

Regional Needs Assessment

REGION VI: THE COUNCIL ON RECOVERY
PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER 6

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Executive Summary

What is the RNA?

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

This assessment was designed to aid PRC's, HHSC, and community stakeholders in long-term strategic prevention planning based on the most current information relative to the unique needs of the diverse communities in the State of Texas. This document will present a summary of statistics relevant to risk and protective factors associated with drug use, consumption patterns and consequences data, and it will offer insight related to gaps in services and data availability challenges.

Who writes the RNA?

A team of Data Coordinators has procured national, state, regional, and local data through partnerships of collaboration with diverse agencies in sectors such as law enforcement, public health, and education, among others.

How is the RNA informed (data collections)?

Qualitative data collection has been conducted, in the form of surveys, focus groups, and interviews with key informants. The information obtained through these partnerships has been analyzed and synthesized in the form of this Regional Needs Assessment. PRC 6 recognizes those collaborators who contributed to the creation of this RNA. Quantitative data has been extrapolated from federal and state agencies to ensure reliability and accuracy.

Main key findings from this assessment include:

1. Alcohol continues to be the primary substance of concern regarding youth consumption and intervening environmental variables. Before moving into discussion of alcohol as a concern, it is important to first unpack the term 'intervening variables' within the current sociological context. Currently, intervening variables should not be referred to lightly as the nation, and world are feeling the effects that a pandemic poses on a society. The arrival of COVID-19 in the United States, and more specifically, in Texas and Region 6, has put its inhabitants on lockdown. This pandemic has touched the population through more risk factors at one time than what would normally be experienced by all at one time. For individuals who were already behind the curve and economically disadvantaged before March 2020, many are reaching the depths of despair during this time when businesses are shut down, jobs are scarce and money for bills and rent even scarcer. The mental and behavioral health issues, including trauma, depression, suicidality, and, of course substance use and misuse, have been pronounced to a level possibly not seen since the Great Depression. As a result, we have seen online and at-home alcohol sales increased exponentially. Sales from those initial weeks appear to be reflective of the stockpiling that was taking place. However, although sales have decreased since April when alcohol sales were estimated to have increased by more than 250 percent, those sales are still hovering at 50 percent more than this time last year. So, if one has a youth living in a household where there are stockpiling efforts being made in pursuit for alcoholic

beverages, care might need to be taken. For some youth, accessibility to alcohol might be unusually high right now, especially if their parents drink – and not necessarily at high-risk levels.

2. Vaping and marijuana consumption remain the secondary and tertiary substances of concern with regard to youth substance consumption. The data presented, here, along with the societal and cultural influences arising from the legalization of marijuana are indeed great cause for concern. In February of this year, the PRC 6 partnered with The Council on Recovery in producing their Vaping Summit where much of the talk on the matter now included deaths and severe lung injury due to the consumption of vaping liquids that contained an additive called vitamin E acetate, which is an additive used in the black market production of vaping liquids containing THC. There is great 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 pleasant 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 the youth consumption data presented in this needs assessment. HIDTA also reports that marijuana is the most trafficked and most frequently seized illicit drug 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 cited in the aforementioned HIDTA report. 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 in which the already high THC potencies in these products are causing individuals to overdose and require medical attention.

Demographic

As of 2020, it is estimated that about 7,547,256 people call the Gulf Coast Region 6 home. Thirty-seven percent of that population identifies as Hispanic, 36 percent identifies as Anglo, 17 percent identifies as Black, 8 percent identifies as Asian, and two percent identifies as other.¹ Seventy-four percent of that population is 18 years of age and older, while 26 percent is under the age of 18. Of those under the age of 18, about 33 percent are members of single-parent households. As of 2019 and of children enrolled in school (1,353,798), about 1.5 percent of those children experience homelessness.² About 16.7 percent of the Region 6 individual population, five years of age and older, report speaking with limited English proficiency (LEP), while at the household level, 9.5 percent of Region 6 households identify as speaking with LEP. As of 2020, the per capita income was \$30,143 for Region 6.³

¹ Texas Demographic Center. Texas Population Projections and Estimates. 2018-2020.

<https://demographics.texas.gov/Data/TPEPP/Projections/Tool?fid=E78EA7AF7FA040DEA6D207B2F706C607>. Accessed July 6, 2020.

² Texas Education Agency. County-level homelessness and year-end enrollment rates. 2017, 2018, 2019. <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/adhocrpt/adspr.html>. Accessed July, 2019.

³ Texas Demographic Center. Texas Population Projections and Estimates. 2018-2020.

<https://demographics.texas.gov/Data/TPEPP/Projections/Tool?fid=E78EA7AF7FA040DEA6D207B2F706C607>. Accessed July 6, 2020.

Consumption

As per the Texas School Survey (TSS, 2018)⁴ the percentage of youth, grades 7-12, in Regions 5/6 reporting having tried alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and prescription drugs (not as prescribed) at least once in their lifetime were 52.1 percent, 31.1 percent, 22.8 percent, and 19.7 percent, respectively. The percentage of youth reporting having used alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and prescription medication (not as prescribed) within the past 30 days were 30.4 percent, 16.7 percent, 14.3 percent, and 7.5 percent, respectively. Youth reporting that their initiation to a substance (s) occurred before the age of 13 (early initiation) for alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana, did so at rates of 16.7 percent, 4.9 percent, and 5.1 percent, respectively, as measured by the TSS.

Consequences

The discussion of legal, mortality, medical, educational, criminal activity, and mental health consequences of substance use and misuse in this needs assessment present county- and region-level data. Legal consequences data include: DUI rates, drunkenness, and liquor law violations; drug possession arrests; juvenile referrals and offences; and consequences for sales to minors. Data concerning mortality consequences of substance use and misuse include: alcohol related vehicular fatalities, suicide rates, and overdose deaths. Data illustrating the medical and hospitalization consequences of substance use and misuse include: hospital discharges for youth substance overdose and/or poisoning, emergency room admissions due to alcohol and other drugs, HIV infection and AIDS onset data, treatment episode admission data for youth and adults, and opioid related exposures. Educational consequences include data in the areas include: illegal drugs on school property, conduct problems and absences due to substance use, and dropout rates. Discussion of criminal activity includes violent and property crime index data. Lastly, mental health data are presented to illustrate the issues of depression and receipt of mental health services.

Protective Factors

The environmental protective factors of note in Region 6 include the work of the nine substance use prevention coalitions, the work of initiatives such as the Houston Recovery Initiative, the treatment providers located in the area, and the provision of youth prevention programs. Also included are Region 5/6-level indicators of ATOD education and parental support in the event of eliciting help for possible substance use difficulties on the part of the youth.

⁴Texas A&M University. Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use: 2014, 2016, 2018 HHSC Region 5 and 6 Report. <https://www.texasschoolsurvey.org/Report>. Accessed July 25, 2019.