



2019

Regional Needs Assessment 2019: Executive Summary

EPIDEMIOLOGICAL PROFILE, YOUTH SUBSTANCE USE AND
MISUSE TRENDS, AND PREVENTION EFFORTS IN THE TEXAS GULF
COAST REGION

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Executive Summary

The Regional Needs Assessment (RNA) is a document created by the Prevention Resource Center (PRC) in Region 6 along with Evaluators from PRCs across the state of Texas and supported by The Council on Recovery and the Texas Health and Human Resources Commission (HHSC). The PRC 6 serves 13 counties in the Texas Gulf Coast Region.

This RNA was designed to aid PRCs, HHSC, and community stakeholders in long-term strategic prevention planning based on most current information relative to the unique needs of the diverse communities in the state of Texas. This document will present demographics, summaries of statistics, and prevalence rates relevant to risk and protective factors associated with substance use and misuse, as well as consumption patterns and consequences data. This RNA will also provide insight related to gaps in services and data availability challenges.

A team of regional evaluators has procured national, state, regional, and local data through partnerships and collaboration with diverse agencies in sectors such as law enforcement, public health, and education, among others. The data obtained through these partnerships have been synthesized and compiled into this comprehensive reference source. PRC 6 staff members recognize those collaborators who contributed to the creation of this RNA.

Key findings:

1. As predicted, there were some indicators that showed the impact of Hurricane Harvey on Region 6 Gulf coast counties and this definitely deserves some discussion, here. The trends for indicators in the Society Domain section of Environmental Risk Factors in this needs assessment, particularly those that provide information on levels of dependence on public assistance, homelessness, and violent crime rates, which are conditions one might assume to typically follow such a catastrophic event. The data for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) show a distinct increase for Region 6, overall, for calendar year 2017, with what seems to be a return to pre-Harvey levels, even back down to 2015 levels for 2018. It could also be possible that this kind of drop in number of SNAP recipients in 2018 is associated with the child homelessness or displacement issues that many residents faced, and continue to face, after Hurricane Harvey hit.

The child homelessness data begins to show the kind of impact Harvey had on individuals experiencing homelessness. Although there are only three data points for each county in Region 6 (data sets from Texas Education Agency, that include child homelessness data, only go as far back to the 2016-2017 school year), the data shows that homelessness rates more than doubled and even tripled for many counties, especially many of the coastal counties, in Region 6 during the school year that Harvey hit, compared to the previous year. Subsequently, many of the child homelessness rates seemingly returned to pre-Harvey rates for the 2018-2019 school year. In addition to coastal counties, Liberty County, positioned near the mouth of the Liberty River and experienced record rainfall during Harvey, appears to have experienced significant increases in several indicators, as well.

2. Region 6 currently has eight substance use prevention coalitions, all concentrated in coastal counties, which are definitely warranted. However, it seems that it is time to make a more concerted effort in directing attention regarding substance use prevention out toward those

non-coastal counties that seem to be suffering, especially where indicators of risk factors are concerned. Particularly notable during compilation of the current RNA, Liberty County seems to be in need of strong prevention efforts. As there are no state-funded community prevention coalitions in Liberty County, nor are there any state-funded Youth Prevention Programs in Liberty County, perhaps the community readiness for ushering both types of prevention of prevention efforts into the county is now at a level where successful implementation is a strong possibility. This is particularly important as the substance use treatment, mental health, health care center, and buprenorphine provider services (one provider of each in this county) are almost non-existent in this county.

3. Vaping and marijuana consumption continue to demand attention of prevention providers, as the data presented, here, along with the societal and cultural influences arising from the legalization of marijuana are, probably here to stay. The results of focus groups with adults and youth invoke concern regarding the increase in vaping, the ease with which vaping paraphernalia can be obtained (even in the mail) and concealed, and the use of vape pens to smoke marijuana concentrates in them with a pleasantly scent or no odor at all. Houston HIDTA found in their annual Drug Threat Assessment that vaping is showing a significant upward surge in adolescents, a finding that resonated with adolescent substance use professionals who participated in the aforementioned adult groups conducted by the PRC 6. HIDTA also reports that marijuana is the most trafficked and most frequently seized illicit drugs in Texas. Influence of increased marijuana availability, along with slight decrease on perception of harm measures, the threat of marijuana for teens is seen as marijuana concentrates (wax and oil) and high-grade/hydroponic marijuana are the top two emerging trends. Edibles incorporating the high doses of THC are being produced as candy and baked goods and poses yet another trend of which providers need to be aware, as youth have been found to consume such products in alarming quantities, and alarming because the high THC potencies in these products are causing individuals to overdose and require medical attention.