitioners having received training on the treatment of tobacco dependence. In addition, Florida's AHECs have provided nearly 300,000 school children with preventive education focusing on the health consequences resulting from tobacco use. This comprehensive tobacco program has been so successful that the state has also entrusted Florida's AHECs recently with significant pilot funding to utilize its academic and community-based infrastructure to address the opioid epidemic.



Having a national organization such as the NAO has been, and continues to be, a key component of our development and success. "Through the National Organization of AHEC Program Directors (the precursor organization to NAO), I gained a rare and invaluable opportunity to network with and learn from some of the true AHEC pioneers of that early era" Dr. Zucker said.

"My boundless respect for the beauty and great potential of linking town and gown through AHEC to serve community needs was formed in these early national meetings and phone conferences," Dr. Zucker added. "The advocacy skills I learned working directly with Dr. Mayer and others have helped me greatly to assure continuous state funding for Florida's AHECs."

In addition to its essential role in mobilizing and leading a coordinated national advocacy effort, Dr. Zucker also recognizes the importance of NAO as a critical forum for networking and sharing of best practices and lessons learned, which has also become integral to AHEC's ongoing evolution and overall success.

The AHEC success story is one that wholly supports Dr. Zucker's firm belief that "When the cause is right, and when good people dedicate themselves to the solutions, great things can and do happen." To him, the AHEC cause has always been right, and, through the NAO, good people from throughout the nation have dedicated themselves to working together to find worthy solutions over many years, resulting in the emergence and continued growth of a very special program for the nation.

**Dr. Zucker is in good company –  
66% of those surveyed ranked  
NETWORKING as a valued  
benefit of NAO membership!**

(2018 NAO Membership Survey)

To learn more about NAO Membership categories, visit [www.nationalahec.org](http://www.nationalahec.org). To nominate a member to highlight email [LinBrowning@centralcoahec.org](mailto:LinBrowning@centralcoahec.org)