

2026 AHNS Cancer Prevention Service Community Service Award Application

Nebraska Head & Neck Cancer Screening and Prevention Initiative

Buffet Cancer Center – University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, NE

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Targeted Population

Underserved populations in the greater Nebraska area including western Iowa, South Dakota, and Kansas. These populations consist of (a) rural population limited to healthcare by “healthcare deserts” (highlighted in Figure 1), significant travel distances to specialty care, and socioeconomic hardship including education and income (b) urban populations with access limited by socioeconomic factors and a fragmented and overburdened healthcare system which may prevent or delay appropriate care.

Events Targeted

Three major events will be targeted, including the University of Nebraska Cattleman’s Ball June 6-7, 2026, the University of Nebraska *One Stop Cancer Shop* in Fall of 2026, and the Nebraska State Fair August 28 - September 7 in Grand Island, Nebraska.

The Cattleman’s Ball of Nebraska is a longstanding annual fundraiser that supports cancer research. This is a unique event which rotates to a different host community each year, drawing a large and diverse crowd from various regions of the state including rural and underserved. At this event, there is an established Health and Wellness tent organized in partnership with the Fred and Pamela Buffet Cancer Center and other UNMC partners. This aspect focused on cancer prevention initiatives including screening, education, and outreach for event attendees and those in the community. Our partnership with the Cattleman’s Ball of Nebraska would target an already established population that represents communities across the Nebraska and Western Iowa.

The University of Nebraska *One Stop Cancer Shop* is a public health initiative to provide free cancer screening to the city of Omaha, Nebraska and the surrounding residents of Eastern Nebraska and Western Iowa. This event allows uninsured, walk-in patients access to free cancer screening and follow up care. The success of the events held on September 27, 2025 and November 1, 2025 providing comprehensive, effective screening events for breast, lung, prostate, and colorectal cancer provide us with another event to provide head and neck cancer screening to uninsured, locoregional patient populations.

The Nebraska State Fair is an 11-day event that frequently reaches capacity drawing from diverse communities across the state of Nebraska. The 2025 Nebraska State Fair was a tremendous success with a total attendance of 334,383 with daily attendance rising to more than 54,000 attendees. Hosted in Grand Island, Nebraska, this annual event provides a significant opportunity to provide early head and neck cancer screenings to both urban and rural patient populations statewide.

Methods

Recruitment efforts for participants for the events will stem from university-led efforts and local broadcasting and business advertisements. Our advertising group will work with radio stations, local shops, and grocery stores in Omaha and surrounding rural areas. With a new regional campus in Kearney, Nebraska, we will utilize these connections to extend our advertising efforts to reach communities in rural eastern Nebraska. Furthermore, we will work in concert with the other specialties (colorectal surgery, general surgery, thoracic surgery, and urology) who have demonstrated success at promoting the *One Stop Cancer Shop* annual event in promoting screening efforts to maximize the effect of our resources. Additionally, there will be a Google Voice

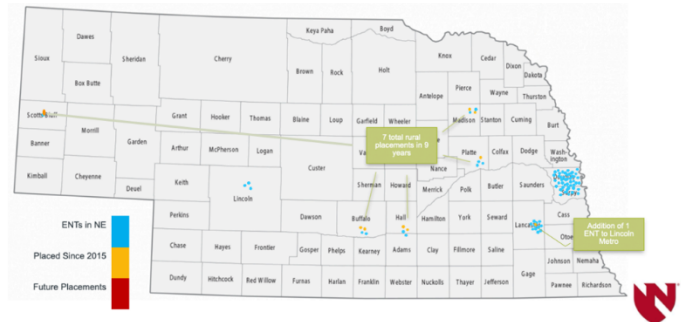


Figure 1. Overview of practicing otolaryngologists in Nebraska. Blue denotes established providers. Yellow denotes UNMC Otolaryngology Residency Program graduates placed since 2015.

number where community members can ask questions about the event and gain access to screening measures. By targeting these three separate events held across the state of Nebraska in June, August, September, and November, we believe our longitudinal efforts will improve our ability to reach a broader patient population.

Efforts during the events will center around awareness, education, and free screenings. Our main goals will be to (a) highlight the significance of head and neck cancer, (b) improve understanding of worrisome signs and symptoms for people to share in their personal communities, (c) promote and encourage HPV vaccinations when appropriate, and (d) provide in person free screening efforts for participants consisting of comprehensive head and neck examinations.

Digestible materials will be presented to improve awareness of the impact and incidence of head and neck cancer, advocate for smoking cessation and HPV vaccination, and provide education regarding common signs and symptoms of head and neck cancer. These will be delivered in pamphlets that have been previously used within the University of Nebraska Department of Head & Neck Surgery with appropriate modifications made to the targeted population of each event.

Expected Outcomes and Community Impact

Our main goals of the events will be to (a) improve awareness of head neck cancer, (b) provide free head neck cancer screening and discussion of community resources, and (c) provide educational materials regarding the signs and symptoms of head and neck cancer and the importance of HPV vaccinations.

In an effort to improve awareness, we plan to have brief discussions with attendees and their friends and family regarding the significance of head and neck cancer, risk factors, and the signs and symptoms to prompt medical evaluation. Medical students and resident physicians will help to lead discussions amongst groups to emphasize the importance of prevention with lifestyle changes and the HPV vaccine.

Screening efforts will be completed by a team of nurses, medical students, resident physicians, and attending surgeons with a goal to screen at least 100 patients across each event for signs and symptoms of head and neck cancer. If there is concern based on the screening history and physical exam, detailed instructions regarding clinic follow up will be provided to the patients. At this time, our team will also obtain consent to contact each patient ensure timely clinic scheduling.

Educational materials will focus on improving participants' understandings of signs and symptoms of head and neck cancer and preventative measures. We will aim to first inform participants, with an emphasis on them advocating for awareness and spreading the information and resources to their community networks.

Estimated Cost

The total projected cost of this initiative is approximately \$850–\$1,000, supplemented by significant in-kind support from the Department of Otolaryngology and University of Nebraska Medical Center partners. Screening supplies are estimated at \$100–\$150 and include disposable tongue blades, gloves, otoscope specula, and infection-control materials. Diagnostic equipment (headlights and otoscopes) will be provided by the department. Educational materials are estimated at \$150–\$250 and include printed oral cancer and HPV vaccination pamphlets (English and Spanish), supplemented by the Department of Otolaryngology and University Discounts. We will also hand out informational sunscreen bottles, estimated at \$100, providing both practical protection and durable outreach. Targeted community radio, business and community advertising is estimated at approximately \$500, focusing on underserved populations in rural Nebraska, Omaha, and western Iowa using nonprofit or PSA rates.

Additional Funding

We will be working closely with The Fred and Pamela Buffett Cancer Center and the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Specifically, we will partner with the Buffett Cancer Center's Community Outreach and Engagement Team for insight into best serving our targeted population. Medical student and resident volunteer involvement will partially support this effort. The Department of Otolaryngology has resident-allocated funds that may be applied, and medical students on the team will apply for outreach grants within the College of Medicine. Additional regional and statewide funding opportunities and donations for the cause will be pursued to support our efforts. Overall, these additional funding opportunities will help to amplify the impact made by the AHNS screening grant and cement longitudinal funding sources for these efforts.